



File Code: 1950

Date: February 2, 2009

Dear Interested Party,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the proposed *Sitkum Commercial Thinning* project on the Pacific Ranger District of the Olympic National Forest. The Forest is proposing to commercially thin approximately 1,900 acres in the South Fork Calawah subwatershed, east of the city of Forks in Clallam County. The purpose of the proposed thinning is to accelerate the development of late-successional forest characteristics in the selected stands. Forest Service personnel are initiating an environmental analysis of the project as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The legal location of the project is: T28N, R11W, Sections 5-10, 17-18; T28N, R12W, Sections 1-6, 8-9, 11-12, 16-17; T29N, R10W, Sections 31-32; T29N, R11W, Section 31; and T29N, R12W, Section 35. The area is accessible by Forest Service Roads 29 and 2923. (Please see the enclosed maps).

YOUR INVOLVEMENT

We invite your participation in the NEPA process as we prepare this environmental analysis. Comments in support or in opposition are welcome. If you have information you believe the Forest Service may not be aware of, or if you have specific concerns regarding potential effects of this proposed action, please send your comments in writing to the Environmental Coordinator (Robin Shoal, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512), or by e-mail to comments-pacificnorthwest-olympic-pacific@fs.fed.us, on or before March 6, 2009. We will use any significant issues that are identified to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action. Respondents will receive a copy of the draft Environmental Assessment for a thirty-day review and comment period. If you have no input at this time but would like to remain involved, please let us know.

PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSAL

The purpose of the proposed thinning is to implement the Olympic National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) by increasing structural diversity and accelerating the development of late-successional forest characteristics in the selected units. These characteristics include multiple canopy levels, large standing snags, large woody debris (LWD) on the forest floor, and understory and groundcover layers of native shrubs and plants. 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, and have little understory or



groundcover. These stands do not currently provide adequate habitat for old-growth-dependent species.

BACKGROUND

The forest in the project planning area has been heavily influenced by past logging activities. Roughly 5,300 contiguous acres in the northwestern portion of the planning area were burned in the intense Forks Fire of 1951. Much of the burned timber was salvaged after the fire. Approximately 1,760 additional acres in the planning area were clearcut in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. As a result of this history, much of the forest is relatively dense second growth in a structurally simplified stage. Also due to historic logging operations and fire, riparian vegetation in the project area has shifted: areas that once supported large conifers now have high percentages of small-diameter conifers and hardwoods, and the available supply of trees for recruitment of LWD, an important component of fish habitat, into streams has been reduced.

LAND ALLOCATIONS AND MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The Forest Plan-designated land allocations within the project area are Late-Successional Reserve (LSR), Adaptive Management Area (AMA), and Riparian Reserve (RR). The objective of LSR is to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems, which serve as habitat for late-successional and old-growth related species. The AMA designation is intended to provide opportunities for the development, demonstration, and testing of technical and social approaches to achieving desired ecological, economic, and other social objectives. Management goals for Riparian Reserves, which overlie the LSR and AMA allocations, are to maintain and restore riparian structures and functions of intermittent streams, confer benefits to riparian-dependent and associated species other than fish, and provide for greater connectivity of the watershed. As such, the desired future condition for the portions of stands in Riparian Reserve is similar to that for stands in LSR, with the addition of a dense, shading canopy within 50 feet of streams and wetlands. Table 1 provides a summary of acres by land allocation within the planning area and the proposed thinning units.

