

**Decision Memo for the
Programmatic Forest Plan Amendment
for Unique and Mosaic Habitats**
USDA Forest Service
Umpqua National Forest
Lane, Douglas, and Jackson Counties, Oregon

INTRODUCTION

The Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) defines unique habitats as including: “natural meadows, talus slopes, or other natural openings with high wildlife values”; and mosaic habitats as generally being “intermixtures of forest openings and conifers” (LRMP IV 200-202). Unique habitats vary from 1 to 75 acres and mosaic habitats are larger than 75 acres.

Although unique and mosaic habitats occupy only about 4% of the Umpqua National Forest, the importance of unique habitats to plant and animal diversity is far greater than their diminutive acreage would indicate. About 3% of the Umpqua National Forest area is included within this amendment; the other 1% is within wilderness or other areas where no timber harvest is permitted.

The resource values of this 3% of the Forest’s total acreage are considerable. Approximately 85% of plant species diversity occurs in non-forested openings (Hickman 1976) while 87% of local wildlife species use these openings for reproduction or foraging. Because of their importance, maintenance and enhancement of these areas are paramount and our understanding of the natural processes that shape these habitats is much better today than it was 24 years ago when the LRMP was written. Succession toward climax forest types is very slow in both the wettest and driest openings, but boundaries between other types of meadows and forest are much more dynamic, with considerable invasion by trees (Hickman 1976). Long-term maintenance of these meadows and surrounding transition zones, is attributed to continued disturbance, primarily fire

PURPOSE AND NEED

Circumstances have dramatically changed since the Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan was signed in 1990. Prior to the LRMP, management of the forest was dominated by road building and regeneration timber harvest activities. It was not unusual prior to this time for clearcut units to extend to, and sometimes through, meadow and wetland openings. Dry openings were commonly used for landings or for staging of equipment. Rock outcrops were left exposed in the center of clearcut units. It was in the context of this management regime that the unique habitat (C5-I) and mosaic habitat (C5-III) prescriptions were adopted to better protect these crucial wildlife habitats. The C5-I and C5-III prescriptions directed that no timber harvest or firewood cutting may occur within 150 feet of inventoried openings with some exceptions for salvage. However, decades of fire suppression have culminated in formerly open meadows and woodlands that have been encroached by conifers as this natural disturbance process was removed. The result is that openings are often smaller than they were historically. Perhaps more importantly, open grown pines, oaks and other hardwoods with their large spreading branches that formerly thrived within these unique and mosaic openings and the adjacent transitional areas between opening and forest, are rapidly succumbing to competition from Douglas-fir and other conifers that are adapted to growing under much denser conditions than the pines and oaks. Many of these centuries-old white and black oak, ponderosa and sugar pine have already been lost to competition. In many cases the encroaching trees are now too large to manage effectively and safely solely with prescribed fire, meaning that mechanical removal may be the only feasible option for maintaining or enhancing these habitats. When encroaching trees are of a commercially viable size

(which may be as small as 7" diameter), a timber sale may be the most cost-effective means of managing the stand for restoration purposes. Often it is the only feasible method of restoring these areas because non-commercial falling or girdling of more than small numbers of trees is cost prohibitive and can result in very high fuel loads, which can lead to wildfires that burn with much greater intensity than if fuels are removed. Commercial firewood cutting could also be used as a tool to meet restoration or maintenance objectives. A Forest Plan amendment is needed that will allow for removal of timber, including firewood, within 150 feet of unique and mosaic openings when the objective is to preserve or restore species composition, stand structure and ecological function. It is important to emphasize that this is meant to augment rather than replace other means of management including prescribed fire and non-commercial thinning. It is only with updated Forest Plan prescriptions for these areas that reflect our current understanding of these important habitat features, and the management tools needed to restore and maintain them, that we can meet our Forest Plan objectives for plant and animal diversity.

In order to use timber harvest as a tool to restore or maintain forest habitats adjacent to unique and mosaic habitats, the majority of recent thinning projects across the Forest have included project-level Forest Plan amendments, each of which expire once implementation of the project has been completed. Six such project-level amendments have been done in the past 5 years, and local experience has shown them to be successful. The frequency of these project-level amendments led me to consider a programmatic amendment. With a programmatic amendment, projects that are of a size and complexity normally done at the District level will no longer need to be elevated to the Forest level.

DECISION

This Decision includes the following modifications to the language in the Prescriptions of the Forest Plan as shown in Table 1 below: strikethrough text indicates language that is deleted. Inserted text is indicated with bold italics. The plain text is the language that stays the same.

