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Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project-
Consistency Report-
Old Growth Forest Plan Standards

To Project File:

During the environmental analysis that was conducted for this project, the timber stands that are proposed for fuel reduction treatments were reviewed to determine if any of the stands met old growth criteria. In addition, the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) Forest Plan Standards regarding Old Growth were reviewed and consistency findings were determined. The following information documents the methodology used and the findings.

Methodology

An analysis was conducted, using aerial photographs, GIS, TSMRS, and FACTS database information, in which the forest structure was determined for all the stands that occur in the proposed treatment areas (see the old growth map, forest structure map, and the exam type table in the Old Growth section of the project file). As depicted in the attached maps, none of the proposed treatment areas occur in stands meeting old growth criteria or in stands meeting allocated recruitment/ stepdown. (See the old growth and forest structure maps in the Old Growth section of the project file). In addition to using the TSMRS information, walk-through examinations were conducted in each of the stands proposed for treatment and forest structure was recorded. No stands proposed for treatment were found to meet old growth criteria, and no errors were found pertaining to old growth within the TSMRS information database.

During public scoping, a report entitled Lost Forests: An Investigative Report on the Old Growth of North Idaho was referenced by a member of the public, supposedly supporting claims that the IPNF has not maintained at least 10% of its forested acres as allocated old growth. However, as referenced in Zack (2006), the IPNF made exhaustive attempts, working with the sponsor of the report (the Lands Council of Spokane), to understand their data and interpret their findings. After a thorough look at the reports findings and methodologies, the IPNF forest ecologist determined that the Lands Council claims about IPNF old growth are not credible, and that used together, the IPNF Forest Inventory and the National Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program old growth assessments provide the most reliable account of old growth amounts on the IPNF.

Consistency with IPNF Forest Plan (1987) Standards

Regarding the Management of Old Growth

The IPNF Forest Plan lists standards regarding old growth on page II-29. These standards are listed below as well as an explanation as to how this project will meet or exceed these standards.



Old Growth Standard 10a: A definition for old growth is being developed by a Regional Task Force and will be used by the Forest when completed. As an interim guideline, stands classified as old growth should meet the definition given by Thomas (1979).

The Regional Task Force completed its work and published its report. That report is Old Growth Forest Types of the Northern Region by P. Green, et al., and is part of the R-1 SES Series released in April 1992 (errata corrected 9/04) by the Northern Region, Forest Service, USDA (Green et al 1992). The IPNF used the definitions in this report to determine allocation of its Old Growth. Therefore, this standard has been met.

Old Growth Standard 10b: Maintain at least 10 percent of the forested portion of the IPNF as old growth.

The Forest Plan identified 2,310,000 forested acres on the IPNF. Therefore, the Forest Plan Standard requires maintaining 231,000 acres of old growth. The most recent information contained within the 2004 IPNF Forest Plan Monitoring Report indicates that 278,552 acres or 12.1% of forested acres have been allocated as old growth. Of the stands identified as old growth, 98.5% have been field verified (USDA, 2005). This inventory shows that the IPNF has allocated enough acres of old growth to clearly meet and exceed Forest Plan Standard 10b. for the amount of old growth to be retained. The IPNF also has an additional 7,444 acres (0.3% of forested acres) of previously field examined, unallocated old growth, which provides old growth habitat for wildlife and serves other ecological functions. An additional 6,737 acres have been identified as possible old growth, but have not yet been field checked or counted in this allocation.

Additionally, a thorough, independent inventory of old growth on the IPNF, by the National Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, estimates that the IPNF currently has 11.8% of its forested portion as old growth. Therefore, this standard has been met.

Sandpoint Ranger District's old growth allocation - The IPNF old growth allocation of 10% old growth was distributed among the districts as documented in the Forest Supervisor's May 7, 1991 letter concerning the subject "Forest Plan Explanation: Implementing Old Growth Standards (Morden 1991). The Sandpoint Ranger District was responsible for allocating 21,500 acres of old growth. The 2004 Forest Plan Monitoring Report indicates that 24,591 acres have actually been allocated in the Pend Oreille River Subbasin (USDA, 2005). Therefore, the Forest Supervisor's allocation was exceeded in the District.

Old Growth Standard 10c: Select and maintain at least five percent of the forested portion of those old growth units that have five percent or more of existing old growth.

The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project area occurs within a portion of Old Growth Management Unit (OGMU) 27. OGMU 27 consists of approximately 13,405 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands. Of that, 195 acres within OGMU 27 is classified as field-allocated old growth, which represents 1.5% of the total acres in the OGMU. An additional 85 acres of potential old growth recruitment has been identified within OGMU 27, which accounts for an

additional 0.6% of the total acres in the OGMU. (See the old growth map in the Old Growth section of the project file). The proposed treatment acreage of the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project (about 573 acres) within OGMU 27, accounts for only 4.2% of the total OGMU 27 area. Stands 65401-004 and 65401-005 are the only allocated old growth or old growth recruitment located in the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project area. No treatments are proposed in these stands.

