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Forest Service

September 2016

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the:

High Valley Integrated Restoration Project

Emmett Ranger District, Boise National Forest

Located In:

Boise, Valley, and Gem Counties, Idaho

Responsible Agency:

USDA Forest Service, Boise National Forest

Responsible Official:

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

My Decision..... 3

 Decision Authority..... 3

 My Decision..... 3

 Rationale for My Decision..... 9

Brief Summary of Public Involvement 15

 Public and Other Federal, State, County and Tribal Government Involvement 15

 Alternative Development 16

Finding of No Significant Impact 19

 Context..... 19

 Intensity 19

Findings Required by Laws and Regulations 22

 National Forest Management Act 22

 Clean Air Act 26

 Implementation 29

Appendix A: Design Features 31

 Design Features for Alternative B 31

Appendix B: High Valley Integrated Restoration Project EA Errata..... 39

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Introduction

This Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents my decision to implement Alternative B, the proposed action documented in the High Valley Integrated Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (EA), and my finding that Alternative B will *not* significantly affect the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively.

The Boise National Forest (Forest) Land and Resource Management Plan¹ (Forest Plan) identifies the High Valley Project Area as a high-priority area for restoring vegetation and short-term wildlife habitat. The Boise Forest Coalition (BFC), a citizen-led collaborative group, developed specific recommendations for the High Valley Integrated Restoration Project (High Valley Project) based on information in the 2010 Forest Plan. BFC recommendations included restoring forest and ecological health, reducing forest fuel hazards, creating economic opportunities, producing forest products, and maintaining and enhancing fish and wildlife habitats. The Emmett Ranger District used these and other recommendations to inform the development of the four purpose and need statements and the Proposed Action, and on March 29, 2016, the Forest published the High Valley Integrated Restoration Project EA to disclose the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects which would result from the Proposed Action and alternatives of the High Valley Project.

The High Valley Project is located approximately 4.0 miles southwest of Smiths Ferry, Idaho. The project area covers approximately 7,736 acres in the Upper and Lower Little Squaw Creek subwatersheds, surrounding High Valley, Idaho (Figure 1). The Project Area falls within one of two Forest priority landscapes designated by the Governor of Idaho and approved by the Secretary of Agriculture for forests at high risk of insect and disease mortality under Section 8204 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill). The two subwatersheds encompassing the Project Area (Upper and Lower Little Squaw Creek) were identified in the nationwide Watershed Condition Classification to have impaired function.

The High Valley Integrated Restoration Project EA documents the analyses of three alternatives: Alternative A (No Action) and two action alternatives designed to meet the needs identified within the project area (Alternative B [Proposed Action] and Alternative C [Reduced Riparian Conservation Area Treatment Intensity]).

This DN and FONSI hereby incorporates by reference the June 2016 High Valley Integrated Restoration Project EA. The EA contains the analysis and documentation used to support the decision and conclusions in this FONSI and DN.

¹ USDA Forest Service. 2010. Boise National Forest land and resource management plan. Boise, ID: USDA Forest Service, Boise National Forest.

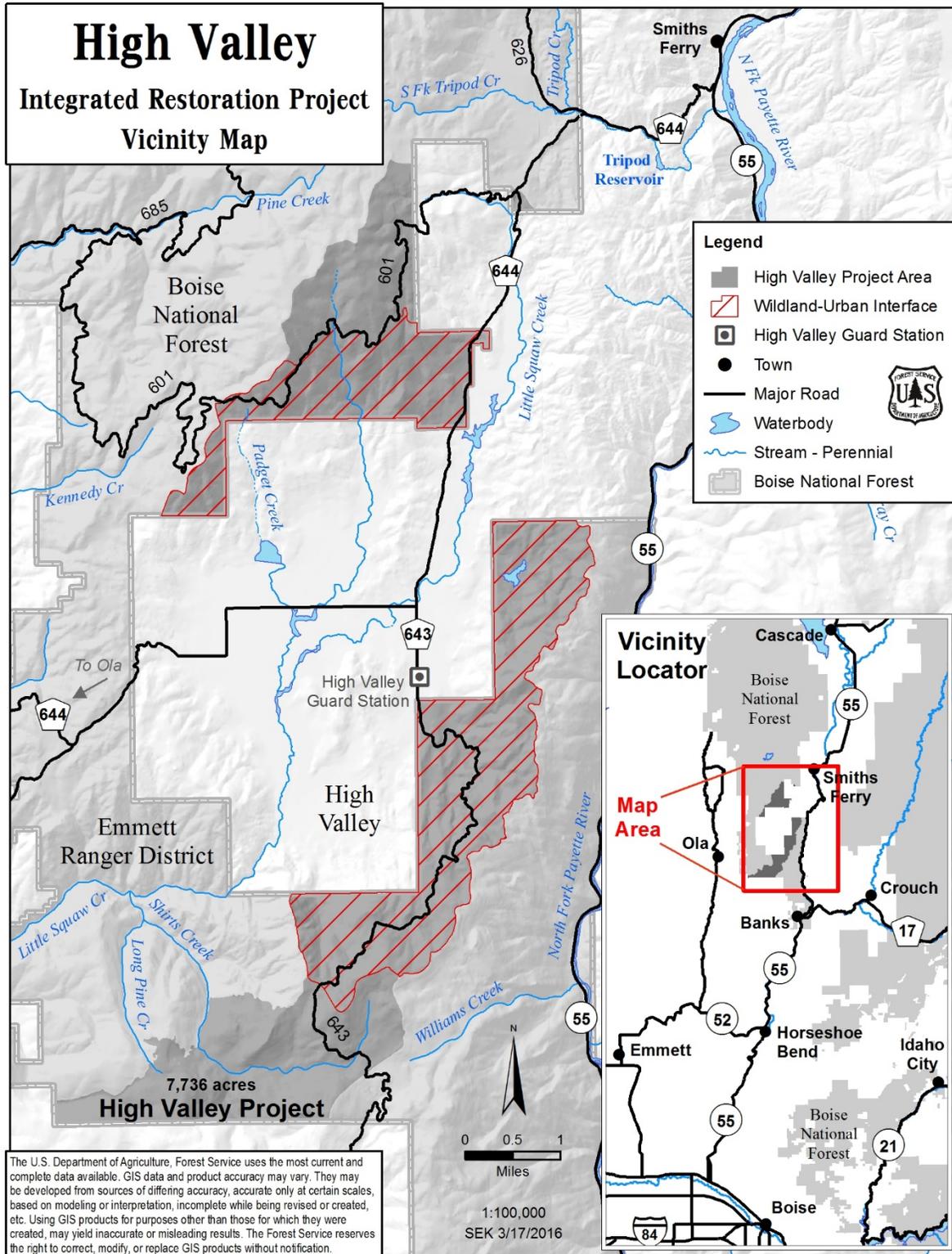


Figure 1. High Valley project area

My Decision

Decision Authority

Pursuant to the delegation by the Secretary of Agriculture at 7 CFR 2.60 and Chief of the Forest Service at FSM 2404.2 and Exhibit 01 at FSM 2404.28, I have been delegated the authority to make this decision.

My Decision

I reviewed the effects analyses disclosed in the EA and considered the public comments received throughout the process, and discussed the project's anticipated effects with the interdisciplinary team.

In addition, the draft DN/FONSI was released for the pre-decisional objection process (36 CFR 218) in June 2016 and one objection was received. The Objection Reviewing Officer (ORO) released responses for the objection on September 1, 2016. The following instructions were included as part of the ORO's response:

1. The text of Purpose 3 was accidentally omitted from page 6 of the Environmental Assessment. It is directly tied to the need for the road work which is proposed to minimize effects to hydrological resources. The text is included in the Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact. Include the Purpose 3 text in the errata sheet for the EA.

