

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**AND**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

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**NORTH FORK NOXIOUS WEED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

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NORTH FORK RANGER DISTRICT  
USDA FOREST SERVICE  
CLEARWATER NATIONAL FOREST  
CLEARWATER AND IDAHO COUNTIES, IDAHO

**DECISION SUMMARY**

It is my decision to select Alternative 3 as described in the North Fork Noxious Weed Treatment Environmental Analysis. This alternative employs an integrated and adaptive strategy utilizing mechanical, biological, cultural and chemical treatment methods, and will allow aggressive control of noxious and invasive weeds on approximately 3,150 acres annually of identified infestations over the next ten years and provides for improved management of roadside vegetation along approximately 64 miles of road right-of-way annually.

This project will be implemented in conjunction with the Clearwater Basin Weed Coordinating Committee's recommendations as well as with the implementation activities approved under the Middle-Black Analysis (FEIS signed January 2003).

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**

In January 2003, the North Fork Ranger District initiated an Environmental Assessment for the control of noxious and invasive weeds within the North Fork Clearwater River watershed. The proposed project area includes all National Forest System lands within the North Fork Clearwater River and Orofino Creek drainages including that portion of the Powell Ranger District containing the Gravey Creek and upper Cayuse Creek drainages. In addition, 41 miles of road rights-of-way on adjacent ownerships under cost share agreements were included.

Tribal consultation and public scoping aided in the development of three alternatives; these were analyzed and the environmental effects disclosed in the North Fork Noxious Weeds Treatment Project EA issued on August 10, 2004. The EA was made available to the public for 30 days for review and comment. The decision described in this Decision Notice was made following a thorough review of the Environmental Assessment and the public comments received related to the EA.

**PURPOSE AND NEED**

Noxious and undesirable weed species are spreading across public lands at an alarming rate. These weed species alter ecosystem processes including productivity, decomposition, hydrology, nutrient cycling, and natural disturbance patterns such as the frequency and intensity of wildfire. These changes can lead to the displacement of native species, eventually impacting wildlife and plant habitats, recreational opportunities and scenic beauty.

The spread of weeds is primarily associated with human activities; and State laws and County ordinances require that landowners be responsible for control of noxious weeds on their lands. The District recognized the need for an adaptive approach to the problem of controlling noxious weeds across the entire watershed.

## **PROPOSED ACTION**

The District proposed to control noxious and invasive weeds within the following project area:

“All National Forest System lands within the North Fork Clearwater River and Orofino Creek drainages. This includes the Gravey Creek and upper Cayuse Creek drainages which are within the North Fork Clearwater drainage but administered by the Powell Ranger District. The project area also includes 41 miles of Forest Service road right-of-way areas through other ownerships adjacent to Road 247 (Beaver Creek), Road 250 (Pierce Superior), Road 246 (Scofield Divide), Road 680 (Sheep Mountain Saddle), and Road 683 (Teepee Creek). These are cost share roads.”

The proposal is to treat noxious and invasive weeds on approximately 500-3000 acres annually at various locations within the project area. This includes treatment of roadside vegetation to maintain a clear travelway on up to 64 miles of roads.

The District proposed an integrated, adaptive strategy that included use of biological, mechanical, cultural, and chemical means to control noxious weeds according to established control objectives.

## **SCOPE OF THE DECISION**

The Scope of the Decision is limited to the actions described in the EA and Decision Notice.

## **TRIBAL CONSULTATION**

The Nez Perce Tribe was invited to consult on the project in a letter dated April 4, 2003. In addition to inviting them to participate in the initial ID Team meeting launching the project, a formal meeting was held on February 13, 2004 between members of the Nez Perce Tribe, the District Ranger and the ID Team to discuss any concerns or issues that the Tribe may have with the project.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUE DEVELOPMENT**

The public has been involved throughout the analysis process. In April 2003, public comment was formally solicited from over 300 individuals and organizations on the North Fork Ranger District Vegetation Management mailing list, as well as through the Clearwater National Forest's Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions in October 2002.

During this scoping period comments were received from thirteen (13) individuals and organizations. Most expressed wholehearted support for the project. Three expressed concern over the use of chemicals, favoring biological and mechanical means instead. Three also commented regarding the development of practices and policies that reduce the introduction and/or spread of non-desirable species into new areas. All comments were included in the EA along with responses to their questions, concerns and suggestions.

Analysis of the comments received was incorporated into the development of the three alternatives considered in detail within the EA.

## ISSUES

Four issues were identified during the scoping and public involvement phases of the analysis. Those included:

1. Effects on Water Quality and Aquatic Organisms - concern expressed within public comments and tribal inputs indicated a high awareness of the potential for negative effects on water quality and aquatic organism when using chemical applications. This issue is addressed in Alternative 2 which does not use chemicals, and fully mitigated in Alternative 3.
2. Ensure that Education/Prevention are Incorporated - several comments included suggestions for decreasing the spread of invasive weeds through increased education of public users as well as developing additional prevention actions and policies. Education and Prevention are addressed throughout the EA in each Alternative with some measures being common to all alternatives including the No Action Alternative.
3. Human Risk - some commenters were concerned about the effects on human health where chemical applications would be utilized. The primary concern regarded risk from exposure to sprayed sites by the user populations. This concern is eliminated in Alternative 2 by removing the use of chemicals. Alternative 1 (the No Action Alternative) and Alternative 3 address the concern for human risk from chemical applications.
4. Use of Chemicals - several comments related to concern over the use of chemicals in general as a means of controlling weed infestations. Discussions in Alternatives 2 and 3 compare the pros and cons of chemical use as a practical means of control.

## ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Following tribal consultation and public scoping, three alternatives were developed and all three were considered in detail in the EA.

## ALTERNATIVES

**Alternative 1 - No Action:** This alternative would result in no change to current activities for the treatment of noxious and undesirable weeds. Mechanical, biological and cultural treatments would continue, as would the use of chemical treatments at administrative sites. In addition, all integrated treatments - including chemical treatments - planned under the Middle-Black decision of <date> would be implemented.

**Alternative 2 - Integrated Non-Chemical Treatments:** This alternative utilizes mechanical, biological and cultural treatments only in an integrated strategy. No chemical treatments would be considered under this alternative including those currently utilized.

**Alternative 3 - Integrated Treatments Including Chemicals:** This alternative (the Proposed Action) would utilize all treatment options currently available including the selected application of chemicals. Under an integrated adaptive strategy, this alternative would initially rely more heavily on chemical applications to control large weed infestations; subsequent treatments would rely progressively more on other treatment methods as large populations are reduced.

