

Huckleberry Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Little Crow Restoration Project

USDA Forest Service
Naches Ranger District
Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest
Yakima, County, Washington State

Introduction and Background

Research has shown that the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) is experiencing uncharacteristically severe fires, insect infestations, disease epidemics, habitat loss, and hydrologic events (FRS 2012). Numerous assessments of the OOWNF, resulting in a long list of peer-reviewed publications, show: (1) increased susceptibility to uncharacteristically large and severe fires; (2) uncharacteristically severe insect outbreaks; and (3) habitats are declining for late successional and old forest associated species (Lehmkuhl et al. 1994, Hessburg et al. 1999a, Franklin et al. 2007). Additionally, while the Forest's aging road network provides needed access for recreation and forest management, it also degrades the condition of aquatic ecosystems. To restore forest sustainability and resiliency, the OOWNF needs to substantially increase its restoration footprint. To that end, the Tapash Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration project prioritized specific project areas for restoration based on consideration of: forest type, vegetation density and structure, landscape and stand level fire behavior, priority watersheds for wildlife and fish habitat restoration, and consideration of high risk roads with adverse impacts to fish and water quality. Based on the criteria identified above, the approximately 100,000 acre Little Naches watershed was identified as a high priority watershed for landscape-scale restoration treatment on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

The overall purpose of the proposed Little Crow Restoration project is to increase forest resiliency, restore aquatic resources, and maintain public access within the larger context of the Little Naches watershed. The objective is to achieve vegetation and watershed health objectives set forth in the Wenatchee Forest Plan (1990), as amended; the Okanogan-Wenatchee Restoration Strategy (2012); the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act (2010); the Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl (FWS 2011); and the Yakima Steelhead Recovery Plan (2009). In this context there is a need to: accelerate the development of a sustainable vegetative structure, composition, and pattern, which will allow for natural processes to function; improve hydrologic function and water quality; restore stream habitat conditions to contribute towards long term recovery goals of listed fish species; and to provide for an economically and environmentally sustainable transportation system that maintains public access for recreational opportunities, special uses, and other traditional and non-traditional Forest use in the context of vegetative and watershed health.

The environmental assessment (EA) documents the analysis of a No Action alternative and a Modified Proposed Action alternative to meet this need.

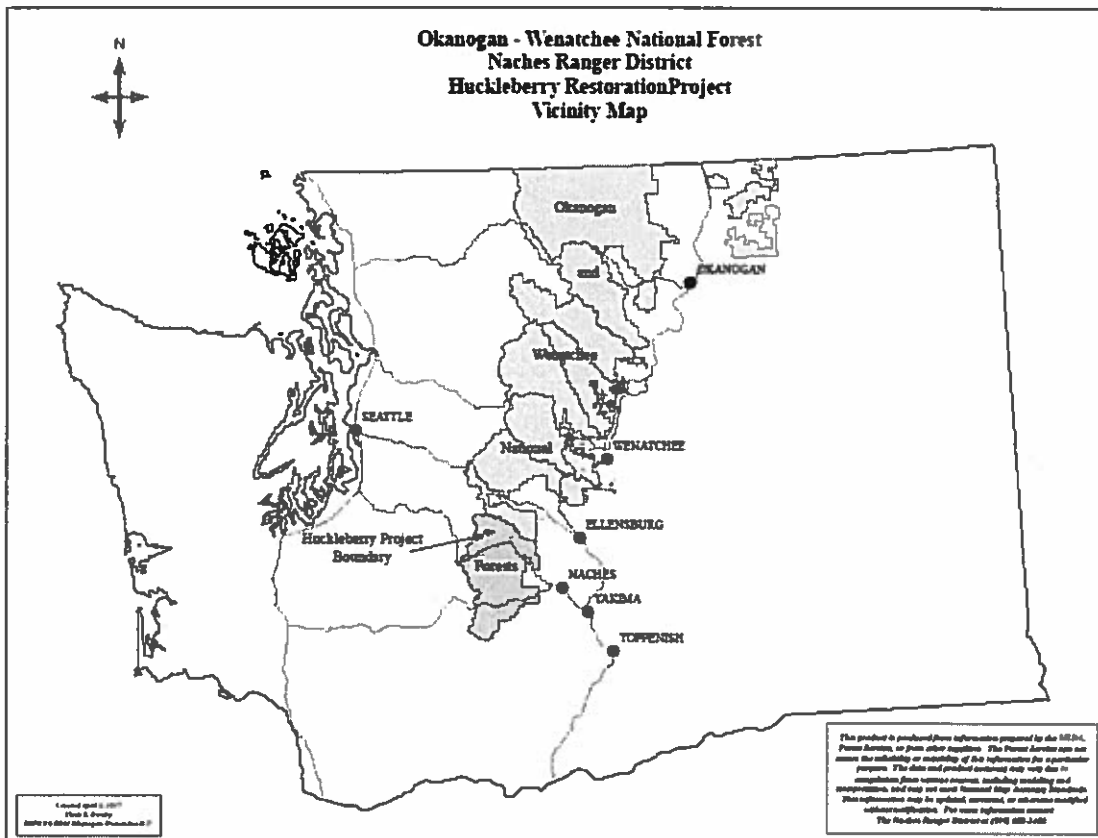
Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Based upon my review of the Little Crow Restoration Environmental Analysis, I have decided to implement a Modified Proposed Action to begin to achieve the outcomes described above. This decision will authorize the management actions identified below, within the Little Crow Restoration Project area. The actions authorized with this decision will be referred to as the Huckleberry Restoration Project. Restoration of the vegetation and proposed road treatments will occur outside of designated Wilderness, Inventoried Roadless Areas, Late-Successional Reserves, and Managed Late-Successional Areas, over an area of approximately 711 acres.

The proposed activities are anticipated to be implemented beginning in the summer of 2017. Activities would potentially continue for five to ten years. All applicable laws, policy, and direction will be followed during the implementation of the proposed activities displayed below. In addition, all applicable project design features, mitigation measures, and best management practices will be applied. Project design features, mitigation measures, and best management practices are considered as a fundamental element of the selected action, and will be applied accordingly.

Project Location

The Huckleberry portion of the Little Crow project area is located in the southern portion of the Little Naches watershed in T18N R12E, Sections 13, 14, 23, and 24; and T18N R13E, Sections 17, 18, 19, and 20.



Restoration Treatments

Vegetation Treatments:

Treatments may occur in stands within the cool, moist and dry forest vegetation types. These stands include Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce, western larch, western hemlock, lodgepole pine, western red cedar, pacific silver fir, subalpine fir, western white pine, and grand fir. There are approximately 711 acres ranging from evenly aged, stem exclusion closed canopy to understory reinitiation structure type where implementation of restoration treatments would result in enhanced huckleberry production in the understory. Commercial harvest, non-commercial small tree thinning, and prescribed burning are the methods proposed to treat the vegetation type described above. Treatments would be applied in combination to achieve the desired objectives and outcomes.

