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Final Environmental Impact Statement

Meteor

Salmon River Ranger District, Klamath National Forest
Siskiyou County, California

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**Meteor
Final
Environmental Impact Statement
Siskiyou County, California**

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Abstract: The Environmental Impact Statement considers three alternatives in detail. Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative. Alternative 2 proposes harvesting timber and conducting associated activities on 744 acres in 39 units, treating fuels on an additional 131 acres in 9 stands, conducting habitat improvement activities, and implementing road actions. Alternative 3 proposes harvesting timber and conducting associated activities on 650 acres in 34 units, treating fuels on an additional 41 acres in 3 stands, conducting habitat improvement activities, and implementing road actions. Alternative 2 is the preferred alternative.

Web Address For Project:

www.fs.fed.us/r5/klamath/projects/project/meteor/

SUMMARY

The Klamath National Forest proposes to harvest timber and conduct associated activities including fuel treatment on 744 acres in 39 units, to treat fuels on an additional 131 acres in 9 stands, to conduct habitat improvement activities, and to implement road actions. The area affected by the proposal includes the Salmon River Watershed near the towns of Sawyers Bar, Forks of Salmon, and Cecilville, approximately 55 miles southwest of Yreka, California. This action is needed to maintain stand health by leading stands into a resilient condition where they can provide a sustained yield of wood products, reduce the risk of these stands to catastrophic fire, maintain unique wildlife habitats, and provide an economical, safe, and environmentally sensitive transportation system.

A number of stands in the Salmon River drainage were identified as needing treatment to achieve desired conditions identified in the Klamath National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (*Forest Plan*) and the Ecosystem Analyses that are pertinent to this area. Several road actions were identified that would improve the transportation system.

A variety of efforts were made to involve the public. Notices were placed in the Klamath National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions. A scoping letter was mailed to those who expressed interest in the proposal, to those who owned property adjacent to the project area, and to agencies with responsibilities for local resource management. Information about the proposal was placed on the Klamath National Forest web page. A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on April 7, 2003. Federally recognized tribes were consulted; they are the Karuk Tribe of California, the Quartz Valley Reservation, the Yurok Tribe, and the Hoopa Tribe. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – Fisheries, and the North Coast Water Quality Control Board were consulted during the planning process. The Draft EIS was circulated to interested parties on November 6, 2003. A Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on November 21, 2003. A public comment period ran through January 5, 2004.

Issues identified as significant include stability in the Jones Gulch area, cumulative watershed effects, effects on Riparian Reserves, effects on anadromous fish habitat, entering critical spotted owl habitat in the Matrix, and effects on Wild and Scenic Rivers.

These issues led the agency to develop an alternative to the proposed action that would not harvest or treat fuels in the Jones Gulch area and would not propose thinning in any Riparian Reserves. This alternative proposes to harvest timber and conduct associated activities on 650 acres in 34 units, to treat fuels on an additional 41 acres in 3 stands, to conduct habitat improvement activities, and to implement road actions, including road decommissioning, upgrading, and maintenance. The proposed action is the preferred alternative.

The primary conclusion is there would be a number of short-term adverse effects for either Action Alternative. The short-term effects include removing less than 1% of late-successional habitat in watersheds supporting 55.5% and 47.8% of late-successional vegetation, well within the acceptable levels (15%) identified in the Forest Plan. Other short-term effects include a 1 to 2 year increase in fuel hazard in the harvested stands prior to fuel treatment, a 3 to 5 year increase in fuel hazard after some post-harvest silvicultural treatments, and a reduction in visibility and unpleasant odors during the short periods when prescribed burning occurs. There would be minor to moderate changes to scenic integrity

from sensitive viewpoints, a short-term increase in noise due to logging, and some adverse effects on the values held by some individuals. There would also be a minimal increase in runoff with the potential for sediment delivery to streams, but no degradation of water quality is expected. The effects on fish habitat would be negligible. Approximately 50 acres of suitable Northern spotted owl habitat would be removed, less than 1/10th of a percent of the suitable habitat within the analysis area; this includes 5 acres of critical habitat within the Matrix as discussed below. There would be limited noise disturbance and smoke disturbance to owls due to burning. Because Late-Successional Reserves are functioning well in this area, there would not be any jeopardy to owl populations. There would also be some minor effects to other wildlife species.

In addition to the above effects, the proposed action would also have a low likelihood of increasing the on-site landslide potential in Jones Gulch and a very small to negligible increase in landslide risk due to a short-term reduction in root strength and transpiration in the thinned Riparian Reserves associated with unstable ground as well as minimal short-term increases in runoff in all thinned Riparian Reserves.

Long-term beneficial effects would accompany the short-term adverse effects. Well-stocked, vigorous stands would be established for the long term. This would apply to critical habitat and thinned Riparian Reserves. Both Alternatives would provide timber products to benefit consumers in the short-term; Alternative 2 would provide a somewhat higher yield than Alternative 3. There would be an increase in stand vigor, a reduction in fuel hazard within the stands, and a corresponding decrease in the risk of stand-replacing fire occurring within the harvest units.

The cumulative effects of either Alternative 2 or 3 when combined with other actions in the assessment area would remove less than 1% of the late-successional and old growth vegetation, would reduce access for fire suppression and fuel management, would range from none to minor sedimentation impacts on various streams, would have negligible effects on fisheries habitat, would reduce northern spotted owl critical habitat by an inconsequential amount, would have a minimal effect on the habitat of other wildlife species, and have a minor effect on scenery. There would be beneficial cumulative effects through reducing stand stocking levels, reducing the number of acres with high fuel loading, reducing the opportunities for human-caused fire starts, reducing long term sediment delivery, restoring channel function, and creating more stable and attractive recreation and community settings.

The cumulative effects of Alternative 2 when combined with other actions would result in a very small increase in landslide risk in the Jones Gulch area that would be offset by decommissioning a short spur road in the area. Alternative 2 with other actions would provide beneficial effects to large woody debris recruitment in streams.

Either Alternative 2 or 3 would be consistent with all environmental laws.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide whether to approve the Proposed Action or an alternative design that would move the area toward the desired condition, or to not implement a project at this time.

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