**Criteria Common to all Alternatives:** Prevention and education measures will be implemented as will the application of prevention measures discussed under Best Management Practices in Appendix M. Ground disturbances will be re-vegetated with appropriate certified noxious weed-free seed as will treated sites where noxious weeds have been eradicated or reduced to an acceptable level. Monitoring will be conducted to determine the effectiveness of treatments and instream monitoring will occur where fisheries concerns are the greatest. Public safety concerns will be addressed through preparation of an annual operating plan, notification of adjacent land owners, and informational signing during weed control opera-

tions. Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive plant populations as well as riparian areas will be evaluated prior to and during treatments.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES COMPARISON**

Attribute	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Integrated with No Chemicals	Alternative 3 Integrated with Chemicals
Acres Noxious Weed Bio-Control Release per Year	50	50	50
Acres Noxious Weed/Roadside Veg Chemical Treatment per Year	Up to 1500 acres per year (Admin sites and Middle Black project area)	0	Up to 3000 acres per year
Acres Noxious Weed Mechanical/ Cultural Treatment per Year	100	100	100
Approximate Total Acres Noxious Weed Treatment per Year	1650	150	3150
Miles Roadside Vegetation Treatment w/ Chemicals per Year	0	0	64 miles
<b>Effects on Water Quality and Aquatic Species</b>			
Maximum Acres Treatable with picloram while remaining under NOEC <sup>1</sup>	Picloram not analyzed	0	4921
<b>Vegetative and Biological Community Diversity - Effect on Non-target Species</b>			
Impacts on Non-Noxious and Desired plant species	0 miles of road will be sprayed for road-side brush per decade	0 miles of road will be sprayed for road-side brush per decade	64 miles of road will be treated annually to control roadside vegetation (approx 320 acres of non-noxious plants could be affected)
Impacts on Desired Plant Species	Desired plant species would decline in the long term as noxious weeds increased, especially outside the Middle Black project area.	Long term decline at a faster rate than Alternative 1	Potential short term impacts to individuals; long term benefits to desired plant species by reducing noxious weeds
Effects on Wildlife	Potential long term decline in forage habitat	Potential long term decline in forage habitat at a rate faster than Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 2. Risk from herbicides would be insignificant
<b>Potential Effects on Human Health from the Application of Herbicides</b>			
Effects on Weed Control Workers	No Change	Slight risk of skin and eye irritations, cuts, sprains, and bruises	Same as Alternative 2. Risk from herbicides would be insignificant
Effects on visitors or nearby residents	No Change	No Effect	Same as Alternative 2. Risk from herbicides would be insignificant

<sup>1</sup> No Observable Effect Concentration - In this case, Picloram Acres are shown. In reality, very little Picloram will be used; clopyralid will be the common herbicide used. Picloram is chosen here to provide consistency with the worse case scenario.

## COMMENTS ON THE EA

The EA was mailed to the Nez Perce Tribe for review and comments as well as to those persons and organizations who commented on the project during the scoping phase. Two comment letters were received during the formal comment period from the public: 1) Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Industries and 2) Friends of the Clearwater.

## RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The comment from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture was a factual correction which has been made. Comments presented by Friends of the Clearwater have been addressed in the attached Response to Comments.

## SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

It is my decision to select Alternative 3, as described in the North Fork Noxious Weed Treatment Project EA. This decision will control noxious weeds on National Forest lands within the North Fork Clearwater River and Orofino Creek drainages at a rate of approximately 3150 acres annually including control of roadside vegetation on approximately 64 miles of system roads.

Control in a broad sense refers to the reduction or elimination of some weed populations, slowing the rate of spread in others, and implementing actions that will help halt new infestations. Site-specific resource objectives and goals determine the level of control desired for specific infestations. An Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Strategy will be used. This approach uses a combination of control methods including biological control through the use of parasites and pathogens; mechanical control such as hand-pulling of individual plants; cultural controls including seeding and fertilization of disturbed areas; and chemical control through use of herbicides. No aerial spraying of herbicides would occur.

Sites range in size from single plants to infestations covering many acres, though in many areas, the infestation does not involve 100 percent of the ground. For example, a two acre dispersed camping area may be infested with weeds but the amount of actual land occupied by the weeds would be small - scattered clumps covering only a few square feet total.

Twenty-eight (28) weeds species are considered for control measures. They include:

- ◆ Tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)
- ◆ Rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*)
- ◆ Matgrass (*Nardus Sticta*)
- ◆ Meadow hawkweed (*Hieracium pratense*)
- ◆ Orange hawkweed (*Hieracium aurantiacum*)
- ◆ Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*)
- ◆ Russian knapweed (*Centaurea repens*)
- ◆ Dalmation toadflax (*Linaria gentisfolia spp. Dalmatica*)
- ◆ Yellow toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*)
- ◆ Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)
- ◆ St. Johns-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)
- ◆ Ox-eye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthe mum*)
- ◆ Sulfur cinquefoil (*Potentilla recta*)
- ◆ Common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)
- ◆ Diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*)
- ◆ Meadow knapweed (*Centaurea pratensis*)
- ◆ Yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*)
- ◆ Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- ◆ Musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*)
- ◆ Houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*)
- ◆ Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*)
- ◆ Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*)
- ◆ Common crupina (*Crupina vulgaris*)
- ◆ Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)
- ◆ Scotch thistle (*Onopordon acanthium*)
- ◆ Common teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*)
- ◆ White top (*Cardaria draba*)
- ◆ Common burdock (*Arctium minus*)
- ◆ Texas blueweed (*Helianthus ciliaris*)
- ◆ Japanese knotweed (*Polygonium cuspidatum*)

Many of the identified sites have noxious weeds that are new to the North Fork subbasin. New weeds are defined as those that have one or more established populations but are not wide spread. New noxious weeds on the North Fork District include: Meadow hawkweed, Orange hawkweed, and Dalmatian toadflax.

This EA also addresses control of the following five (5) undesirable weed species:

- ◆ Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*)
- ◆ Common chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)
- ◆ Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*)
- ◆ Nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*)
- ◆ Poison Ivy (*Rhus radicans*)

While these weeds have not been officially or legally defined as noxious, they are exotic non-native plants with the ability to out-compete native vegetation or to be dangerous to humans (nightshade).

Initial or first-year treatments will not likely be 100% effective for weed control since dormant seeds in existing populations germinate in following years. Therefore, follow-up treatments could be needed for up to the next ten (10) years. However, such treatments would likely be at reduced levels, especially where herbicides would be used.

