

DECISION NOTICE  
AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

USDA Forest Service  
Region 6  
Umatilla National Forest  
North Fork John Day Ranger District  
Grant County, Oregon

INDIANBERRY SALVAGE AND REHABILITATION PROJECT  
AND FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT #5

An environmental assessment (EA) is available for public review in the Forest Supervisor's Office in Pendleton, Oregon and at the North Fork John Day Ranger District in Ukiah, Oregon. This EA documents the site specific analysis conducted by an interdisciplinary team to determine the potential environmental effects connected to a proposal of salvage harvest, reforestation, road construction and reconstruction, prescribed burning, and wildlife and fisheries habitat improvement.

These actions are needed to begin restoration of the ecological function of the area, begin recovery of habitat (cover) for big game wildlife, reduce fuel loads to reduce the risk of moderate to high intensity wildfires, recover the economic value of deteriorating and dying or dead trees by harvesting them before loss of commercial value and to replace these stands to ensure adequate species habitat and quality watershed protection.

Based on the results of the analysis documented in the EA, it is my decision to implement Alternative 3 with the following modifications:

1. Unit 27 will be dropped to lessen the effects on goshawk pairs discovered in the area in 1992, and retain habitat within a traditional goshawk home range.
2. Riparian buffer widths will be increased along streams as follows: buffers of 300 feet from the edge of the floodplain on each side of Class I, II or III streams; buffers of 150 feet from the edge of the floodplain on each side of second order Class IV streams; 75 feet from the edge of the floodplain on each side of first order Class IV streams; buffers of 100 feet from the edge of isolated springs and wet areas.
- Units 2, 3 and 4 boundaries will be adjusted away from riparian corridors. Units 5 and 24 will be dropped.
3. Units 1, 10 and 16 will be dropped to lessen the effects on cavity dependent species as a result of clarification of Forest policy on replacement snag levels.

With the above changes, Alternative 3 will include:

1. Salvage harvest of dead and dying, insect damaged Douglas-fir and grand fir over 867 acres. This will consist of seed tree harvest with leave tree reserves of western larch and ponderosa pine for shelter and seed. The estimated volume to be produced under this alternative is 6.3 million board feet (MMBF).
2. Fuel reduction will include 759 acres of underburning, and 87 acres of jackpot or concentration burning for hazard reduction and site preparation.
3. Salvaged areas will be planted with new trees after harvest on 640 acres. Natural regeneration will be relied upon in the remaining harvested areas, and supplemental planting will be used as needed.
4. Temporary road construction of approximately 4.1 miles of road and reconstruction of approximately 9.8 miles of existing system road. No specified road construction will be required.
5. Establishment of a "security area" approximately 2,800 acres in size in the southern portion of the planning area for big game escapement. Within the area, timber harvest is deferred, and all roads within this area will be effectively closed.

6. Implementation of the North Fork John Day Access and Travel Management program with changes for this planning area. Currently there are 124.1 miles of open road within the Indianberry planning area. Road closures will reduce the miles of open road to 37.4 miles.

Before implementation of the Access and Travel Management (ATM) program in this area and additional road closures made part of this decision, the open road density was 4.0 miles per square mile. After implementation of this project, it will be reduced to 1.5 miles per square mile.

7. Hardwoods and conifers will be planted in riparian areas deficient in stream shading which have high tree mortality and where potential for natural regeneration is low.

8. Fencing riparian areas along one mile of Indian Creek and two miles of Little Indian Creek where cattle use has degraded stream habitat.

## MITIGATION MEASURES

The mitigation measures that were developed reflect existing direction found in the Umatilla Land and Resource Management Plan and salvage program direction established on the Forest in 1991. Below are highlights from the mitigation measures developed in detail in Chapter II of the Indianberry Environmental Assessment.

-- Measures to provide snag and green tree replacement habitat has been changed to reflect interim guidelines made available March 1993. Snags and green tree replacements will be managed at 100% based on information outlined in "Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests - The Blue Mountains of Oregon and Washington" (Thomas and others 1979) for management indicator species. This will be accomplished by designating snags and replacement trees within salvage units at 130% to account for losses due to windthrow and other natural forces.

The guidelines for green tree replacements are as follows:

15 green trees >20" DBH per 10 acres

120 green trees >12" DBH per 10 acres

73 green trees >10" DBH per 10 acres

Of total green tree replacements per acre, a maximum of 6 trees may be host species with grand fir preferred over Douglas-fir. The remaining green trees will be in order of preference, western larch and ponderosa pine.