I have updated the final DN/FONSI to include Appendix B which is an errata sheet including the Purpose 3 text as directed by the ORO's instructions.

Based on my review, I have decided to implement Alternative B.

To accomplish Purpose 1, *Manage forest structure and species composition to accelerate development of the large tree size class stands dominated by early seral species that would contribute to achievement of Forest Plan desired vegetation and associated wildlife source habitat conditions, increase landscape resiliency to uncharacteristic events and promote fire's ecological role in achieving desired conditions*, my decision will do the following:

- Implement tree thinning restoration activities with wood product removal (i.e., commercial harvest) on approximately 5,729 acres, including 357 acres within Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs). All treatments with wood product removal will be followed by submerchantable tree thinning (i.e., trees <8 inches diameter at breast height [dbh]) and activity fuel abatement treatments as described under Purpose 2 (Figure 2).
- Thin trees without wood product removal on approximately 1,013 acres, including 684 acres within RCAs (Figure 2)
- Conduct restoration prescribed fire treatment on roughly 4,098 acres (Figure 2)
- Conduct the following road maintenance, construction, reconstruction, and decommissioning activities to facilitate commercial timber harvest (Figure 3):

- Construct 0.4 miles of road on existing unauthorized² routes
- Reconstruct (realign) 2.6 miles of road on new prism and 1.8 miles of road on existing prism
- Construct 5.6 miles of temporary roads on new prism and 3.0 miles on existing unauthorized routes
- Conduct aggregate surface road maintenance by replacing existing aggregate surface on 9.0 miles and placing spot aggregate on 5.3 miles for targeted sediment reduction
- Conduct 64.5 miles of road maintenance activities to facilitate commercial sawlog removal and to address current and future sediment production throughout the project area

To accomplish Purpose 2, *Reduce the fuels hazard and risk of crown fire spread, focusing on more intense surface fuel treatments within the wildland-urban interface*, my decision will do the following:

- Mitigate activity fuels associated with tree thinning treatments on 6,743 acres using one or a combination of the following activities: whole tree yard, lop and scatter, mechanical pile and burn, hand-pile and burn, mechanical jackpot burn, and hand pile jackpot burn (Figure 2).
- Implement fuel abatement prescribed fire treatments on 5,213 acres (Table 1)
- Construct 0.1 miles of road to provide access to State Endowment Lands to help facilitate wildfire hazard reduction efforts within the wildland-urban interface (WUI). A cost-share and easement will be established for the newly constructed road, and National Forest System (NFS) road 606 will be converted from Maintenance Level (ML) 1 to ML 2 closed year-round (Table 1)

To accomplish Purpose 3, *Improve watershed function through restoration of aquatic resources and road-related impacts to wildlife, fish, soil, and water resources while providing for the transportation system necessary to meet short and long-term management needs*, my decision will do the following:

- Decommission 8.5 miles of NFS roads and 18.8 miles of unauthorized routes, reducing road density by 0.3 miles per square mile (mi/mi²) across the project area and 1.9 mi/mi² within RCAs (Table 1)

² Unauthorized can be used interchangeably with unclassified, as defined in the 2010 Forest Plan. Unauthorized or unclassified roads are roads on NFS lands which are not managed as part of the Forest transportation system, such as unplanned roads, abandoned travelways, and off-road vehicle tracks that have not been designated and managed as trails. Unclassified roads also include roads which were once under permit or other authorization and were not decommissioned upon termination of the authorization (36 CFR 212.1).

- Restore the wetland area in the Little Squaw Creek drainage by decommissioning NFS road 643G, realigning NFS road 643S, and implementing a wetland restoration strategy, which includes building a buck and pole fence livestock enclosure for up to 25 acres, redesigning a culvert, and establishing habitat suitable for beaver reintroduction. Though actions associated with road maintenance, surfacing, and realignment were addressed under Purpose 1, these actions will contribute to improving the quality of soil, water, and wildlife habitat in this location (Table 1).

To accomplish Purpose 4, *Utilize wood products resulting from restoration and fuel reduction treatments to support local and regional economies and offset the cost of project implementation*, my decision will do the following:

- Provide an estimated 31.7 MMBF (60,872 CCF) of wood products (Table 1)
- Generate an estimated potential net value (PNV) of \$2,949,000 in wood products, which will be used to offset the estimated \$2,518,700 cost to implement vegetation, fuels, and other watershed restoration treatments
- Create an estimated 726 private sector jobs which will support the local and/or regional economies

Associated project design features included in my decision are identified in Appendix A.

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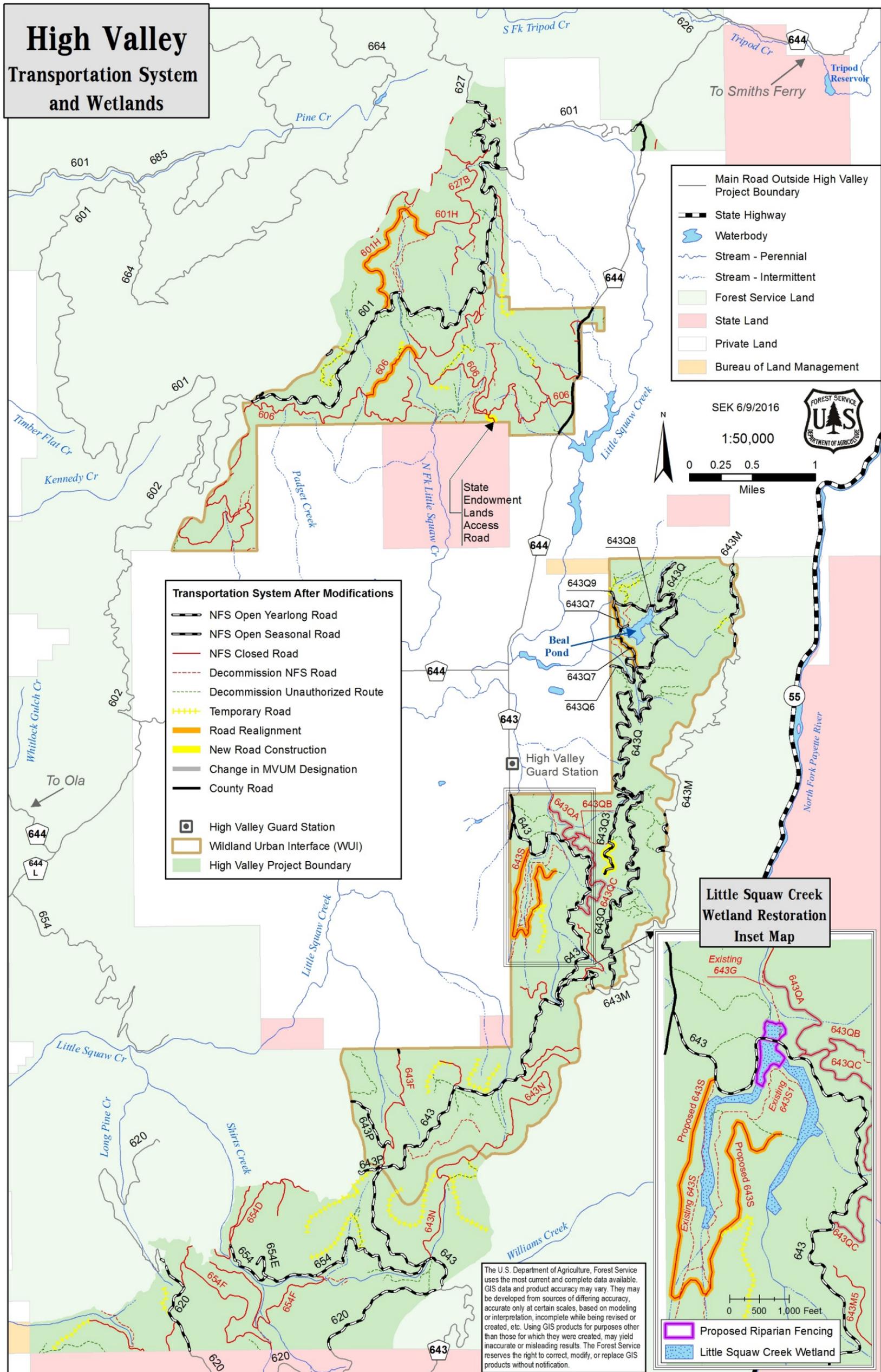


Figure 3. Modifications to the transportation system and wetlands to be completed under my decision within the High Valley Integrated Restoration Project area.

