



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Northern
Region

Idaho Panhandle
National Forests

August 2016



Interagency Natural Resource Center Project

Decision Notice

Kootenai County, Idaho

Lead Agency:

USDA Forest Service

Responsible Official:

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Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Interagency Natural Resource Center Project

USDA Forest Service
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Kootenai County, Idaho

Introduction

This decision notice describes my decision to proceed with the Interagency Natural Resource Center Project (INRC), background information about the project, which alternative I selected, and the rationale supporting my decision. This document also includes my “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI) to the human environment, which means no further environmental analysis is necessary in order to proceed with this project.

The INRC Project Environmental Assessment (EA) and supporting resource reports are incorporated by reference in this document. The environmental assessment and this decision are all available for download from the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44817>.

Background

The Forest Service proposes to construct a new Interagency Natural Resource Center. The new center will provide office space and other facilities for Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees (USFWS) to include public information and services.

The current Forest Supervisor’s Office is located at 3815 Schreiber Way, Coeur d’Alene, ID in leased buildings. The BLM Coeur d’Alene District and Field Offices are co-located with the Forest Supervisor’s Office. There are currently 128 Forest Service and 35 BLM employees who work at this location, but 221 total work spaces. The lease for these facilities consists of approximately 43,041 square feet of office, 15,760 square feet of warehouse, and 68,084 usable square feet of ware yard space. There is parking for 162 employees and 24 visitors. There are also 78 secure parking spaces for government vehicles. This current lease expires in September 2017.

Because there are currently no USFWS office facilities in northern Idaho, the USFWS Northern Idaho Field Office (19 employees) currently shares facilities with the Eastern Washington Field Office in Spokane Valley, WA. The USFWS is in a separate lease in Spokane, WA for 6,781 square feet.

Over the past 10-15 years both the Forest Service and the BLM have reduced the number of employees assigned to the organizations in the current office. As a result, the office building has more space than either agency needs. In addition, the annual lease rate is very high and the office building is not energy efficient. When the lease expires, the Forest Service has determined that it would be financially advantageous to relocate to an energy efficient building owned by the government in the Coeur d’Alene area. The Forest Service conducted a Preliminary Project Analysis of possible options in April 2011. Based on the results of this analysis, the Forest Service proposes to construct a new facility on Forest Service managed land at the Coeur d’Alene Nursery, one mile west of the current

facilities (see Figure 1). The total rentable office space would be reduced from 49,822 square feet down to 27,488 square feet; approaching a reduction of 40 percent.

Executive Orders 13423 (January 2007) and 13541 (October 2009) require new government facilities to be high performance and sustainable, including optimized energy performance, protection and conservation of water, and reduced environmental impact of material.

Due to the pending expiration of the lease on the current facilities used by the Forest Service and BLM, there is an opportunity to reduce costs, become more energy efficient and improved public service and inter-agency coordination.