-- Measures to protect water quality and riparian values has been changed to reflect the modification made to alternative 3.

-- For Class I, II and III riparian zones, a buffer approximately 300 feet from the edge of the floodplain on each side of the stream will be designated.

-- For second order Class IV streams, a buffer approximately 150 feet from the edge of the floodplain on each side of the stream.

-- For first order Class IV streams, a buffer approximately 75 feet from the edge of the floodplain on each side of the stream.

-- For isolated springs and wet areas, a buffer approximately 100 feet from the edge of these areas.

-- The access and travel management program will be modified to effectively close those roads necessary to meet wildlife habitat needs. These include the following road closures: 3980070, 3980082, 3980140, 3986, 3986244, 3986255, 3986298 and 3986500.

Roads that were identified for closure in the access and travel management program but will remain open seasonally or all year with selection of this alternative include: 3980080 (all year), 3980085 (all year and seasonally), 3986050 (seasonally), and 3986052 (seasonally). These modifications to the ATM program are necessary because these roads provide access to private land or are cost-shared roads with Louisiana-Pacific Corporation which allows them access.

-- A winged subsoiler will be used to rip all tractor skidtrails, landings, and temporary roads designated by the Forest Service where it is determined that the soil is detrimentally compacted. This will alleviate impacts to future growth and forest productivity.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Effectiveness monitoring will evaluate the project's effectiveness in meeting the objectives of the salvage sale direction. This includes post harvest evaluation of the significant issues.

Post harvest evaluation of Water Quality will include the following:

- stream surveys of Indian Creek.
- reviewing protection measures for riparian buffers.
- effectiveness of restoration projects, including fencing critical riparian habitat and hardwood and conifer plantings on water quality.
- implementation and effectiveness of BMPs, prescriptions and mitigation measures.

Post harvest evaluation of Big Game Cover will include the following:

- effectiveness of road closures to reduce open road density.

Post harvest evaluation of Stand Health will include the following:

- establishment of seral tree species.
- fuels reduction.

In addition, monitoring will be conducted to evaluate effectiveness and implementation of mitigation measures and factors considered in this decision notice:

- Post harvest evaluation of cavity nester habitat.
- Evaluation of snag and green tree replacement survival over time relative to prescribed levels.
- Post harvest evaluation of goshawk habitat.
- Evaluation of occupation and reproductive success of goshawks nesting in the sale area.

## RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

Alternative 3 with modifications and mitigation measures was selected because it:

1. Recognizes and protects riparian and fisheries habitat and water quality values in the planning area.
2. Provides for recovery of hydrologic flow regimes by planting trees over 640 acres after salvage harvest.
3. Improves satisfactory cover on winter range to a higher degree than no action, but will still be below the minimum of 10 percent in 50 years. Satisfactory cover on summer range will be achieved 10 to 20 years sooner than the no action, and is projected to meet standards and guidelines in 50 years.
4. Provides for regeneration of stands which have moderate to severe western spruce budworm defoliation. Applied treatments will reduce stand susceptibility to pest-caused damage.
5. Establishes productive and vigorous stands of timber in stands that have been below their productive capability. Dead and dying trees will be utilized for lumber and other wood products before they deteriorate.
6. Begins the immediate restoration of 867 acres within the planning area. The replacement of dead and dying trees is expected to increase timber productivity in the area approximately 10 to 20 years sooner than no action. This alternative will treat 43 percent of the acres available for rehabilitation in this planning area.
7. Allows for the removal of moderate to heavy fuel loads on 867 acres. Treatment units will act as fuel breaks which will reduce the potential spread of catastrophic wildfire in the area. There is also an opportunity to reintroduce fire into the ecosystems in this planning area.
8. Meets the habitat requirements for cavity nesters in the "security area" and other unharvested areas by managing snags and green tree replacements at 100% based on information outlined in "Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests - The Blue Mountains of Oregon and Washington" (Thomas and others 1979) within the salvage units.
9. Is expected to move the area toward its desired future condition in a shorter time frame than the no action alternative.

## **FACTORS CONSIDERED**

I have determined that the changes to Alternative 3 would result in no significant difference in the effects displayed in the environmental assessment.

### **Goshawk**

A pair of adult goshawks with fledged young and evidence of hunting and roosting were found in unit 27 during a survey in 1992. Unit 27 consists of large trees with a fairly dense canopy and is an important component of the goshawk's home range. This unit is also the only relatively intact stand on the north facing slope above a tributary to Huckleberry Creek. Dropping unit 27 will retain habitat within a traditional goshawk home range, as well as provide additional foraging habitat for pileated woodpeckers.

