

TABLE 10: Summary of Potential Impacts

	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE			PROPOSED ACTION		
	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>
Access and Public Safety	• No effect on access to pre-existing rights or public safety • Motorized vehicle access reduced	• Would improve condition of 596 miles of roads needed for access and public safety	• Approximately 18 miles of new roads could be constructed for access and public safety purposes	• No effect on access to pre-existing rights or public safety • Motorized vehicle access reduced to a greater extent	• Would improve condition of roads needed for access and public safety	• Same as no action
Fire, Insects, and Disease	• No effect on forest health projects • Could reduce frequency of human-caused fires	• Would improve condition roads used for forest health projects	• New roads could be constructed for forest health purposes	• No effect on forest health projects • could further reduce frequency of human-caused fires	• Would improve condition of roads needed for forest health projects	• Same as no action
Forest Management (Timber)	• No effect on roads needed to access existing contracts	• Would improve condition of 2,436 miles of roads used for timber harvesting	• Approximately 1,534 miles of new roads could be constructed to facilitate timber harvesting • An estimated 3.6 billion board feet of timber could be offered for sale annually	• No effect on roads needed to access existing contracts	• Would improve condition of more than 2,436 miles of roads used for timber harvesting	• During transition, 1,313 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • An estimated 3.3 billion board feet of timber could be sold annually

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE				PROPOSED ACTION		
	Decommissioning	Reconstruction	Construction	Decommissioning	Reconstruction	Construction
Land Uses (non-recreational)	• No effect on roads needed to access land uses	• Would improve condition of 225 miles of roads used to access land uses	• Approximately 107 miles of new roads could be constructed for land uses	• No effect on roads needed to access land uses	• Would improve condition of more than 225 miles of roads used to access land uses	• During transition, approximately 105 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • Access to already developed areas would not be affected
Law Enforcement	• No effect	• No effect	• No effect	• No effect	• No effect	• No effect
Minerals	• No effect on roads needed to access existing contracts	• Would improve condition of 61 miles of roads used for minerals exploration and extraction	• Approximately 109 miles of new roads could be constructed to facilitate minerals exploration and development	• No effect on roads needed to access existing contracts	• Would improve condition of more than 61 miles of roads used for timber harvesting	• During transition, 102 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • Could decrease amount of mineral exploration and extraction on NFS lands and/or make it more expensive

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE				PROPOSED ACTION		
	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>
Noxious Weeds and Nonnative Invasive Plants	• Decrease likelihood of introduction	• Could increase points of entry and infestation	• Approximately 1,827 miles of new roads, increasing points of entry and infestation	• Additional decrease in likelihood of introduction	• Additional increase in points of entry and infestation	• During transition, 1,581 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • Reduced opportunity for infestation
Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness Resources	• No effect on access to recreational facilities • Reduction in off-road vehicle use • Improvements in scenic quality and dispersed recreation	• Would improve 249 miles of roads used for recreation • Improved access could increase use	• Approximately 30 miles of new roads could be constructed for recreation, heritage, and wilderness resource purposes	• No effect on access to recreational facilities • Additional reduction in off-road vehicle use • Additional improvements in scenic quality and dispersed recreation	• Would improve more than 249 miles of roads used for recreation • Improved access could increase use	• During transition, 18 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • Would reduce ability to travel through NFS lands by motorized vehicle • Could prevent development of new recreational facilities

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	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>
Watershed and Air	• Could improve hydrologic conditions and water quality • Could promote site productivity	• Could reduce amount of environmental damage caused by substandard roads	• Would construct approximately 1,827 miles of new roads, 6 of which would be for watershed improvement projects • Could adversely affect hydrology, water quality, site productivity, and air quality	• Could further improve hydrologic conditions, water quality • Could promote site productivity	• Could further reduce amount of environmental damage caused by substandard roads	• During transition, 1,581 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • Fewer adverse affects to hydrology, water quality, site productivity, and air quality
Wildlife, Fish, and Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species	• No effect on wildlife, fish, or TES species protection projects • Could improve habitat conditions	• Short-term impacts through human presence, habitat disturbance, sedimentation • Could reduce environmental degradation caused by substandard roads	• Would construct approximately 1,827 miles of new roads, 9 of which would be for fish or wildlife improvement projects • Could cause habitat loss, fragmentation, migration disruption, sedimentation, direct mortality	• No effect on wildlife, fish, or TES species protection projects • Could further improve habitat conditions	• Additional short-term impacts through human presence, habitat disturbance, sedimentation	• During transition, 1,581 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • Fewer adverse affects due to habitat loss, fragmentation, migration disruption, sedimentation, direct mortality

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	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Decommissioning</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>Construction</i>
Economic and Social Effects (including civil rights impact analysis, environmental justice, and costs)	• No effect to access, timber sales, minerals exploration or development • Increase social values associated with environmental protection	• Increase access to forest resources • Reduce environmental degradation caused by substandard roads • Annual cost could be between \$31 and \$190 million, depending on the type of road being reconstructed	• Would construct approximately 1,827 miles of new roads • Decrease environmental protection • Timber harvesting facilitated by new roads could result in annual receipts of \$516 million and 29,413 jobs • Annual cost could be \$23 to \$98 million, depending on type of road being constructed	• No affect to access, timber sales, minerals exploration or development • Additional increase for social values associated with environmental protection	• Further increase access to forest resources • Additional reduction in environmental degradation caused by substandard roads • Annual cost would be higher than the no action alternative	• During transition, 1,581 miles of new roads could be constructed • Fewer miles of new roads would be constructed overall • \$40 million in timber sales annually and 2,680 direct jobs could be affected if timber harvesting did not occur in roadless or other unroaded areas • Reductions in forest uses could have adverse economic and social effects and decrease community ability to sustain itself • Small communities near NFS lands could be disproportionately affected economically • Annual cost could be between \$16 and \$68 million, depending on miles and type of road being constructed

Cumulative Effects

The Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA define a cumulative effect as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7). Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively important actions taking place over a period of time. An evaluation of cumulative impacts can aid in understanding the environmental implications of a proposed action.