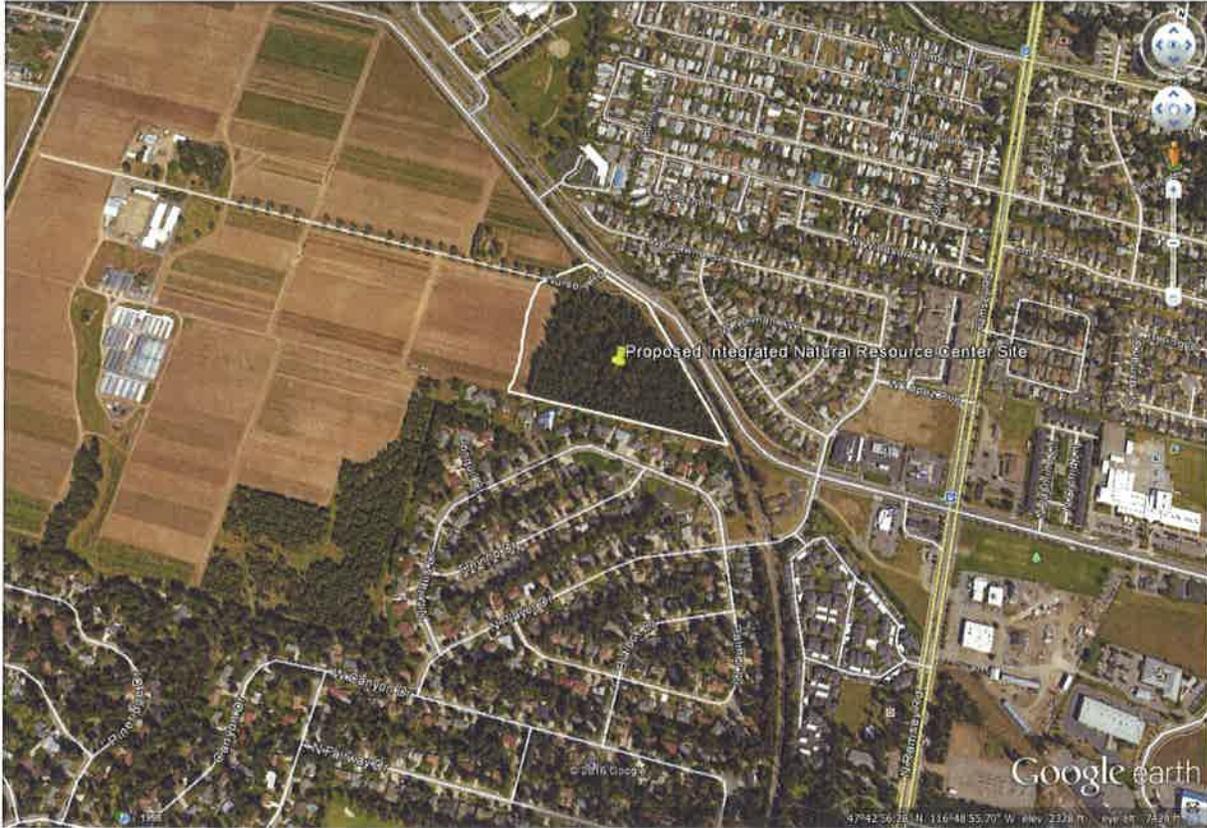


Figure 1. Vicinity Map

Decision

Based upon my review of the INRC environmental assessment (EA), supporting information and public comments, I have decided to implement Alternative 2, which will construct a new Interagency Natural Resource Center on Forest Service managed land at the northeastern corner of the Forest Service Coeur d'Alene Nursery. The footprint of the office, infrastructure, and other facilities will be about 7.5 acres. The new facilities will be high performance and sustainable to include optimized energy performance, protection and conservation of water, and reduced environmental impact of material.

Development will occur in phases. The removal, thinning of trees and slash treatments on the approximately 14 acre site will begin in the spring of 2017, followed by construction of a dispatch

center beginning in the fall of 2017 (including new entranceway and parking lot), a warehouse in the fall of 2018 and the new office construction beginning in either the fall of 2019 or 2020. Construction activities on the site will be completed by 2021 or 2022.

Activities to be implemented under the selected alternative include the following (see Figure 2):

- A developed footprint of approximately 7.5 acres;
- Construction of 28,000 square-foot combination dispatch center and warehouse;
- Construction of a new 30,750 square-foot, two-story office building;
- Surface paving of about 3.5 acres for visitor, employee, and government vehicle parking;
- Construction and paving of new 50' x 250' entrance road from Kathleen Avenue;
- Addition of turn lanes (east and westbound) and traffic light on Kathleen Avenue. The minimum lengths for turn lanes is 100' westbound and 160' eastbound;
- Provide space for a City of Coeur d'Alene constructed paved parking area adjacent to the existing bike trail on the south side of Kathleen Avenue for public use;
- Installation of 1,580 foot chain-linked security fence with two electric gates around the warehouse and government-vehicle parking area;
- Installation of street lights within parking areas and external lighting on buildings;
- Installation of buried water, sewer, electric, and communications lines;
- Inclusion of native landscape design features utilizing native species that are resilient to insects, disease and drought as well as pollinator friendly for landscaping and educational purposes;
- Construction of drainage for surface water run-off;
- An 80 foot wide open space/visual buffer area along the southern property line composed of the 20 foot wide utility access area and a 60 foot wide two-aged forest area designed, planted and maintained to provide a 50 percent or more sight obscuring buffer. The intent is to plant and maintain trees and shrubs within the first 20 feet past the 20 foot utility corridor and overtime have them grow to provide additional dense screening. The open space/buffer area will be managed for fuel loadings and forest health in accordance with best forest land management practices; and
- A thinning is proposed for a firewise area (see Figure 3);

Features of the thinning will include:

- Larger trees with good vigor will be maintained;
- Ground-based yarding (i.e. skidder) will be utilized to move trees from the woods to a landing;
- Whole-tree yarding will be utilized; and
- Non-utilized material, including tops and limbs will be chipped or masticated.