Table 1 Forest Plan Amendment Modifications to Prescriptions

Document Location	Section	Amendments
FEIS, Appendix D, page 128 and LRMP, Chapter 4, page 201	Prescription C5-I Wildlife - Unique Habitat, Protected	Timber: No timber harvest within 150 feet of inventoried openings. Commercial harvest of timber and firewood within 150 feet of inventoried openings permitted only for the purpose of maintaining or restoring the diverse vegetative species composition, stand structure and ecological function for these habitats. Harvest activities must not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components. No salvage permitted except where removal of timber killed by catastrophic events such as windthrow, wildfire, drought or severe insect or disease infestation will not further adversely impact wildlife habitat values.
FEIS, Appendix D, page 130 and LRMP, Chapter 4, pages 202 and	Prescription C5-III Wildlife - Mosaic Habitat, Protected	No commercial or personal use firewood cutting. No personal-use firewood cutting, except of residual wood from commercial timber harvest that has been

Document Location	Section	Amendments
		<p><i>piled, or within areas that have been designated for firewood cutting.</i> Gathering of firewood is allowed only for onsite recreational use, but cutting for this use is not allowed.</p>

DECISION RATIONALE

This Decision amends the Forest Plan and changes the C5-I and C5-III prescriptions to allow for commercial timber harvest and firewood cutting within 150 feet of unique and mosaic habitats. The change in Forest Plan prescriptions is critical to restoring natural disturbance regimes and improving habitat for the diverse plants and animals occupying these areas.

This amendment modifies the language in the Forest Plan, it does not approve projects or activities, nor does it propose ground-disturbing activities. Therefore this amendment is excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under categorical exclusion 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16). This amendment does not affect any of the extraordinary circumstances as found in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, 30.3(2), as listed below. Furthermore, future project-level activities will undergo site-specific analysis, as appropriate to determine the specific effects, if any. The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as Categorical Exclusion 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16): Land management plans, plan amendments, and plan revisions developed in accordance with 36 CFR 219 et seq. that provide broad guidance and information for project and activity decision-making in a National Forest Service unit. Proposals for actions that approve projects and activities, or that command anyone to refrain from undertaking projects and activities, or that grant, withhold or modify contracts, permits or other formal legal instruments, are outside the scope of this category and shall be considered separately under Forest Service NEPA procedures(36 CFR 220.6(e)(16).

This decision is entirely administrative in nature which, by definition, does not include any ground-disturbing activities; as such, there will be no ecological/environmental beneficial or adverse direct effects associated with it in regard to the seven extraordinary circumstances set forth in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30. Implementing the decision will result in a beneficial increase in planning efficiency. Future projects will not be required to include site specific forest plan amendments for unique habitats. This will allow projects of the size and complexity that are normally District Ranger authority to have NEPA decisions made by District Rangers, rather than elevating the decision to the Forest Supervisor because of the Forest Plan amendment. Since no ground-disturbing activities are proposed with this amendment, the proposed action is anticipated by the interdisciplinary team to have no effect on the following: Sensitive, Rare, and Uncommon Botanical Species, Invasive Plants, Terrestrial Wildlife (including Threatened Species, Sensitive Species, Survey and Manage Species, and Management Indicator Species), Aquatic Wildlife, Soils, Heritage Resources, and Recreation.

This amendment will influence future actions adjacent to unique and mosaic habitats by allowing activities that maintain and improve ecological conditions. Indirect effects may occur when future projects are implemented under these guidelines. Future projects will be analyzed under NEPA and potential effects disclosed before future decisions are made and projects implemented. The programmatic amendment language has been carefully drafted to ensure that commercial firewood and timber harvest will only be implemented within 150 feet of unique and mosaic habitats when needed to maintain or restore vegetative species composition, stand structure and ecological function for these

habitats, and when harvest activities will not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components. Therefore, overall effects to these areas are expected to be beneficial. It is possible that future projects may have some short-term adverse effects, such as soil disturbance, but they would not have persistent or irreversible adverse effects. These indirect effects would be analyzed and disclosed when specific activities are proposed in the future and would be subject to public comment and review.

The amendment is expected to have an overall beneficial cumulative effect on unique habitats by allowing maintenance and restoration activities to take place within 150 feet of these natural openings. There are approximately 35,000 acres of unique habitats currently identified on the Umpqua National Forest. The 150-foot areas around each of the unique habitats within land allocations that allow harvest equal approximately 32,000 acres. In the past 5 years, six of the Forest's vegetation-related projects have included site-specific forest plan amendments for the purpose of maintaining and restoring these open areas when degraded by ingrowth due to fire suppression or by past management adjacent to them. These six projects allowed a total of 298 acres of commercial thinning within 150 feet of unique habitat areas; this averages 60 acres per year. Looking ahead to projects anticipated in the next several years to assess reasonably foreseeable future actions, it is anticipated that a comparable level of commercial thinning may take place within 150 feet of unique habitats over the course of the next five years. This amendment is permanent to the current plan. Since vegetated landscapes are dynamic in nature, maintenance treatments would be needed in the future to retain the open characteristics and conditions of these areas, unless maintained by wildfire. Once commercial sized trees are removed, non-commercial methods will be the preferred method to maintain these areas.

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANGE TO THE FOREST PLAN

I have determined that this Forest Plan Amendment is not a significant change to the Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan based on my evaluation of the following factors in Forest Service Manual sections 1926.51 and 1926.52.

