



**DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
HOPKINS FIRE SALVAGE**

**U.S. FOREST SERVICE
OCALA NATIONAL FOREST
SEMINOLE RANGER DISTRICT
MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA**

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Hopkins Fire Salvage Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 2, which would harvest about 1,000 acres within the area designated on the map shown as Figure 1.

DECISION RATIONALE

Purpose	Need	How Proposed Alternative Meets Purpose and Need
Create new habitat for Florida scrub-jays (contributes to Forest Plan Objectives 9, p. 2-5 and 19, p. 2-6)	Present suitable habitat is below Forest Plan target level	Creates about 1,000 acres of scrub openings which will be suitable 2-3 years after implementation. If salvage harvest not done, jays would not use area for 7-10 years.
Recover wood products and economic value of sand pine killed by wildfire.(contributes to Forest Plan Goal 5, p. 2-4)	1800-acre wildfire on March 2, 2013 killed sand pines in fire area. If not salvaged, a large amount of useable wood product is left on site.	Salvages 1,000 acres within the wildfire area.
Reduce hazard of dead and dying trees.	Reduce the risk of falling trees after wildfire (when large numbers of dead trees were created by fire-kill)	Removes dead trees on 1,000 acres of the 1800-acre wildfire area.

The Hopkins Fire Salvage EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based and is incorporated by reference into this Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact. The Environmental Assessment and maps of the proposed actions are available on the project website at

http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=41522.