Commercial harvest treatments could include group selection cutting, shelterwood, or seed tree with reserves cutting to meet the desired outcome. Commercial harvest would consist of the removal of Douglas-fir, western larch, grand fir, subalpine fir, pacific silver fir, lodgepole pine, Englemann spruce, western hemlock, and ponderosa pine greater than seven inches diameter breast height (DBH) and less than 25 inches. Commercial treatments to enhance the development of huckleberry productivity would potentially occur on 711 acres. Harvest methods would include 164 acres of skyline harvest method and 547 acres of feller-buncher harvest method. Noncommercial small tree thinning treatments would include mechanically removing trees less than seven inches DBH. Mechanical treatments could include hand felling with chainsaws, hand piling, machine piling, chipping, and girdling.

Prescribed fire would include a mild to moderate intensity broadcast burn with an emphasis on retaining desired large trees. Jackpot burning of fuel concentrations would be considered as an option, as would piling of slash followed by burning of the piles. The determination of the type of fuel treatment would be based in part on the amount of huckleberry present on the site, the amount and arrangement of the fuel, and the aspect of the unit. Handline and fuel breaks may be constructed around individual burn units for control purposes, natural fuel breaks and roads are preferred and would be utilized whenever possible. All handlines would be rehabilitated upon completion of burning with erosion control measures such as water bars, based on slope and soil conditions and covering with brush/slash where appropriate. Chipping of material from the fuel break may be utilized. Areas that receive treatment with prescribed fire would be monitored for the need and timing of maintenance burning and would receive a maintenance burn as needed to sustain the resilience of the stand and to retain the mosaic of properly functioning ecotypes across the project area.

Commercial haul activities and other vegetative treatments described above would result in the use of approximately 14 miles of system roads under Forest Service jurisdiction. During the course of treatment activities approximately 0.3 miles of roads currently closed and in custodial status as M/L 1 roads would be converted to open M/L 2 status. After completion of harvest activities, these roads would be put back into M/L 1 closed condition. Activities such as road blading, drainage improvement, and brushing could be performed on roads identified for commercial haul activities.

Road Treatments:

- **Road Decommissioning:** The objective of road decommissioning is to return the unneeded road to a more natural state. Decommissioning is accomplished using techniques intended to transform the road area from a facility to productive Forest land. Approximately 2.7 miles of

Forest Service System Maintenance Level 2 roads are proposed for decommissioning (FSR 1902-859 and FSR 1902-860). Actions to achieve this typically include:

- De-compacting the road prism.
 - Re-contouring all or part of the road prism to re-establish drainage patterns that move stormwater across the road scar rather than along its' length. Road prism re-contouring would also be designed to prevent runoff from immediately entering adjacent streams.
 - Removing culverts.
 - Removing stream crossing road fill and re-contouring and revegetating the streambanks.
 - Constructing waterbars.
 - Constructing earthen barricades.
 - Armoring overflow and outflow channels to reduce resource damage.
 - Controlling erosion.
 - Seeding and mulching to promote vegetative revegetation.
- Structural Improvements (Upgrades) on Forest Service System Roads: The objective of implementing structural improvements on Forest roads is to reduce runoff and road surface generated sediment delivery to streams in the project area. Approximately 5.5 miles of Forest Service System Roads (Maintenance Levels 2 and 3) are proposed for structural upgrades. Structural upgrades could include:
 - Replacing undersized stream crossings with structures that provide aquatic organism passage. Upgrading two (2) stream crossings; with one (1) of these crossings occurring on fish bearing streams.
 - Constructing stormwater management features such as waterbars, drivable dips, and drain sags.
 - Constructing permeable fills to facilitate natural ground water movement.
 - Increasing the size and frequency of cross drainage structures.
 - Re-establishing drainage ditches.
 - Increasing the size and frequency of ditch relief drain structures.
 - Hardening crossings at stream fords
 - Re-conditioning the road surface to the appropriate shape and restoring road crowns to standard.
 - Road grading
 - Placing or replacing of surface aggregate.
- Temporary Road Construction: Up to 4.3 miles of temporary road could be constructed to facilitate the removal of commercial timber. After harvest activities are complete, all temporary roads constructed under this project would be decommissioned using the treatments described under Road Treatments above.
- Gate Installation
 - A gate would be installed on FSR 1902-861 at approx. MP 0.1. This gate would serve as a year-round gate to discourage motorized access into the Inventoried Roadless Area. FSR 1902-861 would change from a level 1 road to a gated level 2 road with the option to open it as needed for land management. Gating this road is intended to

enhance security habitat for wolves, wolverines, grazing ungulates and late-successional species.

Best Management Practices (BMPs), Standards, and Project Design Features (PDFs)

Best Management Practices (BMPs), Standards, and Project Design Features (PDFs) are an integral part of the selected alternative and serve to minimize the impacts of activities on natural resources. They are considered to be part of the action. The content and effects analyses for each resource are dependent upon adherence to the BMPs, Standards, and referenced PDFs during project implementation.

Forest Service Handbook 2509.25 Watershed Conservation Practices Handbook, and USDA National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System lands (USDA 2012) provide guidance and BMPs concerning impacts to streams. Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality and timber sale contract provisions would be followed to prevent or reduce adverse impacts to water quality from forest activities and meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act (PL1.1972, Federal Water Pollution Control Act and later amendments).

Best Management Practices for the Prevention of Invasive Species (USDA Forest Service, 2002)

BMPs Common to All Ground Disturbing Activities

Forest workers would inspect, remove, and properly dispose of weed seed and plant parts on their clothing, equipment including and vehicles. (BMP I-3.4)

When operating outside the limits of the road prism, all heavy equipment (bulldozers, skidders, graders, backhoes, dump trucks, etc.) would be cleaned prior to entering the National Forest. Cleaning of equipment would be required to occur off National Forest lands. (This does not apply to service vehicles that will stay on the roadway, traveling frequently in and out of the project area. (BMP I-5.1)

Soil disturbance would be minimized to no more than needed to meet project objectives. (BMP III-23.1)

All disturbed soil would be revegetated in a manner that optimizes plant establishment for that specific site. (BMP I-4.3)

Only weed-free plant materials and mulch would be used for revegetation and site stabilization. (BMP I-4.5)

Native plant materials would be the first choice for revegetation. When timely natural regeneration of the native plant community is not likely to occur; non-native, non-invasive plant species would be used as an interim, non-persistent measure designed to aid in the re-establishment of native communities would be utilized in revegetation projects. Seeding and or planting will occur at the appropriate times in spring and fall where needed to reduce erosion, prevent weeds from re-invading, or to hasten recovery of non-weed species. (BMP I-4.6)

Revegetation efforts would be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness of revegetation efforts. (BMP I-4.9)

All gravel, fill, sanding stockpiles, quarries and borrow sources would be inspected and approved prior to transport and use. The source will not be used if the weeds present at the pit are not found at the site of intended use. If weeds of concern are present, they must be treated before transport and use. (BMP I-5.3)

Water for dust abatement and other uses would not be drafted from weed infested water sources. (BMP I-4.14)

All restoration activities will be designed and implemented to avoid all known Interagency Special Status Plant Species.

Treatments will be designed and implemented to avoid culturally sensitive areas.

