United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Idaho Panhandle National Forests

Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District

P. O. Box 159
Smelterville, ID 83868

2502 East Sherman Avenue
Coeur d' Alene, ID 83814

File Code: 1950

Date: December 2, 2008

To whom it may concern:

In conjunction with the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, the Rocky Mountain Research Station is proposing research involving silvicultural management activities in a portion of the Deception Creek Experimental Forest. For purposes of this analysis, the project area has been identified as the Hoodoo-Ames Resource Area.. The study is designed to develop, implement and evaluate forest and fuels restoration strategies applicable to the moist forests of the Inland Northwest.

Location

The proposed research project area is located approximately 20 miles east of the community of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, within the Deception Creek Experimental Forest. The Experimental Forest is approximately 3,250 acres in size and is surrounded by the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF). The major drainage in the project area is Deception Creek, which flows into the Little North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River. The legal location of the project area includes portions of sections 19, 20, 29 30, 31 and 32, T51N, R1W; B.M.

Lands in the project area have been designated as Management Area 14 under the IPNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Management Area 14 consists of experimental forests that are to be used for scientific research. Forest Plan goals and standards for these lands are identified in the Forest Plan, pages III-61 through III-64. The Forest Plan indicates that timber harvesting may occur within this management area for research purposes.

Objective

The Hoodoo-Ames Research Project proposes to implement two studies that require the management of forest vegetation over approximately 389 acres of the Deception Creek Experimental Forest. The first objective of the study is to evaluate the irregular selection silvicultural system. The irregular selection system is a multi-entry uneven-aged system, which was developed as an alternative tool to even-aged management practices. Although the intent of this management technique is documented, the technique needs to be evaluated using a series of studies across different habitat types. The first of a series of replicated studies was implemented on the Priest River Experimental Forest. However, these results have limited applicability to other landscapes and places, so in order to fully understand the applicability of results, similar studies have to be implemented and evaluated in other locations. The proposed Hoodoo-Ames Research Project would be the second replication of the study; as in the Priest River Experimental Forest, the management objective is to provide future research opportunities and increase forest resilience

The second objective of the Hoodoo-Ames Research Project is another entry into the uneven-age management study started in the 1980s. Given the current condition of the study area, the objective is to introduce a new age class of trees that contain a variety of tree species including, but not limited to western white pine and western larch, which would need to be planted. Within this study area, existing long-lived early seral species established during the first entry would be released by removing competition.

Current Condition

Deception Creek Experimental Forest has an east-west orientation and encompasses the Deception Creek drainage, which favors north-facing and south-facing aspects. These forests contain a diverse mixture of conifers, with an abundance of western hemlock, grand fir and western white pine on the north slopes, and heavier amounts of grand fir on the south and west aspects. Western white pine that once was prevalent in the forest has been killed over time by white pine blister rust (Figure 1). Stands within the Ames and Snyder Creek areas are in the younger age class and tend to have a larger dominance of western white pine and western larch within the stands. Western larch, the other historically dominant species, is present throughout the drainage, yet tends to be more scattered due to past management practices and overcrowding by other species.


Figure1

Root diseases are prevalent throughout the area and Indian paint disease is common in the boles of western hemlock and grand fir. The moderate to high amount of insect and disease activity in Deception Creek, along with isolated wind and ice damage, has contributed to moderate amounts (16.5 to 33 tons per acre) of coarse woody debris dispersed across the forest floor.

Openings in the canopy have been readily occupied by late seral species and lush vegetation (Figure 2).

Desired Condition

The desired condition within the study area is to ensure there is a representation of all potential forest species and structures, with an emphasis on increasing western white pine abundance so that it becomes the primary cover type.

The desired multi-species composition and complex forest structures will provide abundant research opportunities not found in other areas of the Deception Creek Experimental Forest, which were created using traditional even-aged management. By decreasing the abundance of suppressed and diseased trees and featuring dominant western white pine, western larch, and western red cedar where they occur, the resilience and resistance of the vegetation to native and introduced disturbances will increase. Also desired is a high variability in species composition and structure at all spatial scales.


Figure 2

Purpose and Need

The purpose of and need for action in the Hoodoo Ames Research Project is:

- *To conduct the second replication of the irregular selection silvicultural system that was started on the Priest River Experimental Forest, as well as to evaluate and monitor the long-term effects of irregular selection systems.*
- *To conduct a second entry into the uneven-age management study started in the Deception Creek Experimental Forest under the Hoodoo Timber Sale, introducing a new age class of trees and releasing regeneration established during the first study.*

Both of the above are needed to improve and maintain long lived seral species and resilient structure. Long-term forest health would be improved by promoting early seral species (through natural and artificial means) under various canopy openings.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action for the Hoodoo Ames Project would include commercial harvest on approximately 389 acres through two studies: one using an irregular selection harvest (a combination of even-aged and uneven-aged harvest methods) replicating the study conducted in the Priest River Experimental Forest; and the other using uneven-age management in the second entry of the Hoodoo Timber Sale study area. Please refer to the enclosed map for location of proposed activities.

Under Study 1, the irregular selection system would be used to harvest timber on 228 acres. Harvest strips would occur in varying widths (from 50 to 200 feet) to create openings that favor the establishment of early and mid-seral western larch and western white pine. Increasing variable densities would be used around the edges of the strips to avoid edge effects. Within the 228 acres, approximately 110 acres would be artificially regenerated in places where there is less than 75% canopy cover in the overstory. The remaining 118 acres would promote natural regeneration, or the release of existing overstory.