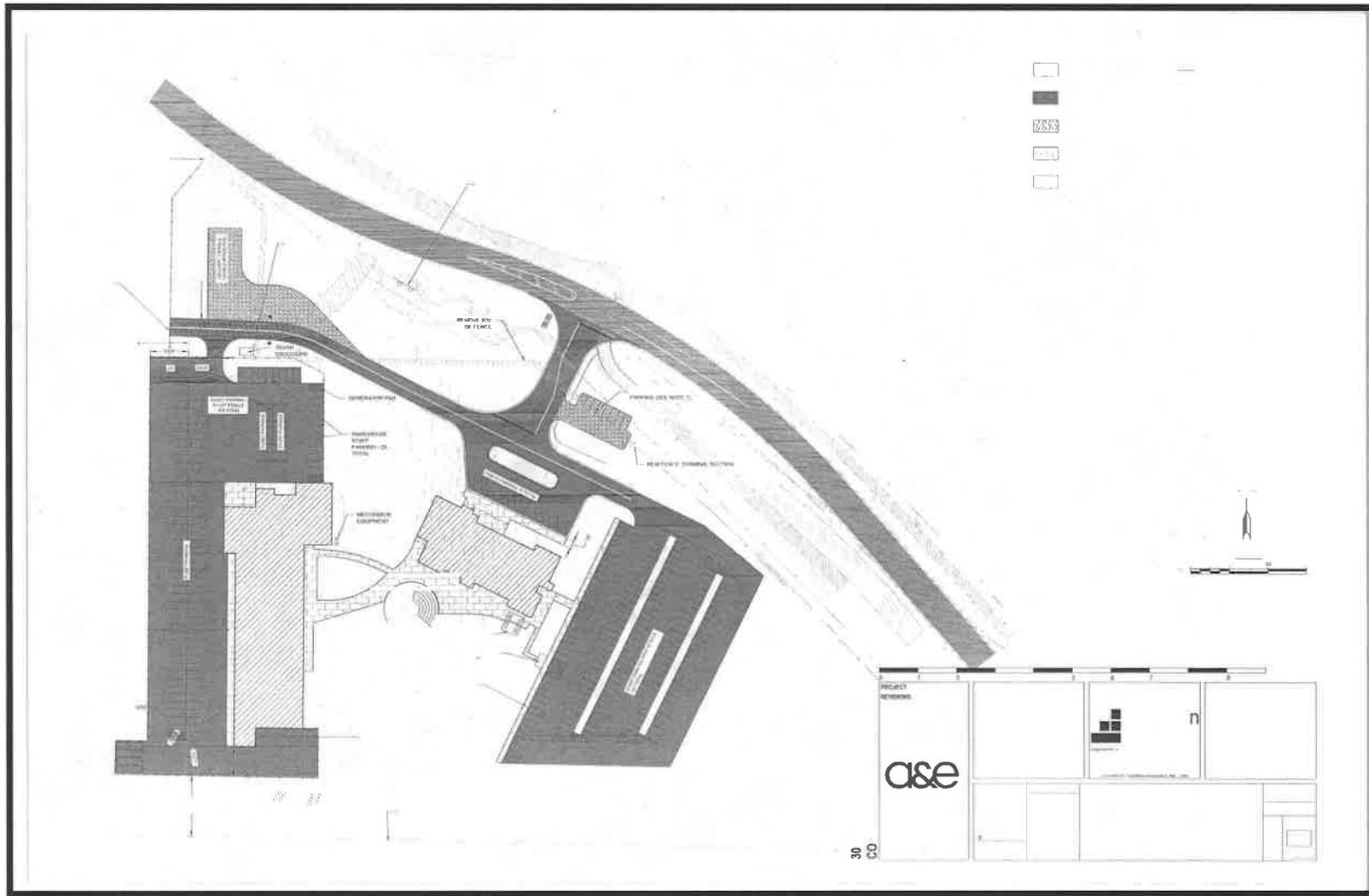


Figure 2. Overall Site Plan



Figure 3. Vegetation Treatment

The firewise area's fuel reduction activities will include:

- Sub-merchantable trees less than 7 inches DBH (all species) will be selectively cut. Tall shrubs will also be cut where they are contributing to the ladder fuels;
- Slashed material would be chipped and removed from the site; and
- Slash disposal will occur immediately after thinning activities.

The following design features and monitoring will be implemented with my decision:

Design Features

Cultural Resources

- 1) If, prior to, or during construction work, items of archeological or historical value, or human remains are reported or discovered, or an unknown deposit of such items is disturbed, the contractor will immediately cease activities in the area affected. The Forest Service will be notified and ground disturbing activity would not resume until written authorization is provided.

Soils and Hydrology

- 1) Best Management Practices found in the Catalog of Stormwater Best Management Practices for Idaho Cities and Counties (IDEQ, Water Quality Division, 2005) will be applied.