Project Design Features Common to All Vegetation and Fuels Treatments

Riparian Reserve widths as described in the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) in the NWFP will be applied. Riparian Reserve widths are described as at least 300, 150 and 100 feet on both sides of stream channels for fish bearing streams, permanently flowing nonfish-bearing streams and seasonally flowing/intermittent streams respectively. Additionally, minimum reserve widths for lakes and natural ponds are 300 feet, 150 feet from constructed ponds and reservoirs and wetlands greater than 1 acre, and 50 feet for wetlands less than 1 acre. Some Riparian Reserves may extend further due to taller site potential tree heights or other field conditions such as unstable or potentially unstable areas (USDA 1996, pages V-33-35; USDA 1998, pages V-26-28; USDA 2012 BMPs Plan-3, AqEco-2, and Veg-3). Riparian Reserve widths will be confirmed in the field during project layout.

Commercial timber harvest units, and non-commercial small tree thinning areas will not be located within Riparian Reserves. Harvest unit landings will not be located within Riparian Reserves. Forestry staff will consult with fisheries or hydrology staff when determining Riparian Reserve buffer distances in the field, based on the Okanogan-Wenatchee Forest fish distribution database, Riparian Reserve data layer, field reviews, and site specific fish presence surveys or observations.

Vegetation treatments will not occur within Riparian Reserves except for the treatment of danger trees located adjacent to log hauling routes. A danger tree is a diseased or defective tree with characteristics that indicate instability, and had the potential to fail and cause damage or harm to vehicles, equipment, or people within the work area, or along transportation routes. Danger trees within Riparian Reserves will be felled and left as downed wood (BMP Veg-3).

Heavy equipment operating within areas designated as ground based will be confined to operating on designated skid trails, landings, approved roads, or prepared slash mat trails that are at least one foot in depth, and result in no significant increase in soil bulk density.

Heavy equipment used for mechanical falling or machine piling must be equipped with a boom capable of reaching cut trees or slash while maintaining confinement to designated skid trails, landings, approved haul roads, or prepared slash mat trails.

Northern spotted owl surveys are current for the project area and will remain current throughout the veg treatment (mechanical and fuels) period. No known spotted owl activity centers occur within 0.7 miles of the proposed activities. No disturbance to the northern spotted owl is expected; no timing restriction is needed. However if an active nest sites is found during implementation the following

PDF will be implemented. To avoid human disturbance, timing restrictions would be placed on all project activities that cause noise above ambient levels near active northern spotted owl nests and activity centers during the nesting season beginning March 1 to July 31. Activities that create noise above ambient forest levels including use of chainsaws, tractors, snowplows, bulldozers, graders, dump trucks, excavators, log trucks, or generators would be prohibited within 0.25 mile of nest site. Should a nesting pair of spotted owls be located within 0.25 mile of the fuels treatment area, appropriate burn plan designs would be implemented: restrict burning to occur outside nesting period (March 1 through July 31, design burn plan so that the plume trajectory is at least 45 degrees either side of nest; Use a test-fire prior to ignition to determine plume direction. With this mitigation in place, it is anticipated that project implementation would result in minimal disturbance effects to the spotted owl if found nesting within 0.25 miles of the project activity.

All vegetation treatments will avoid the treatment of spotted owl suitable habitat.

All vegetation treatments will avoid the treatment of late-successional habitat.

The following pertains to raptors (other than the northern spotted owl and northern goshawk). There are no known raptor sites in the project area, however, if an active raptor nest is discovered during commercial timber harvest operations, approximately 30 acres of the most suitable nesting habitat around each nest site would be protected (WFP IV-81). In addition, the following timing restrictions would apply to commercial timber harvest operations (timber falling, yarding or skidding and timber haul) non-commercial thinning, and fuels treatment (natural and mechanical), generally within 0.25 mile of the nest sites (distance may be reduced pending on site specific conditions determined by district wildlife biologist): At active nests (used in the last two years), a no cut 150 foot buffer would be implemented around the nest site and an additional 150 foot transition zone would be managed to grow suitable nest site characteristics. If a nest is determined to be occupied or a bird is found nesting during year of activity, conduct activity outside of nesting period to avoid disturbance. The nesting period is generally from March 1 to August 31. Should an active nest be located within 0.25 mile of a fuels treatment area, design the burn so that the plume trajectory is at least 45 degrees either side of a nest tree; use a test-fire prior to ignition to determine plume direction. These dates may be adjusted depending on species and site specific knowledge (to be determined by district wildlife biologist). If a nest is not occupied, no restrictions on operations would be applied.

Using Reynold et al. 1992 (GTR RM-271) the following mitigation measure will be added onto the 30 acre protection around active northern goshawk nests. Approximately 30 acres of the most suitable habitat surrounding the nest tree will be retained. In addition within the 400 acre post-fledgling area, canopy cover of over 50% will be retained in 60% of the area. USDA Forest Service. 1992. Management Recommendations for the Northern Goshawk in the Southwestern United States. GTR RM-217. Fort Collins, Colorado.

The standard provision CT6.24 and/or BT6.24 for the protection of plants and animals listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, or listed as Sensitive by the Regional Forester under the authority of the Forest Service Manual – FSM 2670, would be included in the timber sale contract. This provision provides for protection of areas where proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive species (now including survey and manage species) are discovered in the timber sale area during the contract period.

Trees exceeding 25 inches DBH may be designated for removal by the Forest Service if the Timber Sale Administration official determines that removal is necessary to provide safety and/or improve functional operational capabilities.

Timber harvest methods would be implemented using the Wenatchee National Forest Ground Based Harvest Policy, as described in the letter dated June 28, 1996. If a revised policy is in effect at the time of timber sale contract preparation, the revised policy will be used. The existing policy would use the following implementation criteria for this project (BMP's Veg-1, Veg-4, Veg-6):

Harvest would be limited to periods when soil moisture level is dry, soils are frozen, or there is sufficient snow cover to protect soils from compaction. (BMPs Veg-2 and Veg-4)

The yarding of logs through or across stream channels, riparians, or wet areas is prohibited.

Stringing of the skyline across intermittent and perennial streams shall be allowed to access tail holds and gain deflection. These tailhold trees, and any trees that are felled within the riparian for establishing skyline clearance, shall not be yarded, but left as downed course woody debris. The typical number of trees required for removal within a riparian to allow for skyline line clearance during initial line tightening is 0-2 trees depending on the ability of the yarder to power the skyline through tree branches during the line tightening process. The typical width needed to clear and tighten the skyline is 1-5 feet in width.

The yarding or removal of any trees from Inventoried Roadless Areas is prohibited. Anchoring the skyline to trees located in Inventoried Roadless Areas to establish tailholds and gain deflection is permitted. If tailhold anchors within the Inventoried Roadless Area require felling for operational safety, the felled tailhold trees shall not be yarded but left as downed course woody debris.

Tractors will not be operated on continuous slopes greater than 35 percent. Exceptions to this can be made on slopes greater than 35 percent and less than 300 feet long where slope breaks above and below the steeper slopes become gentler due to ground terracing. Tractor winching to designated skid trails will be utilized on continuous slopes greater than 35 percent and greater than 300 feet long. Exceptions to this can be made for special situations, if a soil specialist agrees and the exception and its rationale are documented in the project analysis file (BMP's Veg-2 and Veg-4).

