



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

April 2004



Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects

Heppner Ranger District, Umatilla National Forest
Grant, Morrow, and Wheeler Counties

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**Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects
Draft Supplement
Environmental Impact Statement
Grant, Morrow, and Wheeler counties, Oregon**

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Abstract: The purpose of this supplement is to consider new information on the commercial and non-commercial thinning treatments in the C3 management area. Implementation of the action alternatives or the no action alternative will result in a Habitat Effectiveness Index of 67. The LRMP standard for the C3 management areas is to obtain an HEI of no less than 70. Although the HEI would not change with implementation of the action alternatives an HEI of 70 would not be obtained. Therefore, to fully address the purpose and need of the Rimrock projects and to implement the preferred alternative or the action alternatives a forest plan amendment is required. This supplement will further support and disclose effects on the implementation of the action alternatives, including a forest plan amendment, in the remainder of the Rimrock project. The preferred alternative is Alternative 5. In the C3 management area Alternative 5 would commercially thin 804 acres, shelterwood harvest tussock moth defoliated trees on 122 acres and non-commercially thin on 40 acres.

Reviewers should provide the Forest Service with their comments during the review period of the draft environmental impact statement. This will enable the Forest Service to analyze and respond to the comments at one time and to use information acquired in the preparation of the final environmental impact statement, thus avoiding undue delay in the decision making process. Reviewers have an obligation to structure their participation in the National Environmental Policy Act process so that it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewers' position and contentions. Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement. City of Angoon v. Hodel (9th Circuit, 1986) and Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Comments on the draft environmental impact statement should be specific and should address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3).

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Date Comments Must Be Received: May 17, 2004

Summary

This draft environmental impact statement supplements the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects final environmental impact statement (FEIS) released May 2003. This draft supplemental statement documents additional information and effects disclosure and displays where specific changes are incorporated into the May 2003 FEIS; therefore the two environmental impact statement documents must be thought of, and used together, as if they are one statement.

Heppner District Ranger Andrei Rykoff issued a final environmental impact statement for the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects in May 2003 and signed the Record of Decision on May 21, 2003. He selected Alternative 5 which included commercial and noncommercial thinning, shelterwood harvest, landscape-scale prescribed burning, aspen restoration, repair of instream structures, temporary road construction, and other management projects.

The decision was appealed and after reviewing the appeal, Ranger Rykoff decided to withdraw a portion of his decision. The August 14, 2003 withdrawal included all commercial timber harvest and precommercial thinning activities planned in the Monument Big Game Winter Range (Management Area C3). All other aspects of the May 21, 2003 decision were affirmed by the Regional Forester on August 21, 2003 and are being implemented.

A review of the May 2003 final EIS revealed some project activities may not be fully consistent with a forest plan standard concerning habitat effectiveness index (HEI) in the C3 management area. Activities not consistent with a forest plan standard require a forest plan amendment to permit implementation. Since Ranger Rykoff does not have authority to amend the Forest Plan, Forest Supervisor Jeff D. Blackwood becomes the Responsible Official.

To fully address the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects purpose and need, Supervisor Blackwood decided to move forward with the remaining actions (commercial timber harvest and precommercial thinning) in the C3 management area. A notice of intent to supplement the final environmental impact statement for the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects using a draft supplemental environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register (February 17, 2004).

This draft supplemental environmental impact statement adds new information, analysis, and effects disclosure relevant to the forest plan amendment and other decisions to be made within the C3 management area of the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects. Only additions to the FEIS are disclosed in the draft supplemental environmental impact statement.

Insert in FEIS Summary page i at the end of the Purpose and Need for Action section. **Purpose and Need for Action**

Existing habitat effectiveness index (HEI) of 67 and resulting HEI of 67 after project implementation is not in compliance with the Forest Plan standard of an HEI of no less than 70.

As a result, there is a need to:

- Amend the forest plan for the site-specific project of Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects to be implemented in the C3 Monument winter range area.

Insert in FEIS Summary page v following the last bulleted statement under Aspen and before the Issues heading.

Proposed Action

Amend the Forest Plan to change the HEI from 70 to 67 only in the Monument winter Range and only for the site-specific project of Rimrock.

Insert in FEIS Summary page viii following the Species of Interest section and before the Alternatives Considered in Detail heading.

Other Issues Considered

Forest Plan Amendment

A forest plan amendment to change HEI from forest plan standard of 70 to the existing HEI of 67 is required for individual projects within the Monument C3 management area. Along with HEI other aspects of elk habitat including: satisfactory, effective, and marginal cover are used to evaluate elk habitat.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Insert in FEIS Summary page ix, under Proposed Action (Alternative 2) Theme.

Alternative 2

Amend the Forest Plan to change the HEI from 70 to 67 for the wildlife standard on Forest Plan page 4-152 for this site-specific project. The amendment would permit 926 acres of commercial harvest (3,300 mbf or 6,300 ccf) and 40 acres of pre-commercial thinning in the C3 management area.

Insert in FEIS Summary page ix under Alternative 3 Theme.

Alternative 3

Amend the Forest Plan to change the HEI from 70 to 67 for the wildlife standard on Forest Plan page 4-152 for this site-specific project. The amendment would permit 926 acres of commercial harvest (3,300 mbf or 6,300 ccf) and 40 acres of pre-commercial thinning in the C3 management area.

Insert in FEIS Summary page ix under Alternative 4 Theme.

Alternative 4

Amend the Forest Plan to change the HEI from 70 to 67 for the wildlife standard on Forest Plan page 4-152 for this site-specific project. The amendment would permit 830

acres of commercial harvest (2,900mbf or 5,600ccf) and 40 acres of pre-commercial thinning in the C3 management area.

Insert in FEIS Summary page ix under Alternative 5 Theme.

Alternative 5

Amend the Forest Plan to change the HEI from 70 to 67 for the wildlife standard on Forest Plan page 4-152 for this site-specific project. The amendment would permit 804 acres of commercial thinning, 122 acres of shelterwood harvest (4,000 mbf or 7,700ccf) and 40 acres of pre-commercial thinning in the C3 management area.

Insert in FEIS Summary page ix under Decisions to be Made.

Decision to be Made

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide whether to amend the forest plan and implement the proposed commercial and non-commercial thinning within the C3 management area of Rimrock.

Affected Environment and Consequences

Wildlife Habitat

Insert in FEIS Summary page xii.

Late and old structure habitat remains connected and unchanged across the landscape after proposed actions. Dead wood habitat for dead standing trees, snag replacement trees and dead downed wood are expected to remain above the forest plan standard.

Effects of the proposed activities to wildlife are not considered significant in the analysis area, the Umatilla National Forest, and the Blue Mountains. Wildlife species and habitat will not be significantly impacted by projects that only affect a small portion of the area and are limited in duration and intensity.

Preferred Alternative

Insert in FEIS Summary page xiv.

- Amend the Forest Plan to change the HEI from 70 to 67
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Insert in FEIS Summary page xv.

Alternative Comparison for C3 management area only

Activity		Alternative			
		2	3	4	5
Thinning	Commercial	926	926	830	926
	Precommercial	40	40	40	40
Logging System	Helicopter	176	176	81	176
	Harvest/ Forwarder	437	750	437	750
	Tractor	313	-	313	-
Roads (miles)	Reconstruction	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Reopen	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Temporary	2	2	2	2
Volume	Thousand Board Feet	3300	3300	2900	4000
	Hundred cubic feet	6300	6300	5600	7700

