

REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM OFFICE

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 5, 2019

TO: Mike Williams, Forest Supervisor, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

FROM: Becky Gravenmier, Regional Ecosystem Office Representative to the Regional Interagency Executive Committee

SUBJECT: Regional Ecosystem Office Review of the Little Crow Project, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

Summary: The Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) interagency Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) Work Group has concluded its review of the Little Crow Project (Project), in the Manastash Ridge LSR and the Crow MLSA on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (Forest). The Forest proposes to treat approximately 6,317 acres within the LSR by thinning dense single-story stands that naturally regenerated after fire about 110 years ago. These stands also have some scattered older remnant trees. The objective is to move these stands through the stem exclusion phase and into the understory reinitiation phase to accelerate the development of late successional forest characteristics. With the exception of harvesting stands greater than 80 years old, the thinning treatments are designed to meet the Commercial Thinning Exemption Criteria. The REO, based upon the review by the LSR Work Group, concurs with the Forest's finding that the proposed actions are consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs), except for the harvest that is planned in stands greater than 80 years old. This will require a Forest Plan Amendment that will need to be reviewed by the RIEC.

Basis for the Review: The Manastash Ridge LSR and the Crow MLSA are addressed under the Manastash Ridge LSRA and the Crow MLSA LSRA, which were reviewed by the REO (Review Letters dated September 16, 1996 and October 8, 1997 respectively) and found to be consistent under the NWFP S&Gs (C-11).

Limiting factors for Late Successional Forest development in the Crow MLSA and the Manastash Ridge LSR include a lack of existing old forest due to past harvest, particularly in the moister portions of the LSR. At the stand level, limiting factors include the lack of large trees.

The 6,317 acres of commercial thinning in the Little Crow Project are in stand types identified by the LSRAs.

- From the Crow MLSA LSRA – Accelerate the development of suitable spotted owl habitat within the Crow MLSA by utilizing silvicultural activities that accelerate the

development of multi-layered stands. Focus on single layered pole sized stands in moist grand fir, and wet forest groups (LSRA p. 50).

- From the Manastash Ridge LSRA – Improve habitat quality in dense single story stands on owl sites below target where these stands occur. Purpose is to attain target acres of habitat sooner. Utilize silvicultural activities that accelerate the development of multi-layered stands. Focus on single layered pole size stands in moist grand fir and wet forest groups (LSRA p. 144).

Background and Project Description: The primary objective of the Little Crow project is to increase the growth rate of the treated stands, create conditions to allow the development of a multi-layered canopy, increase the number of snags greater than 14” dbh, increase the density of large coarse woody debris, and promote the development of more live trees greater than 25” dbh.

The stands proposed for treatment consist of single-story even-aged forests in warm mesic and cool moist plant associations. The species composition is primarily Douglas-fir. Other dominant tree species include western white pine, lodgepole pine, western hemlock and western larch. Codominants and intermediates include Pacific silver fir, Alaska yellow cedar, Engelmann spruce, grand fir, subalpine fir, and mountain hemlock. Canopy closure ranges from 60-80% and there is little diversity in the understory. Stand structure is primarily stem exclusion with some small areas of understory reinitiation. The basal area-weighted stand age is 107 years. These stands are currently identified as meeting criteria for dispersal habitat for spotted owls. Due to high levels of stand density, individual tree growth has slowed.

Thinned stands would retain 80-100 square feet of basal area per acre in an Individuals-Clumps-Openings pattern (I-C-O) and would retain all trees 20” dbh or greater. Up to 30% of the area will be untreated. Up to 20% of the area would have gaps that would not exceed ¼ acre. Canopy closure at the stand level would not drop below 60%.

The density reduction in these stands would also increase stand resilience to fire by reducing the canopy fuel continuity and creating within-stand heterogeneity in density. Fire-resistant early seral tree species would also be favored, increasing the fire resistance of the stands that are treated.

Review of the Project: The LSR Workgroup received the final consistency review documents on October 16, 2018. The LSR Workgroup based its review on these documents and concurs with the Forest’s conclusion that the proposed treatment is consistent with the S&Gs (except for the harvest of stands greater than 80 years old) and meets the objectives for LSRs for the following reasons:

- The stands identified for treatment are consistent with the stand types identified in the Manastash Ridge LSR and Crow MLSR LSRA.
- The thinning prescription follows the REO Exemption Criteria for commercial thinning and considers the development of both live and dead stand components needed for the development of late successional forest conditions in this forest type.
- FVS modelling in the Forest’s consistency review shows that the treatments should increase the growth rates of individual trees that will be needed to accelerate the development of the desired conditions.

- The proposed treatments should also create greater landscape heterogeneity in stand conditions and should reduce crown fuel continuity to increase stand resilience to wildfire.

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