Designated skid trails and utilization of existing skid trails that are spaced greater than an average of 120 feet apart for tractor logging operations during normal operating seasons will be required. Consistent with the Okanogan Wenatchee Forest ground based harvest policy; the winching of logs to designated skid trails would be required in areas of hand tree felling. Exceptions to this standard can be made if other logging systems are used, or site conditions such as dry, frozen ground or snow cover alleviate the concern. These exceptions would need to be coordinated with a soil specialist and the rationale would be documented in the project analysis file (BMP Veg-4).

Use of ground based systems for log skidding (tractors, skidders, etc.) would be limited, as needed, to meet the WFP standard for detrimental soil compaction (WFP, IV-97). This standard states that no more than 20 percent of an activity area would have detrimental soil conditions after purchaser's operation. Detrimental soil compaction is defined as an increase in bulk density of 15 percent or more over undisturbed conditions. Compacted soil areas that are affected in the proposed timber harvest actions (skid trails, temporary roads, and landings) would be rehabilitated using an appropriate method (such as sub-soiling, scarifying, or planting of perennial grasses) (BMP's Veg-2, Veg-4, and Veg-6).

Landings would be located on road beds, when present, to minimize additional ground disturbance (BMP Veg-6).

The WFP standard and guideline requirements for ground cover retention would be met following logging and fuels treatment operations (WFP, page IV-97, BMPs Fire-2 and Veg-2).

In order to meet WFP standards for soil protection, there would be no tractor piling of slash except on landings, and no machine fireline constructed as a part of fuel treatments (BMP Veg-8).

Prescribed fire ignition would occur outside of Riparian Reserves. Underburning that occurs within Riparian Reserves should be low intensity, backing from ignition sources outside the Riparian Reserve. Burn plan objectives should strive for <10 percent of the Riparian Reserve having moderate burn intensity and no high intensity burn acreage within the Riparian Reserve. In addition, no hand constructed fireline should be constructed in Riparian Reserves or areas of high erosion hazard potential (BMP's Fire-1 and Fire-2). Blackline contain method would be the preferred method in Riparian Reserves, if needed.

Prescribed burning would not be implemented on more than 25 percent of any 6th field watershed within a single season (BMP's Fire-1 and Fire-2).

The public and special use permittees will be notified in a timely manner of upcoming vegetation and fuels treatment activities and locations, and associated system road, trails, and recreation facility access delays or closures. This information will be distributed through various forums, including the news media and internet; at local events during organized recreation group meetings; to recreation residents and other permit holders; and by posting at the entrance roads and critical road or trail junctions in the project area. The purchaser's annual operating schedule and discussion with the timber sale administrator will be used as information sources.

Notification signs such as "Logging Activity Ahead", "Trucks Hauling", and "Prescribed Burning Ahead" will be posted at major road junctions, on the upper and lower ends of the loop roads, and on both sides of Road 1900, where management activities are occurring, to alert recreationists to potential activities on the road, possible delays, and log truck traffic. Notification signs will also be posted at Sno-Parks within the project area or accessible from the project area, and can include Kaner Flat (Road 1900), Crow Creek (Road 1902/1920) and Little Naches/1904 (Road 1900/1904), Pyramid Creek, Greenwater, Milk Creek (Road 1708), Bald Mountain (Road 1701), and Rock Creek (Road 1702).

System trails and OHV routes shall be kept reasonably free of equipment and products, slash, and debris resulting from project operations. System trails (including snowmobile trails) and OHV routes will be kept open from Friday 12:00PM through Monday 12:00AM during the seasons those facilities are open to recreation use, although there may be temporary closures for safety issues. If system trail closures are necessary, closures will be of the shortest possible length for safety and a detour provided where possible.

Road surfaces will be kept open for travel (delays may occur) during project activities.

Wilderness boundaries, recreation sites with some level of development; system trailheads; system trails and four wheel drive routes; facilities and communication sites under special use permit; and groomed snowmobile trail segments that tie trails together not located on system roads will be shown

as “Protected Improvements” on the Sale Area Map. Trees will be directionally felled away from these areas. Protected improvements include Sand Creek Campground and Huckleberry Camp. Trailheads include the South Fork (Trail 963). Trails include the South Fork 946, Sand Creek 963, and Sand Creek Cutoff 963A. System Four Wheel Drive Routes include Pipeline 688. Also included is the Pacific Power powerline (underground).

Slash will not be placed within the site perimeters or within 100 feet of the following areas: Sand Creek Campground, Huckleberry Camp; South Fork Trailhead (Trail 963); and the Pacific Power powerline (underground).

Vegetation and fuels treatment areas and activities within 100 feet of visually sensitive areas (as identified below) will be designed so as not to be unnatural appearing (i.e. marking paint, slash, ribbon, etc.) for more than two seasons (WFP IV-215) in these areas: Road 1902; system motorized trails and four wheel drive routes; and as seen from Sand Creek Campground, Huckleberry Camp; and system trailheads. (Trails, four wheel drive routes and trailheads have been identified in the paragraph above. The recreation planner or developed recreation manager will work with vegetation and fuels personnel during design.

Topographical features and road alignment changes will be used to break up activity areas when designing units adjacent to visually sensitive road corridors. Slash piles will be located out of view and outside of natural openings, or more than 100 feet from these road corridors, if possible. Any landing piles located within 100 feet of visually sensitive road corridors shall be identified by the fuels planner as highest in priority for treatment to occur within the two season time period. The fuels planner should monitor progression of harvest activities to ensure they are aware of the location and proximity of landing piles to these routes. The recreation planner will work with vegetation and fuels personnel during design.

Deferment or rerouting of grazing for up to two seasons would be implemented prior to and following prescribed burning, thinning treatments, or revegetation efforts associated with restoration, to encourage vigorous seedling establishment. Deferment would be considered as the last option.

Log hauling would not be permitted:

- on Federal holidays;
- from 5:00 P.M. Friday to 5:00 A.M. Monday, between April 1 and December 15;
- during Modern Firearm Elk season (typically the end of October thru the first week in November);

Log hauling, and felling/skidding activities would not be permitted:

- from 5:00 P.M. Friday to 12:00 A.M. Monday, between December 15 and March 31 on groomed snowmobile routes; and

Snow removal equipment would be of the size and type commonly used to remove snow and would not cause damage to the road. The use of plows or dozers to remove snow would require written approval by the Contracting Officer. Equip plows or dozers with shoes or runners would be required to keep the dozer blade a minimum of 2 inches above the road surface unless otherwise approved by the Contractor Officer. Removal of snow would be from all or part of the traveled way, including sufficient turnouts for safe and efficient use for timber transportation and to protect the road. Remove Intruding windfalls, debris or slough and slide material would be disposed of only as necessary to provide passage for timber transportation.

