Timber Resources

Introduction

A total of 10,200 ccf of timber was awarded through timber sale contracts and permits in FY 2008. The West Cherry timber sale on the Gauley Ranger District was awarded to Columbia West Virginia Corporation on August 4, 2008 with a volume of 7,760 ccf for $38,031.67. Columbia was the only bidder on the timber sale. Louk Run timber sale, the first timber sale from the Little Beech Mountain Environmental Assessment on the Greenbrier Ranger District, was sold in September, 2008 for an estimated volume of 2,170 ccf with a bid price of $223,104.58. Interstate Lumber based out of Bartow, WV was the only bidder on the timber.

Data collection and surveys began to prepare scoping documentation and develop a proposed action for the Upper Greenbrier River vegetation management projects that should include timber sales. NEPA environmental analyses that involve timber sales continued for the Lower Williams project on the Gauley Ranger District and the Hogback project on the Cheat Ranger District. The Lower Williams Record of Decision was signed in January, 2009. It is expected the Hogback Decision Notice will be signed in April, 2009.

Associated activities with timber sales include stocking surveys, site preparation for natural regeneration, planting tree seedlings, protection of tree seedlings, and timber stand improvement. These activities must be monitored and evaluated to ensure the forest remains healthy and diverse, in both species and ages of trees, so that it may be continuously managed on a sustainable basis for the enjoyment and use of future generations.

Stocking surveys are mandated by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources and Planning Act of 1974. The purpose is to ensure national forest lands that have been treated with a regeneration harvest method or lands that have otherwise been deforested are re-growing or reforested with adequate stocking.

Site preparation activities that enhance the natural regeneration of hardwood trees include, but are not limited to: 1) using herbicide for control of competing vegetation; 2) cutting residual (usually non-commercial trees of low quality or small size) trees during or immediately after a timber harvest to encourage sprouting and improve the quality of the future stand; 3) vine control to improve potential growth of young tree seedlings and sprouts; and 4) prescribed burning to enhance regeneration of trees such as oak and hickory. Timber stand improvement activities include, but are not limited to crop tree release, pre-commercial thinning, and vine control.

Fill-in planting with tree seedlings usually is done on this Forest to ensure a certain species that may be difficult to regenerate remains a component of the stand or to restore certain species that are currently not as prevalent as they were historically. Protection of tree seedlings is necessary in certain areas where deer browsing may inhibit the survival or growth of tree seedlings. Protection may include, but is not limited to fencing, individual tree shelters, and application of chemical deer repellent.
2008 Program Accomplishments

Timber Program accomplishments for 2008 included:

- Budget and work planning, including out-year planning for the next 5 years.
- Internal scoping, surveys, and data collection to develop a proposed action for the Upper Greenbrier River project area on the Greenbrier Ranger District.
- Preparing and analyzing effects and developing mitigating measures to reduce or eliminate adverse effects for 2 project areas containing several timber sales including:
  - Lower Williams on Gauley Ranger District and
  - Hogback on Cheat Ranger District
- Preparing and advertising the Louk Run Timber Sale on the Greenbrier Ranger District.
- Preparing, advertising, selling, and awarding the West Cherry Timber Sale on the Gauley Ranger District.
- Selling a total of 10,200 CCF of timber with 7,760 CCF sold in timber sale contracts.
- Harvesting approximately 5,000 CCF of timber.
- Administering the following active timber sales:
  - Desert Branch, Middle Horse, and West Cherry on the Gauley Ranger District, and
  - Day South and Big & Little on the Marlinton/White Sulphur Springs Ranger District.
- Completing scheduled harvest, TSI, and site preparation for natural regeneration work. Specifically:
  - 31 acres of regeneration harvest using the clearcut harvest method,
  - 14 acres of regeneration harvests were fenced to reduce deer browsing effects,
  - 44 acres of fill-in planting with oak seedlings,
  - 150 acres of timber stand improvement,
  - 1,163 acres of pre- and post-harvest site preparation for natural regeneration, and
  - 453 acres of stocking surveys and 36 acres of natural regeneration certification.
- Monitoring and evaluation efforts as described below.