Invasive Plants

- 1) All known invasive plant sites will be treated prior to any ground disturbing activities.
- 2) All gravel, fill, sand stockpiles, quarry sites and borrow materials used for this project will be inspected for invasive plants before such material is transported and used within Forest Service managed lands. Any infested sources must be treated before use of pit material. Only gravel, fill, sand, and rock that are judged to be weed-free by a weed specialist will be used for this project.
- 3) Mud, dirt, and plant parts will be removed from all off road equipment before moving into project area. Cleaning must occur off National Forest lands. This does not apply to service vehicles that will stay on the roadway, traveling frequently in and out of the project area.
- 4) Straw used for stabilization and erosion control will be certified weed-free or weed-seed-free.
- 5) Vegetation will be re-established on bare ground due to construction and reconstruction activity to minimize weed spread.
- 6) All material brought in from outside the construction area will be certified by the Forest Service as clean and weed-free.

Vegetation

- 1) Local seeding guidelines will be utilized for appropriate mixes. If possible, native material from the site, including shrubs and forbs will be gathered prior to construction and utilized in reestablishing vegetation. Revegetation may include planting, seeding, fertilization, and weed-free mulching as indicated by local prescriptions. This activity will be designed and implemented by a botanist and other resource specialists, as necessary.

- 2) Within the firewise area designated skid trails will be utilized for yarding trees to the landing.

Fuels

- 1) To avoid potential problems with pine engraver beetles (*Ips*), slash will not be created (through harvest activity or follow-up fuels treatments) and left on site from January 1st through June 1st.
- 2) Thinning or slashing will be coordinated as necessary between a silviculturist, fuels specialist, landscape architect, and wildlife biologist.

Recreation and Scenery

- 1) Consider breaking up consecutive spaces in the employee office parking lot in order to reduce visual impact and minimize adverse effects to the viewshed from employee work spaces, adjacent housing units and the Prairie Trail.

Safety

- 1) A six foot tall chain-link fence with electronically controlled gate will be installed to restrict public and unauthorized employee access into the area where nursery operations occur.
- 2) In cooperation with the City of Coeur d'Alene, trail guards will be utilized when necessary during tree felling operations that is occurring within two tree lengths of the Prairie Trail.

Monitoring

- 1) The project area will be monitored to provide for control of newly established invasive plant populations and follow-up treatment for previously treated infestations.

Public Involvement

The Forest Service initially shared information about the proposal during a public meeting conducted in April 2014 where participants were invited to submit comments. The Forest Service received six comment submissions, primarily from adjacent land owners/residents. After conducting preliminary analysis, the Forest Service published a legal notice in the Coeur d'Alene Press sharing more detailed information about the proposal and initiated a 30-day formal public comment period. Three comment letters were submitted by the public during this period. The Forest Service considered all comments received when determining the issues for analysis in this EA (see below) and refining the proposed action.

Using the comments received, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues to be carried forth in the analysis regarding the effects of the proposed action. Main issues of concern included (see EA p.3):

- **Special Status and Native Plants:** How will the construction affect native vegetation at the site?
- **Invasive Species and Noxious Weeds:** Will construction result in spread of invasive species or noxious weeds?
- **Wildlife and Special Status Wildlife:** Will the construction and use of the new facilities affect wildlife or special status wildlife?

- Soil/Water: Will there be excessive run-off or sediment from the site during and after construction?
- Viewshed and Noise: How will noise and changes in the view resulting from construction and use of the new facilities affect neighboring residents?
- Recreation: How will construction and use of the new facilities affect recreational use of the adjacent bike trail?
- Socio-economic: Will the construction and use of new facilities affect adjacent property values?

Additionally, the Forest Service worked with the City of Coeur d'Alene on annexation and zoning, which included opportunities for public comment on the proposed zoning and annexation requests. Working with the Coeur d'Alene Planning Commission and concerned neighbors, language for retaining a vegetative buffer adjacent to the southern property boundary was refined and agreed upon. On April 14, 2015 the Coeur d'Alene Planning Commission held a public hearing on the proposed annexation and zoning request. The request was approved, subject to special conditions, including the requirement for an 80-foot wide open space/buffer area along the southern property line.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives, the no-action and two alternatives not given detailed consideration. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages four to ten.

No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, the Forest Service Supervisor's Office, BLM Coeur d'Alene District and Field Offices and the Coeur Interagency Dispatch Center would continue to be located at their current locations in Coeur d'Alene. The UFWS would maintain their existing office lease in Spokane, Washington. I did not select this alternative for implementation because it does not meet any of the elements of the purpose and need for action.

Alternate Location within the Nursery

The Forest Service considered constructing the facilities at a different location within the nursery to reduce impacts associated with the viewshed/noise, recreation and socio-economic issues identified in the EA. I did not give this alternative detailed consideration because while the proposed action location is not currently being used for nursery operations, the remainder of the nursery is. If new facilities were to be located elsewhere on the nursery grounds, the currently unused area would have to be converted to nursery use to compensate for the loss associated with facilities construction. The conversion and use would likely result in more impacts than the proposed action alone as increased ground disturbance would result at both sites, rather than just the area included in the proposed action. There would also be increased costs associated with this alternative, versus the proposed action, as site conversion would be required at both sites.