The implementation of the proposed action – the revised road management strategy – would not, by itself, result in the imposition of adverse environmental effects or the award of environmental benefits. Rather, such effects or benefits would only be realized when the revised policy was applied on National Forests. Because application of the policy would vary among the forests, it is not possible, from the programmatic viewpoint of this EA, to determine the cumulative effect of the revised road management policy with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions that may take place on each forest.

Nationally, the effect of the proposed road management strategy on physical and biological resources would be beneficial. Such resources include wildlife, fisheries, TES species and their habitats; solitude; and watershed and air resources. Adverse recreational and social and economic impacts could occur as a result of decreased motorized recreational opportunities and decreased timber harvesting and minerals extraction.

The most tangible social and economic cumulative effect is the potential for an incremental decline in timber harvesting resulting from the proposed road management policy added to declines in timber harvesting from NFS lands over the last 10 years. The proposed action could result in a decline in timber sales of up to approximately \$42 million annually, if no timber harvesting were permitted in inventoried roadless or other unroaded areas. This could affect as many as 2,630 direct jobs.

Other ongoing actions also have an effect on timber sales. Specifically, the Forest Service examined the impacts associated with the Interior Columbia River Basin, the forests in the Sierra Nevada affected by the California spotted owl, the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project, the Southwestern Region environmental impact statement, and the Northwest Forest Plan.

Timber harvest in the Interior Columbia River Basin accounts for 10 percent of total U.S. harvest. The harvest in the area has declined by 7 percent since 1986 and is expected to decline another 5 percent by the end of the decade. In recent years, the number of timber jobs in Idaho and Montana has declined due to technological improvements; no such trend exists for eastern Oregon and Washington.

In the Sierra Nevada, the timber volume has decreased from 1987 to 1995, reflecting the shift toward less intensive management practices on NFS lands in the area affected by California spotted owl habitat concerns. Similarly, jobs and income associated with the Region 3 (Southwestern) timber harvest program declined sharply between 1989 and 1994.

Historically, restricted timber harvests in the range of the northern spotted owl resulted in substantial social and economic costs. Timber-based employment would decline under the Northwest Forest Plan as a result of reduced timber harvests.

The potential decline in timber harvesting as a result of the proposed action, together with timber harvesting declines associated with other Forest Service activities, could have a cumulative effect on social and economic resources. However, opportunity does exist to substitute timber, primarily softwoods, from other ownerships to replace most of the reduction in National Forest timber sales in the eastern United States. In the West, substitution opportunity is limited. Substitution factors range from zero (Regions 3, 5, 6, and 10) to 90 percent (Regions 8 and 9). Any volume that could not be substituted from other U.S. ownerships could probably be met by Canadian imports.

Relationship between Short-Term Uses and Long-Term Productivity

Both the no action alternative and the proposed action would involve short-term uses of the environment. Road decommissioning and reconstruction serve to reduce environmental impacts, particularly those that occur as a result of poor location or maintenance, or are unneeded to meet current uses. Road construction can cause adverse environmental impacts such as sedimentation and habitat disturbance or loss. Road construction also facilitates use of forest resources that can be important for social and economic well-being of communities near NFS lands. Because the proposed action would involve more road decommissioning and reconstruction and less road construction than the no action alternative, long-term productivity of the environment would improve under the proposed action as compared to the no action alternative.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

The implementation of the proposed action would not, by itself, result in the irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources. Rather, the commitment of resources would occur if the revised road management policy were applied on National Forests. If implemented, the proposed action would tend to reduce irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources by reducing the miles of roads constructed, particularly in roadless or other unroaded areas, especially until the Roadless Area Protection Rule is issued. At that time, the long-term management direction for roads within these areas would be decided nationally.

Consultation

The Forest Service consulted with several federal agencies for the preparation of this EA, including the Council on Environmental Quality, the Office of Management and Budget, the Council on Economic Advisors, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In addition, the Forest Service considered the comments received as a result of its issuance of the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to revise its regulations concerning the management of the National Forest transportation system (63 Fed. Reg. 4351 (1998)) and comments received in response to the issuance of the proposed interim rule to temporarily suspend road construction in certain unroaded areas of National Forest System lands (63 Fed. Reg. 4351 (1998)) in the development of this EA. The Forest Service also considered comments of external stakeholders and Forest Service employees provided in focus group sessions convened by the Forest Service in 1999 to examine long-term road management policy issues.

This draft EA is being sent out for public review and comment prior to preparation of a final EA and a Finding of No Significant Impact, if appropriate.

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