

Executive Summary

This section is a brief summary of the contents of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (per 40 CFR §1502.12). The FEIS begins with Chapter 1, page 7.

Introduction

The Responsible Officials of this EIS propose to adopt new treatment strategies for invasive plants located on land within the nearly 2.5 million acres which make up the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests (Forests) and the Crooked River National Grassland (Grassland). The Project Area Units are located in Deschutes, Jefferson, Crook, Klamath, Lake, Wheeler and Grant Counties in Oregon, and encompass approximately 52,015 acres of National Forest System lands.

Approximately 14,547 acres of the Project Area Units are currently infested and targeted for treatment. However, the spread of invasive plants is unpredictable and actual locations of target species are likely to change over time.

The Proposed Action was developed to utilize the new tools and management techniques advanced in *Pacific Northwest Region Invasive Plant Program, Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants, Final EIS* (USFS 2005a), and Record of Decision (USFS 2005b).

Background

Invasive plants are currently damaging the ecological integrity of lands within and outside these administrative units. The current situation of invasive plants on the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and Crooked River National Grassland is described in Chapter 3.3. Despite management direction introduced to all Land and Resource Management Plans in Region Six by the *Record of Decision (ROD) for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation* (USFS 1988a), and the 1989 Mediated Agreement, invasive plants continue to increase and occupy previously uninfested areas, including Wilderness areas. Invasive plants spread at a rate of 8-12 percent annually (USFS 2005b) affecting all land ownerships, including National Forest System lands. The 1988 ROD specified and limited the tools available for the treatment of competing and unwanted vegetation, but did not provide administrative mechanisms for adapting new technologies. Herbicides approved for use by the Forest Service at that time were developed before 1980. Since then, new herbicides have been developed and registered for use that have advantages for controlling invasive plants, such as greater selectivity, greater efficacy, reduced application rates, and lower toxicity to animals and people. As noted above, the 2005 Record of Decision for the Pacific Northwest Region Invasive plant Program, Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants allows the use of new herbicides and imposes standards and guidelines that must be followed in the treatment and prevention of invasive plants on National Forest System lands.

Desired Future Conditions

Healthy native plant communities remain diverse and resilient, and damaged ecosystems are being restored. High quality habitat is provided for native organisms throughout the Forests and Grassland. Invasive plants do not jeopardize the ability of the National Forests to provide goods and services communities expect. The need for invasive plant treatment is reduced due to the

effectiveness and habitual nature of preventive actions, and the success of restoration efforts.¹ Forest Plan goals and objectives are listed in Chapter 1.5.1.

Purpose and Need

There is a need to reduce the extent of specific invasive plant infestations at identified sites, and to protect uninfested areas from future introduction and spread of invasive plant species from these sites. This EIS is intended to address the problems posed by invasive plants across the three-million acre planning area of the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and Crooked River National Grassland (“Forests”). This document follows new management direction and proposes the use of new tools made available for use in Region 6 by the R6 Invasive Plant Program Final Environmental Impact Statement (USFS 2005a).

Invasive plants create a host of adverse environmental effects which are harmful to native ecosystem processes. Examples of these effects include: displacement of native plants; reduction in functionality of habitat and forage for wildlife, fish, and livestock; loss of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitat; increased soil erosion and reduced water quality; alteration of physical and biological properties of soil, including reduced soil productivity; changes to the intensity and frequency of wildfires; budget impacts that limit or reduce land management opportunities due to high costs or dollars spent for controlling invasive plants; and loss of recreational opportunities.

There is a need to provide a mechanism to allow quick detection and response to changing invasive plant infestations. Invasive plant infestations change in size and move; even the most complete inventories will never identify all infested areas. The Forest Service needs the flexibility to treat expanded and/or newly identified invasive plant sites in a timely manner. New infestations and new species are usually high priority for treatment. To facilitate this flexibility, there is a need to provide a mechanism to allow early detection and quick response to changing invasive plant infestations in a cost-effective manner that complies with environmental policy.

Public Involvement

Ongoing public involvement occurred throughout this NEPA process. This project was included in the Schedule of Proposed Actions distributed by the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and Crooked River National Grassland since the Winter 2003 issue. On February 23, 2004 the original Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to document and disclose the potential environmental effects of proposed invasive plant treatment activities on the Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests and CRNG appeared in the Federal Register (Volume 69, No. 35/February 23, 2004 on page 8174). Due to the extensive length of time between that publication in the Federal Register and the initiation of the analysis for this project, a Revised Notice of Intent was published Friday, October 21, 2005 in Volume 70, No. 203 on page 61244. Both NOIs called for public comment. Information on the proposal was posted on a project website - <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/invasiveplant-eis/site-specific/DES/>.