Rationale for My Decision

Following is the rationale for my decision to select the proposed action and adopt the Project as written. It reflects how I have considered each question in the “What Decisions are to be Made” section of the EA, including how the alternative addresses issues generated from public comments received during the 30-day notice and comment period.

I believe Alternative B provides the best range of benefits to address the purpose and need for this project (EA, “Why Has the Project Been Proposed [Purpose and Need]” section), while meeting the underlying assumptions for treatment recommendations identified by the BFC. Because opinions vary, I realize none of the alternatives fully satisfy everyone’s interests. However, I believe Alternative B provides the best opportunity to manage forest structure and increase landscape resiliency to uncharacteristic disturbance events, reduce the fuels hazard and risk of crown fire spread within the wildland-urban interface, improve watershed function through restoration of aquatic resources and road-related effects, and to use wood products from restoration and fuels reduction treatments to support local and regional economies.

How well does the alternative meet the purpose and need described in this Environmental Assessment?

Compared to the other alternatives, Alternative B best meets the four purposes of the project as depicted in Table 1. For Purpose 1, implementing my decision (Alternative B) increases the percent species composition of ponderosa pine and forested stand acres in the large tree size class the most, treats more acres to manage conifer succession within aspen clones, restores more acres of ponderosa pine forest habitat for focal bird species, treats more acres to promote ecological processes using prescribed fire, and most greatly reduces the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire within the RCAs. Though similar to Alternative C for Purposes 2 and 3, my decision addresses Purpose 4 to a greater extent, with an outcome of 61,725 CCF of wood products, which will generate more revenues to support implementation of restoration activities and support more jobs in the local and regional economies.

Table 1. Comparison of alternatives by how well they address the purpose and need of the High Valley Project following implementation of all proposed treatments

Need	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C
Purpose 1			
<u>Need 1:</u> Increase the proportion of ponderosa pine in PVGs 2, 5, and 6 to Forest Plan desired conditions. Measure: Percent species composition of ponderosa pine	30%	42%	39%
<u>Need 2:</u> Change structure of small and medium tree size class stands in all PVGs to accelerate progression towards the large tree size class and old forest habitat dominated by early seral species such as ponderosa pine. Measure: Percent of forested stand acres in the large tree size class with the desired species composition of ponderosa pine ^a .	5% (363 acres)	14% (1,034 acres)	13% (1,001 acres)
<u>Need 3:</u> Reduce densities in plantations and create a more natural grouping of irregularly spaced tree clumps. Measure: Acres of plantation that would receive thinning treatment.	0 acres	868 acres	Same as Alt B
<u>Need 4:</u> Remove conifer encroachment to allow for desirable meadow function and species diversity. Measure: Acres of potential meadow restoration	0 acres	234 acres	Same as Alt B
<u>Need 5:</u> Manage conifer succession within aspen clones to improve the extent and diversity of aspen within the Project Area. Measure: Percent of forested acres that would receive thinning and/or burning treatment.	0 acres	97% (7,234 acres)	96% (7,216 acres) ^b
<u>Need 6:</u> Restore ponderosa pine forest habitat for focal bird species, such as the white-headed woodpecker. Measure: Percent of suitable habitat for white-headed woodpecker.	<1% (20 acres)	34% (2,608 acres)	32% (2,457 acres)
<u>Need 7:</u> Manage vegetation in riparian conservation areas (RCAs) to reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire and restore ecological functions. Measure: Wildfire hazard rating within RCAs	Very High	Moderate	High
<u>Need 8:</u> Introduce fire disturbance within the Project Area to promote ecological processes. Measure: Percent of acres that would be treated with a restoration prescribed burn.	0% (0 acres)	53% (4,098 acres)	48% (3,681 acres)
Purpose 2			
<u>Need 1:</u> Reduce the wildfire hazard Measure: Wildfire hazard rating for the Project Area	Very High	Moderate	Same as Alt B
<u>Need 2:</u> Address request by the Idaho Department of Lands for long-term management access to State Endowment Lands. Measure: Access provided or not	No	Yes	Same as Alt B

Need	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C
Purpose 3			
<u>Need 1:</u> Address undesirable impacts to soil and water quality and restore hydrologic function and riparian habitat within the beaver pond wetland area of Little Squaw Creek. Measure: Implement the Little Squaw Creek wetland restoration strategy.	No	Yes	Same as Alt B
<u>Need 2:</u> Reduce degradation resulting from road related impacts to improve the quality of soil, water, fish and wildlife habitat. Measure: Road density within RCAs	7.9 mi/mi ²	6.0 mi/mi ²	Same as Alt B
Purpose 4			
<u>Need 1:</u> Provide a predictable and recurring supply of wood products from lands identified as suitable for timber management. Measure: Estimated total harvest volume	None	61,725 CCF	58,075 CCF

^aDesired species composition of ponderosa pine is 80% for the nonlethal fire regime and 60% for the mixed1 fire regime.

^bThe difference between thinning and burning treatments is 18 acres of prescribed burn only treatment in RCA Zone 2 (30–75 feet).

How well does the alternative progress the Project Area toward the desired conditions which will contribute to accomplishing Forest Plan objectives?

My decision will progress the project area toward Forest Plan desired conditions and contribute to accomplishing Forest Plan objectives related to restoration and maintenance of priority forested acres, restoration of forested stands in the Upper and Lower Little Squaw Creek subwatersheds, fire management in the WUI, watershed function improvement, transportation system management, and removal of wood products as an outcome of forest maintenance and restoration treatments on acres in the suited timber base as noted below.

Restoration and Maintenance of Priority Forested Acres

Forest Plan Objective 1624 identifies a need to manage vegetation in riparian areas to reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire.

- Removing trees felled within the RCA is an important component of addressing this need because departed vegetative conditions and associated risks to riparian-upland transition zones would not be addressed through non-commercial mechanical treatment alone. By establishing a trend toward desired vegetation conditions, riparian-upland transition zones are expected to be more resilient when subjected to natural disturbance processes. This resiliency to disturbance processes is important for maintaining a trend toward properly functioning riparian and ecological processes, such as controlling long-term sediment, properly shading streams, and maintaining a sufficient amount of recruitable large woody debris.

Forest Plan Objective 1672 identifies a need to focus source habitat restoration activities within the Little Squaw Creek watershed in areas field-verified to have good-to-excellent conditions for restoring old forest pine stands. A primary objective of treatment would be to expand the overall patch size of old forest habitat.

- A primary objective of treatments under my decision will be to expand the overall patch size of old forest. Silvicultural prescriptions to be implemented have been designed to retain and recruit development of early seral (e.g., ponderosa pine) large diameter trees to enhance and promote wildlife habitat emphasized by the wildlife conservation strategy (WCS) in the 2010 Forest Plan. Vegetation treatments to be implemented will create forested stands emulating stands experiencing frequent low- or mixed-severity fire disturbances and developing into old forest habitat, which has been described as uneven-aged stands composed of relatively small, even-aged groups or patches interspersed with herbaceous openings and canopy gaps. Legacy and legacy-like trees will be protected with Design Feature VM-2; Design Feature VM-1 will ensure stands currently meeting the definition of large tree size class retain the minimum number of large trees (≥ 20 inches dbh) necessary to retain their large tree size class condition.

