



DECISION MEMO

Robinhood Creek Helicopter Log Deck

June, 2008

USDA Forest Service, Mt. Hood National Forest
Hood River Ranger District
Hood River County, Oregon

Flooding in the fall of 2006 caused significant damage to the 3520 and 3520-620 roads, which eliminated access into the lower 2.0 miles of Robinhood Creek. At present, these roads will not be re-opened for vehicle use since it is impossible to predict or contain Newton Creek channel shifts. A large scale stream and riparian restoration project has been planned in the lower 1.7 miles of Robinhood Creek since 2003¹. The Forest Service was able to implement large woody debris (LWD) placement along a 0.3 mile reach in 2007 using logs that had been decked following the Mt. Hood Complex fire. Given the current conditions, there is no way to haul the remaining 425 logs needed to complete this phase of the restoration work by log truck. In order to complete the project, the Forest Service proposes delivering the remaining 425 logs needed to complete this portion of the restoration project using a heavy lift helicopter.

The overall purpose of this project is to facilitate the completion of the Robinhood Creek Large Woody Debris restoration project, which will improve aquatic habitat by placing large woody debris in the stream and adjacent floodplain. In order to meet this purpose and complete the final phase of this project, there is an underlying need to deliver 425 logs by helicopter to a designated decking location along the lower 0.7 miles of Robinhood Creek.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to temporarily store logs at a log deck in Nottingham Campground, and then transport them via helicopter to Robinhood Creek. The area of the proposed project is an open forest, predominantly lodgepole pine 20 to 40 feet tall, intermixed with conifers and hardwoods with an understory of grasses and low shrubs. Logs will be transported via log truck from existing log decks to the proposed log deck site adjacent to the main access road into Nottingham Campground. Approximately 15 trees, mostly lodgepole pine less than 10-inch dbh, would need to be removed to provide space for the log deck. One large cottonwood snag (approximately 26-inch dbh) would need to be felled for safety reasons. Total ground disturbance at the landing site would be less than one acre.

¹ The 2003 Restoration Environmental Assessment, Decision Notice #4 (April 2005) approved the placement Robinhood Large Woody Debris project. The project is designed to reintroduce the missing large wood component back to the ecosystem, accompanied by riparian thinning and planting to improve the health, diversity, and resiliency of the floodplain and riparian area. The Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice are available at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood/projects/>.

A heavy lift helicopter would transport the logs across the East Fork Hood River and place them at designated locations along the lower 0.7 miles of Robinhood Creek. Nottingham Campground and the preferred refueling location, Little John Snopark (across Highway 35), would be closed during implementation, as would the Hood River Meadows parking lot if that is used for a refueling site. Once the logs are placed, the landing would be scarified if needed and planted with conifers. Given the small scale and plans to revegetate, there would be no irreparable or irreversible impact to the vegetation resource from this activity.



Project Design Features / Mitigation Measures

Design Features and Mitigation Measures are used to minimize the environmental impacts of the proposed actions. The following are a required component of the proposed action to address resource management concerns.

- Hand pile cut poles in orderly stacks for camper use as firewood. Pile branches in small burn piles.
- Establish undisturbed vegetative areas next to perennial and intermittent streams.
- Plant 60 percent western larch seedlings and 40 percent lodgepole pine in disturbed area after logs are removed.
- Utilize existing roadbeds within the Riparian Reserves.
- Clean and inspect off road machinery and equipment before entering the Mt. Hood National Forest. In accordance with FSM #2080.44-10, include Engineering Special Project Specification R6/SPS 601.011.
- Revegetate disturbed areas immediately after project completion. Consult the botanist or soils scientist for an erosion control seed mix that is native to the Hood River Ranger District, or a seed mix of non-persistent non-natives.
- Straw mulch should be certified weed-free.
- Post the Nottingham Campground and other impacted recreation sites during closures. Close the campground only during mid-week (Tuesday to Thursday), if possible.

Scoping and Public Involvement

The Forest Service conducted public scoping to identify any concerns with the proposed activity. Robinhood Creek Helicopter Log Deck was listed in the Mt. Hood National Forest quarterly planning newsletter (Schedule of Proposed Actions [SOPA]) in January 2008. No comments were received through that effort. In May 2008, scoping letters were sent to 20 individuals and organizations, including federal and state agencies and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. No comment letters were received.