Changes to the Land Management Plan That are Significant

1. Changes that would significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected.

While this amendment will allow limited commercial timber harvest and firewood cutting for restoration purposes, these activities will be part of the Forest's regular program of integrated vegetation treatment projects. The amendment is not expected to increase timber sale targets or public fuelwood use. Harvest of these perimeter areas has routinely been done in the past several years under project level amendments, but has only amounted to about 60 acres per year.

2. Changes that may have an important effect on the entire land management plan or affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.

This amendment will have limited effects on a small portion of the Forest for part of the planning period.

There are approximately 32,000 acres of area around unique habitats that could be affected by the amendment on the Umpqua National Forest; this represents 3% of the forest. Since commercial timber harvest or firewood cutting will only be done in certain cases and to meet specific desired conditions, some of these 32,000 acres will never be managed, making the acres potentially affected by future harvest activities actually less than 3%.

The effects of this amendment are also limited because it was proposed two decades after the Forest Plan was approved. The amendment will change the timber management prescriptions of areas within 150 feet of unique and mosaic habitats for the remainder of this planning period. The amendment will not change the desired future condition of the unique and mosaic habitats, but will contribute to achieving those conditions in these perimeter areas where ecological function is being diminished due to past or current management practices. The LRMP recognized the importance of these perimeter areas to protecting the high wildlife values of the unique and mosaic habitats when harvest buffers were required in 1990. The desired condition of these perimeter areas were therefore tied to protecting those wildlife values. Research and monitoring since 1990, has better informed the management of wildlife habitat, and the understanding of disturbance processes in relation to those habitats. Under the proposed amendment, these perimeter areas will still be managed toward the desired condition of protecting the high wildlife values of the unique and mosaic habitats.

Changes to the land management plan that are not significant can result from:

1. Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.
2. Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.
3. Minor changes in standards and guidelines.
4. Opportunities for additional projects or activities that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.

This amendment is consistent with these changes to land management plans that are not significant. As discussed earlier in this section, multiple use goods and services are expected to remain the same. The amendment's changes to management prescriptions will have limited effects on a small portion of the Forest during part of the planning period.

The amendment involves minor changes to prescriptions for unique and mosaic habitats, narrowly focused on timber harvest and firewood cutting within 150 feet of natural openings (see Table 1 above.) As discussed in the purpose and need section on pages 1 and 2, protecting these opening over the long term requires vegetation treatment. The amendment will provide opportunities to use timber harvest and firewood cutting as cost-effective tools for maintaining these habitats.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions starting in July 2012. Amendments to Forest Plans that are categorically excluded from analysis in an EIS and that are documented in a decision memo are subject to notice and comment under 36 CFR 219.82 which states that “the responsible official must complete appropriate environmental analysis and public involvement in accordance with Forest Service NEPA procedures”. The 30-day notice and comment period was June 23 through July 23, 2013.

Appendix A of this Decision Memo discusses in detail the comments received and how they were considered. Clarifications were made to this decision memo in response to public comments. In response to concerns that the effects of future projects were not being considered, statements were added to the decision memo about potential indirect and cumulative effects of future projects and how they will be analyzed and reviewed by the public in the future. In an earlier draft Decision Memo, an

example of legacy stand components was described as “very large trees that developed in open conditions”. This caused a reviewer concern that large trees in closed stand conditions would not be protected. The amendment language “harvest activities must not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components” is intended to protect all legacy components so the example about large trees that developed in open conditions was removed to avoid confusion.

FINDINGS AS REQUIRED BY LAW, POLICY AND REGULATION

Based on public scoping and review of the land allocation by the interdisciplinary team, the proposed forest plan amendment was designed in conformance with the following laws and regulations: Northwest Forest Plan, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and the National Forest Management Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act.

Therefore, I find that amending the Forest Plan to change the C5-I and C5-III prescription to allow for commercial timber harvest and firewood cutting within 150 feet of unique and mosaic habitats is consistent with applicable Federal laws and regulations.

Table 2. Extraordinary Circumstances, Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

Extraordinary Circumstance to be Evaluated	Present?	Is project causing Significant Effect on this Resource?
Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species	Yes	Species are present, however, because the proposed planned amendment are only procedural in nature, resulting in no ground disturbing activities or change in biological services, there will be no direct effects to threatened, endangered, and proposed species and R6 Regional Sensitive Species. Indirect and cumulative effects could result from implementation of future projects in these areas, but are expected to be beneficial overall. Future projects will be analyzed and will include an appropriate level of protection for threatened, endangered, and proposed species and R6 Regional Sensitive Species.
Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds	Yes	This Forest Plan Amendment will not actually result in any on-the-ground activities. Future projects will be analyzed and will include an appropriate level of protection for floodplains, wetlands and/or municipal watersheds.
Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas	Yes	There will be no direct effect to Congressionally-designated areas, because no treatments are being proposed within the wilderness areas, North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River corridor, or the Oregon Cascades Recreational Area. Future projects will be analyzed and will include an appropriate level of protection for Congressionally designated areas.
Inventoried Roadless Areas or potential wilderness areas	Yes	There are 7,280 acres of unique and mosaic habitat that occurs within inventoried roadless areas, however since the proposed amendments are only procedural in nature, resulting in no ground disturbing activities, there will be no direct effect to inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas. Future projects will be analyzed and will meet direction for inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas where they occur.