Forest Plan Objective 1676 further clarifies that occupied white-headed woodpecker source habitat within the Little Squaw Creek watershed that was identified during project planning for vegetative management projects should be maintained, and adjacent patches should be developed to facilitate movement and dispersal of individuals.

- Supporting assessments pertaining to implementation of my decision show a measurable improvement of white-headed woodpecker source habitat, including the maintenance of existing white-headed woodpecker source habitat and expansion into adjacent patches to support movement and dispersal of individuals.

Forest Plan Objective 1647 identifies a need to manage the landscape to reduce the hazard from uncharacteristic wildfire and insect epidemics, with a primary emphasis on forestland supporting ponderosa pine.

- Following the completion of all fuel abatement activities in 2025, the wildfire hazard would be at its lowest level for the modeling horizon, indicating that implementing my decision will result in the greatest hazard reduction. The difference between action alternatives is further expanded by 2035, following the restoration burn, with greatest improvement under my decision when compared to other alternatives considered. The increased benefit being attributed to thinning treatments within RCAs and direct ignition in RCAs compared to Alternative C.
- Also, following vegetative and fuel abatement treatments under my decision, conditions would trend towards a low wildfire hazard in 2024, reflecting a more manageable potential fire behavior *condition* consistent with Forest Plan Objective 1647. Implementing my decision will reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire behavior within the analysis area by reducing overstory density, reducing ladder fuels, and treating activity fuels; thereby limiting the fire's ability to transition from a surface fire to a crown fire and perpetuate through the crowns.

Fire Management and the Wildland-urban Interface

Forest Plan Objective 1655 states, *“Initiate prescribed fire and mechanical treatments within wildland-urban interface areas to reduce fuels and wildfire hazards. Coordinate with local and tribal governments, agencies, and landowners in the development of County Wildfire Protection Plans that identify and prioritize hazardous fuels treatments within wildland-urban interface to manage fuel loadings to reduce wildfire hazards.”*

- The wildfire hazard rating will be reduced substantially for all years within the WUI following implementation of my decision compared to Alternative A, lowering the risk of sustained crown fire and reducing the potential for erratic fire behavior and undesirable fire effects (e.g., size, intensity, and severity). As a result, if a wildfire initiated within the Project Area, greater flexibility in the use of suppression tactics would be available compared to Alternative A. Breaking up fuel continuity across the landscape will increase the likelihood, that if a crown fire were to initiate, it would exhibit passive crown fire behavior and return to a surface fire.

Watershed Function Improvement

The Upper and Lower Little Squaw Creek subwatersheds have impaired function. The functioning at risk classification is largely due to impaired habitat conditions because large woody debris is lacking, road densities are very high, and road maintenance is needed. The following Forest Plan objectives are relevant to this Proposed Action:

Forest Plan Objective 1610 identifies a need to locate subwatersheds for restoration to remove major sources of management-related fine sediment, and **Forest Plan Objective 1617** identifies a need to reduce sediment from roads in the Little Squaw Creek drainage by improving maintenance and surfacing as needed.

- Changes in the transportation system resulting under my decision represent the largest overall contributions and reductions in sediment delivery over the life of the project. Temporary increases in sediment delivery are attributed to road decommissioning, temporary road construction, road reconstruction, and road realignment. Decreases in sediment delivery in the short and long term are attributed to road decommissioning, road realignment, and aggregate surfacing. Design Features RM-1, RM-3, RM-5, SW-5, and SW-9 will assist in controlling sediment during project implementation.

Forest Plan Objective 1618 identifies a need to repair or restore the beaver pond area in the Little Squaw Creek drainage.

- Wetland restoration activities on 25 acres under my decision will result from temporarily excluding cattle and decommissioning roads within the wetland and adjacent RCA zones. These restoration activities will create conditions allowing riparian vegetation to flourish and develop habitat components needed by beaver. By increasing the water table with culvert modifications on NFS road 643 and allowing for woody vegetation establishment with cattle exclusion, the wetland will be more attractive to beaver, potentially allowing for the successful reintroduction of beaver, a necessary tool to restore the full ecological process and function of the wetland complex.

Transportation System Management

The Forest Plan identifies objectives to cooperate with other agencies regarding transportation management to attain resource goals (FROB02) and include the public in developing a shared transportation system serving the needs of all parties to the extent possible (FROB05). Where opportunities exist to reduce road-related degradation, mitigations such as relocation, obliteration, closure, and changes in management strategy, alteration, or discontinuance should be considered (FRGU11), especially within RCAs (FRGU05). My decision reflects the coordination of transportation needs with other agencies, which has resulted in reducing degradation from road-related impacts as follows:

- Inclusion of 0.1 miles of new road construction will facilitate cooperation between the Idaho Department Lands and Forest Service and result in a shared transportation system serving the needs of multiple parties to achieve fuels reduction and vegetation management within the WUI, consistent with Forest Plan Objectives FROB02 and FROB05.
- Transportation management actions under my decision will not decommission roads or routes affecting other federal, State, or County agencies, nor will any cost-share roads be affected. Tribal governments have been consulted and the public has been involved in project development, and the proposed actions are based on recommendations provided by the BFC and the Forest-wide TAP and associated addendums. The High Valley Project will not decommission nor close any routes identified by either a County or State as an RS2477 route. Transportation management actions under my decision include the following:
 - Approximately 8.5 miles of authorized NFS roads will be decommissioned under my decision, and another 18.8 miles of unauthorized or unclassified routes will be decommissioned, thus reducing road density by 2.0 mi/mi² across the project area. Additionally, the 8.6 miles of temporary roads constructed to facilitate vegetation management activities will be decommissioned following implementation.
 - Within RCAs in the Project Area, current road density is 7.87 mi/mi². My decision will reduce RCA road density within the project area to 6.00 mi/mi². About 3.92 miles of road will be decommissioned within RCAs. About 4.4 miles of road will be realigned for the primary purpose of reducing NFS road miles within the RCAs. As a result, the RCA road miles within RCA Zones 1, 2, and 3 will decrease from 11.8 miles to about 8.6 miles through decommissioning.

Removal of Wood Products as an Outcome of Forest Maintenance and Restoration Treatments on Acres in the Suited Timber Base

My decision generates wood products contributing to Forest Plan Objective 1646 to manage suited timberlands for a sustained yield and even flow of forest products, while reducing sediment delivery and progressing toward desired vegetation conditions. Wood products and work associated with implementing restoration activities under my decision help sustain economies in the local communities of Boise, Gem, and Valley counties and adjacent areas by creating jobs. The total private sector estimated jobs created and supported is estimated to be 726.

How well does the alternative address the issues generated from comments received from interested parties?

My decision addresses the major issues pertaining to the High Valley Project identified during scoping and the 30-day notice and comment period. For the first issue regarding effects of commercial removal within RCAs, my decision will maintain the existing functionality of the watershed condition indicators and sensitive riparian soils due to proposed action design features, such as not permitting heavy mechanical equipment within the RCA and no treatment within one site potential tree height (SPTH) from each stream channel (EA Chapter 3, “Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources” section).

For the second issue regarding effects of road activities on water quality, road realignment will reduce sediment delivery to streams and reduce riparian impacts in the short term to long term. No new road construction will occur within RCAs. Temporary road construction will have a temporary to short-term immeasurable negative effect to water quality on riparian habitat at two intermittent stream crossings. After completing project-related activities, these roads will be recontoured and riparian habitat will be restored in the long term.