It is highly likely that new sites will be discovered in each of the watershed ecosystems covered in this analysis. As additional infestations are discovered in the next ten years, each site will be evaluated to determine if the site fits within the scope of this EA and then prioritized for treatment. Those sites selected for control would be treated using the parameters established under the analysis conducted within this EA. Treatment of additional sites would be under an adaptive strategy.

Although private lands are not included in the proposed action - except as identified in the project area - the North Fork Ranger District is an active partner in the Clearwater Basin Weed Management Committee which considers actions, including herbicide application, on lands adjacent to the District.

Within the selected alternative, a number of mitigation measures are now, or will be, implemented. These include:

#### **Prevention and Control**

- ◆ Certified weed-free feed forage and straw is now required for use on all National Forest lands in the North Fork Ranger District (36 CFR 261.50).
- ◆ Cleaning of equipment used for forest activities would be required before operating within all areas previously treated for noxious weeds or within areas currently considered weed-free. Provision 2400-3 10.2, C 6.26 or CT 6.26 would be included in all contracts associated with those areas. Contract Provision CT 6.27 will also be part of timber sales requiring purchases to treat weeds along haul routes.
- ◆ To prevent the establishment and spread of noxious weeds, all ground disturbances resulting from management activities would be re-vegetated with an appropriate mix of certified noxious weed-free seed and fertilized as necessary.
- ◆ Cultural control would be considered for all sites following weed treatment. After weeds have been eradicated or reduced to acceptable level, re-vegetation with more desirable species is often necessary to prevent reinvasion by the weeds. To the extent practicable, native species would be used for re-vegetation realizing that until local seed sources become more available on a cost-effective basis, non-native species with desirable characteristics would also be used.
- ◆ Each newly proposed project would be evaluated for the potential to spread noxious weeds. The weed prevention Best Management Practices (BMPs) listed in Appendix M as well as other measures used to halt the spread of noxious weeds would be implemented during project planning.

- ◆ Efforts to educate, inventory and control noxious weeds with the North Fork Weed Partnership would continue.
- ◆ All noxious weed control activities would comply with state and local laws, and agency guidelines.

### **Watersheds**

- ◆ All gravel pits in the project area would be treated for noxious and undesirable weeds.
- ◆ Provisions would be made for the prevention and control of weeds within new and existing special use permits as needed.
- ◆ Weed control would occur at developed campgrounds, trailheads and high-use dispersed campsites following the standards and guidelines outlined in the EA.
- ◆ All weeds that are hand pulled or dug would be bagged and disposed of by burning at designated sites, or removed to landfills.
- ◆ New noxious weed invaders, as identified by state and local agencies, would be given high priority for treatment as funding becomes available.
- ◆ Additional biological control agents may become available for use. Before such agents are released, their effectiveness and impacts to other resources would be evaluated.

### **Public Safety**

- ◆ An annual operating plan outlining proposed treatments would be available to the public at the North Fork Ranger District office.
- ◆ Adjacent landowners would be notified prior to treatment of noxious weeds on National Forest lands.
- ◆ Traffic control and signing during weed treatment operations would be used as needed to ensure safety of workers and other forest users.

### **Resource Protection**

- ◆ All treatment sites would be evaluated for Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive plants habitat suitability. Highly suitable habitat would be surveyed as necessary prior to treatment.
- ◆ Riparian areas and TES populations that adjoin or overlap disturbed areas, i.e. roadsides with heavy canopies, would be surveyed and monitored prior to - and during - treatment.
- ◆ Site-specific treatment guidelines would be developed for infestations within or adjacent to TES plant habitat. See Alternative 3 for specifics regarding chemical use.

### **Adaptive Strategy**

- ◆ Priorities for treatment would be established based on weed species present, infestation size, and vulnerability of recreational, wildlife, aquatic and special vegetation resources adjacent to the infestation.
- ◆ Treatment methods for each site would be selected based on weed species ecology, cost-effectiveness of the treatments, the management objective for the sites (e.g. eradication or reduction of seed production), and the potential effects on other forest resources. Proposed treatments would be evaluated to determine if they fit within the scope of this EA relative to the issues analyzed.
- ◆ Monitoring of the sites would be conducted. Assessment of the effectiveness of control efforts would consider the weed management objective for each site, as well as the infestation size and percent occupancy of the target weed species following treatment. See Appendix G for a flow chart illustrating the decision process to be following in applying the adaptive strategy.
- ◆ Monitoring of water quality would be conducted (monitoring plan attached).

## DECISION CRITERIA

I have made my decision based on:

1. a review of the EA, appendices, project file, and supporting information such as the Forest Plan,
2. how well the various alternatives meet the project's Purpose and Need, and
3. public comments we have received.

## RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

As stated in the EA, noxious and undesirable weeds are spreading on public lands at an alarming rate. The project's purpose is simple - to help control the spread of such weeds (EA Chap 1, pg 5). According to the scientific assessment of the Interior Columbia Basin, invading weeds can alter ecosystem processes including productivity, decomposition, hydrology, nutrient recycling, and natural disturbance patterns such as frequency and intensity of wildfires. Changing these processes can lead to displacement of native plant species eventually impacting wildlife and plant habitat, recreational opportunities, and scenic beauty.

On National Forest System lands, the Forest Service is responsible for promoting healthy ecosystems while providing for a diversity of plant and animal communities, long-term sustainability of natural resources, and future opportunities for public use and continued ecosystem restoration. A review of noxious weed surveys conducted within the North Fork Ranger District has shown me that weed infestations are a serious problem within the areas affected and are becoming detrimental to ecosystem health and diversity. I believe that Alternative 3 is an aggressive, integrated, adaptive program that will slow the spread of large infestations, eliminate new invaders, and prevent or limit the spread of weeds into areas that are currently free of or have limited infestations. This alternative best meets the intended objective of preventing the introduction, reproduction and spread of designated noxious weeds and invasive exotic plants. It helps implement an integrated management strategy using all appropriate methods of treatment available.

While some commenters were concerned about the continued use of chemicals for noxious weed management, it must be made clear that some noxious and invasive species such as the knapweeds and hawkweeds will never be eliminated from our ecosystem. Thus our goal is to reduce the size of existing infestations and to prevent or limit their spread to uninfested areas. This will require continuing use of chemicals, but I believe that the amounts of herbicide prescribed for use at each site combined with the safety measures that will be utilized will ensure that the negative effects of chemical use will remain at undetectable levels.

I believe that the strategies outlined in Alternative 3 for control, treatment and monitoring of infestations will allow us to make significant progress in limiting the spread of existing weeds and new invaders while helping us reduce the threats to our ecosystems currently and in the future.