Extraordinary Circumstance to be Evaluated	Present?	Is project causing Significant Effect on this Resource?
Research Natural Areas	Yes	No ground-disturbing activity is proposed with this amendment; therefore no direct effects to the three research natural areas on the Forest (Limpy Rock, Cougar Butte and Squaw Flat Research Natural Areas) will occur. Future projects will be analyzed and will meet direction for research natural areas where they occur.
American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites	Yes	No ground disturbing activities are proposed by this amendment; therefore religious or cultural sites will not be affected by the proposed amendment. Consultation with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe has been ongoing with this amendment. Any future projects will be consulted on as the proposals are being developed.
Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas	Yes	No ground disturbing activities are proposed by this amendment; therefore historic properties including archaeological sites will not be affected by the proposed amendment. Future projects will adhere to the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act.

Based on the information in the table above, I find that no extraordinary circumstances exist for this project.

EXCLUSION FROM FURTHER NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT ANALYSIS

Based on my review of (1) the timber prescription change for Unique and Mosaic habitats as proposed by this amendment; (2) the lack of environmental consequences documented above; (3) the consistency of this amendment with applicable laws, regulations, and management direction; (4) the non-jeopardy to endangered or threatened species or heritage resources; and (5) the absence of extraordinary circumstances; this amendment is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27) and that no extraordinary circumstances will be adversely affected with this amendment (FSH 1909.15). This amendment is also anticipated to produce no adverse environmental effects, individually or cumulatively, on the physical, biological, or social components of the human environment. Any indirect or cumulative effects of future activities under this amendment will be analyzed during development of those projects. Because the amendment guidelines are written to include only activities proposed for the purpose of maintaining or restoring the diverse vegetative species composition, stand structure and ecological function for these habitats, and which do not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components, it is anticipated that the indirect and cumulative effects resulting from future activities would be beneficial overall.

Finally, this amendment is not an action that approves a project or activity, nor does it command anyone to refrain from undertaking projects or activities, nor does it grant, withhold, or modify contracts, permits or other formal legal instruments. Therefore, I find that the Forest Plan Amendment to modify this timber prescription for Unique and Mosaic habitats is categorically excluded from analysis in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement (40 CFR 1508.4 and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.1, Part 2) and that the category of exclusions is identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 31.2(16) and as codified at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This amendment will be implemented immediately.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW/OBJECTION PROCESS

A Draft Decision Memo was circulated for objection pursuant to 36 CFR Part 219 Subpart B. A notice for an Opportunity to Object was published in the *Roseburg News-Review* on November 25, 2014 for the 45-day objection period. No objections were received.

CONTACT

For additional information regarding this decision, contact Jane Beaulieu by phone, (541) 957-3466, email jbeaulieu@fs.fed.us or at the Umpqua National Forest Supervisor's Office, 2900 NW Stewart Parkway, Roseburg, Oregon 97471.

/s/ Alice B. Carlton

1/26/15

Alice B. Carlton
Forest Supervisor
Umpqua National Forest

Date

Reference

Hickman, J.C., Non-forest Vegetation of the Central Western Cascades Mountains of Oregon, Northwest Science, Vol. 50, No. 3, 1976.

**Programmatic Forest Plan Amendment
for Unique and Mosaic Habitats**

**USDA Forest Service
Umpqua National Forest
Lane, Douglas, and Jackson Counties, Oregon**

**Decision Memo
Appendix A – Response to Public Comments**

INTRODUCTION

This appendix to Programmatic Forest Plan Amendment for Unique and Mosaic Habitats (DM) documents the public involvement process that occurred during planning, including a description of the 30-day public comment process, the comments received on the Categorical Exclusion (CE), and the Forest Service’s response to those comments.