Moving unit boundaries for units 2, 3 and 4 will lessen the effects on another goshawk pair discovered in this area in 1992. Dropping units 1 and 5 will allow retention of high quality goshawk habitat in an area of low to moderate grand fir mortality.

The combined effects of the above changes will be to retain important habitat options for goshawk, a species that is listed as sensitive by the State of Oregon. These changes will bring our management of goshawk populations in compliance with interim Regional direction for protection of known nest sites and fledging area surrounding the nest sites.

### **Riparian Buffers**

Streams in the project area are important habitat for summer steelhead and rainbow trout, and Indian Creek historically provided habitat for bull trout, a sensitive species that was recently petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Indian and Little Indian Creeks currently exceed state water quality standards and Forest Plan standards for maximum water temperatures. These streams contribute to the Middle Fork John Day River where summer water temperatures exceed standards and pose risks to sustaining some fish populations.

Increasing buffer widths will reduce blowdown to help maintain stream shading and more gradual recruitment of large woody debris in the streams; reduce erosion and sediment production near streams and water sources from soil disturbances associated with salvage harvest activities and temporary road construction; and reduce potential for increasing peak flows and prolonging summer low flow period during the next decade by retaining tree canopy in the buffers.

Unit boundaries for units 2, 3 and 4 will be located further from the riparian corridors. Units 5 and 24 will be dropped due to the width of the riparian buffers.

### **Wildlife habitat**

Additional short-term foraging habitat for pileated woodpeckers will be retained as a result of widened riparian buffers. For smaller woodpeckers and secondary cavity nesting species, more than 150 acres of existing potential nesting and foraging habitat will be retained. Pine marten may also experience short-term habitat benefits since more of their preferred riparian habitat will be retained. Additional thermal, hiding and calving cover will be retained for elk. Immediate impacts to big game travelways within riparian corridors will be reduced.

Recent direction provides clarification of existing policy established in the Forest Plan for snag levels. As a result, units 1, 10 and 16 will be dropped from consideration for salvage harvest due to low volume amounts and cost of removal. Unit 10 which contains ponderosa pine will be included in an existing wildlife burn program to reduce slash levels and promote seral species.

## **CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS**

Scoping for this planning area included public participation concerning the proposed activities. Public input was requested in letters sent to interested and affected individuals, organizations and other agencies. Several public meetings were conducted at the Ranger District office in Ukiah, Oregon. News releases in the East Oregonian and the Blue Mountain Herald were used to inform the general public about the western spruce budworm and bark beetle situation on the District.

The following groups and individuals were contacted during the scoping process: the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Hunter's Association, Association of Oregon Loggers, adjacent landowners and range permittees.

The proposed timber sale lies within lands ceded to the United States by treaties with American Indian tribes. These treaties established trust responsibilities for the United States that were intended to protect reserved rights and interests of the tribes. The paramount concern of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is the need for cold, clear water. My decision to modify the buffers along the streams in this planning area was made to address these concerns. Salvage and restoration activities were designed with our trust responsibilities in mind.

Maintenance of biological diversity and ecological function within the planning area are at risk. The amount of residual fuels and late seral multi-storied stands are well above the range of natural variability. The concerns raised by groups and individuals who responded during the scoping process pertained primarily to the management practices that were proposed to enhance the natural ecosystem function. This process identified the following significant issues and mitigation measures:

1. Water Quality - Salvage harvesting of dead and dying trees and road reconstruction and temporary road construction creates sediment which may impact fish populations.
2. Water Quantity - Salvage harvesting may create openings which allow earlier melt-off of snow and change the timing of peak flows. A change in the timing of peak flows may have an impact on downstream users (irrigators). An increase in water yield may disrupt channel stability.
3. Big Game Cover - Loss of cover and quality habitat from stand mortality and insect and disease damage and the salvage of dead and dying trees will cause big game habitat effectiveness to be reduced below standards and guidelines. Big game species would not have sufficient hiding and thermal cover throughout the planning area.
4. Stand Health - Long-term productivity can be enhanced by salvage harvesting to improve forest health and stand vigor. The Forest has an opportunity to improve forest health by reducing the current decline. Fire protection can be increased with a reduction of fire risk.