I did not select Alternative 1 (the No Action alternative) as this represents the current level of weed management activity and has been shown to have limited success over the past several years. Even though this alternative includes the continued administrative use of chemicals and will proceed with all approved projects under the Middle Black EIS, infestations outside these areas will remain largely unaffected and weed populations will continue to grow and spread into uninfested areas. Alternative 2 was not selected as this alternative would only provide for very limited control activities thus eliminating the aggressive, integrated strategy I believe is needed to make inroads into our weed populations. While the combination of mechanical, biological and cultural treatments would provide for some relief of weed infestations, these methods alone have shown limited success in the past and are likely to be inadequate for the treatment of large and aggressive infestations.

## CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER LAWS, REGULATION OR POLICY

Numerous laws, regulations and agency directives require that my decision be consistent with their provisions. I have determined that my decision is consistent with all laws, regulations and agency policy relevant to this project. The following discussion is not all inclusive; rather, it is intended to address issues raised through comment as well as to ensure consistency of the decision within the larger legal framework.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - NEPA's intent is to "promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere, and stimulate the health and welfare of man." I believe that Alternative 3 meets the intent of the Act based on rationale stated previously and below.

National Forest Noxious Weed Management Policy (FSM 2080-2083) - I believe that Alternative 3 is consistent with National Forest Noxious Weed Management Policy which requires District Rangers to prevent the introduction and establishment, and provide for the containment and suppression, of noxious weeds; and to cooperate with State agencies. This policy is consistent with the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended (7 USC 2801 et seq.)

Endangered Species Act (ESA) - Forest specialists evaluated Alternative 3 with regard to threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Their findings are summarized in the EA (pages 36-39, 50-64, and 70-76) and in the Biological Assessments and Biological Evaluations, which are enclosed. The project also meets the standards and guidelines for noxious weed control activities contained in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion (April 29, 2005) for effects to bull trout. Based on these findings, I believe Alternative 3 is consistent with the ESA.

In addition, we have received an e-mail dated May 9, 2005 from Bob Ries, USFWS, indicating "...Section 7 conferencing for proposed species is not required unless the action might jeopardize the species. The biological assessment for the project indicates that the noxious weed spraying project would be unlikely to jeopardize Snake River Basin *Onchorynchus mykiss* since the project is using the same chemicals and mitigation practices that were evaluated for similar non-jeopardy actions proposed by the Bureau of Land Management, and the levels of exposure are similar. Since the weed project is unlikely to jeopardize *O. mykiss*, and North Fork Clearwater River drainage has only proposed *O. mykiss* and no listed species or critical habitat at this time, section 7 conferencing is not required at this time. Consequently, as long as *O. mykiss* is proposed for listing, the action may proceed without a biological opinion."

Clean Water Act - Based on the measures outlined in the EA to protect soil and water resources (page 20 and Appendices H, I, & M) and the Soils, Water Quality and Aquatics Analysis (pages 44-48), I believe Alternative 3 meets the intent of the Clean Water Act.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA) - The National Forest Management Act and accompanying regulations require that several other specific findings be documented at the project level.

Forest Plan Consistency - Management activities are to be consistent with the Forest Plan [16 USC 1604(i)]. The Forest Plan guides management activities [36 CFR 219.1(b)]. This project is consistent with Forest Plan, Regional and National direction.

Resource Protection - The following 12 statements address resource protection requirements of NFMA:

1. Alternative 3 conserves soil and water resources and does not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land (EA pages 44-48).
2. Within the scope of the project and consistent with the other resource values involved, activities will minimize risks from serious or long-lasting hazards (EA pages 26-29).
3. The purpose of this project is to prevent or reduce serious, long-lasting hazards and damage from pest organisms, utilizing principles of integrated pest management (EA pages 1-4).
4. Alternative 3 will protect bodies of water (EA page 20 and Appendices H and I).

5. Alternative 3 will provide for and maintain a diversity of plant and animal communities by reducing displacement of native plant species (EA pages 31-36).
6. Alternative 3 will maintain sufficient habitat for viable populations of existing native vertebrate species (pages 50-63, 70-76, BA/BE attached).
7. The EA assesses potential physical, biological, aesthetic, cultural, engineering and economic impacts of Alternative 3 and it is consistent with multiple uses planned for the area.
8. Alternative 3 prevents the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat for threatened and endangered species (EA pages 36-39, 50-64, 70-76, BA/BE attached).
9. There are no right-of-way corridors capable or likely to be needed to accommodate the project.
10. There is no road construction associated with this project.
11. No temporary roads will be built.
12. Applicable Federal, State and local air quality standards will be met.

Riparian Areas, Soil and Water - All riparian areas, soil and water will be protected as described in the EA (page 21 and Appendices H and I).

Diversity - The purpose of this project is to preserve and enhance the diversity of plant and animal communities by reducing and limiting the spread of noxious weeds (EA pages 1-3). Alternative 3 is consistent with this objective.

Executive Order for Environmental Justice - No impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or the effects assessment.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

### Summary of Environmental Assessment

The selected alternative, as described on page 1 of this document, will implement an integrated strategy for control of noxious weeds using mechanical, cultural, biological and chemical control. The purpose of the project is to control noxious and undesirable weed infestations within the North Fork Clearwater River and Orofino Creek watersheds as described in the project area. The approximately 3150 acres proposed for treatment annually represent less than one percent of the National Forest System lands administered by the North Fork Ranger District. In addition, approximately 64 miles of road side vegetation management will be conducted annually including activities on approximately 41 miles of cost-share road right-of-way.

Key issues are discussed on pages 2-3 of this document and on page 16 of the EA. They are 1) effects of herbicides on water quality and aquatic organisms, 2) incorporation of education/prevention, 3) human risk, and 4) use of chemicals.

Alternatives considered include: Alternative 1 - No Action - continuing the current treatments including chemical use at administrative sites; Alternative 2 - Integrated Treatments with Non-Chemical Control; and Alternative 3 - Integrated Treatments with Chemical Control. These are described fully on page 3 of this document and on pages 26-29 of the EA.

### Summary of Impacts

**Water Quality and Aquatic Organisms:** There will be no detectable changes in water quality in the drainages proposed for treatment. Herbicide concentrations in streams are expected to remain under the No Observable Effect Level or Concentration for all herbicides analyzed. Therefore, no significant effects to aquatic organisms should be observed as a result of this project. Individual drainages have a

specific maximum allowable acreage to be treated annually (see Appendix L attached). The likelihood that high aquatic concentrations would exist is very low (EA page 61). In fact, it is unlikely that any herbicide would be detected in stream water as a result of proposed herbicide application because of the low level of herbicide use and the herbicide application requirements.