The socio-economic analysis in the EA examined the effects on adjacent property values resulting from the facility construction proposed under the Alternative 2. While appraisers from the Kootenai Assessor's Office have noted that changes to adjacent property sale values can result when commercial facilities are constructed next store, such effects on property values have not been observed in cases

such as this, given the type of facilities proposed and the 80-foot open space buffer to be implemented with the proposed action (Kootenai County 2014a, 2014b).

While development of the site under Alternative 2 would allow for a view into the site as seen from neighboring residences, maintenance of the visual buffer area along the southern perimeter of the site are expected to reduce changes in neighborhood view and provide for a noise reduction emanating from the construction site and traffic along Kathleen Avenue.

As discussed under the Public Involvement section (above), the Forest Service worked with the City of Coeur d'Alene on annexation and zoning, which included opportunities for public comment on the proposed zoning and annexation requests. Working with the Coeur d'Alene Planning Commission and concerned neighbors, language for retaining a vegetative buffer adjacent to the southern property boundary was refined and agreed upon.

For these reasons, I did not feel that an alternative, which considered constructing the facilities at a different location within the nursery would be substantially different with respect to impacts on adjacent property values, noise and view, than Alternative 2, my selected alternative.

Lease other Existing Facilities

The Forest Service researched opportunities for leasing other existing facilities but found that this would result in an increase in costs. Therefore, this alternative would not meet the purpose and need element for lowering facility costs and I eliminated it from detailed analysis.

Decision Rationale

My decision to select Alternative 2 is consistent with all laws, regulations, and agency policy. I believe my decision best responds to the purpose and need identified in the development of the project, and is responsive to concerns voiced by those who provided comment on the proposed action. I have considered the direct and indirect effects to environmental and social issues, as well as the potential cumulative effects.

The following describes how the selected alternative is responsive to the purpose and need for action and the issues considered in the environmental assessment. Consideration of other environmental and social issues under the selected alternative is also described.

Responsiveness to the Purpose and Need

Of the two alternatives considered in detail, the selected alternative best responds to the objectives I have identified for this proposal. Alternative 1 (no action) does not respond to the project's objectives of reducing costs, becoming more energy efficient and improving public service and inter-agency coordination. The selected alternative will implement construction of a new interagency natural resource center on Forest Service managed land at the northeastern corner of the Forest Service Coeur d'Alene Nursery, which will eliminate high lease costs associated with the current location. This is an important consideration for me, because a dollar saved in lease costs means more funding for on-the-ground projects here on the Forest. The new facilities will be high performance and sustainable to include optimized energy performance, protection and conservation of water, and reduced environmental impact of material, conforming to the requirements of Executive Orders 13423 (January 2007) and 13541 (October 2009). The co-location of the Forest Service, BLM, and US Fish and Wildlife Service will provide for improved and more convenient public service and as well as inter-agency coordination.

Consideration of Other Environmental and Social Issues

The issues given detailed consideration in the EA (vegetation, native plants and invasive plants, wildlife, soil/water, recreation, viewshed and noise, and socio-economic) were not essential in developing action alternatives, but were important to measure, because the analysis of these issues may show effects of each alternative on the different resources.

Vegetation

The treatment prescription is designed to encourage the growth and health of the residual stand while reducing hazardous fuels, and leaving a visual buffer for local residents. Within the firewise area, the selected vegetation treatments of intermediate harvest, selective understory removal, and chipping and planting of shrubs will: (1) help improve the health of the stand, (2) maintain the area dominated by desirable long-lived, seral-tree species, (3) reduce hazardous fuels, and (4) increase wildlife forage (EA, p. 12).

Stand structures in the firewise treatment area will over time move the stand overstory into the large size class, by reducing competition and increasing available resources. The understory tree cohort will be selectively removed; resulting in reduced fuel loading, lower canopy density, and reduced horizontal and vertical fuel continuity - relative to existing stand structures. Among other benefits, these changes in fuel characteristics will result in less intense fire behavior and make a fire easier to control (EA, p. 13).

In addition to the retention of most of the healthy overstory trees within the firewise area, leave patches of diverse shapes and sizes will be retained. These leave areas will be centered on existing concentrations of shrubs, trees, large coarse woody debris, snags, or other unique structural and/or habitat features. These areas will include representation of all tree species that are present in the pre-treated stand. Retention of individual trees and untreated areas will promote the diversity of the early-successional stands that would become established and will provide continuity in structural, functional, and compositional elements from the pre-harvest to the post-harvest forest (EA, p. 13).