Table 1. Land allocations and acres in the planning area and the proposed units

Allocation	Acres in Planning Area	Acres in proposed units
AMA	17,153	867
LSR	5,965	1030
RR (overlay)	15,175	878

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Under the Proposed Action, approximately 1,900 acres would be commercially thinned using variable-density thinning. On the majority of the treated acres, the thinning would utilize a "thinning from below" treatment which generally retains the larger trees, and would include skips (unthinned areas), gaps (small openings), and some more heavily thinned areas to provide increased structural and spatial heterogeneity within the stands proposed for treatment. Hardwoods and other minor tree species would generally not be cut. Logging systems would include a combination of ground-based, cable, and helicopter logging. Current Forest system

roads, unclassified or abandoned road grades, and new temporary roads would be used to access the stands: approximately 14.25 miles of currently unclassified or abandoned roads would be reopened, and about 4.25 miles of new temporary roads would be constructed. All of these roads would be decommissioned after use. Opportunities may also exist to decommission additional system and non-system roads and to implement other restoration work with funds generated from the project.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED SO FAR

Preliminary issues identified by the Forest's interdisciplinary team include slope instability, soil disturbance, and their potential effects to water quality and aquatic resources, especially those associated with road construction and timber harvesting in riparian reserve areas. The economic feasibility of helicopter logging has also been identified as an issue.

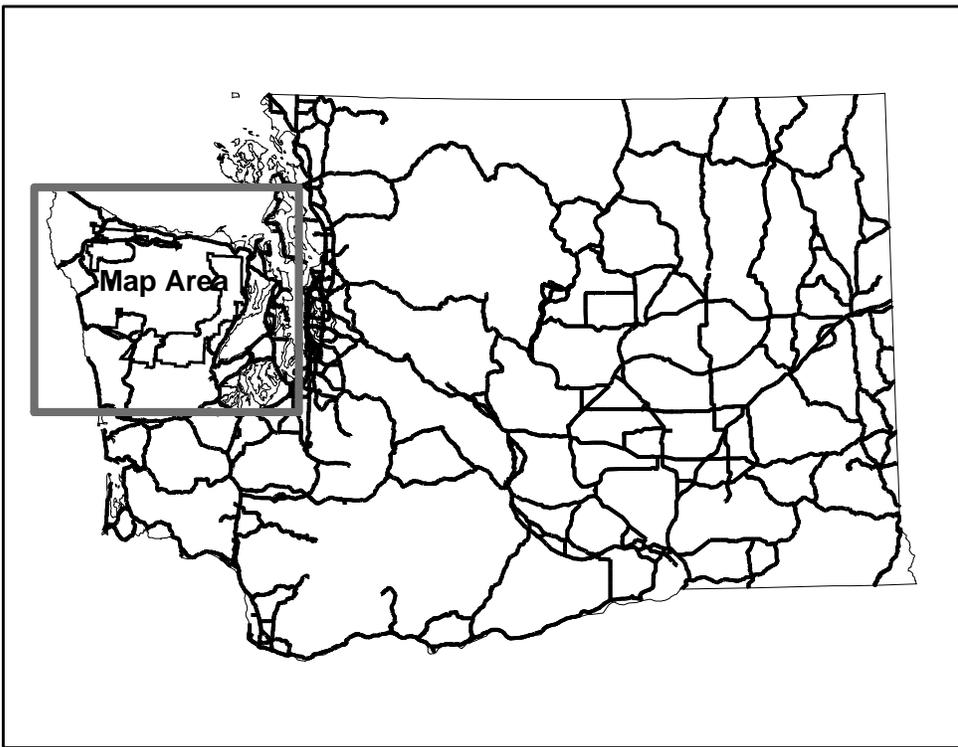
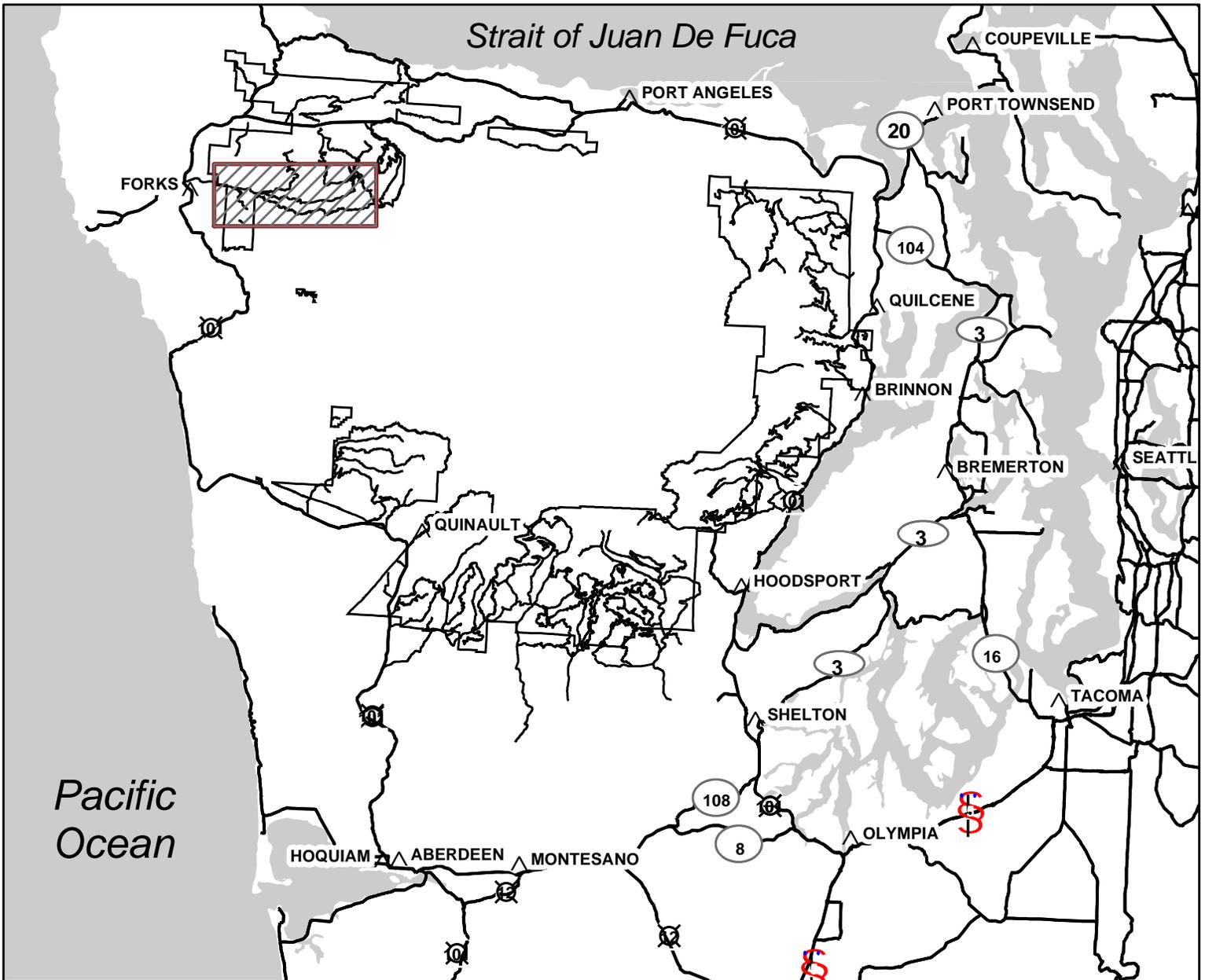
DECISION TO BE MADE

