

**Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
Noxious Weed Control**

USDA Forest Service

Deschutes National Forest

Deschutes, Jefferson and Klamath Counties, OR

Location

The project areas analyzed in the Deschutes National Forest Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (EA) are located at various sites across the Deschutes National Forest. A variety of control methods (manual, biological control, chemical and prescribed burning) are proposed to treat 166 noxious weed sites encompassing 1,531 acres.

Decision

Based on the analysis documented in the Noxious Weed EA, I have decided to implement Alternative 2, the proposed action. This alternative would treat 98 noxious weed sites on 901 acres with manual treatment, 27 sites on 149 acres with biological agents, 1 site on 5 acres with prescribed burning and 40 sites on 476 acres with herbicides. Implementation depends on available funding, with sites treated in order of priority.

I have also decided to implement an Integrated Weed Management Plan (IWMP), which is included in the EA. Together, the EA and IWMP represent an effort to manage noxious weeds on the Deschutes National Forest in a manner consistent with direction provided in the Regional Final Environmental Impact Statement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation, its Record of Decision, and the associated Mediated Agreement.

Rationale

I prefer this alternative because it provides the best mix of treatments that most effectively increase the rate of gaining control over the spread of noxious weeds, provides the least risk of reduced diversity (over Alternatives 1 and 3) and the least risk of spread of noxious weeds to wilderness or private land.

After the initial scoping period, the Interdisciplinary Team evaluated public and internal Forest Service comments and developed issues. The following two issues aided in the development of the Alternatives: concern about the use of herbicides and concern about the loss of diversity in native plant communities from the continued spread and incidence of noxious weed populations. Alternative 2 proposed the use of herbicides because they can be an effective tool in reducing noxious weed populations to a point at which they can be manually controlled. Sites proposed for herbicide treatment under Alternative 2 were selected because past manual treatments have been ineffective at reducing the rate of spread or eradicating the populations, and there is a high risk of further spread. To reduce potential effects from the use of herbicides, mitigation measures have been identified for the protection of riparian systems, water quality, human health, threatened, endangered and sensitive species and other environmental factors (*EA, Chapter 2, pages 7-11*). These mitigation measures would be adhered to throughout herbicide operations.

Alternative 2 provides the best long-term protection to native plant communities because it provides for using herbicides, which can be the most effective tool for controlling noxious weed species such as spotted and diffuse knapweeds, thereby reducing risks to native plant communities from encroaching noxious weed populations. Using herbicides under this alternative allows high priority infestations to be chemically treated in order to reduce the size of the infestations to a level at which they would then be hand-pulled. Habitat for native plant species is expected to increase in the long-term under this alternative if treatments, including manual follow-up treatments, are consistently applied. In some areas, such as noxious weed sites in interior forest communities where residual native plant communities exist, reducing noxious weeds would provide an opportunity for the weed sites to be colonized by the existing native plants.

Ten additional issues were identified that were used in the development of mitigation measures and the Deschutes National Forest Integrated Weed Management Plan (*see EA, Chapter 1, pages 8-9*). These issues include concerns about the effects of noxious weeds on unique areas, such as Wilderness Areas, concerns about water quality and human health risks from the use of herbicides, and spread of noxious weeds from Forest Service lands to private lands and vice versa. In addition to mitigations, monitoring actions were identified to measure elements such as water quality adjacent to specific sites where herbicide applications would occur and populations of spotted frogs in Big Marsh where prescribed burning would be utilized to control reed canary grass.

Alternatives Considered

The Environmental Assessment describes three alternatives in detail:

- Alternative 1 (No Action) proposes continuing existing management and treatment for control of

noxious weed populations on 44 sites. A categorical exclusion completed in 1994 authorizes the control of noxious weeds with biological or manual control (majority is biological control). This activity would still continue under the No-Action alternative. However, due to increased inventory efforts, reporting processes, awareness of employees and the continued spread of noxious weed population, the Forest now has 235 known noxious weed sites. I did not select this alternative because it provides the greatest risk that noxious weeds would continue to displace native plant species, thereby decreasing vegetative diversity.

- Alternative 2 (the Proposed Alternative) proposes to treat 98 sites on 901 acres with manual treatment, 27 sites on 149 acres with biological agents, 1 site on 5 acres with prescribed burning and 40 sites on 476 acres with chemical herbicides. Mitigation measures have been identified for the protection of riparian systems, water quality, human, health, threatened, endangered and sensitive species and other environmental factors. Alternative 2 contains monitoring elements to measure water quality adjacent to specific sites where herbicide applications would occur and populations of spotted frogs in Big Marsh where prescribed burning would be utilized to control reed canary grass.
- Alternative 3 proposes to treat 1,531 acres of noxious weeds (the same acres treated as Alternative 2) with manual (138 sites on 1,377 acres), prescribed burning (1 site on 5 acres) and biological methods (27 sites on 149 acres). No herbicides are proposed for use with this alternative. I did not select this alternative because it would be extremely difficult to slow the spread of noxious weeds without the use of herbicides on some sites due to the number and size of weed infestations on the Deschutes National Forest

Public Involvement

A scoping letter dated December 10, 1997 was sent to a mailing list of over 1,400 people compiled from each Ranger District on the Deschutes National Forest (Crescent, Sisters, and Bend/Ft. Rock).