#### **OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

**Alternative 1:** (No Action) No management activities implemented at this time.

**Alternative 2:** The objective of this alternative was to treat high priority insect and disease damaged stands that were determined to be at risk of becoming non-viable stands. Approximately 9.8 MMBF of timber would be salvaged from 1,445 acres using seed tree harvest methods. Approximately 3.9 miles of temporary road would be constructed, and 8.4 miles of existing road would be reconstructed. This alternative includes opportunities to improve fisheries habitat in Indian and Little Indian creeks in management area C5 and establishes a "security area" for big game escapement in management areas C3 and C4.

**Alternative 4:** The objective of this alternative was to treat the same stands identified in alternative 2 by using prescribed fire without harvesting timber. Approximately 1,445 acres would be burned over the next 17 to 20 years using prescribed fire to restore forest health and wildlife habitat. No timber would be salvaged. No roads would be constructed or reconstructed. This alternative includes opportunities to improve fisheries habitat in Indian and Little Indian creeks in management area C5 and establishes a "security area" for big game escapement in management areas C3 and C4.

**Alternative 5:** The objective of this alternative was to treat those stands identified in alternative 3 that could be harvested without building any new temporary roads. Approximately 7.7 MMBF of timber would be salvaged from 1,435 acres using seed tree harvest methods. No temporary road construction will be required. Approximately 9.0 miles of existing road would be reconstructed. This alternative includes opportunities to improve fisheries habitat in Indian and Little Indian creeks in management area C5 and establishes a "security area" for big game escapement in management areas C3 and C4.

## FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

Alternative 3 is not consistent with the Forest Plan in management area C3 due to the large scale western spruce budworm defoliation and past harvest activities. It is my decision to issue a site specific, non-significant Forest Plan amendment for this project which will not alter the desired future condition in this management area. This amendment is as follows:

**Habitat Effectiveness Index** - In management area C3, big game winter range, Forest Plan standards and guidelines require a Habitat Effectiveness Index (HEI) no less than 70. This planning area does not meet this requirement currently, and under this alternative will not meet this requirement for 50 years.

The Forest Plan is amended by allowing an exemption from this standard (Forest Plan 4-152) for the Indianberry planning area.

**Big Game Cover** - In management area C3, big game winter range, Forest Plan standards and guidelines require a minimum of 10 percent of the winter range in satisfactory cover, with a minimum of 30 percent of the winter range in total cover (marginal and satisfactory). Satisfactory cover does not currently meet this requirement, and under this alternative will not meet this requirement for 50 years. Total cover does not currently meet the minimum requirement, but under this alternative is expected to meet it in 50 years.

The Forest Plan is amended by allowing an exemption from this standard (Forest Plan 4-152) for the Indianberry planning area.

## OTHER FOREST PLAN CONCERNS

Alternative 3 is consistent with the Forest Plan in management area C4 by invoking the exception language on page 4-159 in the Forest Plan. Large scale western spruce budworm defoliation and past harvest activities have made the possibility of accomplishing the desired condition for HEI and cover standards marginal within the next 50 years. Activities may occur that reduce HEI and cover where the activities will result in achieving a higher HEI cover condition and desired condition in a shorter period of time than if the area was left untreated.

**Habitat Effectiveness Index:** In management area C4, wildlife habitat, Forest Plan standards and guidelines require an HEI no less than 60. This planning area does not meet this requirement currently, but under this alternative will meet this requirement in 40 years.

**Big Game Cover:** In management area C4, Forest Plan standards and guidelines require a minimum of 15 percent of the habitat in satisfactory cover, with a minimum of 30 percent of the habitat in total cover (marginal and satisfactory). Satisfactory cover does not currently meet this requirement, but under this alternative will meet the minimum requirement in 50 years. Total cover does not currently meet the minimum requirement, but under this alternative is expected to meet it in 30 years.

**Dedicated Old Growth** - The existing dedicated old growth management area, management area C1, consists of one stand 340 acres in size. Previous harvest activities over most of the area have fragmented habitat for species dependent on mature and old growth stand characteristics. The Forest Plan (page 4-145) provides direction for selection of a replacement unit when the designated old growth unit and adjacent feeding area are deficit in these habitat components.

The replacement unit consists of 370 acres in four blocks which contain mature and old growth stand characteristics in the southeastern portion of the planning area. The security area includes or is adjacent to most of this management area. This unit will be included in the dedicated old growth system to meet management requirements.

Under most circumstances openings created by even-aged silviculture should not exceed 40 acres to conform to the Regional guidelines on created forest openings. However, an exception is permitted when natural catastrophic situations such as fires, windstorms, and insect or disease attacks occur [Forest Plan standard and guideline page 4-73] and [36 CFR 219.27 (12)(d)(2)(iii)].

