

**Decision Notice and
Finding of No Significant Impact
Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project**

**USDA Forest Service
Pacific Ranger District, Olympic National Forest
Clallam County, Washington**

T29N, R12W; T29N, R11W; T29N, R10W; T28N, R12W; T28N, R11W; and T28N, R10W

Introduction

This Decision Notice documents my decision to implement Alternative B of the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project, and the rationale for my selection of Alternative B.

Background

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project. The project area is located on National Forest System lands within the Calawah River watershed east of the town Forks, in Clallam County, in the northwest portion of Washington's Olympic Peninsula. The legal land description of the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project planning area is T29N, R12W; T29N, R11W; T29N, R10W; T28N, R12W; T28N, R11W; and T28N, R10W. The planning area is accessed by Forest Service Roads 2900, 2912, 2922, 2923, and 2952.

The purpose of the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project is to protect and restore watershed health, water quality, and fish habitat on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Calawah watershed. This action is needed to correct and improve existing road conditions that pose a high risk of sedimentation into streams.

Management direction for the project comes from the 1990 *Olympic National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (LRMP) as amended by the 1994 *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl*. The 1994 Record of Decision (ROD), along with its Standards and Guidelines, is commonly known as the Northwest Forest Plan. The 1990 LRMP, as amended by the 1994 ROD and other current amending documents, is referred to as the Forest Plan in this Decision Notice.

On December 17, 2009, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington issued an order in *Conservation Northwest, et al. v. Sherman, et al.*, No. 08-1067-JCC (W.D. Wash.), granting Plaintiffs' motion for partial summary judgment and finding NEPA violations in the *Final Supplemental to the 2004 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines* (USDA and

USDI, June 2007). In response, parties entered into settlement negotiations in April 2010, and the Court filed approval of the resulting Settlement Agreement on July 6, 2011. Projects that are within the range of the northern spotted owl are subject to the survey and management standards and guidelines in the 2001 ROD, as modified by the 2011 Settlement Agreement.

The actions proposed in the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project would treat 35.5 miles of NFS roads in the Calawah Watershed. Treatments would include removal of large stream crossing fills, culverts, and unstable side-cast material; decompaction of road surfaces to allow infiltration; recontouring to restore hillslope profile; creating cross-drains, swales, and other drainage features; blocking vehicular access by constructing berms; and seeding, mulching, and reestablishing native vegetation to minimize erosion and sediment transport. Treatment intensities would vary based on the objectives for each individual road segment.

As a result of those treatments, 18.2 miles of system road would be decommissioned and permanently removed from the road system. The remaining 17.3 miles would be converted to maintenance level 1 (ML1) administrative closure. These roads would be closed to vehicular traffic, but would remain on the Forest's road system for potential administrative use in the future.

The Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project also analyzed a no-action alternative. The alternatives differed by the miles of treatment versus a no action alternative which would continue with current road management in the planning area.

Decision and Reason for the Decision

After careful review and consideration of the public comments and analysis disclosed in the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project EA, I have decided to implement Alternative B, the Proposed Action, as described in the EA (p. 6). My decision includes implementing all the treatment types (p. 8), conservation measures (p. 10), and monitoring (p. 13). My decision is based on a review of the EA and the project record, which shows a thorough evaluation of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

Alternative B includes treating 35.5 miles of NFS roads in the Calawah Watershed. Treatments would include removal of large stream crossing fills, culverts, and unstable side-cast material; decompaction of road surfaces to allow infiltration; recontouring to restore hillslope profile; creating cross-drains, swales, and other drainage features; blocking vehicular access by constructing berms; and seeding, mulching, and reestablishing native vegetation to minimize erosion and sediment transport. Treatment intensities would vary based on the objectives for each individual road segment.

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In making this decision, I examined the proposed treatment of 25 segments of Forest Service system roads, the associated treatments to stabilize these roads, and related activities in relationship to the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. I also considered the resource concerns noted in the watershed analysis and the EA. I considered the responsiveness of the alternatives to the three key issues identified in the EA (loss of public access, loss of timber harvest opportunities, and road decommissioning is too costly); applicable laws and policy; Tribal Treaty rights, and public input. I considered the effects of implementing the action alternative and the no action alternative on the physical, biological, social, and economic environment. I believe Alternative B provides the best balance among these considerations.

Implementing Alternative B with its project design criteria and mitigation measures will result in minimal impacts to resources, and will provide long term benefits to the resources. My decision to implement Alternative B meets the purpose and need for action established for this project, and is consistent with the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines of the Forest Plan. The road treatments and system road decommissioning follow ecosystem management policies and scientific recommendations. Alternative B meets requirements under the National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and all other applicable environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Alternative B also provides local economic activity and employment opportunities within the general vicinity of the project. The individual road segments selected for this proposal were identified as high priority for treatment during the collaborative Watershed Restoration Plan process. The treatments would be designed to reduce the amount of sedimentation these features contribute to aquatic habitat. This action responds to the goals and objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy described in the 1990 Olympic National Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, and helps move the project area towards desired conditions described in that plan.