The primary reason that OGMU 27 does not contain a higher percentage of old growth is that the stands in this area are fairly young. These young stands are largely the result of the extensive wildfire history in the area, as well as historic logging, the primary species composition, and associated forest health issues. Much of the area within OGMU 27 was burned in the 1910 or 1922 fires and/or another fire which occurred between 1926 and 1931, all of which were particularly intense and widespread fires. The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project is not harvesting any old growth stands and subsequently, would not reduce the amount of old growth currently in OGMU 27.

The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project is focused on reducing the risk of a landscape fire event by reducing live ladder fuels, intermediate and suppressed trees, as well as insect- and disease-prone species. The primary size class designated for harvest is immature-medium (sawlog) and pole-size trees. The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project proposes regeneration harvest in stands that are experiencing high levels of insect and disease-caused mortality. As a result, attainment of old growth structural class within these stands is highly unlikely.

Old growth standard 10c requires selection and maintenance of at least five percent of the forested portion of those old growth units that have five percent or more of existing old growth. Only 2.1% of OGMU 27 qualifies as either old growth or potential old growth recruitment. Although OGMU 27 currently has less than 5 percent of old growth, these types of harvest, as well as the relatively small portion of the NFS lands within the OGMU which are proposed for harvest, would not preclude the eventual attainment of 5 percent or more old growth within OGMU 27. Therefore, this standard would be met.

Old Growth Standard 10d: Existing old growth stands may be harvested when there is more than 5% in an old growth unit, and the Forest total is more than 10%.

As previously mentioned, no old growth stands are being treated or harvested in association with this proposal and therefore, this standard would be met.

Old Growth Standard 10e: Old growth stands should reflect approximately the same habitat type series distribution as found on the IPNF.

The habitat type series distribution of the allocated old growth stands on the IPNF reflects approximately the same habitat type series distribution on the IPNF. The 2004 Forest Plan Monitoring report supports this finding (USDA, 2005). Therefore, this standard has been met.

Old Growth Standard 10f: One or more old growth stands per old growth unit should be 300 acres or larger. Preferences should be given to a contiguous stand; however the stand may be subdivided into stands of 100 acres or larger if the stands are within one mile. The remaining old growth management stands should be at least 25 acres in size. Preferred size is 80 plus acres.

In OGMU27, because of the relatively young age of most forest stands in the area, there was not an option of identifying and retaining 300 acre plus old growth patches. This project is consistent with this Forest Plan standard because we identified the largest blocks of old growth for retention or recruitment that occurred within OGMU 27. There simply were not any larger patches of old growth to select.

Past wildfires and historic logging are responsible for the scarcity of old growth in OGMU 27. The majority of stands in OGMU 27 consist of trees regenerated after large wildfires around the beginning of the 20th century. Areas proposed for thinning in the project area, as well as untreated stands throughout the OGMU will very likely increase the proportion of the OGMU occupied by old growth over the next 50-75 years.

As time passes, groups of contiguous stands of stands throughout OGMU 27 will move toward old growth structural status. These assemblages will be 100 acres or more in size, and the potential exists for 300+ acre of continuous old growth to develop on the Gold Hill and Grouse Mountain portions of OGMU 27. Old growth standard 10f would be met.

Old Growth Standard 10g: Roads should be planned to avoid old growth management stands to maintain unit size criteria.

None of the new permanent road construction proposed with the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project enters or is adjacent to old growth allocated or old growth recruitment stands. Additionally, none of the proposed temporary roads those roads proposed for reconditioning or maintenance with this project enter into old growth stands (see the timber stand structure map and the transportation system map in the Engineering section of the project file). Therefore, this standard would be met.

Old Growth Standard 10h: A long-term objective should be to minimize or exclude domestic grazing within old growth stands.

The proposed activities would not include any new domestic grazing allotments. Therefore, this standard would be met.

Old Growth Standard 10i: Goals for lands to be managed as old growth within those lands suitable for timber production are identified in the management area prescriptions.

The 2004 Forest Plan Monitoring report (USDA, 2005) includes a table showing the Forest Plan management areas that have acre goals associated with them for old growth allocation. The table also shows the existing amounts of allocated old growth for those same areas. Within each

management area, current acreages of old growth allocations meet and far exceed those Forest Plan goals. Therefore, this standard has been met and exceeded.

Findings

The activities that are proposed for the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project are consistent with all the 1987 IPNF Forest Plan Standards regarding the management of Old Growth stands.

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Enclosures

Literature Cited

Green, P., J. Joy, Sirucek, W. Hann, A. Zack, and B. Naumann. 1992. Old Growth Forest Types of the Northern Region. USDA, Forest Service, Northern Region, R-1 SES 4/92 (errata corrected 9/04).

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