

REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM OFFICE

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 14, 2013

TO: Patricia Grantham, Forest Supervisor, Klamath National Forest

FROM: Michael Hampton, REO Representative to the REIC

SUBJECT: Regional Ecosystem Office Review of the Butte Mountain Habitat Restoration Project, Klamath National Forest

Summary: The Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) interagency Late Successional Reserve (LSR) Work Group has concluded its review of activities within the Goosenest Late Successional Reserve (RC-363) that are proposed as part of the Butte Mountain Habitat Restoration Project on the Klamath National Forest. The Forest proposes to treat approximately 3,090 acres within the 39,770 acre Goosenest LSR using a variety of treatment prescriptions to achieve ecological objectives that are consistent with the Goosenest Late Successional Reserve Assessment (LSRA) and the Klamath Forest-Wide LSRA. 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).

Basis for the Review: The proposed habitat restoration project includes aspen stand enhancement, commercial and non-commercial conifer thinning in plantations and natural stands, reforestation, prescribed underburning and hand-pile burning. As required by the NWFP S&Gs (C-11), the Klamath National Forest completed the Goosenest LSRA in 1996 and the Klamath Forest-wide LSRA in 1999. Both LSRAs were reviewed by the REO and found consistent under the NWFP S&Gs (C-11). Both LSRAs include treatment criteria for silvicultural projects and habitat restoration activities. Silvicultural activities described in these LSRAs that meet criteria and objectives and that are consistent with the S&Gs of the NWFP are exempt from further project-level REO review. Most of the Butte Mountain Habitat Restoration Project is consistent with these criteria and were not reviewed for consistency with the NWFP. The proposed activities in the Butte Mountain Habitat Restoration Project that are not consistent with criteria in the LSRAs are those that involve removing trees greater than 20' DBH; these activities were reviewed by the LSR Workgroup to determine if they provide late-successional habitat benefits, or if their effect on late-successional associated species is negligible. Standards and Guidelines for Multiple-Use Activities Other Than Silviculture include Habitat Improvement Projects (C-17), and the NWFP section on Ecological Principles for Management of Late-Successional Forests (B-1 to B-9) were used as the basis for determining consistency.

Background and Project Description: The Butte Mountain project was developed in response to the reduced ecological diversity caused by a century of fire exclusion, timber harvest, and other historical vegetation management activities. Tree species diversity is declining where

Shasta red fir and white fir encroach and out-compete quaking aspen. Aspen stands have declined in part due to the lack of natural fire, which stimulates regeneration and inhibits conifer encroachment. This absence of fire threatens high elevation meadow and aspen systems, and some aspen clones are completely dead with no sign of regeneration. Elsewhere in the project area, lodgepole pine and true fir are encroaching into meadow complexes, resulting in a further reduction of meadow habitat.

The aspen stand/meadow enhancement portion of the project will remove encroaching conifers within and surrounding aspen clones. The project is as described in Alternative 2 of the Butte Mountain Late Successional Reserve Habitat Restoration Project Environmental Assessment, but modified to include removal of conifers ≤ 30 " DBH within 75' of aspen clones. Between 75 and 150' of aspen clones, the size of conifer trees to be removed will be ≤ 26 " DBH, except for on north aspects, where removal will only extend out to 100' from aspen clones. All trees greater than the stated diameter above will be retained as either standing live, dead, or down woody debris. This treatment will be applied to 378 acres, with 149 acres to be underburned to encourage natural regeneration. Activity-generated fuels will be piled and burned if the fuels impede aspen regeneration.

Review of the Project: The LSR Work Group held conference calls with members of the project team on June 14, 2011 and June 28, 2013. The Forest provided a description of the proposed project (Alternative 2 of the Butte Mountain Environmental Assessment) for review. The LSR Work Group requested additional information from the Forest to support a consistency finding. The Forest furnished that information on September 30, 2013 (letter from the Forest Supervisor dated September 25, 2013, with attachment, "Request for Review by Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) Late Successional Reserve (LSR) Working Group"). The Work Group based its review on the preferred alternative (alternative 2) of the Butte Mountain EA, modified to remove trees up to 30" DBH within 75 feet of aspen clones.

The interagency LSR Work Group reviewed the revised proposal and concurs with the Forest's conclusion that the treatment in the LSR meets the objectives and S&G for managing LSRs. That is, the removal of trees up to 30" DBH within 75' of aspen clones, and removal of trees up to 26" DBH between 75 and 150' of aspen clones (except for on north aspects, where removal will only extend to 100' from aspen clones) is consistent with the NWFP S&Gs. This conclusion was reached in part for the following reasons:

- Aspen is a valuable habitat on the forest and is a substantial contributor to vegetative and community diversity. A large extent of aspen in the Gooseneck LSR has been lost to grazing, fire exclusion, and subsequent conifer encroachment. Aspen stands have been inventoried and those in the most critical need of restoration have been identified. These areas have also been selected to reduce effects on other late-successional species (e.g., they are outside of most northern spotted owl core areas and modeled optimal habitat).
- Research on successful aspen regeneration suggests that removal of conifer canopy cover helps aspen regenerate successfully. Specifically, the longer canopy cover in aspen stands remains below 25%, the greater the likelihood of successful aspen regeneration. For example, modeling indicates that removal of trees up to 26" DBH will yield a 23% canopy cover, with an effective aspen regeneration period of 5 years, whereas removal of

trees up to 30" DBH will yield a 17% canopy cover with an effective aspen regeneration period of 10 years.

- Down wood and snag amounts will be adequate in the project area post-treatment.

Conclusion: Based on the REO LSR Work Group's review, the REO concurs with the Klamath national Forest's conclusion that restoration of aspen stands as described above is consistent with the NWFP. If you have questions regarding this review, please contact Kim Mellen-McLean at 503-808-2677.



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