Mitigation Measures and Design Features

Project design criteria and mitigation measures were developed for the action alternative and will be implemented to insure compliance with direction in the Forest Plan and Forest program direction, as well as to avoid or minimize adverse impacts of project implementation. Specific project design criteria and /or mitigation measures were developed for the following areas:

fisheries, hydrology, water quality; wildlife and wildlife habitat; invasive plants; and cultural resources. These requirements, which are described in the EA on page 10, are expected to minimize potential adverse effects of management activities. Implementation of these features is considered to be highly effective.

I have decided to add the additional design feature to those described in the EA:

As part of ML1 storage treatments on the 2912 and 2912060 roads a 2-4 foot footpath would be constructed where outsloping, or fill material storage on the road bed occurs. The intent of this measure is to facilitate walk-in access where high intensity road treatments occur.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Specific monitoring activities will be implemented to assure that implementation of elements of my decision are carefully tracked during and after project implementation. Monitoring activities are described in individual resource chapters in the EA.

Other Alternatives Considered

I originally considered three alternatives, one of which was eliminated from further analysis (see “Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Further Study”, below).

Two alternatives were considered in detail in the EA: one that included activities to treat 25 segments of Forest Service system road within the Calawah River watershed to reduce the potential for the roads to generate sediment, restore hillslope hydrology; and improve stability of the road prism by removing unstable sidecast fill (Action Alternative B), and one that would not (Alternative A- the No-Action Alternative).

I did not select the No-Action Alternative because it does not meet the purpose and need to protect and restore watershed health, water quality, and fish habitat on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Calawah watershed. The primary objective for treatments on road segments proposed for decommissioning is to reduce the potential for management-related mass wasting and surface erosion that could deliver sediments to fish spawning and rearing habitat

The analysis in the EA shows that the action alternative would not result in any measurable adverse environmental effects. I have decided to implement Alternative B because it meets the purpose and need of the project most effectively.

Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Further Study

Project commenters suggested converting route 2912 and 2912-060 into a motorized off-highway-vehicle (OHV) route. Based on these public comments, an alternative was considered that would have converted roads 2912 and 2912-060 into a motorized-use OHV route.

Authorizing an OHV route is outside the scope of this project and would not meet the project's purpose and need. Proposed road treatments and reclassification of the 2912 and 2912-060 roads as ML1 would not preclude future options for trail development. The public request for OHV recreation has been identified on the Pacific Ranger District, and a separate planning effort is underway for an OHV route in the Northwest portion of the Calawah Watershed.

Public Involvement and Tribal Consultation

The Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project was listed on the Olympic National Forest's *Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA) July 1, 20012, and remained on the SOPA throughout the planning, analysis, and decision process. On October 16, 2012, I sent scoping letters to the Quileute Tribe to solicit comments on the project. On November 1, 2012, I sent a scoping letter to concerned citizens, organizations, and state, federal, and local government agencies that have expressed an interest in the Forest's management activities. The letter described the proposed action, and requested comments.

Based on comments received from the Tribes, the public, and other agencies, the Forest's interdisciplinary team and I developed a list of issues to address when considering alternatives to the proposed action. When the draft EA was complete, it was circulated for a 30-day comment period beginning on December 16, 2013, 2013. Five responses were received during the comment period. The comments and my responses are found in Appendix C of the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering comments from the public and the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that implementation of Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Alternative B does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. This determination of no significant impact is based on the EA, the design of the selected alternative, and on the following factors:

Context of Action:

The Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning activities will be local and short-term. The treatment and decommissioning activities would occur over the next five to ten years, depending on funding.

Intensity of Effects:

The environmental effects of the following actions are documented in Chapter 3 of the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning EA: sedimentation during construction activities; temporary fish barriers during treatments; and temporary treatment effect on wildlife. The beneficial and adverse direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of these activities have been disclosed in the EA. Effects are expected to be low in intensity because of standard management practices and the project design criteria and mitigation measures described on pages 10 of the EA.

1. Potential beneficial and adverse effects were considered in the analysis of the proposed action and alternative. The analysis considered both direct and indirect effects, and also the project's contribution to the cumulative effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the watershed. Potential adverse effects of Alternative B will be reduced or eliminated by the application of the required project design criteria and mitigation measures (EA p. 10).
2. The project will not have a significant effect on public health or safety. Roads will be closed as needed to protect public safety during treatment and decommissioning operations. Mitigation measures and design features will protect worker safety during project implementation (EA p. 10). Effects on water quality (sediment) are expected to be very limited due to mitigation measures and project design features (EA p. 10).
3. There will be no significant effects to unique characteristics of the area. No historic or cultural resources will be affected with this proposal (EA, p. 49). The project is not in close proximity to prime farmlands or ecologically critical areas. Wetlands located within the project area would be protected by project design criteria. No project activities will occur within designated Wilderness, Inventoried Road less Areas, or within the Olympic National Park, although there will be minor, short-term indirect effects from noise. There will be no effects to Wild and Scenic Rivers; the Calawah watershed is not designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers. The project is expected to be beneficial to Riparian Reserves through the decommissioning or stabilization of roads currently presenting risks to aquatic habitat (instability or sediment sources).
4. The effects of this project on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Comments received during the comment period from respondents opposed to the project were concerned primarily with public and timber thinning access and converting roads to OHV use. The project will permanently decommission some existing system roads that are currently posing resource concerns and place other system roads into ML1 storage. Comments received during the 30-day comment period raised no substantial concerns.
5. The effects of this project are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risks. Road decommissioning has recently been a regular activity on the Olympic National Forest and is consistent with Forest direction, policies, and directives; this project will be consistent with regulations concerning these activities and the protection of natural resources.
6. This action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Road

