

REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM OFFICE

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 6, 2014

TO: Alice Carlton, Forest Supervisor, Umpqua National Forest

FROM: Michael Hampton, REO Representative to the REIC

SUBJECT: Regional Ecosystem Office Review of the Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project, North Umpqua Ranger District, Umpqua National Forest

Summary: The Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) interagency Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) Work Group has concluded its review of the documents provided by the Forest regarding proposed activities in LSRs within the anticipated action of Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project within LSR RO-222, North Umpqua Ranger District, Umpqua National Forest. The REO, based upon review by the LSR Work Group, concurs with the Forest in its finding of consistency with the Standards and Guidelines (S&G) under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) for the Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project.

Basis for the Review: Silviculture treatments in LSRs are subject to REO review under the NWFP S&G (C-12) if they do not meet existing criteria in the LSR Assessment or the exemption criteria for commercial thinning in the REO Memorandum #694 "Criteria to Exempt Specific Silvicultural Activities in Late-Successional Reserves and Managed Late-Successional Areas from Regional Ecosystem Office Review" dated July 9, 1996. As required by the NWFP S&G (C-11), the Forest prepared a Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (LSR assessment). The 1998 South Cascades LSR Assessment (SCLSRA), which encompasses the Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project, was reviewed and found to be consistent under the NWFP standards and guidelines (C-11). Although the South Cascades LSR assessment supports the thinning, the projects came before the LSR Workgroup for review because certain recommendations in the LSR Assessment and Exemption Criteria cannot be met and promote successful restoration of native tree species diversity, especially sugar pine.

Background and Project Description: The Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project planning area is located on the North Umpqua Ranger District of the Umpqua National Forest (UNF) within the Middle North Umpqua and Steamboat 5th-field watersheds, approximately 37 road miles east of Roseburg, Oregon in Townships 25 and 26 South, Ranges 1 West and East, Willamette Meridian, Douglas County, Oregon (Figure 1). The Lower Steamboat planning area is located entirely within the Western Cascades physiographic province of LSR RO-222. The planning area encompasses approximately 30,500 acres, with approximately 2,400 acres analyzed in detail.

Silvicultural treatments proposed for the Lower Steamboat project are consistent with pertinent S&Gs in the ROD (C-12), and with SCLSRA treatment criteria for density management in stands less than 80 years of age but vary from existing review exemption criteria (REO Memorandum #694 dated July 9, 1996 and REO Memorandum #801 dated September 30), by proposing gaps larger than ¼-acre in extent to promote successful restoration of native tree species, particularly relatively shade-intolerant native pine species.

The purpose of the Lower Steamboat project is to promote the development and maintenance of late-successional forest conditions in existing even-aged stands in LSR (USDA & USDI, 1994b, C-12). Proposed project activities include silvicultural (commercial thinning and fuels treatments) designed to develop structurally complex stand and landscape structure and species composition within second-growth stands that originated following even-aged management and subsequent planting in the 1950s through the 1970s. These second-growth stands lack the structural and species diversity they would otherwise have if exposed to natural successional pathways, such as fires (Zenner, 2005). Historically, sugar pine trees were naturally abundant in the planning area on south through west aspects and were maintained by the historical fire regime. Today, sugar pine (*Pinus lambertiana*) is underrepresented within the planning area landscape and is declining due to competition related to dense planting of Douglas-fir, fire exclusion, and occurrence of white pine blister rust (*Cronartium ribicola*).

Ecological processes actively functioning as disturbance agents in the planning area include fire, Armillaria root disease (*Armillaria obscura*), laminated root rot (*Phellinus sulphurascens*), white pine blister rust, Douglas-fir beetle (*Dendroctonus pseudotsugae*), mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*), fir engraver beetle (*Scolytus ventralis*), and flathead fir borer (*Melanophila drummondi*). Depending on stand conditions and disturbance event, these disturbance agents can create forest openings ranging from very small (individual tree scale), to moderate (up to a few acres in size, as with root disease pockets; p. 86, SCLSRA; USDA, 1998), to very large (stand-replacing fire at the landscape scale; pp. 73-88, SCLSRA; USDA, 1998).

The proposed action includes creation of ½-acre and 1-acre gaps also is proposed for 112 acres within treatment units to increase structural complexity and to facilitate understory development and planting of native species, including sugar pine, incense cedar, and western redcedar.

Review of the Project: The LSR Work Group reviewed the proposed action for the Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project. Members of the LSR Work Group also met with District staff on June 11, 2013 via conference call. The Work Group's review was based on discussions during the call and review of the document "Regional Ecosystem Office Late-successional Reserve Project Consistency Review: Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project", dated June 11, 2013 and updated May 6, 2014.

Conclusion: Based on the interagency REO LSR Work Group's review and conclusions, the REO concurs with the Umpqua National Forest's conclusion that the Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project on the North Umpqua Ranger District is consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan.

If you have questions regarding this review, please contact Kim Mellen-McLean at 503-808-2677.



Michael Hampton

REO Representative to the REIC

cc: Stephanie Wessell-Kelly, North Umpqua RD
Kim Mellen-McLean, LSR Workgroup, FS