



File Code: 1900

Date: April 24, 2008

Dear Interested Party,

The Olympic National Forest is proposing to commercially thin 68 acres of second-growth forest to enhance structural diversity and promote the development of old-growth characteristics to achieve desired conditions identified by the Forest Plan. This proposal includes salvaging up to 15 acres of blowdown timber within the 68 acres. This action would occur in the Cook Creek drainage within the Quinault Watershed, in Grays Harbor County, (see attached map). The legal location of the proposed stand for thinning and salvage is T22N, R10W, Section 28.

Forest Service personnel are preparing to conduct an environmental review for the proposed thinning as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). It is expected that this project will fall within a category of actions listed in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and has no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude use of the categorical exclusions. (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31).

YOUR INVOLVEMENT

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in the NEPA analysis during our 30-day public notice and comment period. Comments in support or in opposition are welcome. In particular, if you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or feel you have issues (points of dispute, debate, or disagreement) regarding potential effects of this proposed action, please send those issues in writing to the project leader (Bruce Huntley, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512), or e-mail: comments-pacificnorthwest-pacific@fs.fed.us

Comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of a notice in The Daily World (Aberdeen). The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. Those who provide timely and substantive comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

All comments received will become part of the public record and copies of comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, may be released for public inspection. Requests by individual respondents to have their home addresses withheld from the public record will be honored to the extent allowable by law. Such requests to withhold names and/or addresses must be stated prominently at the beginning of the comments. Anonymous comments will not be considered. Submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.



This comment period is being provided pursuant to the September 16, 2005 order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Storms of 2007 have blown down and damaged patches of a second-growth timber stand in the Cook Creek Drainage. The remaining undamaged portions of the second-growth stand are characterized by a single story that is experiencing slowing growth due to overcrowding. Given these forest conditions there may be opportunities to help meet the Forest Plan desired future conditions in the area by implementing silvicultural practices (salvage and commercial thinning).

The purpose of this action is to:

- Increase structural diversity of forest stands, develop a multi-layered canopy, and enhance growth and coverage of herbaceous plants on the forest floor.
- Capture timber value for economic benefit.

The Northwest Forest Plan designated land allocations within the project area are Adaptive Management and Riparian Reserve. The Adaptive Management Area under the Northwest Forest Plan, is designed to encourage the development and testing of technical and social approaches to achieving desired ecological, economic, and other social objectives. Riparian Reserves, overlaying other Northwest Forest Plan land allocations, are intended to protect the health of the riparian and aquatic system.

Thus, there is a need for forest stands in the project area to be healthy and structurally diverse. The majority of the stands within the proposed project units are single-storied, second-growth stands that are experiencing a slowing of growth due to overcrowding. The current stand condition is the result of past tree planting and natural reseeding following past logging activities and does not provide adequate habitat for old-growth dependent species. If no action is taken, this overstocked condition would result in stands with reduced vigor, increased mortality, and reduced diversity. If no action is taken in Riparian Reserves, stands will have reduced capability to produce the size and quantity of large woody debris sufficient to sustain physical complexity and stability of the Riparian Reserves and associated streams.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Pacific Ranger District of the Olympic National Forest proposes to apply a “thinning from below” silvicultural treatment by removing the suppressed, intermediate and some co-dominant trees (i.e., the smaller trees). The stands will be thinned to approximately 110 trees per acre and favor retention of less common species in order to increase diversity. The stands being considered are 73 years old in Adaptive Management Area (AMA). The reduction in trees per acre would result in increased diameter growth and crown expansion by the remaining trees, while still leaving options for future stand management, such as snag and coarse woody debris creation. The proposed thinning will accelerate development of the stands to become fully functioning late successional old-growth forest. The thinning will also open the stands to allow more light to reach the forest floor, promoting the natural regeneration of trees, shrubs and forbs and increase forage for deer and elk.

The salvage of blowdown timber is in pockets of one to five acres, removal will provide important gaps within the stand for increased forage and species diversity.

Thinning in Riparian Reserves within the proposed units will provide more space for the remaining trees to accelerate diameter growth. The objective is to provide large diameter coniferous trees adjacent to streams to serve as future recruitment for large organic debris. Additionally, prescriptions would be adjusted for unstable or potentially unstable areas within Riparian Reserves.

In the southeast corner of the Forest Service ownership, 400 feet of temporary road will be constructed on Rayonier Forest Resources L.P. land for access, continuing for an additional 100 feet on Forest Service land. This entire length of temporary road will be decommissioned when timber harvest is completed. The proposed thinning units would be yarded utilizing one or both of the following methods:

1. skyline yarding system incorporating the use of intermediate supports to maintain log suspension and reduce impacts to forest soils
2. groundbased yarding systems during the dry months, thereby, reducing impact to forest soils.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The responsible official (District Ranger) will decide what level of thinning and salvage is appropriate in the project area and what management requirements and mitigation measures are included in the project.