Monitoring and Evaluation

2006 FOREST PLAN MONITORING ITEMS FOR TIMBER RESOURCES

The Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Plan (2006) outlines required timber resource monitoring on page IV-7. Changes to some monitoring items were made in 2008 to better capture what was actually being monitored on the Forest and what was driving the need to monitor. See Administrative Correction 7 for the changes that were made.

Item 7 - Are regeneration harvest units adequately restocked after five years?

Item 8 - To what extent is commercial harvest occurring on lands suited or not suited for timber production? Is there any need to adjust the suitable timberlands on the Forest?
Item 9 - Are even-aged harvest units, particularly clearcuts, exceeding the 40-acre size limit established under the NFMA? If they are, is there a need to adjust the size limit to better accommodate Forest Plan management objectives and practices?

Monitoring results for these items are reported below.

**Monitoring Item 7. Are regeneration harvest units adequately restocked after five years?**

The purpose of this monitoring is to ensure that lands are adequately stocked within 5 years of a regeneration harvest, as required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976. Monitoring is accomplished through stocking surveys conducted after the first and third growing seasons following the completion of the site preparation for natural regeneration activity initiated during or immediately after the regeneration harvest. The expected precision and reliability of this monitoring is considered very high.

District personnel on the North Zone of the Forest conducted stocking exams on 433 acres in 24 stands of regeneration harvest in 2008. Stocking ranged from 55 percent in one stand, 70-80 percent in three stands with the remaining stands having 90-100 percent. Deer browse was noted as heavy in several stands, affecting the diversity, height, growth, and quality of the regenerating stand.

Stocking surveys on the South Zone were done on 20 acres in 1 stand with 100 percent stocking.

**Monitoring Item 7. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

As mentioned in previous annual monitoring reports, the effects of deer browse on tree regeneration are still apparent. In some parts of the Forest a browse line is developing where little or no vegetation palatable to deer is growing on the forest floor. Districts are currently taking steps to increase regeneration success with fill-in planting and deer exclosure fencing projects in regeneration units where excessive deer browsing is threatening the growth of tree seedlings and sprouts. In 2008, 14 acres in 3 stands were fenced to protect regeneration.

Stocking surveys will continue to monitor the effects of deer browse on the vegetation within regeneration harvest units and the effects of protection methods.

**Recommendations:** It is highly recommended that pre-harvest surveys be completed prior to or during project analysis to determine where those areas are that are experiencing heavy deer browsing. If regeneration harvests are planned in these areas, deer exclosure fences should be installed immediately, where practical and feasible, after a unit is cut to ensure the unit regenerates with adequate stocking of acceptable tree species. In those areas where there is a potential for regeneration failure due to excessive deer browse and fencing is not practical or feasible, timber harvesting should be deferred until the deer population decreases. The Forest may also consider working with WVDNR to re-instate a doe harvest season, initiate special deer hunts, and/or open roads for hunters during the fall deer hunting seasons in areas where deer browsing is a chronic problem to our regeneration efforts.
**Monitoring Item 8. To what extent is commercial harvest occurring on lands suited or not suited for timber production? Is there any need to adjust the suitable timberlands on the Forest?**

This monitoring item is derived from the NFMA requirement to identify lands not suited for timber production every 10 years, roughly the Forest planning horizon. MNF lands considered not suited for timber management were determined as part of the recent Forest Plan revision process that culminated with the revised 2006 Forest Plan. The suitability analysis can be found in the Timber Supply section of Chapter 3 in the Final EIS for Forest Plan Revision (2006). The Forest Plan revision analysis identified an estimated 329,400 acres of land considered suitable for timber production on the Forest, which means that there are roughly 589,700 acres on the Forest that are not suited for timber production.

We recognize that the Forest Plan revision suitability analysis was done at a very broad scale and that refinements may be needed as lands are scrutinized more closely, typically during project-level analysis or timber stand compartment examination. All sorts of factors may influence potential refinements, including stream buffer delineation, the discovery of federally listed plants or animals, new special area designations, pockets of land that are extremely steep or susceptible to erosion, or areas that are just not economically feasible to commercially harvest. These refinements, either individually or collectively, can be used to adjust suitable timberlands through Forest Plan amendments or revision.