System trail tread would be protected during project activities to allow for minimal physical disruption of the trail experience and maximum retention of the integrity of the trail corridor and tread. Trees will be directionally felled away from the trail corridor. The trails manager will coordinate activities to re-establish trail markers on trees adjacent to trails where tree harvesting occurs, or move markers to trees which will be retained during marking activities conducted by Forest Service personnel. No hauling will be permitted during Modern Firearm Elk season. From December 15th through March 31st, No hauling will be permitted on weekends (Friday evening, Saturday, Sunday) or holidays (including Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, or President's Day) and the snowmobile routes would be open to snowmobiling during these times

Trees would be directionally felled away from natural openings (such as meadows) visible from visually sensitive road 1902.

System trails and four wheel drive routes would not be used as temporary haul roads or skid trails. Skid trail and other equipment crossings over the trails would be minimized. All created crossings would be blocked immediately after use with natural appearing obstacles immediately after use to disguise the opening.

In the event unintended impacts occur, the drainage and trail tread will be restored to previously designated Forest Service Trail Class Specifications after log hauling is complete. System four wheel drive routes include: Pipeline 688.

Landings and skid trails with invasive species would be treated before logging and prescribed fire activities. These areas will be prioritized based on weed species present, concentration, and resources threatened. (BMP III-22.4). Invasive species infestations at landings and on skid trails would be monitored and treated after harvest, when necessary. (BMP III-24.2)

Project Design Features – Road Decommissioning

Northern spotted owl surveys are current for the project area and will remain current throughout the veg treatment (mechanical and fuels) period. No known spotted owl activity centers occur within 0.7 miles of the proposed activities. No disturbance to the northern spotted owl is expected; no timing restriction is needed. However if an active nest sites is found during implementation the following PDF will be implemented. To avoid human disturbance, timing restrictions would be placed on all active northern spotted owl nests and activity centers during the nesting season beginning March 1 to July 31. Activities that create noise above ambient forest levels including use of chainsaws, tractors, snowplows, bulldozers, graders, dump trucks, excavators, or generators would be prohibited within 0.25 mile of nest site.

There are no known raptor sites in the project area, however if an active raptor nest (excluding spotted owl) is discovered during temporary road construction, the following timing restrictions would apply within 0.25 mile of the nest sites (distance may be reduced pending on site specific conditions determined by the district wildlife biologist). At active nests (used in the last two years), a no cut 150 foot buffer would be implemented around the nest site and an additional 150 foot transition zone would be managed to grow suitable nest site characteristics. If a nest is determined to be occupied or a bird is found nesting during year of activity, conduct activity outside of nesting period to avoid disturbance. The nesting period is generally from March 1 to August 31. These dates may be adjusted

depending on species and site specific knowledge (to be determined by the district wildlife biologist). If a nest is not occupied, no restrictions on operations would be applied.

When drafting water for dust abatement or road grading, sources from ponds or streams that are non-fish bearing will be favored. If no reasonable alternative water source is available, the drafting rate from streams occupied with fish will not exceed 10 percent of the current streamflow, the streambed will not be altered, and pump chances will not pose any barrier to fish movement. Water drafting/pumping will maintain a continuous flow of the stream, without altering the original wetted width (NFP, 2002). Pump hose intakes in fish bearing streams will be equipped with a screen of 3/32 inch mesh or less, and will have an intake flow of less than 1 cubic foot/second to prevent entraining juvenile fish (NFP, 2002) (BMP WatUses-3).

Road treatments would occur during seasons when soil moisture conditions are not saturated.

Excavated culvert fill would be disposed of outside of the flood-prone areas.

Sediment filter logs, limbs, and tree branches would be scattered on the bare soil areas of re-contoured streambanks after culvert fill removal.

Water bars would be constructed to prevent water from running along the road surface at intervals appropriate to site conditions. The road surface would be scarified and seeded with native grasses and forbs.

Erosion control work, such as water-barring etc., would be completed prior to fall rains and then kept up weekly if work continues beyond normal operating season. Road construction would not begin unless erosion control work can be completed the same season (BMPs Road-3, Road-4, Road-5, and Veg-2).

Within riparian areas, road decommissioning would result in re-contouring of the stream bank and valley side slopes to mimic the natural floodplain contours and gradient.

All soil disturbed from road treatments and re-contoured streambanks would be seeded and planted with native species.

Appropriate stormwater and sediment management structures would be utilized during the decommissioning process and until the decommissioned road scar becomes stabilized.

Create or maintain an adequate area of approximately 300 feet at the beginning/junction of the road to provide a location for livestock bedding and to minimize reductions in the total number of sheep bedgrounds associated with road decommissioning. If providing adequate area at the beginning/junction of the road is not feasible, a new area for livestock bedding must be identified prior to implementation of the road decommissioning.

Sediment control barriers would be used between the project and the stream, when obliterating road segments immediately adjacent to streams.

Drainage features used for road decommissioning would be spaced to hydrologically disconnect road surface runoff from stream channels.

Project Design Features – Structural Road Improvements (Upgrades)

Road blading, brushing and ditch cleaning in areas with high concentrations of invasive plants would be conducted in consultation with District plant specialists, and would incorporate invasive plant prevention practices as appropriate.

When removing culverts from first or second order, non-fish bearing streams, a fishery biologist or hydrologist would determine which applicable design criteria under Fish Passage Culvert and Bridge Projects should be followed.

Aquatic Passage Structures would be designed to accommodate the peak flood flow and debris (100 year event).

The following Culvert Removal/Upgrade Construction and Area Isolation for Fish Removal BMPs will be adhered to (BMP's AqEco-2 and Road-6):

- Isolate Worksite areas from streamflow when removing culverts on flowing streams.
- Remove as much road fill from over the culverts as possible, excavating from the outlet end to inlet before pulling out the structures. Fill should be removed at least to the invert of the pipe.
- All fish capture, removal, and handling activities would be coordinated and managed by experienced fishery biologists.
- Isolate the capture area by installing block nets at up and downstream locations and leave in a secured position to prevent fish from entering the construction area. Leave nets secured to stream channel bed and banks until fish capture and transport is complete. Monitor block nets or traps at least on a daily schedule to ensure they are secured to the banks and free of organic debris accumulation.
- Fish capture may occur by: using hand or dip nets, as the area is slowly dewatered; seine netting with appropriate mesh size; installation of minnow traps overnight in conjunction with seining; or prior to dewatering, electrofishing (only where other means of fish capture are not feasible or effective) using methods outlined in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS, 2000) Guidelines for Electrofishing Waters Containing Salmonids Listed Under the Endangered Species Act.
- Captured fish will be kept in large buckets (five gallon minimum) and rapidly released into a pool or area that provides cover and flow refuge, upstream of the isolation reach. Larger fish will be placed in separate buckets from smaller prey-sized fish. All fish injuries or mortalities will be documented for reporting.
- If diverting streamflow around the construction site, construct a coffer dam (built with non-erosive materials or clean rock) and an associated pump or a bypass culvert. Small amounts of streambed substrate may be moved to help seal and secure diversion structures. Pumps must be fitted with fish screens and be operated in accordance with NMFS fish screen criteria (NMFS 1995). Dissipate water flow at the bypass outflow to prevent damage to riparian vegetation or stream channel. If the diversion is unscreened, place diversion outlet into area

that provides safe re-entry of fish into the stream channel, preferably pool habitat with cover. When necessary, pump seepage water from the de-watered construction area or bridge abutment coffer dams to a temporary storage and treatment site or into upland areas and allow water to filter through vegetation prior to reentering the stream.