Combined with the design criteria listed in Chapter 2 and herbicide application guidelines in Appendix H (attached), use of these parameters would protect aquatic resources from potential effects of herbicide treatment. No adverse effects to soils, water quality or aquatic resources would be expected to occur from future herbicide application under the adaptive strategy.

Pages 27-29 of the EA describe the Forest Plan standards relating to water quality and outlines how the project will meet all of the application standards.

**Vegetative and Biological Community Diversity:** There may be short term potential impacts to individual desired plant species; however, there will be long term benefits by reducing competition from noxious weeds (EA pages 34-35). Chemical treatment of noxious weeds is not likely to have an adverse effect on sensitive plant species; in fact, removal of competing species is likely to improve habitat for colonization by sensitive species (page 38). There is a higher likelihood of maintaining forage habitat for wildlife species with Alternative 3 (pages 74-75) and it has the highest predicted effectiveness for controlling weeds thus preserving the native plant community diversity. Chemical treatment of noxious weeds is not likely to have an adverse effect on Threatened and Endangered species and is consistent with the Forest Plan (page 75). No significant impacts are anticipated on desired vegetative and biological community diversity.

**Potential Effects on Human Health:** Negative risks from herbicide use on weed control workers and effects on visitors or nearby residents would be insignificant (page 30). Using the proper personal protective equipment, giving the proper care and attention to mixing, loading, and application of herbicides all greatly reduce the risk of negative direct effects from exposure. Similarly, the risk of indirect exposure to people hiking through a recently sprayed area would be low. Based on the best scientific information available, we would reasonably expect that human health impacts from herbicide applications on the proposed sites would be insignificant (pages 65-69).

## Significance Findings

Based on a review of the EA and the project file, I find that this decision is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively with other activities in the general area. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not needed. This finding is based on the following factors set forth in 40 CFR 1580.27.

**Context:** This project is a site specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide or state-wide importance. The actions involved in this decision are consistent with the management direction contained in the Clearwater National Forest Plan.

**Intensity:** Impacts from this site specific project are both beneficial and adverse, but not significant. The adverse effects on some non-target plant species will be short term in nature and will not impair land productivity. The long term effects are considered to be beneficial.

**The degree to which the selected action affects public health and safety:** The roadside vegetation clearing will help improve public safety by increasing site distances along rural roads.

**Unique characteristics of the geographic area:** The project will have no effect on historic sites, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands or ecologically critical areas. There are no known cultural resources that will be directly affected by implementation of the selected alternative.

**The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:** The effects of the project are limited to the North Fork Ranger District and adjoining project area. To the majority of respondents, the effects are non-controversial.

**The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:** The adverse effects will be short term and will involve no unique or unknown risks. The selected actions are common and been employed in the past on similar sites and habitats.

**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:** This decision does not set any future precedents for other actions which may have a significant effect.

**Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts:** Cumulative effects were considered for all resources pivotal to the analysis in Chapters 3 & 4, and for all activities relating to noxious weed treatment on adjacent ownerships. No significant negative cumulative effects were discovered.

**The degree to which the action may adversely affect any items eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources:** None of the above resources would be adversely affected.

**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 of 1973:** This is discussed in the attached Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation.

**Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:** The selected actions will not violate any Federal, State or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

## APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11 by individuals or organizations meeting the requirements of 36 CFR 215.13. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the Lewiston Morning Tribune newspaper of Lewiston, Idaho. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source (36 CFR 215.15).

The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why my decision should be reversed. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

Paper appeals must be submitted to:

For Postal Delivery:

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region  
Attn: Appeal Deciding Officer  
PO Box 7669  
Missoula, MT 59807

For Hand Delivery:

Northern Region Headquarters  
Federal Building, 200 East Broadway  
Missoula, Montana

Normal Business Hours are 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM

Appeals may be Faxed to (406) 329-3411

Electronic appeals must be submitted to:

[appeals-northern-region-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-northern-region-office@fs.fed.us)

In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response should confirm that your electronic appeal has been received. Electron appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to why the Responsible Official's decision should be reversed.

The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must include the following:

- ◆ Appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
- ◆ Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
- ◆ When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
- ◆ The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
- ◆ The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either this part or part 251, subpart C;
- ◆ Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
- ◆ Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
- ◆ Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
- ◆ How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

## IMPLEMENTATION

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may occur on, but not before, 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition.

Detailed records of the environmental analysis are available for public view at the North Fork Ranger District Office, 12730 Highway 12, Orofino, ID 83544. For further information about this decision, contact:

Douglas Gober, District Ranger  
North Fork Ranger District  
12730 Highway 12  
Orofino, ID 83544  
[dgober@fs.fed.us](mailto:dgober@fs.fed.us)  
(208)476-4541

Suzanne Qualmann, IDT Leader  
Palouse Ranger District  
1700 Highway 6  
Potlatch, ID 83855  
[squalmann@fs.fed.us](mailto:squalmann@fs.fed.us)  
(208)875-1739

## SIGNATURE AND DATE

*/s/ Douglas Gober*

05/20/05

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DOUGLAS GOBER  
District Ranger, North Fork Ranger District  
Clearwater National Forest  
(208) 476-4541