Does the alternative mitigate potential adverse effects identified in the analysis as needed to support a finding of non-significant impacts?

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) did not identify any significant adverse effects associated with implementing my decision as documented in Chapter 3 of the EA. The specific direct, indirect, and cumulative effects will be within standards set forth by the Forest Plan and consistent with applicable environmental laws (EA Chapter 3). The analysis supports a FONSI as detailed below in the “Finding of No Significant Impact” section.

Brief Summary of Public Involvement

Public and Other Federal, State, County and Tribal Government Involvement

The scoping period to gather information on the Proposed Action was initiated on February 27, 2015. During the scoping phase of this project, the Forest Service consulted with individuals and federal, State, tribal, and local agencies.

Tribal consultation was completed according to the consultation protocols established with each tribe. The Nez Perce Tribe and Shoshone Bannock Tribes were notified of this project in writing on February 24, 2015. The Shoshone Paiute Tribe was consulted during the Wings and Roots meeting on March 12, 2015. The tribal notification and/or consultation processes did not result in the identification of any potential impacts to treaty rights, treaty resources, or other unextinguished tribal rights and interests.

In response to scoping efforts, 9 interested parties provided comments on a variety of interests, including potential impacts on old forest habitat, road and trail networks, wildfire susceptibility, water quality, fisheries, treatments in RCAs, silvicultural prescriptions, wildlife habitat, economics of treatment options, and availability of wood products. The project record contains all written comments received and discloses how the IDT addressed those concerns with

supporting resource analyses which they used to refine the Proposed Action and develop the alternatives documented in the EA. During the analysis process, Agency representatives responded to comments, met informally with interested parties to discuss the project when requested, and provided the BFC with updates at BFC scheduled meetings when requested.

In March 2016, the Emmett Ranger District released the EA for 30-day notice and comment. The EA was posted on the Forest website (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45790>), with a link e-mailed to 255 recipients and hardcopies mailed to 30 organizations, individuals, and agencies. This project has been listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since January 2015.

In response to these efforts, 6 interested parties provided comments on a variety of concerns. The majority of the comment letters showed support for the project. Some comment topics included structural stage/old forest, use of the Good Neighbor Authority, shade in RCAs, project consistency with IDAPA regulations, and potential ecological harm caused by logging road construction. The project record contains the full text of the written comments received, and the Agency's response to those comments. For those interested in reading comment responses, responses to comments received during the 30-day notice and comment period are posted on the project website (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45790>).

I utilized comments raised by the public to inform my decision. In most cases, concerns were addressed in updates to the analysis and disclosure of effects in Chapter 3 or in the project record in the response to comments. In response to a comment to consider a new alternative which did not include construction or reconstruction of NFS and temporary roads, I directed the IDT to develop an additional alternative described in the "Brief Summary of Public Involvement: Alternative Development" section below.

Contact, review, and involvement with other federal and State agencies indicates no major conflicts between the activities to be implemented under my decision and the goals and objectives of other federal, State, or local governmental entities. Chapter 4 of the EA summarizes the involvement that has occurred with other federal and State agencies and local governments.

Alternative Development

Issues identified in Chapter 2 of the EA and other concerns raised were used to generate a preliminary set of alternatives, which were divided into "alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail" and "alternatives analyzed in detail." Both sets of alternatives are included in the reasonable range of alternatives I considered.

Alternatives meeting the purpose and need and addressing the issues I identified were considered for detailed study. However, not all alternatives meeting these criteria were studied in detail, as the number would have been prohibitively large. Instead, I identified those alternatives meeting the criteria and creating a reasonable range of outputs, costs, management requirements, and effects.

Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

Three alternatives are identified in Chapter 2 of the EA that I considered and eliminated from detailed study. Chapter 2 of the EA provides a detailed summary of these alternatives and

discussions as to why they were not considered in detail. Below is a brief summary of what the three alternatives are and why they were eliminated.

Alternative 1—Maximize Economic Return and Increase Restoration Opportunities Using Additional Timber Harvest

This alternative was dropped from further consideration because it did not meet Purposes 1, 2, or 3 because the alternative treatment methods designed to maximize economic return would not achieve the desired uneven-aged conditions within the project area, could result in increased shrub response leading to a potential increase in the wildfire hazard, and would provide less flexibility for reducing small-to-medium tree densities and adjusting species composition. Furthermore, commercial removal closer to the stream channel would not ensure a balance between vegetation and watershed/aquatic resource needs and may compromise the High Valley Project's capability to meet Idaho Forest Practices Act requirements (EA Chapter 2, p. 16-18).

Alternative 2—Protect Large Trees and Expand Overall Patch Size of Old Forest Habitat by Retaining All Trees Greater than 18 Inches Diameter at Breast Height

A study conducted in vegetation types similar to the High Valley Project area on the Forest provides site-specific information about the tradeoffs associated with the use of diameter limits³. This report compared the effects of a 20-inch dbh limit with the Forest's site-specific silvicultural prescriptions for achieving the desired conditions identified in the 2010 Forest Plan. Results indicated the 20-inch dbh limit would eliminate flexibility for developing openings for ponderosa pine regeneration, would not achieve or would compromise density reduction objectives, would result in a simplified stand structure with less diverse species composition in the understory, and would have implications for the long-term retention of live large ponderosa pine. Therefore, this alternative was dropped from further consideration because it would not have adequately met Purposes 1 and 2 of the High Valley Project (EA Chapter 2, p. 18-19).

Alternative 3—No New National Forest System Roads or Temporary Road Construction or Reconstruction

Detailed consideration of this alternative was not warranted or necessary to support the conclusion that a reasonable range of alternatives was considered, consistent with regulations at 40 CFR 1502.14. The effects resulting from considering such an alternative would fall within the range of effects of the alternatives already assessed in detail and, therefore, would not measurably contribute to further defining issues or providing any additional clarity to resource effects from what was already disclosed for the current set of alternatives. The IDT determined this alternative would not accomplish the project purpose and need as well as the current action alternatives, including accomplishing Purpose 3: improve watershed function through restoration of aquatic resources and road-related impacts to wildlife, fish, soil, and water resources while providing for the transportation system necessary to meet short and long-term management needs (EA Chapter 2, p. 19-21).

³ Forest Service. 2015. Legacy tree guide for the Boise National Forest, Version 1.5. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Boise National Forest, Boise, ID.

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

Three alternatives were considered in detail.

Alternative A—No Action

The No Action Alternative, Alternative A, would not implement the activities described in the Proposed Action, thus providing a baseline against which impacts of the various action alternatives could be measured and compared (EA Chapter 2, p. 16).

Under Alternative A, the High Valley Project would not be implemented, although all other ongoing activities, such as recreational activities, public fuelwood gathering, livestock grazing, and motorized travel, would continue. Current fire management strategies in the analysis area would be expected to continue. Existing conditions would continue, including hazardous fuel conditions, the existing road and trail network of both NFS and unauthorized routes, and degraded watershed conditions. Opportunities would be lost for wildlife habitat improvement and vegetation conditions with associated wildfire hazards would continue to trend away from desired conditions.