- Upon project completion, slowly re-water the construction site to prevent loss of surface water downstream as the construction site streambed absorbs water and to prevent a sudden increase in stream turbidity. Monitor downstream during re-watering to prevent stranding of aquatic animals below the water bypass point site.

Project Design Features – Temporary Road Construction

Temporary road construction will occur in spotted owl dispersal habitat and nonsuitable habitat. It does not occur in suitable (NRF) owl habitat. Temporary roads constructed for this project would be blocked within one week at the completion of harvest activities with cull logs, slash, rocks, or other material until soil moisture is at the levels that allow for effective decommissioning (seeding, other erosion control work, contouring, etc.) as described in this section (BMP Road-6).

Temporary road construction within Riparian Reserves would be avoided, and only proposed under specific situations. Temporary road crossings of fish bearing or perennial streams would not be proposed. Under special circumstances, forestry staff will consult with fisheries/hydrology staff when proposing to locate temporary road crossings of intermittent streams, when a stream crossing could reduce lengthy road construction or side slope disturbance to access vegetation treatment units. Temporary road construction within Riparian Reserves would only be proposed where a pre-existing (legacy) logging road template could provide efficient access to proposed harvest units, the route is greater than 75 feet from any stream channels, and has been field reviewed by fisheries/hydrology staff. After logging use, the temporary road would be fully decommissioned, restored to natural slope contour, and soil productivity restored through de-compaction.

Temporary roads will be located on benches, small ridges, or on side slopes less than 20%, when present, to minimize the amount of cut-and-fill. Occasional short segments of temporary roads may be located on side slopes between 20% and 40% in rare circumstances to improve the feasibility of skyline logging systems.

After completion of timber harvest activities, temporary roads would have their junction with system roads effectively disguised and blocked to motorized use. The entire road would have deep soil de-compaction, road cut/fill removal, restoration of the natural slope contour, water bar excavation, and placement of logs, rocks or brush implemented by appropriate excavation equipment. Temporary road decommissioning would be implemented during periods when soil moisture levels are appropriate for effective reduction of soil compaction. Restored areas would be seeded with native grass/forb species. (TSC provision CT5.1# Option 1, and BMPs Road-5, Road-6, Veg-4 and Veg-6).

Monitoring

Monitoring is designed to determine if the resource objectives of the Huckleberry Restoration Project are met. The results will be used to verify implementation and effectiveness of selected mitigation and protection measures in a timely manner. Required monitoring may be determined during consultation and will be, if necessary, included in the final decision as a condition of the ESA consultation. In addition, the following monitoring items may also be considered:

- Consistency monitoring - Wenatchee Forest Plan soil compaction standards (2-5 years after action)
- Effectiveness monitoring of gate on FSR 1902-861 (1-3 years after action)
- Effectiveness monitoring of road decommissioning (2-4 years after action)
- Effectiveness monitoring of aquatic organism passage on FSR 1902-861 at the culvert on Sand Creek (1-3 years after action)
- Effectiveness monitoring of vegetation treatments with respect to huckleberry productivity

When compared to No Action, the Modified Proposed Action will (EA Chapter 1, Pages 1-6 thru 1-8):

- Enhance special and unique habitats such huckleberry communities;
- Provide resilience to insects, disease, and uncharacteristic wildfire;
- Contribute to the local economy via job creation and by providing forest products to local industries and communities.
- Reduce artificial barriers to steelhead, bull trout and other native fish migration caused by road network stream crossings;
- Reduce road surface generated sediment delivery to the stream network

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the Modified Proposed Action, I considered the Proposed Action as initially scoped, and the No Action alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA Chapter 2, Pages 2-33 thru 2-36.

Issues identified during scoping can either be addressed by developing alternatives to the proposed action or by adjusting the proposed action to resolve conflicts [36 CFR 220.7 (b)(2)(i)]. The Forest Service NEPA procedures allow the responsible official to modify a proposed action as the process progresses and requires such modifications to be made in an open and transparent process obvious to all interested parties. The description of the proposal may include a brief description of modifications and incremental design features developed through the analysis process to develop the alternatives considered. The documentation of these incremental changes to a proposed action or alternatives may be incorporated by reference in accord with 40 CFR 1502.21.

By means of on-going collaboration, tribal consultation and public scoping, potential issues were identified and resolved through project modification or application of best management practices or project design features. The incremental differences between the proposed action, as scoped on March 10, 2015; and the modified proposed action analyzed in this environmental assessment, are described in Chapter 1, Pages 1-14 and 1-15 of the Environmental Assessment.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area.

Public Involvement and Scoping

As described in the background, the need for this action arose as early as 1994. A proposal to implement landscape restoration was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in February 2015. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during the scoping period March 10, 2015 through April 8, 2015. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency collaborated extensively with the Little Naches Collaborative Working Group and consulted with the Yakama Nation. A list of individuals, Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies that were consulted can be found in Chapter 4, Pages 4-1 and 4-2 of the Environmental Assessment.

Public Involvement

Seven-hundred and ninety scoping letters were sent to the public, cooperating agencies, and organizations. Five-hundred and seven letters were sent electronically and two-hundred eighty three letters were sent hard-copy mailing. Eighteen of these mailings were returned as undeliverable. Scoping letters were also made available to participants attending the Tapash Working Group and Trail and Wilderness Interest Group meetings. A summary of the comments received is provided below. Individual specific comments, listed by commenter, are included in Appendix B of the Environmental Assessment.

A significant number of the commenters identified issues or concerns associated with some aspect of the proposed road decommissioning actions. Many stakeholders who utilize the Forest, for either economic livelihood or recreation, are concerned that they will no longer have access to these areas and experiences. Several individuals commented on the economics of decommissioning currently open and drivable roads; and the impact of the proposed reduction in the existing infrastructure relative to the long-term economic sustainability of the local community. Commenters also voiced concern relative to the continued ability of the Forest Service to conduct administrative management of the National Forest; specifically, in relation to forest health and fire suppression activities.

Other commenters identified issues associated with the current road network and the associated adverse impacts to fish and wildlife habitat. These individuals did not feel that the road decommissioning proposal was aggressive enough. Commenters indicated that the proposal should be more robust in addressing high road densities and unauthorized roads. The use and long-term disposition of temporary roads for logging activities and firewood removal was also identified as a concern; specifically, for the aquatics and fisheries resource and relative to the protection of woodpecker habitat and vegetative connectivity.

Commenters also voiced concern relative to the proposed vegetation and fuels treatments. Individuals mentioned the need to implement treatments at a scale that would improve forest health and resiliency at the landscape level. In this regard, commenters identified the importance of using commercial harvest in accomplishing the desired outcome and the associated economic value. Others were concerned that the proposal could have an adverse impact on wildlife security habitat and the maintenance of adequate wildlife hiding and thermal cover. There was some question relative to the feasibility of utilizing large-scale prescribed fire given the current forest conditions and available resources.