Additionally, county records were searched to determine landowners adjacent to sites proposed for biological or chemical control and were included in this mailing. The intent of this scoping letter was to solicit information on issues and concerns about this management proposal. The Proposed Action was also listed in the Schedule of Projects for the Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests and the Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management. Approximately 59 written responses and over 20 phone conversations were received and utilized to formulate mitigation measures and alternatives to the proposed action.

In addition, numerous presentations were made to local community groups such as the Sisters Rotarians on February 10, 1998 and to the Sunriver Environmental Committee on April 27, 1998. A small article on the use of herbicides to control noxious weeds appeared on January 28, 1998 in the Bend Bulletin. An additional article on noxious weeds and their management in Central Oregon appeared on May 3, 1998.

In September 1998, the project's Environmental Assessment was made available for public review. A

public notice was published in the Bend Bulletin on September 16, 1998. The public comment period ran from September 17 to October 16, 1998. On September 14, 1998, copies of the EA were mailed to 78 individuals or organizations who had requested an EA. Letters were also mailed to 1,240 people or organizations informing them of the availability of the EA and asking if they would be interested in reviewing it. In addition, the EA was made available to the public on the Deschutes National Forest Internet web site. During the comment period, nine additional EAs were mailed in response to requests.

A total of 16 comments were received. One individual made oral comments on the EA during a telephone conversation. Written comments were received from 15 parties. There were no comments received via Internet. Details of the comments received and specific responses to the comments is found in the Environmental Assessment, Appendix A.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have determined that implementing Alternative 2 is not a major Federal Action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This determination is based on the site-specific environmental analysis documented in the Environmental Assessment and supporting documents (e.g., the biological evaluation, biological assessment and USFWS biological opinion), which describe direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of this decision. This determination is also made with consideration of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest land and other ownerships within potentially affected areas which could have a cumulatively significant effect on the quality of the human environment.

I have found the context of the environmental impacts of this decision is limited to the local area and is not significant. I have also determined the severity of these impacts is not significant, considering the following factors of intensity:

- The analysis considered both beneficial and adverse effects.
- There are no known adverse impacts to public safety. When considering public notification, posting, and signing requirements, worker restrictions, mitigations, and human health monitoring requirements, most of the potential exposure to workers from spraying herbicides should be reduced and the public should not be exposed at all.
- No unique characteristics of the geographic area such as cultural resources and wetlands will be adversely affected. Implementation of Alternative 2 would require implementations of mitigations developed to ensure that wetlands are not impacted by the use of herbicides.
- The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial.
- The degree of possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain, nor are there unique or unknown risks involved.
- The actions should not set a precedent for future actions which may have significant effects, nor do these actions represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
- These actions are not related to other actions that, when combined, will have significant impacts.
- This project complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, under the terms

of the Programmatic Agreement among the USDA-Forest Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer Regarding Cultural Resources Management on National Forests in the State of Oregon.

- As described in the Environmental Assessment, Biological Evaluation, and USFWS Biological Opinion, activities will have no adverse impact to any threatened or endangered species of plant or animal.
- None of the actions implemented by this decision threatens a violation of the Federal, State, or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. (For example, effects from this action will meet or exceed state water and air quality standards.)

Other Findings

Within the range of the northern spotted owl, actions in the selected alternative are consistent with the management direction, standards, and guidelines in the Deschutes Forest Plan (1990) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (1994). An analysis of noxious weed sites on the Forest within the Northwest Forest Plan area determined that there is no habitat and/or condition for Survey & Manage species in the highly disturbed noxious weed sites. This analysis is located in the project file for this EA. Manual and biological control treatments were determined to have no effect on Survey & Manage species and their habitats. Nine chemical sites and the one prescribed burning site within the NWFP do not contain potential habitat for Survey & Manage species. Treatments prescribed are consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives in the Northwest Forest Plan.

East of the range of the northern spotted owl, this decision is consistent with the Forest plan as amended by the Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment No. 2 and the Inland Native fish Strategy (1995). Actions in the selected alternative are consistent with the management direction provided in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation, its Record of Decision and the associated Mediated Agreement.

The vegetation management activities are consistent with the strategy of prevention in accordance with the Pacific Northwest Region's Vegetation Management EIS (1988) and the mediated agreement (1989). This decision implements the Integrated Weed Management Plan which includes prevention measures.

This decision is consistent with protecting water quality parameters in 1998.303(d) listed streams or water bodies by implementing the above mitigation measure (*see Decision, above and the Water Resource Assessment Report located in the project file for this EA*).

Implementation Date

Treatment of noxious weed sites are scheduled for implementation beginning in the Spring of 1999.

Administrative Review

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any written notice of appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14 and must include the reasons for the appeal. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Reviewing Officer within 45 days of the date legal notice of this decision appears in the Bulletin (Bend, Oregon). File notice of appeal with:

Robert W. Williams
Regional Forester/USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208
Attention: 2080 Appeals

For information contact: Katie Grenier

Forest Botanist
Deschutes National Forest
1645 HWY 20E
Bend, Oregon 97701
Phone: (541)383-5564

Responsible Official:

SALLY COLLINS
Forest Supervisor
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Deschutes National Forest
1645 Highway 20E
Bend, Oregon 97701

Date notice published in the Bend Bulletin: Wednesday, December 16, 1998

[Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests Website](http://www.fs.fed.us/centraloregon/manageinfo/nepa/documents/so/weeds/weedea.html)

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Last Update: 12/17/98

R.A. Jensen