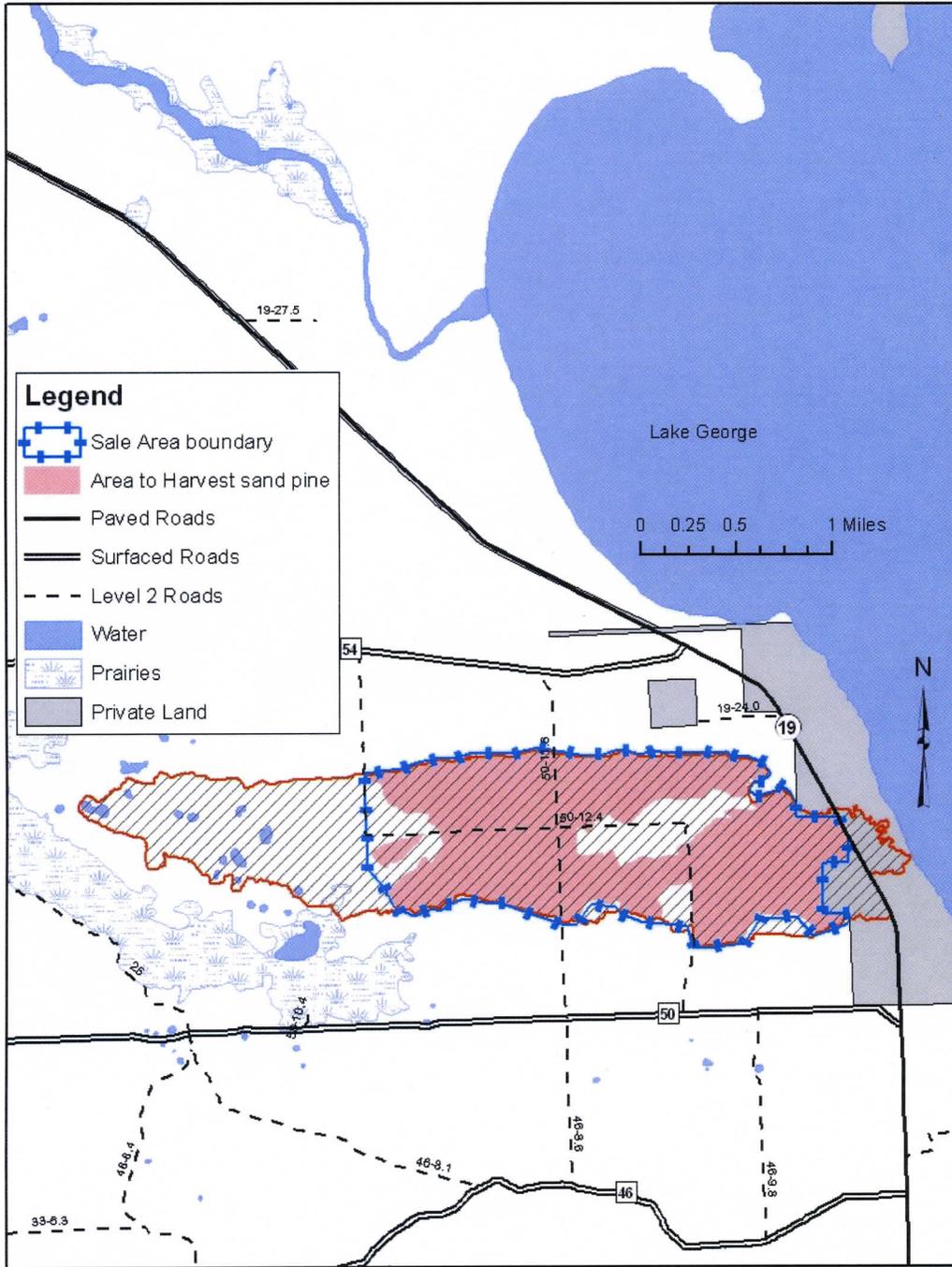


Figure 1. Proposed area to salvage timber after Hopkins Fire, March 2, 2013.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was described and mailed to a Public mailing list on March 20, 2013. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal. The EA lists agencies and people consulted on pages 12-13. Comments received are posted in project file. No negative comments were received.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Consistency with NFMA and the Forest Plan: The Forest Plan was prepared in accordance with the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1601-1610).

This decision is consistent with the Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for National Forests in Florida. This project is consistent with the Forest Plan's DFCs, forest-wide goals, and forest-wide objectives (LRMP, Chapter 2). The project is located in MA 8.2. MA goals, DFCs, and S&Gs apply to actions within these MAs (LRMP, pp. 4-46 through 4-47). I find that the actions in the selected alternative are consistent with direction for MAs, and that the Forest Plan identifies these lands as suitable for timber production. The project is feasible, reasonable, and will apply management practices that meet the Forest Plan's overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

Vegetation Management Requirements (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(E)): This decision is consistent with management requirements associated with the accomplishment of Forest Plan goals and objectives. The following is a discussion of these requirements as it pertains to this project.

a. Soil, Slope, Or Other Watershed Conditions Not Irreversibly Damaged: The soils in the project area are low in fertility, clay, and organic matter; and are excessively drained, and not vulnerable to compaction. Except where slopes exceed 15%, these soils are generally not sensitive. Soil productivity is maintained by minimizing erosion, compaction, and rutting. Timber harvest may cause short-term, localized soil disturbance and minute reductions in soil fertility, but will have a beneficial effect on nutrient cycling. Most disturbance would be limited to the vegetative litter. Minor soil movement may occur, but erosion out of the treated areas is not expected. Based on many years of experience with similar actions on similar soils, only minimal and localized effects are anticipated. Using standard Forest Service timber sale contract clauses for resource protection, timber sale operations are carried out without permanent impairment of site productivity or irreversible damage to soil and watershed conditions (EA, Soils and Water sections).

b. Lands Can Be Adequately Restocked Within Five Years After Final Regeneration Harvest: Regeneration will occur from natural regeneration. Regeneration monitoring following wildfire on similar lands on the ONF has shown that with very few exceptions stands are restocked within five years of harvest. The field examinations of these stands selected for final harvest have confirmed that conditions are sufficiently similar to previously treated stands in the area such that it is likely that the results will be similar. There is a reasonable assurance that the stands in this project will be adequately restocked within five years.

c. Protection Is Provided For Streams, Stream Banks, Shorelines, Lakes, Wetlands, And Other Bodies Of Water From Detrimental Changes In Water Temperatures, Blockages Of Water Courses, And Deposits Of Sediment Where Harvests Are Not Likely To Seriously And Adversely Affect Water Conditions Or Fish Habitat: No streams, stream banks, shorelines or lakes will be adversely affected by the project. Water resources have been excluded from the timber sale area boundary. A comparison of soil loss and sediment yield rates with tolerable soil loss rates shows that soil loss from National Forests in Florida lands falls within acceptable limits (FEIS, p. 3-6).

d. Harvesting System Was Not Selected Primarily Because It Will Give The Greatest Dollar Return Or The Greatest Unit Output Of Timber: The choice of timber harvesting was determined after consideration of many resource factors. Following a wildfire, clear-cutting dead trees will create openings in the sand pine scrub ecosystem to maintain viable populations of scrub-jays and other rare scrub species. They will also meet a Forest Plan objective of producing pine pulpwood. The clear-cutting proposed is practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements, total costs of preparation, logging, and administration. In addition, these practices will reduce hazardous fuels within the scope of, and in support of, the National Fire Plan.

Timber Harvesting Management Requirements (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(F)(i through v): This decision is consistent with the minimum specific timber harvesting management requirements for cutting methods designed to regenerate an even-aged stand of timber. The following is a discussion of these requirements as it pertains to this project.

a. Clearcutting Is Determined To Be The Optimum Method; And For Other Cutting Methods They Are Determined To Be Appropriate (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(i): Based on experience and the site-specific analysis in the EA, I have determined that clearcutting is the optimum method to harvest about 1,000 acres of even-aged sand pine stands (see Figure 1.) Clearcutting is the optimum harvest method for sand pine, because:

- It will meet the purpose and need for action, and the LRMPs objectives and requirements.
- It provides early successional habitat that is essential for most scrub endemics, both plants and animals.
- It is the most successful harvest method to support natural regeneration in the sand pine scrub.