It is important to note, however, that trees may be cut or harvested in areas that are considered not suited for timber production—if that activity is designed to achieve goals or objectives in the Forest Plan other than timber production, such as enhancing wildlife habitat, treating insect and disease infestations, or reducing hazards to Forest visitors. For example, there are several habitat enhancement projects scheduled on the Forest’s Five Year Plan; however, they have not yet reached the planning or layout stage to determine how much of the timber-related activity would occur on suited vs. non-suited lands.

**Monitoring Item 8. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

Virtually all of the commercial timber harvest on the Forest in FY 2008 occurred on lands considered suitable for timber production in the 2006 Forest Plan. Furthermore, there were no reports of specific changes needed to timberland suitability. There were trees harvested in small or isolated instances—for example, to provide a needed stream crossing, road access under a special use authorization, or development of mineral/gas exploration and gas pipeline sites—but these activities were allowed under Forest Plan management direction, and they did not necessitate any change in suitability classification.

**Recommendations:**

The Forest will continue to examine the issue of suited vs. not suited timberland during analysis for upcoming timber sale projects. Minor land classification changes may be made based on field reviews and stand examinations. Major changes due to stand conditions, environmental restrictions, or legislative actions affecting the suitability of lands for timber production should be addressed in Plan amendments or during Plan revision. Changes should also be recorded in
the vegetation inventory FSVeget (Field Sampled Vegetation) database. Currently there is not a need to adjust the suitable timberland base.

**Monitoring Item 9. Are even-aged harvest units, particularly clearcuts, exceeding the 40-acre size limit established under the NFMA? If they are, is there a need to adjust the size limit to better accommodate Forest Plan management objectives and practices?**

The purpose of this monitoring is to evaluate whether we are meeting the NFMA-imposed 40-acre size limit for even-aged timber harvest, particularly clearcutting. If we are not meeting this limit, we need to evaluate why we are exceeding it, and whether there may be a need to change the size limit to better accommodate our Forest management objectives and practices.

Even-aged silvicultural system harvest methods are defined on page A-2 in Appendix A of the 2006 Forest Plan. The 25-acre even-aged harvest size limit from the 1986 Forest Plan has been replaced in the 2006 Forest Plan with the 40-acre size limit in the National Forest Management Act. Exceptions to this size limit could be allowed on a case-by-case basis with Regional Forester approval.

There are no harvest size restrictions when using uneven-aged silvicultural harvest methods, although individual group selection cuts are generally considered to be less than 2 acres each in size.

**Monitoring Item 9. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

The Hogback Environmental Assessment and Lower Williams River Environmental Impact Statement are two of the first NEPA analyses for timber sales that will be completed under the 2006 Revised Forest Plan. Proposed even-aged harvest units in the Hogback analysis average an estimated 31 acres per unit. Unit size ranges from 11 acres to the maximum of 40 acres. An estimated 1,256 acres are clearcuts with reserve trees and 88 acres are shelterwood harvest. In the Lower Williams project, even-aged harvest unit size averages an estimated 27 acres per unit, with a range from 10 acres to 37 acres. An estimated 887 acres of the planned harvest units are regeneration cuts with residuals and 38 acres of shelterwood harvest.

In conclusion, none of the proposed, completed, or sold timber sales in FY 2008 had even-aged harvest units that exceeded the maximum size limit of 40 acres in the NFMA, which applies to the 2006 MNF Forest Plan.

**Recommendations:**

Continue to monitor the size of regeneration units of even-aged silvicultural harvest treatments to ensure the layout of the unit does not exceed the maximum 40-acre size limit. If units do exceed the 40-acre limit, ensure that the rationale is documented in project decisions and evaluated in future monitoring reports to determine if there is a need to adjust Forest management practices or Forest Plan direction. Currently, there is not a need to adjust the even-age harvest unit size limit.