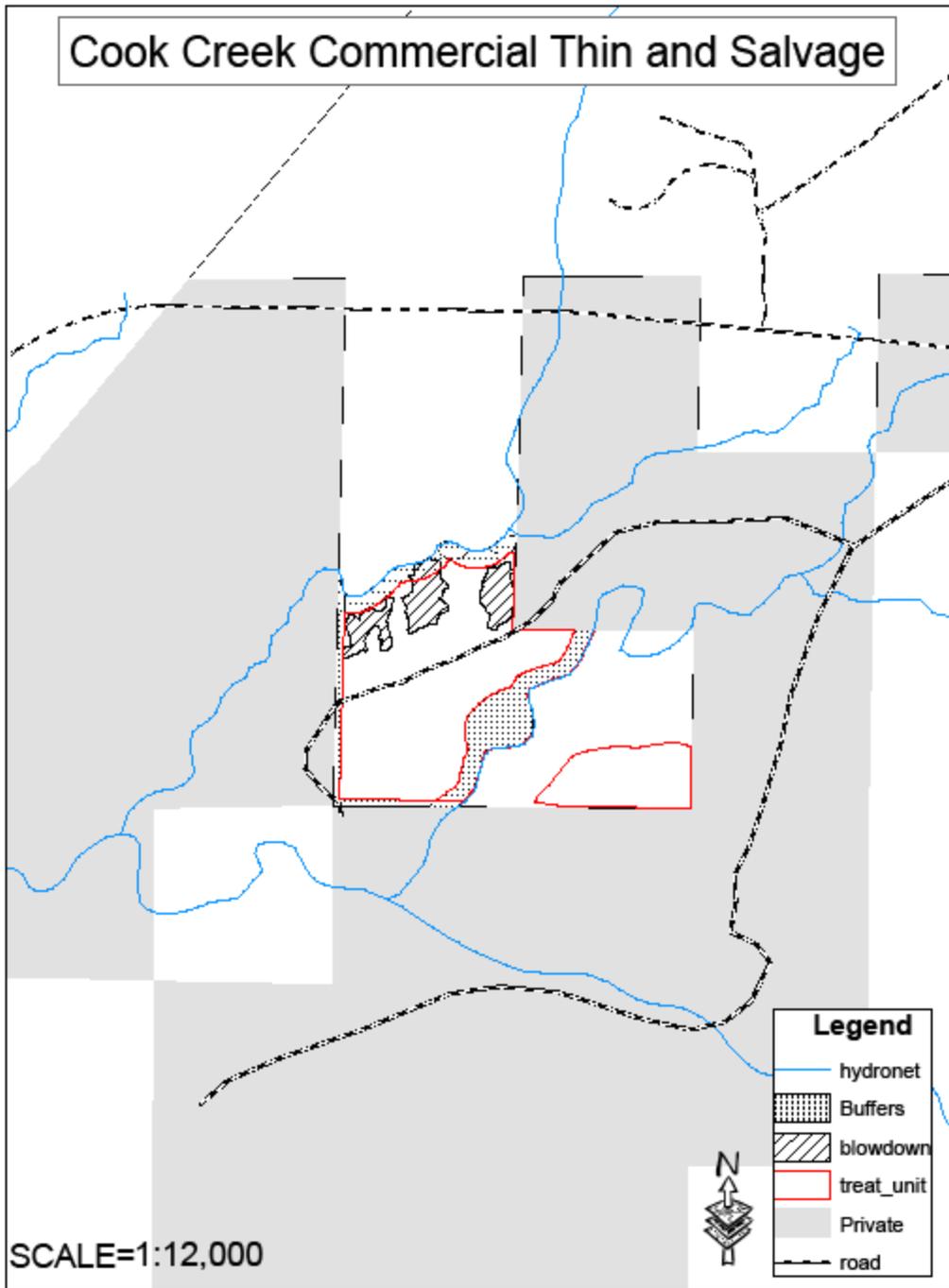
Please submit your comments to Bruce Huntley at the above address by May 24, 2008. You can also contact Bruce by phone at (360) 956-2287 or by e-mail: bhuntley@fs.fed.us

Sincerely,

/s/ Lance J. Koch

Lance J. Koch
District Ranger

Cook Creek Commercial Thin and Salvage



T22N R10W Sec. 28