Within the visual buffer area, a two-aged forest area will be maintained to provide a 50 percent or more sight obscuring buffer. Trees and shrubs will be maintained and planted within the first 20 feet past the 20 foot utility corridor and overtime they will grow to provide additional dense screening. The open space/buffer area will be managed for fuel loadings and forest health in accordance with best forest land management practices.

My selected alternative is consistent with the National Forest Management Act and Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction and guidance (EA, p. 14).

Native Plants

Implementation of the selected alternative is not expected to result in any effects to any known individual or population of Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive or Forest Species of Concern, because none are known to exist within the project area (EA p. 14).

Invasive Plants

Surveys indicated there were non-native plant species within the project area (EA p. 17), including spotted knapweed and Dalmatian toadflax. Activities associated with the INRC construction will involve vegetation removal and ground clearing and leveling, which will provide habitat for invasive plants to establish and potentially spread. Based upon accepted weed prevention practices, the design features (see page 8) that I have included as part of the selected alternative will limit the potential for

establishment and spread as development proceeds over the next five to six years. The selected alternative is consistent with Forest Service Manual direction, Executive Order 13112 and Idaho Code, Chapter 24, 22-2407 (EA p. 19).

Recreation and Scenery

The project area is within an urban, developed setting. Effects to neighboring residents, including noise and a change in the existing landscape character will occur. The increased levels of noise from construction activities are expected last about six years. To reduce the effects associated with the change in landscape character, I have committed to implementing a visual buffer zone along the site's southern boundary (see page 6). Vegetation within this buffer will be maintained to provide a 50 percent or more sight obscuring buffer. Additional trees and shrubs will be planted within the first 20 feet past the 20 foot utility corridor and overtime they will grow to provide additional dense screening.

Construction activities adjacent to the Prairie Trail, including the felling of trees during site preparation, could temporarily disrupt the use and flow of people using the Prairie Trail, however design features will help minimize this effect and assure safe passage for trail users in the immediate vicinity during construction. Once construction is complete, the change in the landscape character of the site (from natural to unnatural or developed) would likely change the setting, or experience, for people utilizing the trail while on the short section that runs along the north edge of the site. However, the Prairie trail is an urban connector trail, so the change in setting in this area would not likely effect the overall experience of trail users (EA p. 21). Implementation of the selected alternative will be consistent with the requirements outlined in the findings and order for the Planned Unit Development of the site (City of Coeur d'Alene 2015).

Social and Economic Conditions – Property Values

There are 12 residential properties on Nicklaus Drive, south of and directly adjacent to the east end of the Forest Service Nursery which could be affected by the proposed action. The view from the backyards of these properties includes the existing stand of trees in the project area and (for properties on the west end) a portion of the open operational nursery grounds.

During construction, the adjacent property owners, especially properties to the west, will have a view of the excavated area and other construction activities. They will also hear sounds, generally between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., from the construction activities during the duration of the construction period. Experienced residential property appraisers from the Kootenai County Assessor's Office have noted that changes to adjacent property sale values sometimes occur when commercial facilities are constructed next door. However, the appraisers have not observed effects on property values in situations such as this, given the type of facilities and uses proposed, and the 80-foot open space buffer (Kootenai County 2014a, 2014b). Considering this, it is unlikely that the proposed action would have a measurable effect on the value of adjacent residential properties (EA, pp. 22-23).

The selected alternative will be consistent with the requirements outlined in the findings and order for the Planned Unit Development of the site (City of Coeur d'Alene 2015).

Soils and Hydrology

Soil disturbance will occur within the construction footprint of the building, roads and surrounding traffic area for equipment. Construction of the resource center will result in a change in use for the soil resource within the construction footprint from one that functions for vegetative growth to one in which the primary function is as a stable construction medium. This is a change in use that is consistent with the expected functions for which we rely on soils. Hydrology of the site will be

affected through an increase in impervious surfaces. This is not expected to have detrimental effects due to the existing soil properties and the incorporation of drainage for surface water run-off and percolation (EA p. 25). The selected alternative will utilize and apply Best Management Practices found in the Catalog of Stormwater Best Management Practices for Idaho Cities and Counties (IDEQ, Water Quality Division, 2005) (see page 9), will be compatible with the natural features of the site, will not create soil erosion or flooding problems, and will prevent surface water degradation (City of Coeur d'Alene 2015).

Wildlife

No federally protected or Forest Service sensitive species are found in the project area (EA p. 26). Migratory birds are present year round in the project area and would be expected to use it for nesting during the spring and summer months. The removal of vegetation for construction and thinning of vegetation within the firewise area will reduce the density of trees and move a portion of the stand towards a mature ponderosa pine site with a more open understory that will benefit some wildlife species and be a negative impact on those species that prefer a more closed canopy, a more vigorous understory, and require more hiding cover. The vegetative buffer will function as the habitat for those species that prefer a brushier site or use shrubs for forage or hiding cover.