The present insect epidemic is a catastrophic situation under which an exception is permitted. This alternative will use seed tree regeneration harvest in units to 227 acres in size. The largest created openings are expected to be about 50 acres in size due to expanded riparian buffers, trees left for seed and shelter, and trees retained for snags and green tree replacements for wildlife.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

The actions of Alternative 3 with modifications are consistent with the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and are discussed below. These are the reasons for this finding:

1. The actions of the project are consistent with Forest Plan objectives as prescribed in Chapter 4 in management area A8 (pages 4-128 to 4-130), management area C1 (pages 4-144 to 4-146), management area C4 (pages 4-158 to 4-162), and management area C5 (pages 4-163 to 4-166) (36 CFR 219.27). The actions are consistent with management prescriptions and standards and guidelines for these areas.

The Forest Plan is amended in management area C3 for big game cover and habitat effectiveness index and is consistent with the Forest Plan (pages 4-151 to 4-154) with the implementation of this amendment in the Indianberry planning area;

2. A site specific determination of suitability has been made for the lands included in the planning area. The lands designated for harvest meet suitability requirements as provided for in 36 CFR 219.14(a)(1-4);

3. Even-aged management of timber has been determined to meet the objectives and requirements of the Forest Plan and 36 CFR 219.27(d). For harvest areas selected for even-age management, the seed tree method will be used;

4. A site specific determination assures that these lands can be adequately restocked within five years after the regeneration harvest which meets the requirements of 36 CFR 219.27(c)(3);

5. The actions of this project which alter vegetation comply with the requirements of 36 CFR 219.27(b) by following the Forestwide standards and guidelines, as well as the management prescriptions for management areas C3 and C4 and the mitigation measures listed in the EA on pages II-12 through II-17; and

6. Prevention strategies for competing and unwanted vegetation were analyzed in accordance with the Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Mediated Agreement for Managing Competing Vegetation.

I have determined that these actions are not a major Federal action, individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Public health and safety are minimally affected by the proposal;

2. There are no known irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable loss of timber production, wildlife habitats, soil productivity or water quality;

3. There are no known significant cumulative effects between this project and other projects implemented or planned on areas separated from the affected areas of this project beyond those evaluated in Chapter IV of the FEIS for the Forest Plan. Cumulative effects on wolverine may occur but they are not significant.

4. The physical and biological effects are limited to this planning area. Cumulative effects to wolverine are not limited to this area. The range for this animal can encompass 150 square miles, which is larger than the Indianberry planning area.

5. These actions do not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented to meet the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan;

6. Prime farmlands, prime rangeland, wetlands and floodplains will not be significantly affected;

7. Consumers, civil rights, minority groups and women will not be significantly affected;

8. Endangered, threatened, or sensitive species will not be significantly affected. For wolverines, a sensitive species, there is a low risk of direct and/or indirect effects, and a moderate risk of cumulative effects to their habitat as a result of this project. Mitigation measures for direct and indirect effects on wolverines and their habitat include riparian buffers, road closures, sampling for occupancy of habitat, monitoring snowmobile use levels on Sharp's Ridge and cooperating on wolverine research efforts conducted on the Umatilla National Forest. Under this alternative, 867 acres, representing 5 percent of the 16,100 acre planning area, are proposed for salvage harvest. The salvage harvest would not impact high quality habitat; the planning area will continue to provide diverse habitat components associated with the wolverine.

9. There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks;

10. The actions do not threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment; and

11. There are no known cultural resources affected.

This project will be implemented immediately to facilitate Forest rehabilitation and recovery in the Blue Mountains and to capture the economic benefit from dead timber.

This decision is exempt from appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217.4(a)(11). Decisions related to rehabilitation of National Forest System Lands and recovery of Forest resources resulting from natural disasters are not subject to appeal when the Regional Forester determines and gives notice in the Federal Register that good cause exists to exempt such decisions from administrative appeal. Notification of this determination was published in the Federal Register on May 5, 1993.

For further information, contact Craig Smith-Dixon, District Ranger, North Fork John Day Ranger District, PO Box 158, Ukiah, Oregon 97880 or at (503) 427-3231.

  
JEFF D. BLACKWOOD  
Forest Supervisor

5/6/93  
Date



# INDIANBERRY

## ALTERNATIVE 3-MOD

--- PLANNING AREA BOUNDARY

