

Regional Interagency Executive Committee

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Memorandum

Date: August 20, 2020

To: Merv George Jr, Forest Supervisor, Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest

From: Matt Ehrman, Regional Ecosystem Office Representative to the Regional Interagency Executive Committee

Subject: Regional Ecosystem Office/Late-Successional Reserve Work Group Review of the Stella Landscape Restoration Project, Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest

Summary: The Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) Interagency Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) work group has concluded its review of the information provided by the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest regarding the proposed in the approximately 64,000 acre Stella Landscape Restoration Project (Project). The REO, based upon the review of the LSR work group in 2019 and 2020 concurs with the Forest's findings that the proposed Project's actions are consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Standards and Guidelines (S&G's).

Basis for the Review: Risk reduction actions are to be reviewed by the REO under the Guidelines for Risk Reduction projects, pages C-12 through C-13 of the S&G's for the NWFP. Silviculture activities require REO review per page C-12 of the NWFP S&G's. The REO identified criteria in the 1998 Late Successional Reserve Assessment (LSRA), which would exempt some activities from review (e.g., REO exemption criteria memoranda referenced below). In addition, through their review of the LSRA, the REO has identified those projects that are sufficiently described and found to be consistent with NWFP S&Gs and has determined in the LSRA review letters those activities that do not require further REO review.

As required by the NWFP S&Gs (per page C-11), an LSRA was prepared for the South Cascades LSR in 1998. The REO's review of the South Cascades LSRA concluded that the silvicultural, risk reduction, and salvage activities described within the LSRA are consistent with criteria and therefore are exempted from subsequent project level REO reviews. The REO stated in their review of the LSRA that fire risk management activities should be a priority in this LSR, and that the "amount of treatments proposed for exemption from further REO review, or the amount of projected treatments overall are not intended to represent the long term activity levels needed to reach desired future conditions."

Background and Project Description: The purpose of the Stella Landscape Restoration Project is to provide greater landscape resiliency to wildfire and other disturbances, by reestablishing forest structure and pattern, vegetation composition, and riparian communities to conditions that are more resilient to natural disturbance processes.

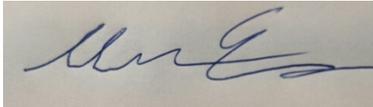
All units included in the Stella Landscape Restoration Project are within the South Cascades LSRA mostly on the High Cascades Ranger District of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest with a small portion of the project occurring on the Tiller Ranger District of the Umpqua National Forest. The planning area for the project includes about 15,982 acres in LSR between LSR 222 and 225. Proposed activities in LSR include commercial thinning of plantations less than 80 years old on 1,102 acres, non-commercial thinning of young stands on 1,167 acres, and non-commercial thinning with an emphasis on reducing surface and ladder fuels where trees less than 10 inch dbh will be removed on 175 acres. Shaded fuel breaks are proposed on 344 acres, and prescribed fire is proposed on 2,308 acres. Meadow and special habitat enhancement are proposed on 3,956 acres. The thinning of stands over 80 years old, prescribed fire, defensible space, fuel break and gap creation treatments all require REO project level concurrence with the Forest's findings of consistency.

In evaluating this project, the Forest identified that the stands within the Stella Restoration Project area proposed for silvicultural treatment are homogenous stands that are currently in an overstocked condition. The Forest identified that these stands are less than 80 years old, and not complex or diverse. The proposed thinning treatment is consistent with the LSRA criteria for snags in managed stands (pg. 133) meant to accelerate the development of these stands into late successional conditions. The Forest also proposes treatment in one LSR4 within the project area that is not covered in an LSR assessment, LSR4 number 11658. The Forest proposes prescribed fire in 24 acres of this LSR4, which is primarily meadow and oak woodland, as part of a large burn block. The total size of this LSR4 is 205 acres. The 24 acres in the burn block are separated from the rest of the LSR4 by a road and a ridge and the key late successional characteristics of that LSR4 would not be adversely affected by prescribed fire. The proposed prescribed fire treatment would increase within stand resiliency consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, page C-18 paragraph two.

Silvicultural treatments proposed for the plantation stands less than 80 years old in the Stella Landscape Restoration Project are consistent with pertinent S&Gs in the ROD (C-12-13), and with the LSRA treatment criteria for density management in stands less than 80 years of age and the existing review exemption criteria (REO Memorandum #694 dated July 9, 1996 and REO Memorandum #801 dated September 30) across 1,102 acres of commercial thinning, non-commercial thinning on 1,167 acres and an additional 175 acres of non-commercial thinning of trees less than 10 inches dbh. As described in the Forest's LSR work group submittal, the project is designed to meet the intent of the Northern Spotted Owl Revised Recovery Plan Actions 6, 10, 12 & 320.

Review of the Project: The Stella Landscape Restoration Project was shared with the LSR work group in a letter on April 8, 2019. Comments from the LSR work group were returned to the Forest, and a final consistency document was sent to the LSR work group on June 29, 2020.

Conclusion: Based upon the REO's review, the REO concurs with the Forest's conclusion that the Stella Landscape Restoration Project's activities, if implemented as described above, are consistent with the NWFP.

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Matt Ehrman
Regional Ecosystem Office

cc: Joshua Chapman, Debbie Anderson, Matt Ehrman, Alice Carlton, Elizabeth Bly, David Palmer, Gabriel Wishart, Michelle Calvert, Elspeth Gustavson

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