Fuels created by the harvest operation would be underburned within regeneration openings, jackpot burned to reduce fuels and provide seed beds within selection areas, and grapple piled or broken up mechanically where slopes are favorable for this treatment. This would break up the continuity of the fuels across the landscape. Slashing of any severely-damaged regeneration would also occur within the harvest units. Adjacent to the openings, top-attach yarding or lop and scatter methods may be used.

Table 1. Unit Treatment Summary for Study 1.

Unit	Acres	Prescription	Logging system	Fuels treatment
1	19	strip/individual tree	skyline	jackpot/underburn/lop and scatter
1a	3	strip shelterwood	tractor	mechanical
2	39	strip/individual tree	skyline	underburn/jackpot/top-attach yarding
3	16	strip/individual tree	skyline	jackpot/lop and scatter
4	37	strip/individual tree	skyline	underburn/jackpot
5	22	strip/commercial thin	skyline/cable	jackpot/lop and scatter
6	16	strip/commercial thin	skyline	jackpot/lop and scatter
6a	4	irregular shelterwood	skyline	underburn
7	8	strip/free selection	tractor	mechanical
8	7	western white pine thin/shelterwood	skyline	lop and scatter
9	19	strip/free selection	skyline	underburn/jackpot/lop and scatter
11	12	strip/individual tree	skyline	underburn/jackpot
14	20	strip/individual tree	skyline	top-attach yarding/underburn/jackpot
16	6	strip/individual tree	skyline	jackpot
Total: 14 units/subunits, 228 acres				

Under Study 2, uneven-age management would be used on 161 acres as a second entry in the old Hoodoo Timber Sale area. Approximately 40 to 60% of the tree canopy would be removed to release advanced regeneration and introduce a third age class to the area. In addition to the commercial harvest, portions of the original study would be treated using non-commercial methods, including the release of early and mid-seral species by removing unwanted regeneration and shrubs. Approximately 50 trees per acre established under the Hoodoo Timber Sale would be treated by this method. Some light jackpot burning may occur in harvest areas or areas of heavy shrubs, for fuel reduction and/or site preparation.

Table 2. Unit Treatment Summary for Study 2.

Unit	Acres	Prescription	Logging system	Fuels treatment
10	6	uneven/individual and group	skyline	jackpot
10a	2	uneven/individual and group	tractor	lop and scatter
10b	5	uneven/individual and group	skyline	jackpot
10c	2	uneven/individual and group	skyline	jackpot/lop and scatter
12	43	uneven/strip and group selection	skyline	jackpot/lop and scatter
13	26	uneven/strip and group selection	skyline	jackpot
13b	2	uneven/individual and group selection	cable/highbank	whole tree
15	26	uneven/strip and group selection	skyline	jackpot
17	29	uneven/strip and group selection	skyline	lop and scatter/jackpot
17a	4	uneven/individual and group selection	cable/highbank	whole tree
18	17	uneven/strip and group selection	skyline	lop and scatter/jackpot
Total: 11 units/subunits, 161 acres				

The proposed harvest activities of the two studies would result in a total of approximately 3 million board feet of timber.

In order to access the treatment units, approximately 18 miles of road would be reconditioned or reconstructed, including brushing and blading, and improving drainage. The roads have been inventoried and potential sediment sources identified. Culverts that were identified as undersized or unable to handle flow would be upgraded to accommodate flow and reduce the risk of sedimentation.

Road decommissioning may be necessary to mitigate potential negative effects of the proposed activities. There are approximately 7 miles of road within the project area that are recommended for storage and/or decommissioning. Some of these roads are hydrologically inert and revegetated, and would be removed from system designation as part of this project. Others would require action to restore stream channel crossings and may be incorporated as mitigation if needed.

To better limit illegal access to the area on roads not designated for motorized use, the existing gate at Five Fingers Saddle would be replaced and gates would be installed on roads currently closed by earthen barriers or vegetation.

Noxious weeds are already established on roads in the resource area and there is a concern that project activities could spread the infestation. To reduce the spread of noxious weeds, weed treatment would occur on all existing haul routes and roads proposed for reconstruction. In addition, there is an opportunity to treat noxious weeds within the Deception Creek Experimental Forest along roads which are not proposed for use during project activities, or which are proposed for decommissioning.

Invitation to Comment

If you are interested in providing comments on this proposal, please send written comments to the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, Fernan Office, 2502 East Sherman Avenue, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814. Comments may also be submitted electronically. Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc) or Word Perfect format to comments-northern-idpanhandle-coeur-dalene @fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments (Hoodoo Ames Research). For electronically-mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated receipt, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt of comments by other means.

Your comments will be most helpful if received within 30 calendar days following publication of the legal notice in the Coeur d'Alene Press. Those people providing comments should include: 1) their name, address, telephone number, organization represented, if any; 2) title of the document on which the comment is being submitted; and 3) specific facts and supporting reasons for us to consider. **When completed, copies of the environmental assessment will be mailed to those people who have submitted comments either before or during the comment period, and to those who request a copy.** Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

If you have any questions, please contact Project Leader Dan Frigard at (208) 783-2130 (dfrigard@fs.fed.us), or District Ecosystem Staff Officer Sherri Lionberger at (208) 769-3022 (slionberger@fs.fed.us).

Sincerely,

/s/ Randy Swick

RANDALL G. SWICK
District Ranger

Enclosure

Hoodoo Ames Research
Proposed Action
Deception Creek Experimental Forest

11/19/08

Legend

Sections
Project Area
Streams

PRESCRIPTION
FREE SELECTION
UNEVEN-AGE
STRIP SELECTION

Transportation Plan
n/a
Green Roads
Haul Route
Long Term Need
Not Needed Long Term
Research Needs

1:14,737
Miles
0 0.25 0.5