AGENCY CONSULTATION

Because the proposed planned amendments are only procedural in nature, resulting in no ground disturbing activity or no change in biological services, the effects determination for threatened, endangered, and proposed species will be “no effect” requiring no consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service. The effects determination for R6 Regional Sensitive Species will be “no impact”, since there are no direct or indirect impacts associated with this action.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, consultation regarding this project included the following tribes: Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians; Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde; and Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

SCOPING AND COMMENT PERIOD

This project was first listed in the July 2012 version of the National Forest Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). Pre-scoping was began on June 28th, 2012 and continued through March 2013; during this time, fifteen individuals, organizations and agencies were contacted. Concerns were

raised during this informal pre-scoping period and included in the project record in their entirety. In summary, the Forest Service considered all input during the pre-scoping period to refine the proposed action. The combined 30-day scoping and comment period began on June 23, 2013 when the legal notice, draft decision memo, and an invitation to submit comments was mailed to approximately 167 individuals, organizations and agencies. The comment period closed on July 23, 2013. Comments were received from the following individuals and organizations:

Commenter	Format Received	Date Received
Ann Dorsey	phonecall	6/20/2013
Rick Sparks (comments were later retracted)	email	6/26/2013
Kathy Staley	email	7/3/2013
William Cannaday, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife	email	7/9/2013
Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild	email	7/18/2013
Francis Eatherington, Cascadia Wildlands	email	7/22/2013
Stan Petrowski, South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership	email	8/6/2013

All comments submitted must be considered and addressed. It should be noted that all comments received are valuable. Alternative preferences, values, and feelings also contribute to increased understanding and were carefully read and considered. The following tables contain the comments, in the order in which they were received, and the corresponding Forest Service responses.

Comments from Ann Dorsey	Forest Service Response
<p>Do not include wetlands, rocky areas and other sensitive unique habitats in this amendment. Concerned about effects of harvest on water quality, hydrology and other sensitive resources, and the possibility of clear-cutting or logging up to edges of wetlands.</p>	<p>Areas around dry meadows are most likely to need the type of restorative treatments that this amendment will allow; however other types of unique habitats may also benefit from treatments under some conditions. Because all unique and mosaic habitats are different in soil, geology, hydrology, plant communities, etc., a determination of treatment, if any, must be made on a site specific basis after specialists have reviewed sites on the ground. This will be done during future project level proposals. The proposed wording includes the sideboard “harvest activities must not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function...” to ensure that hydrology will be protected. Additionally, all wetlands will continue to receive protections under the Clean Water Act and guidelines from the Northwest Forest Plan Aquatic Conservation Strategy for Riparian Reserves, which extend a minimum of 1 site potential tree height (170’ to 180’ on Umpqua NF) from wetland edge.</p>
<p>Does not want old/large trees cut and wants diameter limit specified.</p>	<p>By specifying that areas under this amendment can <u>only</u> be commercially harvested for the purpose of “maintaining or restoring stand structure and ecological function” and that commercial harvest must not result in “persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to legacy stand components”, old or very large trees that established before fire suppression will not be harvested.</p> <p>Because this amendment covers a wide variety of unique and mosaic habitats over a very large area of differing site conditions, specific harvest prescriptions will be determined by a team of specialists using on-the-ground review of sites during future project development. These future projects will go through the appropriate site specific NEPA analysis, and additional public comment and review will occur.</p>

Comment from Kathy Staley	Forest Service Response
Thank you for setting up the meeting with Stan. It answered all of our questions - making it possible to approve the amendment you are proposing.	Thank you for your comment. (This comment refers to a fieldtrip that several residents of the upper Cow Creek community attended with Stan Petrowski to look at some recently thinned units adjacent to unique habitats, to see an example of a project that would utilize the proposed amendment.

Comments from William Cannaday, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife	Forest Service Response
The proposed amendment to the Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) allowing the use of “commercial harvest of timber and firewood within 150 feet of inventoried openings permitted only for the purpose of maintaining or restoring the diverse vegetative species composition, stand structure and ecological function for these habitats,” will complement the ongoing enhancement and maintenance of wildlife habitat that ODFW is pursuing on the Diamond Lake Ranger District, North Umpqua Ranger District and the Tiller Ranger District.	Thank you for your comment
The further stipulation within the amendment stating that “harvest activities must not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components, such as very large trees that established under more open conditions,” gives ODFW assurance that activities occurring under this amendment will not harm existing unique and mosaic habitats.	Thank you for your comment
The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife staff at the Umpqua Watershed District agrees with and supports the proposed amendment of the LRMP as a priority action towards our mission to protect and enhance Oregon’s fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations.	Thank you for your comment

Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild	Forest Service Response
<p>We are somewhat concerned with the process being used here. A programmatic plan amendment affecting up to 32,000 acres, with a CE, and a combined scoping and comment period. This level of analysis and public involvement may not be adequate. The FS should prepare an EA that considers alternative language that is more tightly focused on achieving specific restoration outcomes and avoiding adverse effects. Comparing alternatives will help inform the FS so they can make a decision that better meets objectives. Choosing a more constrained alternative will help maintain public trust.</p>	<p>This proposed amendment follows the process for plan amendment and administrative changes explicitly directed in 36 CFR 219.13. Categorical exclusions are an essential part of NEPA that provide a categorical determination based on agency experience and CEQ concurrence, that certain categories of actions do not result in significant impacts to the human environment. One such category is 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16) "Land management plans, plan amendments, and plan revisions developed in accordance with 36 CFR 219 et. Seq. that provide broad guidance and information for project and activity decision making in a NFS unit. The 2012 planning rule establishes a dynamic process to account for changing forest conditions such as wildfire, new science and many other dynamics. Preparing land management plans and updating plan components to respond to new information or changed conditions is more timely and effective with the new categorical exclusion. This amendment may be done as a CE, rather than EA or EIS, because there are no extraordinary circumstances, the change is determined to be not significant based on National Forest Management Act planning requirements, and the proposed action is within one of the categories listed in sections 220.6 (d) and (e) (36 CFR 220.6(a)). Fourteen individuals or organizations were contacted during pre-scoping; all comments were considered during development of the proposed action.</p>
<p>The political context for this amendment also concerns us. While the FS has shifted to emphasize thinning in recent years, there is mounting pressure to initiate more regeneration harvest which may conflict with objectives for unique and mosaic habitats.</p>	<p>The objectives for managing unique and mosaic habitats have not changed. These areas were originally recognized in the LRMP as having high wildlife value; maintaining and restoring ecological function adjacent to these areas where it has been diminished as a direct result of past and present management, is necessary for meeting these objectives. This amendment will expand the toolset available for achieving these objectives. These future projects will go through the appropriate site specific NEPA analysis, and additional public comment and review will occur. Based on the past 5 years, projects using a project-level forest plan amendment to commercially thin areas around unique and mosaic habitats have totaled an average of 60 acres per year. Looking ahead to projects anticipated in the next several years to assess</p>

Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild	Forest Service Response
	<p>reasonably foreseeable future actions, it is anticipated that a comparable level of commercial thinning will take place within 150 feet of unique habitats over the course of the next five years.</p>
<p>We are also concerned about the substance of this proposed change. While the intent to allow restoration near unique habitat may be good, the proposed language of the plan amendment is too vague and does not assure that activities near unique and mosaic habitat will in fact be restorative.</p>	<p>The amendment is worded to limit commercial harvest and firewood cutting in these areas to <u>only</u> those activities that will maintain or restore ecological function that has been diminished due to past management of these areas. However, because unique and mosaic habitats are highly variable due to site conditions and past management, a programmatic forest-wide amendment cannot cover all the possible specific maintenance and restoration objectives and activities. These specific objectives and activities will be developed by a team of specialists using the best science available during project planning at a site specific scale. Appropriate NEPA analysis will be done on all future projects, subject to public comment and public review.</p>
<p>The proposed amendment uses terms like "diverse vegetative species composition, stand structure and ecological function." In the creative minds of those trying to meet timber targets, this could mean almost anything. We have seen many examples where the Umpqua National Forest says they are doing restoration but the outcome is not necessarily net beneficial. For instance, logging suitable spotted owl habitat to enhance meadow habitat and big game forage in the Loafer Project. Our point is that there are still trust issues with the FS. The FS tries to make all their timber sales seem like restoration these days, even though the restoration benefits may be questionable and many so-called restoration projects are still about getting the cut out.</p>	<p>The terms are necessarily broad because unique habitats encompass a broad range of habitat types. Any future proposed activities will be developed by a team of specialists using site specific field observation, historical site information, past management history, professional judgment and recent available research to assess what if any treatment would be needed in a given site to maintain or restore conditions that likely prevailed prior to fire suppression or other land management that had degraded ecological function. These future projects will go through the appropriate site specific NEPA analysis and additional public comment and review will occur.</p>
<p>The Decision Rationale says that this project will have "no effect" on sensitive species and a host of other resources. This is not a credible statement. Even though this plan amendment does not directly approve any ground-disturbing activities, it does guide and expand future management of 32,000 acres of sensitive habitats. This does have environmental effects. 36 CFR 220.6.(e)(16) was written by the Bush Administration back when they thought that forest plans were</p>	<p>Your comment on having "no effect" has been noted and clarification has been added to the Decision Rationale. This amendment will have no environmental or ecological direct effects because it does not propose any ground-disturbing activity. Indirect and cumulative effects will likely result when future projects are proposed under this amendment. Those effects will be analyzed during the NEPA process for those projects and subject to public comment and review. The proposed programmatic amendment language has been carefully drafted to</p>

Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild	Forest Service Response
<p>"aspirational" and could be exempted from NEPA. This is absurd and directly conflicts with the "staged" or "tiered" decision-making framework used by the FS for decades. Each stage of planning and decision-making informs later stages. Each stage has real effects because it constrains later stages. Failure to properly constrain activities near unique habitats has real environmental effects because later decisions are either permitted and prohibited based on the language of this plan amendment. That's why an EA and a full range of alternatives are required.</p>	<p>ensure that firewood and timber harvest will <u>only</u> be implemented within 150 feet of unique and mosaic habitats when needed to maintain or restore vegetative species composition, stand structure and ecological function for these habitats, and when harvest activities do not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components. Because of these guidelines, the indirect and cumulative effects are expected to be beneficial to these areas overall; short term adverse disturbance will be analyzed at that scale, and be subject to public comment and review.</p> <p>Categorical exclusions are an essential part of NEPA that provide a categorical determination based on agency experience, that certain categories of actions do not result in significant impacts to the human environment. One such category is 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16) "Land management plans, plan amendments, and plan revisions developed in accordance with 36 CFR 219 et. Seq. that provide broad guidance and information for project and activity decision making in a NFS unit. The 2012 planning rule establishes a dynamic process to account for changing forest conditions such as wildfire, new science and many other dynamics. Preparing land management plans and updating plan components to respond to new information or changed conditions is more timely and effective using a categorical exclusion.</p>
<p>The plan amendment fails to recognize and resolve trade-offs. Commercial logging always removes habitat structures, in particular reducing future recruitment of snags and dead wood</p>	<p>Any tradeoffs will be evaluated and analyzed during the NEPA process once a project has been proposed. This amendment is needed to allow for the removal of some trees at some sites where removal would maintain and restore open forest and meadow areas that are in an unnaturally dense condition due to human management, including fire suppression. Effect of any loss of future snags and dead wood will be analyzed in future site specific analysis and subject to public comment and review.</p>

Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild	Forest Service Response
<p>The proposed plan amendment also aims to protect "very large trees that developed in open conditions." This language is too conditional - it fails to protect large trees that developed in open conditions as well as very large trees that did not develop in open conditions. The plan amendment should be much more inclusive to protect ALL large trees (>20" dbh) whether they developed in open conditions or not. Narrow exceptions could be developed for trees that are between 20-26" dbh that are <150 years old and in direct competition with even larger live legacy trees.</p>	<p>It is recognized that legacy trees are important to a wide variety of species from bats, and other wildlife, to lichens and bryophytes. By stating that "harvest activities must not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components" protection will be given to all legacy components; "very large trees that developed in open conditions" was an example given in a previous draft that has been removed in this version to avoid confusion. Legacy trees are generally defined as old trees that survived logging or other stand-replacing disturbance. A diameter limit was not proposed in this amendment to allow flexibility necessary to address a wide variety of habitat types and site conditions.</p>
<p>The proposed language implies that wildfire harms these fire-maintained ecosystems that are generally suffering from too little fire. (e.g., salvage "will not further adversely affect"). Salvage logging should not be permitted. In nearly all cases fire has accomplished what commercial logging would be designed to accomplish. Accumulations of snags and dead wood are under-represented regionally and provide valuable habitat and other ecosystem services. Salvage logging would not be restorative in any sense.</p>	<p>The language addressing salvage logging is part of the original language in the Forest Plan and was not proposed for change. Salvage in these areas is restricted to cases where salvage will not further adversely impact wildlife habitat values; therefore, adequate snags and dead wood for wildlife habitat are expected to be maintained.</p>
<p>Clearer side-boards should be adopted to ensure restorative outcomes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Encourage restoration using natural processes instead of logging; •Use non-commercial methods as much as possible, in order to avoid impacts associated with extraction (e.g., roads, skid trails, heavy equipment); •Emphasize restoration in highly modified systems by limiting the plan amendment to thinning young stands and culturing legacy trees; •Tree over 20 inches, and trees that have old-growth character regardless of size should not be removed; •Unique habitats that depend on cool-moist microclimate should remain buffered. •All dead trees should be retained. 	<p>Although this amendment will allow commercial harvest, it does not limit restoration of these areas to only commercial harvest. Non-commercial methods and prescribed fire will continue to be used as other restorative tools where they are most appropriate. When encroaching timber is of a commercially viable size (which may be as small as 7" diameter), a timber sale may be the most cost-effective means of managing the stand for restorative purposes. Even where commercial-sized trees are removed to restore the open nature of these areas, future maintenance treatments could include prescribed fire or non-commercial thinning</p>

Comments from Francis Eatherington, Cascadia Wildlands	Forest Service Response
<p>An EA should have been done. Alternatives should have been considered. For instance, the Forest Service could have considered an alternative that would allow harvest of timber, but not “commercial” harvest or salvage logging. Another alternative could have considered finalizing a fire plan so fire suppression is not as impactful on unique habitats.</p>	<p>This amendment follows the process for plan amendment and administrative changes explicitly directed in 36 CFR 219.13. Categorical exclusions are an essential part of NEPA that provide a categorical determination based on agency experience and CEQ concurrence, that certain categories of actions do not result in significant impacts to the human environment. One such category is 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16) “Land management plans, plan amendments, and plan revisions developed in accordance with 36 CFR 219 et. Seq. that provide broad guidance and information for project and activity decision making in a NFS unit. The 2012 planning rule establishes a dynamic process to account for changing forest conditions such as wildfire, new science and many other dynamics. Preparing land management plans and updating plan components to respond to new information or changed conditions is more timely and effective with the new categorical exclusion. This amendment may be done as a CE, rather than EA or EIS, because there are no extraordinary circumstances, the change is determined to be not significant based on National Forest Management Act planning requirements, and the proposed action is within one of the categories listed in sections 220.6 (d) and (e) (36 CFR 220.6(a)). Alternatives are not required for Forest Plan Amendments. Consistent with Forest Service policy a collaborative approach was used to develop the amendment. Fourteen individuals or organizations were contacted during pre-scoping; all comments were considered during development of the proposed action.</p>
<p>To maintain and restore meadows and other unique and mosaic habitats, there is no need to use a logging truck. Restoration can be better attained by creating more dead wood. This can be accomplished over a period time if there is concern for increased fuels.</p>	<p>When encroaching timber is of a commercially viable size (which may be as small as 7” diameter), a timber sale may be the most cost-effective means of managing the stand for restorative purposes. Although this amendment will allow commercial harvest, it does not limit restoration of these areas to only commercial harvest. Non-commercial methods and prescribed fire will continue to be used as other restorative tools where they are most appropriate. Once commercial-sized trees are removed to restore the open nature of these areas, future maintenance treatments could include prescribed fire or non-commercial thinning. Often it is the only feasible method of restoring these areas because non-commercial falling or girdling of more than small numbers of</p>

Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild	Forest Service Response
	trees is cost prohibitive. The activities allowed by this amendment are meant to augment rather than replace other means of management including prescribed fire and non-commercial thinning. Any future project proposed for affected areas will follow dead wood standards and guidelines.
<p>Allowing commercial harvest in areas not previously considered for commercial harvest in the LRMP means the Umpqua National Forest timber target could increase. Unique areas could be targeted for harvest to meet either the increased, or even the present PSQ.</p>	<p>The implementation of this amendment is not expected to cause a noticeable increase in timber harvest quantities for typical vegetation management projects or the Forest’s timber sale program. Many recent projects have included restoration of dry forest around meadows because many of these areas are well departed from the fire regime prior to fire suppression. However, these restoration treatments have only amounted to a total of 60 acres per year in the last 5 years. This restoration is needed to maintain these habitats. Any contribution to the Forest’s timber target is just an outcome and expected to be small.</p>
<p>The amendment does not protect trees based on age – trees that existed before the advent of fire suppression. It only protects “very large trees that developed in open conditions”. That protection is too vague. It does not protect very large and very old smaller trees that developed in a variety of conditions.</p>	<p>By stating that “harvest activities must not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components” protection will be given to all legacy stand components; “very large trees that developed in open conditions” was given as one example of legacy stand components. Legacy trees are generally defined as old trees which survived logging or other stand-replacing disturbance. Definitions of “very large” and “very old” are not always easy to define or measure; but the proposed wording is designed to “maintain or restore the diverse vegetative species composition, stand structure and ecological function for these habitats”.</p>
<p>Salvage logging should not be allowed. The whole purpose of allowing any logging at all is because of your practices of fire suppression. Any fire-killed tree must remain to provide for wildlife that is dependent on fire-maintained ecosystems.</p>	<p>The language addressing salvage logging is part of the original language in the Forest Plan and was not proposed for change. Salvage in these areas is restricted to cases where salvage will not further adversely impact wildlife habitat values.</p>
<p>The forest service has been doing fine with EA specific plan amendments. It is not clear why a programmatic plan amendment is necessary.</p>	<p>In order to use timber harvest as a tool to restore or maintain forest habitats adjacent to unique and mosaic habitats, the majority of recent thinning projects across the Forest have included project-level forest plan amendments, each of which expire once implementation of the project has been completed. The frequency of these project-level amendments and success of the projects led to</p>

Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild	Forest Service Response
	this proposal for a programmatic amendment. The programmatic amendment proposed by this CE will lead to greater efficiency.
It is not clear why cutting firewood for personal use is not allowed, but will be allowed for commercial firewood gathering. What difference does it make to the unique habitat if the firewood will be sold, or be used by the person doing the cutting.	Personal use firewood will be allowed, but <u>only</u> “of residual wood from commercial timber harvest that has been piled, or within areas that have been designated for fire wood cutting.” Restriction to these areas only, will allow greater oversight of what gets removed. Commercial firewood harvest is already well-controlled by the use of contracts with specifications that assure a desired outcome. Personal use firewood often offers less opportunity for controlling important aspects such as timing and amount of material removed.

Comments from Stan Petrowski, South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership	Forest Service Response
The collaborative SURCP is dedicated to supporting restoration efforts in the South Umpqua Watershed. SURCP supports the UNF proposal to amend the UNF Land Management Plan for unique and mosaic habitats. SURCP believes that this amendment will support the vision of SURCP for restoration of oak woodlands and other unique habitats.	Thank you for your comment.
We would however like to see some language that protects legacy trees, even if killed by catastrophic events. We also feel that it is critically important to utilize trees for downed wood, snag creation and other significant habitat components that dead wood provides.	By stating that “harvest activities must not result in persistent or irreversible adverse impacts to soils, hydrologic function or legacy stand components” protection will be given to all legacy stand components, including those killed by catastrophic events.