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Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

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Route To:

Subject: Biological Evaluation of Humbug Mastication Thinning Project (FHP Report No. N08-07)

To: Patricia Grantham, Forest Supervisor, Klamath National Forest

On September 8, 2008, in response to a request for proposals for Western Bark Beetle Initiative (WBBi) projects, Dave Burgess (Salmon/Scott River Ranger District, Klamath National Forest) sent me a proposal requesting \$44,300 to implement 91 acres of precommercial thinning near Humbug Creek on the Scott River Ranger District of the Klamath National Forest. This project was previously submitted in FY2006 and 2008, but was turned down because of a lack of sufficient suppression/prevention program funding in the Region. NEPA for the project is complete under the “Thin O Boy” and “Vista Thin” Categorical Exclusion Decision Memos (signed 9/31/2003 and 8/2/2004, respectively), and it is ready for implementation.

The Humbug WUI mastication area is located approximately 7 miles northwest of Yreka, CA. Project plantations are in the Yreka Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area on Matrix land. Entomologist Dave Schultz and I last visited the plantations on July 19, 2005. The plantations consist mainly of precommercial sized ponderosa pine, though smaller numbers of seeded-in Douglas-fir, incense cedar and sugar pine are also present (see attached photos). Plantation trees are mostly 14-25-years old. Stocking densities of these stands vary from 250 to 450 trees per acre (TPA), with the majority of the trees occupying the codominant crown class, creating a closed canopy. The stands are dense, and the risk to attack by western and mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus brevicomis* and *Dendroctonus ponderosae*, respectively) is increasing fast. The risk to crown fire and mortality from drought is likewise increasing.

To address this problem, the District proposes to precommercially thin the stands by mastication, leaving only the healthiest, most vigorous, defect-free trees. Healthy Douglas-fir, incense cedar, sugar pine and hardwoods will be retained as much as possible to enhance vegetative species diversity. The target post-treatment stocking level will range from 76 to 134 TPA. Competing manzanita and ceanothus brush will also be masticated, and the resulting chunks and pieces of brush and non-crop trees will be left in contact with the ground.

The treatment, if fully implemented, will be effective in addressing concerns regarding bark beetles, fire and drought, and will meet the Regional Forester’s density management policy that high risk density levels will not be reached again for at least 20 years (Regional Forester letter, “Conifer Forest Density Management for Multiple Objectives”, July 14, 2004).



In summary, the Humbug Mastication project has my support, and I recommend it for consideration for WBBF funding. I also agree with Dan Blessing's placement of the project among the Klamath NF's new FY09 WBBF proposals in third place behind the Tompkins and Godfrey Ranch proposals. The proposed treatment has a good potential to reduce the risk of bark beetle attack and will provide several additional benefits, including reducing potential impacts of drought and fire in the WUI, protecting nearby private homes, developing additional northern spotted owl habitat, and producing more diverse and resilient stand structure. In addition, the Scott River Ranger District and Klamath National Forest have an excellent record of accomplishment in the planning and timely implementation of similar thinning treatments.

Please feel free to call if you have any questions regarding this report.

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Humbug Masticate WUI

Stand 133-912