I did not select this alternative because it did not meet the purpose and need for this project. Specifically, this alternative would not do the following:

- Manage forest structure and species composition to accelerate development of large tree size class stands dominated by early seral tree species (e.g., ponderosa pine [*Pinus ponderosa*]) that would contribute to achieving Forest Plan desired vegetation and associated wildlife source habitat conditions or increase landscape resiliency to uncharacteristic disturbance events and promote fire's ecological role in achieving desired conditions; refer to EA Chapter 3 "Vegetation," "Fire and Fuels," and "Wildlife" sections.
- Reduce the fuels hazard and risk of crown fire spread, focusing more intense surface fuel treatments within the WUI; refer to EA Chapter 3, "Fire and Fuels" section.
- Improve watershed function through restoration of aquatic resources and road-related impacts to wildlife, fish, soil, and water resources while providing for the transportation system necessary to meet short and long-term management needs; refer to EA Chapter 3, "Wildlife;" "Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources;" "Fish Habitat;" and "Transportation" sections.
- Utilize wood products resulting from restoration and fuel reduction treatments to support local and regional economies and offset the cost of project implementation; refer to EA Chapter 3, "Economics" section.

Alternative B—Proposed Action

I selected Alternative B to implement as my decision; it is described in detail above. Refer to the "Rationale for My Decision" section above for greater detail as to why I selected this alternative.

Alternative C—Reduced Riparian Conservation Area Treatment Intensity

Alternative C was developed in response to public comments to limit vegetation removal within RCAs to non-commercial opportunities to account for potential effects of commercial treatment

on watershed function, such as stream shade; contribution of large wood; and negative impacts to sensitive riparian soils, water quality, and riparian habitat. This alternative is identical to Alternative B (Proposed Action), with the exception of treatments in the RCAs and the associated design features (Appendix A in the EA). In RCAs, less intensive fuel treatment methods would be used and no commercial timber harvest would occur. This alternative is consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines and complies with all laws, regulations, and policies (EA Chapter 2, p. 21-23).

I did not select Alternative C because Alternative C does not meet the purpose and need of the project as well as Alternative B, my decision. In addition, the slight difference in addressing Issue #1 compared to implementing my decision did not offset the loss of benefits in meeting the purpose and need compared to Alternative B. Refer to the “Comparison of Alternatives” section of Chapter 2 of the EA for more detail concerning the differences between Alternative C and my decision, Alternative B.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined this decision is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to Section 102 (2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) is not required. This determination is based on the following context and intensity factors as outlined in 40 CFR 1508.27(a) and (b), respectively.

Context

The selected alternative will be limited in geographic application [40 CFR 1508.27(a)].

Activities associated with my decision will be confined within the 7,736-acre project area described in the EA, which is less than 0.4% of the 2,203,703 Boise National Forest acres, and will be limited to those actions disclosed in that document and its appendices. Further, this action will be consistent with the management area prescriptions and Forest Plan standards and guidelines specified for the area (EA Chapters 1, 2, and 3).

Intensity

1. My decision will not result in any significant beneficial or adverse effects [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)].

The IDT did not identify any significant adverse effects associated with implementing Alternative B as documented in Chapter 3 of the EA. While the overall effect of implementing Alternative B is expected to be beneficial, the specific direct, indirect, and cumulative effects will be within standards set forth by the Forest Plan and consistent with applicable environmental laws (EA Chapter 3).

2. The selected alternative will not result in substantive effects on public health or safety [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)].

My decision will reduce the wildfire hazard rating within the WUI, lowering the risk of sustained crown fire and reducing the potential for erratic fire behavior, undesirable fire effects, and the threat to structures (EA Chapter 3, “Fire and Fuels”).

For the air quality resource, proposed fuel treatment activities, including prescribed underburning and burning of landing piles, hand piles, and machine piles, will comply with National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for PM_{2.5}, including within all sensitive areas, such as High Valley, Smiths Ferry, and Ola. All burning will comply with the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group Smoke Management Plan and is designed to meet the requirements of the Idaho Administrative Procedures Act (IDAPA), State administrative rule for air quality and the policies of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires (Interim Policy) (EA Chapter 3).

Design features associated with my decision (EA Appendix A) will minimize potential impacts on public health and safety during and after implementation, including safety on roads and trails open to public access. Specifically, Design Features RR-1, VM-5, and VM-6 have been developed to mitigate conflicts between public use and project-related implementation activities (EA Chapter 3 and Appendix A).

3. My decision will not result in any significant effects on any unique characteristics of the geographic area, historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)].

No unique characteristics of the geographic area will be adversely affected by implementing Alternative B. No roadless or wilderness areas, park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or research natural areas exist within the project area (Forest Plan Consistency Table, project record). The analysis documented in the EA discloses that Alternative B, my decision, will not result in any significant effects on cultural or historic resources or wetlands (EA Chapter 3). Restoring the Little Squaw Creek wetland will increase habitat quality and quantity within the 25-acre wetland by creating water inlets and pool habitat where emergent vegetation could re-establish and will improve temperature conditions on the small tributary to Little Squaw Creek (EA Chapter 3, “Wildlife” and “Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources” sections).

4. The selected alternative will not result in any effects that are likely to be highly controversial [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)].

Controversy in this context refers to situations where substantial dispute as to the size, nature, or effect of the federal action exists, rather than opposition to its implementation. The scientific basis for the analysis is contained in the project record and summarized in the EA. Standard analysis techniques and models were used and limitations of those models were summarized in the EA where pertinent, with greater detail included in resource technical reports contained in the project record. Literature supporting the use of these models, as used in this analysis, is contained in the project record.

As disclosed in Chapter 1, the analysis presented in the EA reflects management direction, findings, and conclusions issued in the 2010 Forest Plan to integrate a wildlife conservation strategy (WCS) for the forested biological community. This Forest Plan WCS complements the Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (Idaho CWCS) by building on the broad-scale conservation needs identified in the Idaho CWCS for the Forest area and represents a thorough review and consideration of the best available science applicable to management of forested landscape on the Forest. Therefore, I have concluded that, while opposition to aspects of this project may exist, the effects of this action are not highly controversial.

5. The effects associated with the selected alternative will not result in any highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)].

The environmental analysis, including the EA, resource technical reports, Biological Assessments, and Biological Evaluations, determined the selected alternative will not involve any highly uncertain or unknown risks (EA Chapter 3 and resource technical reports and Biological Assessments and Evaluations contained in the project record). Management activities associated with my decision are typical of those successfully implemented in the past on NFS lands.

6. My decision does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)].

My decision is consistent with direction found in the 2010 Forest Plan (EA Chapter 3 and Forest Plan Consistency Table in the project record). Implementing my decision will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. The analysis documented in the EA discloses that my decision will not result in any significant short-term, long-term, or cumulative effects [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)].

Chapter 3 of the EA discloses that Alternative B, my decision, will not result in any known significant temporary, short-term, long-term, or cumulative effects to resources assessed (EA Chapter 3).

8. My decision will not adversely affect sites or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)].

Activities proposed under Alternative B, including prescribed fire, are expected to have *No Adverse Effect* on historic properties in the project area. Applying project Design Features CR-1 and CR-2 will ensure known and newly discovered historic properties and cultural sites be protected during implementation (EA Chapter 3). The State Historic Preservation Office has reviewed the resource report and concurred on January 27, 2016, with the no adverse effects determination.

9. My decision will not adversely affect threatened or endangered species or their habitats [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)].

The Endangered Species Act (ESA; 16 USC 35 §§1531 et seq. 1988) provides for the protection and conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animal species. Implementation of my decision was assessed to determine the effects on threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Because the project area does not include suitable habitat or known populations of threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate plant, wildlife, or fish species, Alternative B will have no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects or impacts on threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species (EA Chapter 3).

Additionally, Design Feature WL-3 provides protective measures for any threatened, endangered, and Regional 4 sensitive plant or animal species identified in the project area during the entire period that project-related activities are under contract.