Collaboration

Development of the Little Crow Restoration project was done in collaboration with the Little Naches Working Group. The Little Naches Working Group is a project-level collaborative within the Integrated Restoration Team of the Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative (<http://www.tapash.org/>). The collaboration began in 2013 as partners recognized an opportunity to work with the Naches Ranger District identify priorities, opportunities, and solutions that implement the Forest Restoration Strategy in the Little Naches watershed. The working group is an open collaborative group that has continued to reach out to potentially interested stakeholders throughout the process. In early 2015, the working group summarized key issues and considerations from various interests to be considered during project development and analysis in: *Little Naches Working Group Pre-Scoping Report – Land Management and Restoration Issue Feedback by Interested Subgroups* (January 21, 2015). Information provided by the Little Naches Working Group and public stakeholders through scoping, was considered and incorporated into the initial proposed action. On-going collaboration with the working group further contributed to the development of the modified proposed action.

Tribal Consultation

A government-to-government consultation letter was mailed to JoDe L. Goudy, Chairman, Yakama Nation; and Jim Boyd, Chairman, Business Council, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation on March 10, 2015.

As a signatory member of the Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative, the Yakama Nation has been fully engaged in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration program of work for priority watersheds on the Tapash landscape. Through active participation in the Little Naches Working Group, individuals representing the Yakama Nation have contributed directly to the development of the Little Crow Restoration project. In this respect, concerns that were identified included: the need to protect woodpecker habitat (snags) in firewood gathering treatment areas; the lack of a proposed action to improve habitat for bull trout in the vicinity of Crow Creek Campground; and the relatively small scale of the proposed large wood placement.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, the Yakama Nation, and the Little Naches Collaborative Working Group; the interdisciplinary team modified the proposed action, as well as, applied project design features and best management practices to address these concerns. Through collaboration and public involvement we were able to resolve all potential issues identified and develop the Modified Proposed Action.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The following is a summary of the project analysis to determine significance, as defined by Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 (05). “Significant” as used in NEPA requires consideration of both context and intensity of the expected project effects.

Context means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts (i.e. local regional, worldwide), and over short and long time frames. For site-specific actions, significance usually depends upon the effects in the local rather than in the world as a whole. This project is limited in scope and duration.

Intensity refers to the severity of the expected project impacts and is defined by the 10 points below.

Context

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have an international, national, region-wide, or state-wide importance. The discussion of significance criteria that follows applies to the intended

action and is within the context of local importance in the area associated within the Little Crow project area.

Intensity

The following factors were considered to evaluate intensity.

- 1) Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on the balance the effects will be beneficial.**

A thorough effects analysis (direct, indirect, and cumulative) is available in Chapter 3; Pages 3-1 thru 3-375 of the Environmental Analysis, and in the Biological Evaluations and Letters of Concurrence. The beneficial effects of the action as disclosed in Chapter 3 do not bias my finding of no significant environmental effects, nor do beneficial effects mask adverse effects.

- 2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.**

The proposed actions would not have adverse effects to public safety. Chapter 3; Air Quality (pages 3-5 thru 3-28) has a specific discussion related to human health. Altering the fuel profile will not directly reduce ignitions or stop fires, but its intent is to allow suppression forces a higher probability of successfully attacking a wildland fire, thus improving firefighter and public safety.

- 3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**

There will be no significant effects on the unique characteristics of the area. No park lands, prime farmlands or wild and scenic rivers are found in the project area. I base my determination on the effects discussion found in Chapter 3 of the Environmental Assessment. Project design criteria and mitigations address and minimize possible effects to the scenic character, historic or cultural resources, and wetlands. Best Management Practices and Mitigation Measures listed in Appendix D will limit or eliminate damage, or assure rehabilitation to the soil, water, and aquatic/riparian resources.

For northern spotted owl, the project will not alter (remove or degrade) nesting/roosting/foraging habitat, will remove 698 acres of dispersal habitat. Stands are expected to return to functional dispersal habitat 20 to 35 years post vegetation treatment. Dispersal habitat would remain throughout the project area in complex patches. All suitable habitat in the project area will be retained, and dispersal opportunities will still extant. The project will result in short-term effects (not likely to adversely affect) but in the long-term has the potential to protect more habitat than it treats; minimizing the risk of catastrophic loss of habitat due to wildfire.

- 4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

The nature of potential effects on the human environment from the Modified Proposed Action is well established and not likely to be highly controversial.

- 5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

The Forest Service has considerable experience with this type of action. The effects analysis (Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3) as well as science and monitoring shows the effects are not uncertain, or where they are an adaptive management strategy has been included to ensure effects

remain within those predicted in the EA. Effects do not involve unique or unknown risk. Refer also to Chapter 5 - References Cited. The Forest Service has used best available science in guiding (The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Restoration Strategy) and assessing (the Ecosystem Management Decision Support tool) the effects of this project (Chapter 1, Pages 1-5 and 1-6; Chapter 3, Pages 3-213 thru 3-221 and Chapter 5).

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

My decision to implement the actions included in the Modified Proposed Action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. I have made this decision based on the overall consistency of the proposed activities with the Amended Wenatchee Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The effects of implementing the actions included in the Modified Proposed Action would not be significant, individually or cumulatively, when considered with the effects of other past and reasonably foreseeable future actions. See the cumulative effects analysis for each resource area in Chapter 3 of the Environmental Assessment.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant cultural or historical resources.

I have determined that the actions described in the Modified Proposed Action do not adversely affect or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Chapter 3, Pages 3-86 thru 3-93 of the Environmental Assessment describes the effects of the actions on heritage resources. No scientific resources are located within the project area.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act.

Biological Assessments for threatened and endangered wildlife and fish species were completed. The fisheries Biological Assessment determined that implementation of the Modified Proposed Action, as further refined by this Decision Notice “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” Middle Columbia River steelhead, Columbia River bull trout, and their designated critical habitat.

The wildlife Biological Assessment concluded that the project “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” gray wolf, North American wolverine, northern spotted owl and Designated Critical Habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl. The project will have “no effect” to the marbled murrelet, grizzly bear, Canada lynx, or Designated Critical Habitat for the Canada Lynx. The project area does not occur within a Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU), is outside of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone, and does not modify marbled murrelet habitat. Biological Assessments are located in the project file.

Level I Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service is ongoing at this time. The Forest Service has completed the pre-level I coordination meeting with the Services and is scheduled for Level I Consultation on May 9, 2017. Concurrence with the findings above is anticipated and will be documented in the final decision notice.

Pre-implementation surveys for Proposed, Endangered, and Threatened plant species are on-going and will be completed prior to project implementation. No Proposed, Endangered, or Threatened plant species are known to occur within this area as of this time.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The actions described in the Modified Proposed Action, as further refined in this Decision Notice do not threaten any violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (see sections on other laws below).