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Date



## APPENDIX L - DETERMINATION OF MAXIMUM ACRES ANNUALLY TREATABLE

North Fork Ranger District Noxious Weed EA - 2004				Clopyralid	Dicamba	Glyphosate Rodeo	Glyphosate Roundup	Methsulfuron Methly	Picloram	Triclopyrl TEA	2,4-D
Chemical Application Rate (pounds/acre)				0.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.4	1.0	0.4	1.0
Median Lethal Concentration ( LC50 - ppm)				100	135	923	22	150	0.8-26	199	240
Median Lethal Concentration/20 ( LC50/20 - ppm) or NOEL or NOEC (ppm)				20	6.8	46.2	1.1	7.5	0.29	104	10
Major Subbasin	Watershed Name	Watershed Acres	Known Concen- trations of Noxious Weeds (acres)	Maximum Acres to be Treated							
Clearwater	Lower Orofino	68,399		30,684	3,452	23,601	563	14,383	222	199,448	7,671
	Upper Orofino	27,972		16,144	1,816	12,417	296	7,567	117	104,936	4,036
Lower North Fork Clearwater	Alder Creek	15,459		6,417	722	4,936	118	3,008	47	41,712	1,604
	Bear Creek	3,817		2,571	289	1,977	47	1,205	19	16,711	643
	Beaver Creek	39,812	21	24,850	2,796	19,114	456	11,649	180	161,527	6,213
	Isabella Creek	19,774	14	13,210	1,486	10,161	242	6,192	96	85,867	3,303
	Lower NF Clearwater	50,077	4	24,634	2,771	18,948	452	11,547	179	160,120	6,158
	Minnesaka Creek	3,572		2,248	253	1,729	41	1,054	16	14,610	562
Upper North Fork Clearwater	Cayuse Creek	107,851	167	86,459	9,727	66,502	1,585	40,528	627	561,986	21,615
	Fourth of July Creek	28,491		17,847	2,008	13,727	327	8,366	129	116,004	4,462
	Lake Creek	22,057	213	18,326	2,062	14,096	336	8,590	133	119,117	4,581
	Long Creek	17,981	9	14,530	1,635	11,176	266	6,811	105	94,442	3,632
	Lower Kelly Creek	30,424	47	15,899	1,789	12,229	291	7,453	115	103,342	3,975
	Moose Creek	46,619	239	30,427	3,423	23,403	558	14,262	221	197,773	7,607
	Orogrande Creek	58,820	122	33,705	3,792	25,925	618	15,799	244	219,085	8,426
	Quartz Creek	27,936	5	18,445	2,075	14,187	338	8,646	134	119,892	4,611
	Skull Creek	55,859	5	41,474	4,666	31,901	760	19,441	301	269,584	10,369
	Upper Kelly Creek	56,885	3	43,143	4,854	33,184	791	20,223	313	280,430	10,786
	Washington Creek	30,232		15,203	1,710	11,694	279	7,127	110	98,822	3,801
Weitas Creek	139,796	174	84,122	9,464	64,704	1,542	39,432	610	546,790	21,030	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,058,368</b>	<b>3,038</b>	<b>678,759</b>	<b>76,360</b>	<b>522,079</b>	<b>12,444</b>	<b>318,168</b>	<b>4,921</b>	<b>4,411,934</b>	<b>169,690</b>



## DECISION NOTICE - APPENDIX A

### RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

#### NORTH FORK NOXIOUS WEED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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##### PREVENTION

The best way to deal with weeds is through prevention. The scientific literature supports this view. A comprehensive plan needs to be done that engages in serious prevention because the worst weeds are those that have yet come into an area.

The public and agency personnel coming in to the North Fork should take all precautions feasible to limit the spread of exotic weeds.

Closing roads, a goal of the agency in the area, will help lessen the spread of weeds.

**Response: We agree that prevention is an important component of an overall noxious weed strategy. We expect that prevention efforts will expand over time to complement the treatments planned in this project. But, prevention alone, no matter how rigorously pursued, will not address weed populations that already exist.**

The EA lists measures in appendix M to prevent weeds. However, these methods have been in place for years and are largely ineffective. There are no requirements that inspections be performed.

**Response: Prevention measures, including the BMP's in Appendix M, are not completely addressing the weed problem partly because weeds were established in areas of the Forest before prevention efforts were implemented. It will take weed treatments as proposed in this document to complement prevention efforts and effectively address the weeds problem. As weeds become less prevalent as a result of treatment, the implementation and effectiveness of prevention efforts is expected to increase.**

We suggest that the following be considered:

1. Require inspection of all vehicles before entering the North Fork.

**Response: Considering the volume of vehicle traffic (highway and OHV) entering the North Fork, the logistics and cost of inspecting them all would make this idea unworkable. Heavy equipment typically creates exposed soil and seed beds for weeds as part of its normal operation. Cleaning and inspection of this equipment is already required, and addresses concerns for the vehicles with the greatest capacity to pick up, hold, transport and deliver weed seed.**

**The Forest Service and area weed committees continue to work on increasing public understanding of weed issues and support for prevention efforts. Prevention will become a more effective part of the weed strategy as people realize the importance of cleaning vehicles, avoiding travel through infestations, etc.**

2. Prohibit packstock grazing and/or use in areas that currently contain weeds until the weeds are eliminated. Stock grazing on weeds along trails or in meadows carry and deposit those weed seeds into other places. Even if horses are free of weeds when entering the North Fork, they can still spread weeds if allowed to graze in areas that contain weeds.

**Response:** Prohibiting pack stock, motor vehicle, or other uses of areas is impractical as weeds may never be completely eliminated. Treatment of weed areas as proposed in this project will reduce concentrations. This, coupled with expanded prevention efforts and early identification and treatment of new populations will reduce the threat considerably from current conditions.

6. Quarantine all animals for at least 48 hours prior to entering the North Fork. Having a quarantine corral established at all stock trailheads and have the trailheads staffed (especially during hunting season) and stocked with pelletized feed (weed-free hay isn't, people would be required to either bring in pelletized feed for the quarantine or purchase it from the campground host at the trailhead) is a start.

**Response:** Trail head quarantines are impractical - it would require too many corrals and would be nearly impossible to administer. Continued education for stock users about what they can do prior to entering onto National Forest lands has much greater opportunity for success over the long run. Areas of concentrated livestock use will be treated for new infestations to reduce transportation of weed seed from these areas to others.

7. Require pelletized feed. There is a great deal of doubt that all certified feed is in fact weed free. Pellets are a simple and proven effective remedy.

**Response:** The Forest recommends that stock users feed pellets as much as possible since they are more likely to be truly weed seed free. Pellets are not a complete replacement for hay though, as it takes some time for stock to adjust to pellets and some animals just don't tolerate them. While pellets provide adequate nutrition, they do not provide the necessary "chew time" for animals or the roughage needed in their diet. There will be a continuing need to use hay and certified weed free feed is required on all National Forest lands although there is some limited risk that such products still contain some viable seed.

3. Prohibit ORVs from trails that contain weeds and close all backcountry trails to ORV use. Travel planning is essential in helping to prevent weed spread. Vehicles are the vectors that have spread weed seeds throughout the North Fork. Closing the inventoried roadless areas to vehicles, closing unneeded roads, and requiring vehicle inspection are all measures that should have been adopted years ago.

**Response:** There are many vectors that spread weeds; ORV's are one of them. Horses, feet, pets, clothes, boats and bicycles also spread weeds. Early detection and response will be the key to minimizing weed spread. Travel management in roadless areas is outside of the scope of this proposal.

5. Close all administrative sites, campgrounds (formal and informal) unless and until they are certified as weed free.

**Response:** Closing all roads, trails, campgrounds, administrative sites, etc. until they are certified as weed free would not leave much of the National Forest available to the public. It's unlikely that any significant area can be made completely "weed free." A program of treatment as proposed in this project along with public understanding of - and support for - weed prevention offers the best chance for substantial weed reductions.