10. My decision is consistent with federal, State, and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)].

The IDT evaluated my decision as to compliance under the laws, regulations, and requirements relating to federal natural resource management. Several of the design features (refer to Attachment A) were developed and incorporated to ensure these requirements will be met. Based on the evaluations completed by the IDT, my review of comments received on the EA, and formal or informal consultation with other federal, State, local and tribal governments, I have determined that implementing this decision will be in compliance with applicable federal, State and County laws, regulations, or other permitting requirements. Alternative B meets federal, State, and local laws for air quality, heritage resources or cultural sites, water quality, threatened and endangered species, noxious weeds, and fisheries (EA Chapter 3). It also meets NEPA disclosure requirements (EA and this Finding of No Significant Impact). Chapter 1 of the EA and the “Rationale for My Decision” section of this document disclose consistency of my decision with applicable laws and regulations relating to federal natural resource management, and I did not identify any consistency issues with other State or local laws and requirements. Chapter 3 of the EA and the project record provide supporting information.

Findings Required by Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that projects and activities be consistent with the governing Forest Plan (16 USC 1604 (i)). My decision incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan direction from the Forest Plan as summarized above under the “Rationale for My Decision” section and discussed in greater detail in the EA (EA Chapters 1 and 3). I have determined that implementing my decision, Alternative B, is consistent with the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines in the 2010 Forest Plan (for further information, see the Forest Plan Consistency Table available in the project record).

In addition to Forest Plan Consistency, the National Forest Management Act and Accompanying Regulations Require that Several Specific Findings Be Documented at the Project Level

Diversity of Plant and Animal Communities [16 U.S.C. § 1604(g)(3)(B)]

I have determined the assessment method used to support the High Valley Project wildlife and rare plant conclusions is reasonable and scientifically based and is consistent with those completed in support of the 2010 Forest Plan amendments. The 2010 Forest Plan amendments, which incorporated a WCS, included a set of assumptions and analysis methodology which were evaluated through a science consistency review and provide the foundation from which the effects of this project to wildlife and their associated habitat can be related to those at the planning unit scale.

In making a determination of compliance with NFMA in this DN and FONSI, I considered existing or reasonably foreseeable conservation measures, including consistency with the Idaho CWCS. In accordance with the theme of ecosystem management, I placed reasonable reliance upon assessments of (1) species with habitat needs that are roughly the same; (2) a group of species generally thought to perform the same or similar ecosystem functions; and/or (3) the continued integrity and function of ecosystem(s) in which a species is found (EA Chapter 3, wildlife and botanical technical reports in the project record, and Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan Amendment to Facilitate Implementation of the 2010 Plan Scale Wildlife Conservation Strategy: Phase 1—Forested Biological Community⁴).

Timber Harvest [16 U.S.C. § 1604(g)(3)(E)]

A Responsible Official may authorize site-specific projects and activities to harvest timber on NFS lands only where the following applies:

- *Soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(i))*—All areas proposed for treatment are consistent with this requirement (see EA Chapter 3, “Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources” section; as well as the hydrology specialist report available in the project record).
- *There is assurance that the lands can be adequately restocked within five years after final regeneration harvest (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(ii))*—Artificial regeneration is described in the “Silvicultural Prescriptions Appendix” of the EA (EA Appendix B), where methods will use the existing heterogeneity on the landscape to promote variability while planting and encourage long-term development of forest structure reflective of historical conditions. As a result of these practices, lands will be adequately restocked within 5 years.

⁴ Forest Service. 2010b. Record of decision for the final environmental impact statement and forest plan amendment to facilitate implementation of the 2010 plan scale wildlife conservation strategy: Phase 1—Forested biological community. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Boise National Forest, Boise, ID.

- *Protection is provided for streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water from detrimental changes in water temperatures, blockages of water courses, and deposits of sediment, where harvests are likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(iii))*—Proposed activities under the selected Alternative B will not seriously or adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat. Alternative B will maintain the existing functionality of the watershed condition indicators (WCIs) in the temporary, short-term, and long-term time frames and will not have direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fish habitat or fish species (EA Chapter 3, “Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources” and “Fish Habitat” sections and technical reports in the project record).
- *The harvesting system to be used is not selected primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(iv))*—The harvest system proposed under selected Alternative B was identified as the system that best accomplished the multiple resource objectives for which timber will be an outcome of these restoration efforts (EA Chapter 1, “Why Has the Project Been Proposed” section).

Clearcutting and Even-aged Management [16 U.S.C. § 1604(g)(3)(F)]

The National Forest Management Act limits clearcutting and other even-aged harvest to situations where the following applies:

- *For clearcutting, it is determined to be the optimum method, and for other such cuts it is determined to be appropriate, to meet the objectives and requirements of the relevant land management plan (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F)(i))*—No clearcuts are proposed under selected Alternative B, though Group Selection with Reserves is proposed (EA Appendix B). These types of methods will use the existing heterogeneity on the landscape to promote variability and encourage long-term development of forest structure reflective of historical conditions, consistent with the 2010 Forest Plan.
- *The interdisciplinary review as determined by the Secretary has been completed and the potential environmental, biological, esthetic, engineering, and economic impacts on each advertised sale area have been assessed, as well as the consistency of the sale with the multiple use of the general area (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F)(ii))*—Chapter 3 of the EA discloses the potential environmental and biological, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts on areas to be treated. The Project has also been determined to be consistent with the multiple-use objectives for this area identified in the 2010 Forest Plan (see previous section of this document, as well as the Forest Plan Consistency Table available in the project record).
- *Cut blocks, patches, or strips are shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F)(iii))*—Disclosures in Chapter 3 of the EA and the scenic environment technical report (project record) regarding the visual quality resource indicate that implementing my decision will meet the visual quality objectives for the area.

- *Cuts are carried out according to the maximum size limit requirements for areas to be cut during one harvest operation, provided, that such limits shall not apply to the size of areas harvested as a result of natural catastrophic conditions such as fire, insect and disease attack, or windstorm (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F)(iv))*—All treatments meet 2010 Forest Plan standard requirements (i.e., TRST02 and TRST03) for maximum size openings (see previous section of this decision, as well as the Forest Plan Consistency Table available in the project record).
- *Such cuts are carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic resources, and the regeneration of the timber resource (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F)(v))*—Chapter 3 of the EA discloses activities to be implemented in this decision are consistent with 2010 Forest Plan requirements for protecting soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and visual quality resources and the regeneration of the timber resource (EA Chapter 3). Related findings are documented in the Forest Plan Consistency Table (available in the project record).

Lands Suitable for Timber Production [16 U.S.C. § 1604(k)]

Identify lands within the management area which are not suited for timber production (16 USC 1604(k))—All lands identified for commercial treatments have been determined to be suited for timber production. Commercial treatments from Alternative B will occur on Management Prescription Category (MPC) 5.1. All commercial treatments emphasize restoring or maintaining vegetation within desired conditions to provide a diversity of wildlife habitats, reducing the risk from undesirable disturbance events, or supporting sustainable human uses of resources, consistent with the 2010 Forest Plan.

Culmination of Mean Annual Increment of Growth [16 U.S.C. § 1604(m)]

Stands of trees are harvested according to requirements for culmination of mean annual increment of growth (16 U.S.C. 1604(m))—For implementation of Alternative B, I have considered the multiple uses of the Forest, including recreation, wildlife, and range (EA Chapter 3), and have completed public participation processes as described in the “Brief Summary of Public Involvement” section in this document and in Chapter 2 of the EA.

Temporary Roads [16 U.S.C. § 1608(b)]

Unless the necessity for a permanent road is set forth in the forest development road system plan, any road constructed on land of the NFS in connection with a timber contract or other permit or lease shall be designed with the goal of reestablishing vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover has been disturbed by the construction of the road, within ten years after the termination of the contract, permit, or lease either through artificial or natural means. Such action shall be taken unless it is later determined that the road is needed for use as a part of the National Forest Transportation System (16 USC 1608(b))—As disclosed in Chapter 3 in the “Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources” section and in Appendix A of the EA, Design Feature RM-5 requires all temporary roads proposed to be built under my decision will be fully obliterated within 3 years of project completion with the goal of reestablishing vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover has been disturbed by the construction of the road within 10 years.