Conclusion

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA and specialist reports, I have determined that Modified Proposed Action, as refined in this Decision Notice will not have significant effects on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). I have made this determination after considering both positive and negative effects, as well as direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this action. Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

I base my conclusion on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment that there is not incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, or risk associated with the Modified Proposed Action, as further refined in this Decision Notice. My basis includes the effects analysis contained in the Environmental Assessment in Chapter 3, public comment, and consultation with interested environmental groups and government agencies (Chapter 4, Appendix B).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

This decision to authorize the implementation of the Modified Proposed Action, as further refined in this Decision Notice is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives identified in Chapter 1, Pages 1-4 thru 1-8 of the Environmental Analysis. The project was designed in conformance with Wenatchee National Land and Resource Management Plan, as Amended, standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for Recreation and Cultural Resources (WFP, Page IV-65) Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Species (WFP, Page IV-78), Wildlife and Fish (WFP, IV-80), Riparian Areas (WFP, IV-84), Range (WFP, Page IV-88), Timber (WFP, Page IV-92), Water (WFP, Page IV-94), Soil (WFP, Page IV-96), Air (WFP, Page IV-98), and Protection (WFP, Page IV-103).

No management activities are planned in Administratively Withdrawn or Congressionally Withdrawn Areas.

This project is consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives. The project will maintain all nine objectives of the ACS at the project and 5th field watershed levels (Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3, Page 3-62). The project may involve some short term negative impacts but this will be offset by long term riparian area improvements.

This project is consistent with the 2001 Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage Protection buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3, Pages 3-188 and 3-189).

This project is consistent with the 2005 Pacific Northwest Record of Decision for Invasive Plant Management (Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3, Pages, 3-193 thru 3-203. All applicable prevention standards and guidelines from that document have been incorporated into the design criteria for the Little Crow Restoration Project (Appendix D).

This project has no impact on timber or other Forest resources and is consistent with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976. This project does not propose any commitments of resources that are irretrievable or irreversible. No timber harvest is planned to occur on lands not suited for timber production. Timber harvest is planned to occur only on lands where soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged. There is no clearcutting planned. Temporary roads constructed as part of this project will be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources. Temporary roads constructed in connection with this project will be designed with the goal of reestablishing vegetative cover on the road and in areas where the vegetative cover has been disturbed by the construction of the road, within ten years after the termination of the timber sale contract (Appendix C).

On April 9, 2012 the Department of Agriculture issued a final planning rule for National Forest System land management planning (2012 Rule, [77 FR 68 \[21162-21276\]](#)). None of the requirements of the 2012 Rule apply to projects and activities on the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest, as the Wenatchee National Forest Plan was developed under a prior planning rule (36 CFR §219.17(c)). Furthermore, the 2012 Rule explains, “[The 2012 Rule] supersedes any prior planning regulation. No obligations remain from any prior planning regulation, except those that are specifically included in a unit’s existing plan. Existing plans will remain in effect until revised” (36 CFR §219.17).

Roadless Area Conservation Rule

This project is consistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The project does not propose road construction or reconstruction in any Roadless Area; nor does the project propose the cutting, sale or removal of timber from any Inventoried Roadless Area.

Endangered Species Act

This project has been designed to promote the conservation of ESA-species, see FONSI element nine above.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

Within the Upper and Lower Little Naches River sub-watersheds, the Little Naches River and all tributaries are considered Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for Chinook and coho salmon, under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. EFH for Chinook and coho salmon includes all streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, tributaries and other water bodies currently viable, and most of the habitat historically accessible to Chinook and coho salmon. Spring Chinook salmon occur throughout the Little Naches River and its larger tributaries. No adverse effects to EFH are expected to occur under the Refined Proposed Action. This project is consistent with the MSA.

Clean Air Act (CAA)

This project is consistent with the CAA. See FONSI element two above.

Clean Water Act (CWA)

Integrated project design features and BMP implementation will ensure that water quality standards and the anti-degradation policy (Chapter 173-201A WAC) are expected to be met with the Modified

Proposed Action, as further refined by this Decision Notice. The Modified Proposed Action, as further refined, is not expected to substantially alter the water quality (Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3, Page 3-289). Full implementation of BMPs has been shown to be an effective method in preventing and controlling nonpoint source water pollution (Rashin, 2006), (USDA Forest Service, 2000). Monitoring would be conducted during the project in order to validate implementation and effectiveness of BMP's and assure compliance with the Clean Water Act, State water quality regulations and forest plan standards.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Alaska Native Religious Sites, and Cultural Sites

The Forest Service program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act includes locating, inventorying, and nominating all cultural sites that may be directly or indirectly affected by scheduled activities. Although the proposed project is comprised of the types of activities that have the potential to directly or indirectly affect cultural resources, adverse effects will be avoided through project design feature, requiring the avoidance of National Register eligible and unevaluated sites and isolated occurrences. Provided these measures are implemented, the project will result in no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effects to cultural resources. Documentation of compliance with the NHPA will be prepared in accordance with the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest's 1997 Programmatic Agreement. (Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3; Page 3-93).

Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988), Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990), Municipal Watersheds

The project design criteria and implementation of mitigation measures for Riparian Reserves will ensure compliance with EO 11988 Floodplain Management (11988, 1977), and EO 11990 Wetland Protection (11990, 1977). Proposed unit boundaries have been located to avoid floodplains and wetlands. Vegetation and fuels management prescriptions were developed which will not affect stream shading or ground cover levels within riparian floodplain or wetland areas. These actions will provide protection and reduce the risk of detrimental effects to riparian areas and wetlands (Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3; Page 3-289).

Recreational Fishing (E.O. 12962)

Recreational fishing is an identified use in the analysis area. This project would not result in any appreciable reduction in the fish population numbers or otherwise negatively affect the fishing opportunity. This project is consistent with this Executive Order 12962.

Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)

The Modified Proposed Action, as further refined by this Decision Notice, is consistent with Executive Order 12898. This project will not have any disparate effects on minority populations or low-income populations. This project is site specific and will not have human health effects on any group.

Potential or Unusual Expenditures of Energy

This project has no potential or unusual expenditures of energy. All proposed activities are actions which the Forest Service routinely takes. This project does not involve energy production or storage.

Conflicts with Plans, Policies, or Other Jurisdictions

The IDT has cooperated with State and other local agencies to the fullest extent possible to reduce duplication between NEPA and State and local requirements. State, local, and federal laws were reviewed and this project has no inconsistencies with approved State or local plan and laws.

Administrative Review and Objection Rights

On March 27, 2013, a final rule revising 36 CFR Part 218 was published in the Federal Register Volume 78, No. 59. The new rule replaces the previous appeal rules defined in 36 CFR 215, and expands the use of the pre-decisional objection process. The new rule provides the public an opportunity to comment and express concerns on projects before decisions are made, rather than after.

The Little Crow Restoration project is a non-HFRA project that was subject to subparts A and B of 36CFR 218 regulations. This Decision was subject to administrative review (objection) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218.

Implementation

If no objections are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, the fifth business day after the close of the objection filing period. When objections are filed, implementation may not occur until the objection reviewing officer has responded in writing to all objections and the responsible official has complied with any written instructions identified by the reviewing officer.

For further information concerning the Little Crow Restoration Project, contact Jodi Leingang, Environmental Coordinator; 509-653-1450; jleingang@fs.fed.us during normal business hours.

Approved by:



KELLY D. LAWRENCE
District Ranger
Naches Ranger District
Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest

7-14-2017
Date

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