On August 19, 2005 a scoping letter describing the project proposal was sent to over 700 individuals, organizations, tribes, and other agencies. It explained the February, 2004 scoping efforts and the reasons for again inviting public comment. It introduced the Proposed Action, summarized the Purpose of and Need for the proposal, and invited interested parties to submit written, facsimile, or electronic comments. A comment form was provided that could be filled out and mailed back to the Forests.

¹ This Desired Future Condition Statement became part of the Deschutes, Ochoco, and Crooked River National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plans with the Pacific Northwest Region Invasive Plant Program Record of Decision (USFS 2005b, page 2 and Appendix 1).

A public comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement commenced on February 2, 2007. The Forest Service received comments from 17 individuals, organizations, and agencies. These comments were considered during completion of this FEIS. Responses to substantive comments are included in Appendix I. More information on the public involvement activities and consultation is available in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

Issues

The following issues were identified through public scoping and internal evaluation and are studied in detail in this EIS and used to compare the alternatives. These issues are discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.8.

Water & Aquatic Species - The public expressed concern about potential impacts to water quality and fish, primarily centered around risks of using herbicides in riparian areas. Alternative 3 was developed to compare the proposed action with an alternative that responds to this issue by imposing more restrictions on herbicide use near water.

Treatment Effectiveness - The public and other agencies and organizations expressed a strong desire to see the Forest Service utilize the methods necessary to make substantial progress in effective treatment of invasive species. This was mostly expressed as a desire to see more herbicides used where they are the most effective treatment, and to avoid delay which could allow further spread. These comments were often tied to the concept of prevention as well.

Effects to Non-target Plants and Wildlife - Native plant communities are at risk from the invasive plant species which can overtake and degrade habitat. Sensitive plant species and plants utilized for cultural purposes can be impacted by the treatments intended to control invasive species. On the whole, native plants are expected to benefit through reclaimed or protected habitat.

Social/Economic Considerations - The public wants to see economics considered when choosing methods of treatment. The different treatment methods vary in how much they cost to implement; and therefore, how much can be completed in any year. Labor-intensive methods such as hand pulling can be more expensive. Some members of the public would also like to see the Forest Service take the opportunity to provide jobs in rural areas by considering manual and mechanical methods of treatment.

Human Health – Worker and Public Exposure to Herbicides – The public expressed concerns about the use of herbicides and what kinds of effects they may have on human health, either through drinking water, through direct contact by forest workers, eating contaminated special forest products, or recreationists coming into contact with contaminated vegetation. There is concern about long-term and cumulative effects to humans from the use of herbicides. Some believe that the potential cost to human health is too high and other methods should be used to control invasive plants.

Other Issues analyzed – The EIS also analyzes effects of treatments on cultural resources, designated or special interest areas, soil, range resources, scenery and recreation values. These are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Alternatives

In addition to the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1), the interdisciplinary team developed one additional action alternative to the Proposed Action (Alternative 2).

Alternative 1: No Action – This alternative is legally required and forms the basis for comparison against the action alternatives. Under this alternative, there would be no change in current management direction or in the level of ongoing management activities within the Project Area

Units. Only invasive plant sites already authorized for treatment under previous NEPA documents would continue to be treated. New sites would not be treated under this alternative. This alternative is described in Chapter 2.3.1.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action – This alternative was described in the Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register on October 21, 2005. It was created using the most current inventory of invasive plant sites. This alternative proposes to address problems posed by invasive plants that compromise our ability to manage native ecosystems on the Forests and Grassland. New management direction and tools made available for use in Region 6 will be utilized. Analysis will tier where appropriate to the *R6 Invasive Plant Program Final Environmental Impact Statement* (USFS 2005a). The following objectives are identified for each of the approximately 1,892 known invasive plant sites that span approximately 14,547 acres of the Forests and Grassland: Eradication, Control, Suppression, and Containment. This alternative is described in Chapter 2.3.2.

Alternative 3 – This alternative proposes to meet the same objectives as stated in the Proposed Action, but intends less risk of impact from herbicides in riparian areas near water. Certain herbicides would not be allowed for use, and treatment methods to apply herbicides would be limited. Mechanical treatment methods that may cause increased sediment would not be allowed in this alternative. This alternative is more fully described in Chapter 2.3.3.

Decision Framework

The Forest Supervisors for the Deschutes National Forest and the Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland are the responsible officials for this EIS. Based upon the effects of the alternatives, they will be making the following decisions: Will the Invasive Plant Project be implemented as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all? What mitigation measures and monitoring will be required with implementation of the project?

The responsible officials will base their decisions on review of the environmental impact statement, and the following factors: 1) How well the alternative meets the need for action; 2) The potential for treatments to affect human health and the environment; and 3) The economic efficiency of the treatments.