b. Interdisciplinary Review Has Been Completed And The Potential Environmental, Biological, Aesthetic, Engineering, And Economic Impacts On Each Advertised Sale Area Have Been Assessed, As Well As The Consistency Of The Sale With The Multiple Use Of The General Area (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(ii): See the list of Interdisciplinary Team members who participated in and reviewed this project and its analysis (EA, p. 13), and the Environmental Consequences section of the EA. This project was designed to be consistent with the LRMP direction for MA 8.2 and other applicable MAs. See the Forest Plan Consistency discussion above.

c. Cut Blocks, Patches, Or Strips Are Shaped And Blended To The Extent Practicable With The Natural Terrain (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(iii)): The stand shape is a result of the wildfire and its containment by firefighting equipment. It meets the visual quality objectives of the area.

d. Maximum Size Limits For Areas To Be Cut In One Harvest Operation Have Not Been Exceeded (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(iv)): Harvesting limits shall not apply to the size of areas harvested as a result of natural catastrophic conditions such as fire.

e. Timber Cuts Will Be Carried Out In A Manner Consistent With The Protection Of Soil, Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, And Esthetic Resources, And The Regeneration Of The Timber Resource (16 U.S.C. 1604 (G)(3)(F)(v)): This project is expected to provide the desired effects on water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired species, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields as identified in the environmental analysis. (EA, Environmental Consequences section)

f. Even-Aged Stands Of Trees Scheduled For Regeneration Harvest Generally Have Reached Culmination Of Mean Annual Increment (CMAI) Of Growth (16 U.S.C. 1604 (m)(1)): Salvage harvesting is exempted from this requirement.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action as well as the severity of effects.

CONTEXT

As analyzed in the EA, the effects of this project have social, environmental, spatial, and temporal dimensions.

- This is not a major action within the context of the Forest Plan, the historic level of management activity for the project area, and the amount of management activity needed to meet the purpose and need for action (EA, Environmental Consequences section).
- The types of activities that will be implemented are similar to activities that have occurred in the past in this area or areas similar to it. The amount of management activity is similar to historic levels of activity in this area (EA, Environmental Consequences section).
- The physical and biological effects will usually be limited to the project area and immediately adjacent areas. However, for some resources the spatial boundary was expanded for the effects analysis (EA, as well as the severity of effects. section).

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.**
Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.
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 any hazards are mitigated by timber sale and contract specifications for safety, and state traffic laws. (See EA page 10)
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 there are no unique characteristics of the geographical area that will be significantly affected by the selected actions. Wetlands and ponds were excluded from the timber sale area boundary.
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** Based on consultation with others, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action.
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The effects of this project involve well-quantified risk. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Similar projects have been completed with results well within anticipated effects (EA, Environmental Consequences section, pages 7-11).
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 commonly accepted techniques will be employed in the implementation of this project. Additionally, this decision to implement activities within the project area does not commit us to actions on lands outside the project area.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. There are no known significant cumulative effects between this project and other projects implemented or planned within the project area or adjacent areas. All known connected actions associated with the selected activities which are likely to occur in the reasonably foreseeable future have been identified in the EA. All anticipated direct, indirect, and cumulative effects have been disclosed (EA, Environmental Consequences section, pages 7-11).

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The action 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. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The heritage resource survey determined that the actions are not expected to adversely affect any heritage resources in the area that are listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Findings are located in FY-13 Heritage Resources Status Report 4, Lake George Ranger District, Ocala NF, ACC# LKGF00450, prepared by the Ocala NF Archeologist. The State Historic Preservation Officer reviewed the report and concurred with the findings (April 23, 2013). The tribes were consulted by mailout on March 20, 2013 and no responses were received. Consultation is complete. (See EA page 11)
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 of 1973.** The Biological Assessment recognized the possibility that the project activities could negatively affect individuals of the following species: sand skink, Eastern indigo snake, Florida bonamia, scrub buckwheat, and Lewton's polygala. However, effects to Eastern indigo snake and sand skink were evaluated as "discountable" because present habitat in project area for these species is currently unsuitable. Effects to Florida bonamia, Scrub buckwheat, and Lewton's polygala are considered "insignificant" because disturbance to these plants from harvesting would be limited to above-ground disturbance and not harm woody taproots that these species have. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concurred with our effects determination in the Biological Assessment (refer to FWS response on May 7, 2013). Based on the analysis and findings in the Biological Assessment and concurrence from the FWS, I have determined that the risk and potential consequences of adverse effects to endangered or threatened species from the approved activities is not significant.
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate 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 during preparation of the EA and in this Decision Notice. The action is consistent with the National Forests in Florida Land and Resource Management Plan. (See EA pages 4-5 and Appendix D)

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

As no substantive comments expressing concerns were received during the 30-Day Comment Period (March 28-April 28, 2013), this decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (e)(1).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project is scheduled to begin in May of 2013. This decision for Alternative 2 may be implemented immediately after publication of the legal notice of this Decision Notice (36 CFR 215.9 (c) (1)).

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact me at the Seminole Ranger District (address listed below).



5-9-13

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Date

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