The effects of the selected alternative, though potentially negative for some species, are not expected to rise to the level of significance or move any migratory bird species towards a future need for protection under the Endangered Species Act for the following reasons (EA p. 28):

- The number of individuals affected by this project will be small compared to the population size for the species in the larger analysis area; and
- The area of habitat to be affected is small compared to the available habitat within the larger analysis area.

The landscaping plans that will be implemented within the footprint of development include use of native shrubs, trees, and forbs; many species of which will be beneficial to native wildlife that continue to use the site. In addition, any non-native plants will be selected for their benefit to wildlife, especially pollinators and birds (i.e. crabapple trees). Planting native shrubs and perennials that provide a food source or cover for wildlife will benefit species that continue to use the site (EA, p. 29).

Finding of No Significant Impact

The following is a summary of the project analysis to determine significance, as defined by Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-05. "Significant" as used under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires consideration of both context and intensity of the expected project effects.

Context means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts (i.e. local regional, worldwide), and over short and long time frames. For site-specific actions, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. This project is limited in scope and duration.

Intensity refers to the severity of the expected project impacts and is defined by the 10 points below.

Context

The INRC Project is limited in context (scope and duration). The INRC EA is a site-specific project-level analysis; its scope is confined to addressing the issues and environmental effects of the project, and the context of the proposal is limited to the locale of the INRC Project Area (approximately 14 acres). Project activities are limited to the specific vegetation treatments and construction of a new Interagency Natural Resource Center on Forest Service managed land at the northeastern corner of the Forest Service Coeur d'Alene Nursery.

The analysis found within the EA focuses on relevant aspects of the alternatives that have a potential for adverse effects. The selected alternative will not pose any significant short- or long-term effects because site-specific design features included in this project (see pages 9 and 10) will limit adverse effects to such an extent that they will not be significant (see EA, Environmental Impacts section, by resource).

Intensity

The following factors were considered to evaluate intensity.

1) Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on the balance the effects will be beneficial.

I considered the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in conjunction with beneficial and adverse impacts associated with activities as presented in the Interagency Natural Resource Center project. I have concluded that the specific direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the selected alternative are not significant and this action does not rely on beneficial effects to override any adverse environmental effect. The project area is a 14 acre portion of an administrative site that is developed with buildings and structures (see page 5, Figure 1), it receives no recreation use, and provides moderate to marginal habitat for plant species and wildlife (EA, pp. 15 and 26). Potential adverse effects are limited to the site itself (EA, pp. 10-30).

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because of the project's small scale and the design features included for implementation with the selected alternative (see pages 9-10). All city, state and federal health and safety measures will be followed during site preparation and construction.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the project area is located within a designated administrative site (see page 5, Figure 1) with no existing unique characteristics or ecologically critical areas such as park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, and wild and scenic rivers within the project area. There are also no inventoried roadless areas.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. The Council on Environmental Quality defines scientific controversy as when experts disagree with the Forest Service cited science. The environmental assessment (pp. 10-30) and associated resource reports document the

use of the best available science for each resource. The project file includes relevant literature citations, references to science, biological assessments, and monitoring results that were used in the project analysis to support this decision.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The effects analysis (EA, pp. 10-30) shows that the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. The Forest Service has considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented and has assigned routine design features (see pages 9-10) that have been extensively used on other similar projects with no unexpected consequences

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because the site preparation and facility construction are site-specific activities and do not represent a decision in principle that causes future considerations. Any future proposals would need to go through a separate environmental review process.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Cumulative impacts are absent or are not significant (EA, pp. 10-30). Effects are limited in context and intensity to the administrative site itself with a duration of an approximately five to six year construction window. Disturbance will cease once construction is completed and the facilities are on the landscape for the foreseeable future.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant cultural or historical resources.

The selected alternative will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss of or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Based on pre-disturbance surveys and record search of the project area, a finding of "No Historic Properties Affected" was determined by the Forest Cultural Resource Specialist and concurred upon by the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (project file). Project design features (see page 9) provide guidance for protection of any sites discovered or reported during construction activities.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act.

Due to their absence, the action will not adversely affect any Threatened, Endangered or Candidate species or its habitat (EA, pp. 14 and 26).

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (pp. 14, 16-17, 19, 21, 23, 25, and 30).

Conclusion

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA and specialist reports, I have determined that Alternative 2 will not have significant effects on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

The desired conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines of the 2015 IPNF Forest Plan do not apply to the Coeur d'Alene Nursery, which is an administrative site separate from the Forest. The selected alternative is consistent with the requirements of the National Forest Management as documented in the Silviculture Specialist's Report (pp. 8-9).