Administrative sites and developed campgrounds are not really a problem weed source as weed control programs there have been in place for some time. However, dispersed campsites are and additional emphasis will be placed on treating weeds in high traffic areas like these.

**Summary response to prevention suggestions:** Many of the suggestions made might be feasible for a weed that is a "new invader" whose objective is eradication. For weeds that are in the "contain or control" mode, these suggestions would not really be feasible.

## TIMING

The EA is unclear as to the length of time this project will be in effect. This needs to be clarified.

**Response:** The planning period is ten years.

## PURPOSE AND NEED

The EA is rather confused about the need for this project in context of the acreage affected. On one hand, we are told that the impacts of weeds are significant in the area. On the other hand, we are told only a tiny fraction of the land base is affected.

This incongruity leads to a skewed analysis of alternatives and assumptions that may not be valid. The extent of the problem needs to be carefully laid out.

**Response:** The weed infestations in some areas are extensive. The area proposed for treatment using chemical methods is only a small portion of the total land base. We consider weeds a significant problem not on the basis of affected area alone, but because many of the affected areas are in busy travel corridors which enhances the potential for weeds to spread. It is our hope that with time the biological controls released would cover the more extensive infestations.

## ALTERNATIVES

Chapter 2 is somewhat unclear on alternatives. For example, alternative 2 would allow mechanical, cultural and biological control yet is portrayed as a baseline and not considered active control. Please explain these inconsistencies.

**Response:** Alternative 2 is a baseline against which to evaluate the effects of chemicals.

There is no benchmark alternative that would do nothing. While such an alternative may not necessarily be desirable to adopt, it would provide an important benchmark for analysis.

**Response:** An alternative that would do nothing would not meet the purpose and need of preventing the introduction, reproduction and spread of weeds (EA pg. 3).

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The EA seems inconsistent on the amount of herbicide use expected under alternative 3. This is because the concept of spraying native brush is inserted without much consideration or analysis. The EA analyzed spraying weeds, not spraying weeds and brush

**Response:** The analysis of Alternative 3 (page 30) includes treatment of roadside brush along with weed treatment. The effects of chemicals on the environment are similar whether spraying native brush or weeds, with the exception of the effect on native or non-target plants. The effects on water, wildlife, and humans would be the same because the same chemicals are being used. The effects on vegetative community diversity are addressed on page 35 of the EA.

The EA suggests that biocontrol on TES plants is not a risk. However, recent data from Hells Canyon suggests otherwise. Biocontrol agents have affected native plants of the same family including sensitive species. Biocontrol agents tend not to be species-specific, but often genus or family specific when placed in a new environment.

**Response: The EA does not suggest that use of Biocontrol agents is risk free. Biocontrol agents go through extremely stringent testing against all known species within the same family prior to release. However, risks - though considered manageable - still remain.**

Missoula is used as a test case for the persistence and movement of herbicides (picloram) in soil and water. However, Missoula is much drier than the North Fork. Thus, the studies in these environments have little in common with the North Fork.

**Response: The equations used in the risk assessment include site specific rainfall amounts by watershed.**

The EA fails to recognize the NOAA-Fisheries recently declared resident rainbow trout in the North Fork as part of the same population as anadromous steelhead. While this is ridiculous, it shows government inconsistency at its worst. This EA predicts no impacts on anadromous fish. Yet, under the recent NOAA-Fisheries definition, these fish are part of that populations [sic].

At the same time, the EA includes nothing about resident rainbow (native) in the drainage. There is no analysis or the potential impacts on them from herbicides or other forms of weed control.

**Response: Page 57 of the EA describes the Toxic levels of herbicides to fish, including Rainbow Trout (see Table 12).**

Perhaps the biggest problem with the EA is its lack of analysis of extremely sensitive species to herbicides such as amphibians. The EA merely lists some of the sensitive species (leopard frog, Coeur d'Alene salamander, boreal toad) but does not analyze potential negative impacts on those species. Since they use stream areas but are also found some distance from water, they have the opportunity to be greatly affected by herbicides. Furthermore, the EA fails to mention a very rare species in the area, the Idaho Giant Salamander whose populations have plummeted in the past few years.

**Response: Species discussed in pages 63 and 64 of the EA include macroinvertebrates and amphibians which the EPA and US Fish and Wildlife Service use as indicators of a wide range of aquatic organisms.**

Persistence of herbicides is downplayed in the EA. For example, clopyralid is persistent in soil, up to 14 months. Thus, the specter of persistence and chronic use is raised.

**Response: It is important to track the success of treatment; persistent and chronic use is not what is being proposed. Herbicides may be used 3 to 4 times in the same spot, but use over long periods (10 to 20 years) is not effective and is not being proposed. If 3 years of treatment in one spot has not lowered the weed density considerably, then another method should be considered. Proper herbicide use and follow up with revegetation should preclude the need for "chronic use".**

Furthermore, the EPA considers clopyralid as very water soluble and very mobile in soil and concluded that it "has the potential to leach to ground water and/or contaminate surface water." While the use of Clopyralid is small, it has been found in test samples in the Columbia Basin. Clopyralid is also volatile and can evaporate and affect non-target species a distance from application according to the EPA. The toxicity of Clopyralid to humans, or other animals, has been little tested.

Dicamba has been found in ground water in Idaho. It also includes so-called inert ingredients that have not been tested by EPA.

Glyphosate's persistence varies widely. Half lives [sic] (breakdown of half the amount) varies from 3 to 141 days. Initial degradation is faster than subsequent degradation of what remains.

Picloram is very mobile and persistent. Hexachlorobenzene, a carcinogen, occurs as a contaminant in picloram as a result of manufacturing process. It can persist years in the soil. Idaho groundwater has been contaminated by picloram. The EPA's water branch recommended that it no longer be registered because of its negative effects on the environment.

Triclopyr is somewhat persistent in soil. It's [sic] breakdown products, like those of many other herbicides, are also toxic and persist even longer.

**Response:** Without the source citations, it is difficult to discuss each of these contentions; however, there is no doubt that use of herbicides carries an inherent risk. The EA does identify many negative impacts of the herbicides; thus, there are no-spray buffers where we feel infiltration might be an issue, and extremely low thresholds for those chemicals considered more dangerous such as picloram.

The EA does not discuss the impacts to soil organisms like earthworms in any detail. Herbicides are known to affect soils organisms.

Herbicides are generally tested on agricultural areas. It has been found that in wildland environments, many herbicides are even more persistent than in agricultural areas.

The EA does not adequately consider the cumulative impacts of herbicides. Even so-called safe levels of application have produced impacts greater than anticipated as proven by groundwater contamination.