decommissioning is not a new activity on the Forest and will follow common practices with known results. The project design criteria and mitigation measures (EA p. 10) are known to be effective in reducing risks associated with project activities. The EA effectively addressed and analyzed all major issues associated with the project.

7. Implementation of Alternative B does not represent potential cumulative adverse impacts when considered in combination with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. The discussion of effects in Chapter 3 of the EA indicates no likelihood of cumulatively significant impact to the environment.
8. It was determined that the action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. No eligible historic properties were found during surveys of the project area. The Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (SHPO) concurred with the No Effect finding (letter on file at the Olympic National Forest).
9. This action is covered by the Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO) from the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service: USDI Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. Biological Opinion and letter of concurrence for effects to marbled murrelets, northern spotted owls, bull trout, and designated critical habitat for marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls from Olympic National Forest program of activities for 2013 to 2023. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lacey, Washington. The majority of project work will have little to no effect on the structure or function of spotted owl and murrelet habitat since most activities will be restricted to the existing road prism, which is non-habitat. In most cases the vegetation removed from the road treatment areas would be shrubs, forbs/grasses or small trees at most, and as such would not involve removal of dispersal or suitable habitat or constituent elements.
10. This action does not threaten a violation of any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Alternative B is consistent with the Forest Plan, and is in compliance with the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. It was designed to be in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The decision to approve the Calawah Watershed Road Decommissioning Project is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long-term goals and objectives. The project was designed in conformance with standards and guidelines in the 1990 *Olympic National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (LRMP) as amended by the 1994 *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl*. I have carefully reviewed the EA and supporting documents for consistency with the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives in accordance with the 1994 ROD, Attachment B, on page B-10. The EA includes descriptions of the existing condition, range of natural variability of important physical and biological components of the watersheds, and how the proposed project maintains the existing condition or moves it within the range of natural variability (EA p. 46). Based on my review of the EA, and the 1994 ROD, I have determined that this project does not prevent attainment of the Aquatic

Conservation Strategy objectives. I have determined that this project is consistent with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements at USC 1604 (EA p. 220).

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of this project may begin on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When one or more appeals are filed, implementation may begin on, but not before, the fifteenth business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Objection Opportunities

This decision is subject to objection pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 218. Only individuals or organizations that submitted specific written comments during a designated opportunity for public participation (scoping or the 30-day public comment period) may object (36 CFR 218.5). Notices of objection must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 218.8(d); incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided for at 36 CFR 218.8(b).

Written notice of objection must be postmarked or received by the Olympic Forest Supervisor, ATTN: Objections, USDA Forest Service, 1835 Black Lake Blvd SW 98512 within 45 days of the date of publication of the notice regarding this decision in *The Peninsula Daily News* newspaper, (Port Angeles, WA). Objections delivered by mail must be received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period. The objection narrative must be sufficient to identify the specific change(s) to the decision sought by the appellant or portions of the decision to which the appellant objects, and must state how the Responsible Official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided. If applicable, the objections should state how the appellant believes this decision violates law, regulation, or policy. Specific directions on how to file an objection are provided in 36 CFR 218.8. (A printed copy is available upon request.) The regulations can be found at <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=cb8e9b64f65923476f5ef9ee666b8af7&node=36:2.0.1.1.8.1.1.8&rgn=div8>

Objections (including attachments) may be filed by regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand delivery, express delivery, or messenger service. The publication date of the notice regarding this decision in the newspaper is the sole means of calculating the objection filing deadline, and those wishing to object should not rely on dates or timelines from any other source. E-mail appeals must be submitted to: objections-pnw-olympic@fs.fed.us, and must be in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf). Appeals submitted by FAX must be faxed to: 502-956-2330. Objections may be hand-delivered to the Supervisor's Office, 1835 Black Lake Blvd SW 98512 between 8:00AM and 4:30PM Monday-Friday.

It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their objections are received in a timely manner. For electronically mailed appeals, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of the objection, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Contact

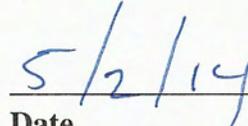
For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service objection process, contact Greg Wahl, Forest Environmental Coordinator, Olympic National Forest, 1835 Black Lake Blvd SW, Olympia, WA 98512, email gtwahl@fs.fed.us , phone: 360-956-2375.



Dean R. Millett

District Ranger

Olympic National Forest



Date