Clean Water Act

The proposed action would be in compliance with federal, state and local laws, regulations and ordinances. The proposed action would utilize and apply Best Management Practices found in the Catalog of Stormwater Best Management Practices for Idaho Cities and Counties (IDEQ, Water Quality Division, 2005) (EA p. 7) and would be compatible with the natural features of the site, would not create soil erosion or flooding problems, and would prevent surface water degradation (City of Coeur d'Alene 2015).

Endangered Species Act

Section 7 of Endangered Species Act directs federal agencies to seek to conserve endangered and threatened species to ensure that authorized actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any of these species. Biological assessments have been prepared for all federally proposed, threatened, endangered designated animals, plants and fish.

Federally protected wildlife species in the Idaho Panhandle National Forests include woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*), grizzly bear (*Ursos arctos horribilis*), and Canada lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*). Based on the biologist's report, none of these species are found in the project area and there is no potential for the project area to provide habitat for any of these species. The project site contains no lynx critical habitat, is not within a grizzly bear management unit, and does not contain grizzly bear core habitat (EA p. 26).

There are no federally listed Endangered plants for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (USDI 2015). Currently, the USFWS (USDI 2015) lists two species as Threatened for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, water howellia (*Howellia aquatilis*) and Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*). There are no documented occurrences of these species on the Forest, although suitable habitat is suspected to occur. No suitable habitat for water howellia was found in the project area. Areas with a grassy understory were searched for Spalding's catchfly, and no suitable habitat or plants were found. Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) was listed as a Candidate species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2011 (USDI 2015). No suitable habitat for whitebark pine is found in the project area (EA pp. 16-17).

For aquatic species, this project meets the ESA because no listed aquatic species or their habitat is present within the project area. A Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation has been prepared for the selected alternative.

Based on these findings, I have concluded that my decision is consistent with the Endangered Species Act.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as amended, directs Federal agencies to evaluate the effects of agency actions on migratory birds within the National Environmental Policy Act analysis process, focusing on species of management concern along with their priority habitat and key risk factors. Priority habitats identified in Idaho for migratory birds are riparian habitat, non-riverine wetlands, sagebrush shrub, and dry ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir/grand fir forests. Riparian habitat, non-riverine wetlands and sagebrush shrub habitats do not occur within the project area. The activities included in the selected alternative will impact an inconsequential amount of dry forest habitat, which represents a very small proportion of habitat available within the larger analysis area (EA p. 30). I have concluded that my decision is consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Forest Service has completed cultural resource surveys in areas potentially affected by the selected actions of this decision (Project file, Archaeologist's Project Completion Memo). No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to cultural resources are expected with implementation of the selected alternative. If cultural resources are subsequently identified during project implementation, they will be treated and protected according to provisions of State and Federal law (see page 9). The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office has concurred with the Forest Archeologist's determination. Therefore, I have concluded that my decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Environmental Justice Act

The selected alternative was assessed to determine whether it will disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations, in accordance with Executive Order 12898. There were no public comments raised regarding environmental justice considerations, and no disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or any other portion of public involvement during the course of this analysis (EA pp. 3-4). Based on this, I find that the selected alternative complies with Executive Order 12898.

Executive Order 13112 – Invasive Species

Executive Order 13112 requires federal agencies to use relevant programs and authorities to prevent the introduction of invasive species. The USDA Forest Service Guide to Noxious Weed Prevention Practices (2001) supports implementation of Executive Order 13112 on invasive species. Based upon the risk assessment, there is the potential for the spread or introduction of invasive plants under the selected alternative. The risk is proportional to the area of ground disturbance planned in the proposed action. The selected design features and monitoring actions (see pages 9 and 10) will be followed to address and reduce occurrences and spread of invasive plants.

Administrative Review and Objection Rights

This project was subject to the pre-decisional objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. A draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) were distributed with the INRC EA in June, 2016. A legal notice was published in the Coeur d'Alene Press on June 24, 2016, announcing the opportunity to file an objection during the 45-day objection period as per 36 CFR 218 regulations. A copy of the legal notice was posted on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest's webpage. Comment period respondents were notified of the opportunity to object via direct postal and e-mail notification. No objections were filed during the 45 day objection filing period.

Implementation

Because no objection was filed, the activities included in the Selected Alternative, as documented in this decision notice and finding of no significant impact may begin.

Contact Information

For further information concerning the INRC Project, contact Karl Dekome at the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Supervisor's Office, 3815 Schreiber Way, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815; by telephone (208) 765-7479 or by email (kdekome@fs.fed.us) during normal business hours (weekdays, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding federal holidays). The environmental assessment and decision notice/finding of no significant impact are available on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' internet website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44817>.

Approved by:



SHANE JEFFRIES
Acting Forest Supervisor
Idaho Panhandle National Forests

8-30-16

Date