The areas of weed concentration are in areas most visited by humans. Thus, use of herbicides for those sensitive to chemicals is quite high. Given the volatility of the herbicide, people could be exposed by simply passing through an area where it is being used. The EA only addresses sensitivity of those who apply herbicides.

**Response:** The environmental and human health consequences of the effects of pesticide use were addressed during the chemical registration process. Recent legislations, FQPA (Food Quality Protection Act) mandate a more rigorous analysis that considers risk not only from a specific chemical but expected cumulative exposure to groups of chemicals. All previously registered chemicals must undergo reanalysis under these more stringent guidelines. The Forest Service has supplemented this registration information with a series of Risk Assessments. These assessments review available research and information on herbicides and then apply this information to conditions that will likely occur during Forest Service wildland pesticide applications. These risk assessments were used as part of the analysis. Information can be found at [www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/pesticide/risk\\_assessments](http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/pesticide/risk_assessments) (EA page 57).

## MONITORING

The EA indicates monitoring will be done. It focuses on water quality monitoring. In these cases, herbicide use would be stopped NOEC is exceeded. However, it does not indicate where the monitoring will take place or how frequently said monitoring will occur.

**Response:** Monitoring to ensure that threshold amounts are not exceeded will be an ongoing process each year.

Furthermore, there are not thresholds for monitoring to determine whether the program is effective. Page 20 merely indicates monitoring of treatment sites will occur. Without a specific protocol and plan, monitoring is of limited use.

**Response:** Please see the monitoring appendix attached.

## RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS (B-2 AREAS)

As such, the agency needs to determine whether the activities proposed in the EA are even compatible with maintaining an "untrammled" (uncontrolled, untethered) environment and preserving wilderness character. While the spread of undesirable, non-native weeds is disturbing and shows a failure of prevention on part of the agency, determining whether herbicide use and an aggressive and manipulative program

of going after weeds in the recommended wilderness is appropriate should be done. Questions such as is the cure worse than the disease need to be asked.

**Response:** The North Fork Ranger District is proposing to use a variety of treatments across the district including manual, herbicide and biological control of noxious weeds. Since noxious weeds are found in Forest Plan proposed wilderness areas, the Forest Service will need to use all of the tools available for noxious weed control - including herbicides - in order to restore the natural character of these areas. The presence of noxious weeds crowds out and replaces native vegetation which adversely changes the character of the proposed wilderness areas. Before the continued spread of noxious weeds makes control even more difficult, an aggressive program of control is necessary. Without herbicides in conjunction with manual and biological treatments, control of noxious weeds in proposed wilderness areas would be less effective and more expensive.

Use of herbicides in wilderness is not an unprecedented treatment. Currently, herbicides are being use to control noxious weeds in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

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## WATER AND SOIL MONITORING PLAN

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### *North Fork Noxious Weed Treatment Project*

### *Clearwater National Forest*

*July 26, 2004 (updated November 29, 2004)*

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## MONITORING PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET

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**Type of Monitoring:** Implementation and Effectiveness (Water Quality & Aquatic Resources)

**Project Name:** North Fork Noxious Weeds Treatment Project (2005-2014)

**Goal:** The goal of the best management practices and design features as described in the North Fork Noxious Weed Treatment Environmental Assessment (USDA-FS 2004) is to prevent herbicide spray from entering streams, wetlands or water. Assure that all herbicides do not reach streams or water.

**Objectives:** Determine if streams and/or aquatic organisms have been exposed to herbicides used to control noxious weeds.

**Parameters:**

1. Spray droplet monitoring.
2. Direct water sampling.

**Location(s):** Four locations: Monitoring will occur along mainstem North Fork Clearwater River at two locations: Two additional locations on two tributary streams, Orogrande Creek and Moose Creek will be monitored.

**Frequency:**

1. Before, during and after treatment (Goal = 0 spray droplets). Approximately 2500 feet (~0.5 mile) of treatment along the stream will be sampled. Cards will be placed 15 feet from the edge of the stream, at 250 foot intervals (10 cards). Also, three transects of cards will be placed perpendicular to a line running across the buffer zone. Each of these 100 foot transects will contain 10 cards placed at 10 foot intervals. The cards will be coded for position and location along each transect. Approximately 40 cards will be used at each site. If a shorter distance between the treatment area and a stream occurs, the transect distance would be reduced to 50 feet and number of transects increased to six.
2. Spray cards: Before and during treatments. Water samples: Before and during treatments, upstream and downstream of application.

**Methodology:** Samples collection will consist of a focused strategy where noxious weed treatment using herbicides is planned.

1. Spray cards (Kromekote - white plastic) will be positioned along a stream. Herbicide will be lightly dyed with food coloring to produce a distinctive droplet stain when drops come in contact with the cards. Cards will be placed on the ground with an unobstructed view of the sky and avoiding local obstructions. Placement of the cards will be determined before hand and flagged to that card can be quickly be deployed on the morning of the spraying to avoid undue exposure to weather. The card will be collected and visually analyzed in the field immediately after spraying; more through analysis will be performed later in the office.
2. Water sampling will be collected at following sites on the mainstem North Fork Clearwater River: (1) downstream of Skull Creek and (2) upstream of Kelly Creek. Water sampling will also be collected in Orogrande Creek and Moose Creek. A sample will be collected before and after treatment, upstream and downstream from the application area. A length integrated sampling procedure will be used along the stream adjacent to the application area. The sample will be analyzed only if spray card monitoring indicated herbicides droplets drifted over the stream and droplets were visible on the spray cards.

Samples will be collected following procedures recommended by the water quality analysis laboratory. The samples would be stored and transported following methods recommended by the laboratory. The samples will be analyzed and results are expected in seven days.

**Duration:** One to two years depending upon results of initial sampling.

**Data Storage:** On the J drive. (fsfiles/office/aquatic/inventory\_monitoring/monitoring/weeds).

**Report:** Include in Forest annual monitoring results report and in the Project File.

**Estimated Cost:** \$2,500 (cost for one year):

1 - Biological technician - field implementation - 3 days

1 - Hydrologist and Fish Biologist (initial setup) - 1 day/each

1 - Fish Biologist - analysis and report

Water sample analysis for 16 samples (\$800 @ \$50/sample).

Supplies - (Kromekote spray cards, sample bottles)

**Personnel Required:** Biological Technician, Hydrologist, and Fishery Biologist

**Responsible Individual:** Pat Murphy

**Prepared by:** Jennie Fischer

and Pat Murphy

**Date:** 07/26/2004