As a result of the environmental analysis, the responsible official (Forest Supervisor) will decide what level of thinning is appropriate in the project area and what management requirements and mitigation measures are included in the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean R. Millett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

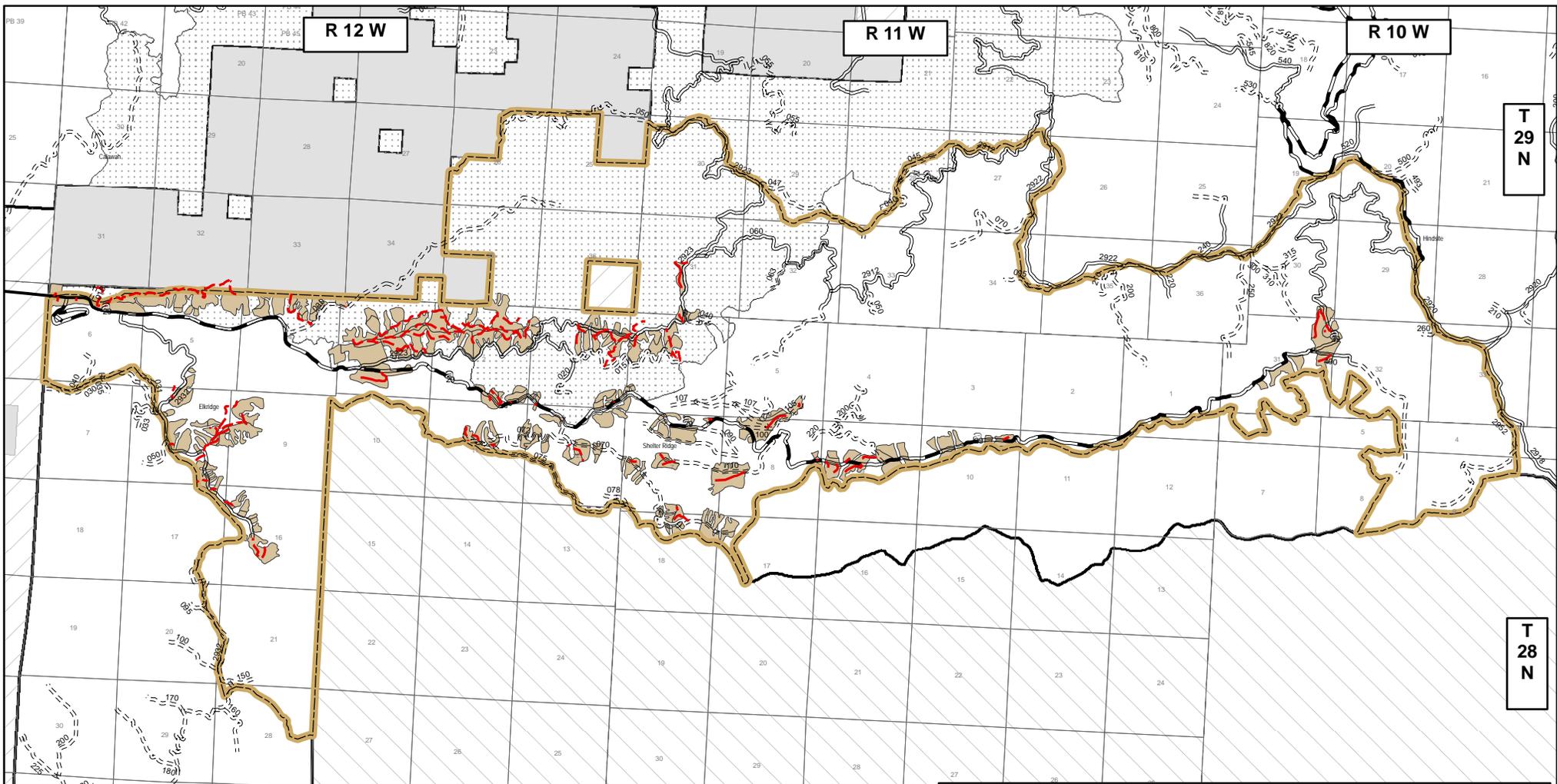
DEAN R. MILLETT
District Ranger



Sitkum Planning Area
Proposed Action

Vicinity Map

 Proposed Action Boundary



Agency/Ownership

- Olympic National Forest
- Olympic National Park
- Private
- Washington State

Existing System Roads

- Double Lane, Paved
- Paved, Single Lane
- Gravel, Passenger Cars
- Gravel, High Clearance Vehicles
- Closed Road

Sitkum Planning Area Information

- Planning Area Boundary
- Proposed Thinning Units
- Proposed New Temporary Road *
- Reconstruction of Unclassified or Decommissioned Road *

Forest Plan Land Allocation

- Adaptive Management Area (AMA)
- Late-Successional Reserve (LSR)

** Locations and lengths of temporary roads are approximate and may change slightly as the project is further refined*

**Sitkum Commercial Thinning
Proposed Action**



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