Decision

I have decided to implement this project as proposed. It is my decision to build the log deck within Upper East Fork Hood River sixth field watershed on the Hood River Ranger District to facilitate the completion of the Robinhood Creek Large Woody Debris restoration project

Reasons for Categorical Exclusion

I find the proposed action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact State because the action fits into Category 31.2-7, described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2007-1, February 15, 2007. This category states: "Modification or maintenance of stream or lake aquatic habitat improvement structures using native materials or normal practices."

I find the proposed action can be categorically excluded because there are no extraordinary circumstances identified by the interdisciplinary team of resource specialists that analyzed this proposal. Resource conditions that were considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation are listed below (A-F). As stated in Section 30.3 of the handbook, “the mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist” (FSH 1909.15).

A. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species designated critical habitat. Biological Evaluations were prepared for sensitive, threatened or endangered wildlife, fish and botanical species. These are available in the project record, located at the Hood River Ranger District in Parkdale, Oregon.

The effects determination for the Northern spotted owl is **no effect**. No spotted owl habitat will be removed and the nearest owl activity center is located approximately 1200 meters to the east which is outside the potential disturbance distance of 800 meters for large helicopters. The proposed project will have **no effect** on Canada lynx because the proposed project does not alter habitat conditions for travel, foraging or denning. The proposed action will have **no impacts** to sensitive wildlife species.

The proposed action will have **no effect** on threatened or endangered anadromous fish and **no impact** on sensitive aquatic species. Project activities, such as tree falling and log decking, will occur far enough from streams that no direct disturbance to the perennial channel will occur. Also, the project will not adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Also, there are no known sites for botanical species that are currently listed Region 6 Sensitive. Consultation is not required for wildlife, fish or botanical species.

- B. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.** Analysis for the effects of the project on floodplains, wetlands and municipal watersheds is included in the Fisheries Biological Evaluation contained in the project record. This project will maintain the function of both wetlands and floodplains. The project does not include any municipal watersheds.
- C. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.** The project is not located in congressionally designated areas.
- D. Inventoried roadless areas.** The project is not located in inventoried roadless areas.
- E. Research natural areas.** The project is not located in research natural areas.
- F. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites / Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.** A complete heritage resource inventory survey was performed

for the proposed project area. The heritage resource survey followed protocol established in the 2004 Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement between the Region 6 USDA Forest Service, the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The inventory survey was negative for the presence of heritage resources. No heritage resources will be affected by the project.

Findings Required by Other Laws

National Forest Management Act: The interdisciplinary team reviewed the applicable Standards and Guidelines of this proposal. The analysis demonstrated that this decision is consistent with the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan, as required by the National Forest Management Act.

Aquatic Conservation Strategy: I find that this project is consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives. The ACS analysis is contained in the project record. I have also considered the existing condition of riparian reserves, including the important physical and biological components of the fifth-field watersheds and the effects to riparian resources. I find that the proposed action is consistent with riparian reserve standards and guidelines and will contribute to maintaining or restoring the fifth-field watersheds over the long term.

Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Laws: The Fisheries Biological Evaluation has determined that this project complies with the Clean Water Act and state water quality laws, which will protect beneficial uses. With design features, mitigation measures, and Best Management Practices, water quality will be maintained through implementation of this proposed action.

Invasive Plants: By considering the prevention of invasive plant introduction, establishment and spread of invasive plants, the planning process is consistent with the Pacific Northwest Invasive Plant Program Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants Record of Decision issued in 2005 and the Site-Specific Invasive Plant Treatments for Mt. Hood National Forest and Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in Oregon, including Forest Plan Amendment #16 Record of Decision issued in 2008. A noxious weed risk assessment was prepared for this project.

Other Laws or Requirements: Findings associated with the Endangered Species Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and National Historic Preservation Act are discussed under the Reasons for Categorical Exclusion section of this document. The proposed action is consistent with all other Federal, State, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment and cultural resources.

Implementation

Implementation of this decision may occur immediately. While this decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215.8(a)(4), I encourage you to discuss this project with me if you have any concerns about implementation.

Contact Person

Detailed records of this environmental analysis are available for public review at the Hood River Ranger District. For further information about this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, please contact Jennie O'Connor at the Hood River Ranger Station, 6780 Highway 35 Parkdale, Oregon 97041; Phone: 541-352-6002 x634; Fax: 541-352-7365; or Email: jmoconnor@fs.fed.us.

SIGNATURE OF DECIDING OFFICER

/s/ Daina L. Bambe

Daina L. Bambe
District Ranger, Hood River Ranger District

June 12, 2008

Date

Enclosures: Vicinity Map

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