Road Standards [16 U.S.C. § 1608(c)]

Roads constructed on NFS lands shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources (16 USC 1608(c))—Roads proposed to be authorized or constructed on NFS lands under my decision have been designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources (see EA Chapter 3 for disclosure of effects by resource; also refer to the hydrology, fisheries, wildlife, transportation, economic, and recreation technical reports and the Forest-wide Transportation Analysis Plan (TAP) and the Forest-wide TAP addendum #1 to the Final Report (09/30/2015) available in the project record).

Clean Air Act

Though temporary direct impacts on air quality will occur with implementation of my decision, Alternative B will not exceed NAAQS for PM_{2.5}. All prescribed burning will comply with the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group Smoke Management Plan and is designed to meet the requirements of State of Idaho IDAPA, State administrative rule for air quality, and the policies of the EPA's Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires (Interim Policy) (EA Chapter 3). Refer to the air quality technical report available in the project record for the detailed supporting analysis.

Clean Water Act (Federal Water Pollution Control Act)

The Clean Water Act (CWA) regulates point source and non-point source discharge as well as dredging and filling activities to water bodies of the United States. The CWA also regulates water quality standards and anti-degradation policies. None of the activities proposed within Alternative B will constitute a point source discharge. Therefore, the proposed activities will be regulated under the Idaho Non-Point Source Management Plan.

Alternative B activities comply with non-point source management plan goals by reducing the effects of management activities through the application of best management practices (BMPs) to reduce sediment delivery and/or impacts to stream temperature (see effects analysis for temperature and sediment in EA Chapter 3, "Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources" section and the hydrology technical report in the project record).

Endangered Species Act

The ESA (16 USC 35 §§1531 et seq. 1988) provides for the protection and conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animal species. Implementation of my decision was assessed to determine the effects on threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Because the project area does not include suitable habitat or known populations of threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate plant, wildlife, or fish species, Alternative B will have no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects or impacts on threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species (EA Chapter 3).

Additionally, Design Feature WL-3 provides protective measures for any threatened, endangered, and Regional 4 sensitive plant or animal species identified in the project area during the entire period that project related activities are under contract.

Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 Floodplains and Wetlands

My decision is consistent with Executive Orders (Eos) 11988 and 11990. Soil, water, riparian and aquatic (SWRA) resource standards and guidelines in the 2010 Forest Plan were specifically designed to ensure management actions implementing the Forest Plan, such as this one, will avoid or minimize short- and long-term impacts to floodplains as required under this executive order. EA Chapter 3, “Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources” section discloses the anticipated effects to these resources. Determinations of consistency with Forest Plan standards and guidelines are specifically addressed in the Forest Plan Consistency Table and the hydrology and fisheries technical reports available in the project record.

The activities proposed in Alternative B are not expected to result in modifications of the floodplain that will negatively affect the ability of the watershed to moderate flood flows, consistent with EO 11988. Removing stream crossings on roads and routes proposed for decommissioning is expected to increase the conveyance flood flows and associated debris at those locations, which will benefit floodplains within the project area (EA Chapter 3, “Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources” section and hydrology technical report available in the project record).

Approximately 35 acres of wetlands occur within riparian areas along some stream segments within the project area. The proposed riparian restoration activity will benefit the associated 25-acre wetland by restoring healthy riparian vegetation, and the wetland area may be enhanced through the reintroduction of beaver. BMPs and design features intended to protect stream and riparian functions and processes are expected to also provide protection of riparian area wetlands, consistent with EO11990 (EA Chapter 3, “Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources” section and hydrology technical report in the project record).

Executive Order 12898 Environmental Justice

EO 12898 directs federal agencies to identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. I have determined from the analysis disclosed in the EA that implementing my decision will comply with EO 12898 (EA Chapter 3). All action alternatives, including Alternative B, were assessed to determine whether they would have disproportionately high and adverse human health, including social and economic effects, on minority or low-income human populations. No such effects were identified.

Executive Order 13112 Invasive Species

EO 13112 on Invasive Species directs that federal agencies should not authorize any activities that will increase the spread of invasive species. The Forest Plan requires integrated pest management methods be used to contain and control the spread of invasive species, following the Region 4 Forest Service Handbook (FSH 2080). These procedures will be implemented under my decision; refer to Design Features NX-1 through NX-5 (EA Chapter 3, “Noxious Weeds” section).

Though implementing Alternative B could increase the potential for the introduction of new noxious weed species or spread of known noxious weed species in the project area based on the proposed ground-disturbing activities and temporary modification of the transportation system, design feature mitigations diminishes the risk for weed dispersal and careful and timely

monitoring and treatment will avoid or minimize the likelihood of introduction and/or spread of weeds in disturbed areas. Refer to the noxious weeds technical report available in the project record for the detailed supporting analysis.

Executive Order 13175 Consultation with Tribal Governments

EO 13175 requires regular and meaningful consultation between federal and tribal government officials on federal policies with tribal implications. As described earlier in this decision, regular notification and consultation processes with potentially affected tribes has occurred throughout the planning process for this project. The tribal notification and consultation processes did not result in the identification of any potential impacts to treaty rights, treaty resources, or other unextinguished tribal rights and interests.

Idaho Stream Alteration Act

Four stream crossings will be constructed with the road realignment included under the selected alternative, so stream alteration permits from Idaho Department of Water Resources will be required. These permits, in addition to Part 404 permits from the Department of Defense and Part 402 Certification from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality will be obtained prior to beginning construction activities (hydrology technical report available in the project record).

Idaho Forest Practices Act

Rules pertaining to IFPA will be implemented under my decision. In addition, logging operations and road maintenance activities will be administered on the ground by Forest Service personnel to ensure compliance with any contract requirements associated with IFPA requirements (EA Chapter 3, “Vegetation” and “Transportation” sections; and the vegetation and transportation technical reports in the project record).

Additionally, the IFPA requires a 75-foot-wide tree retention buffer for fish bearing streams, with two options for retaining enough trees within this zone to allow for adequate stream shading. Not harvesting within one site potential tree height (SPTH) from each stream channel under the selected alternative, will meet the IFPA shade rule based on stand exam data calculated using Option 1 of the IFPA formula for Class 1 Streams. Following proposed thinning treatments, mean relative stocking was estimated to be 56 for RCA Zone 1 (no treatment) and 43 for RCA Zone 2 (non-commercial thin), meeting the IFPA relative stocking requirements (EA Chapter 2).

National Environmental Policy Act

In addition to minor edits and corrections, some changes were made to the EA in response to comments. These changes are reflected throughout the revised EA, with specific changes summarized at the beginning of the document. The updated information disclosed in the revised EA falls within the scope of the analysis depicted in the EA and in most cases, simply provides additional explanation in response to comments received during the EA comment period. The EA disclosures include the following specific elements discussed in NEPA.

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their activities and programs on historic properties. Federal activities and programs are

defined as “undertakings” by 36 CFR §800 regulations implementing NHPA Section 106. Implementing my decision will not have any direct or indirect effects on historically significant sites. Activities included under Alternative B, including prescribed fire, are expected to have *No Adverse Effect* on historic properties in the project area. Applying project Design Features CR-1 and CR-2 will ensure known and newly discovered historic properties and cultural sites will be protected during project implementation (EA Chapter 3 and Appendix A). Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office concluded on January 27, 2016, with concurrence that the No Adverse Effect determination.

Prime Farmland, Rangeland, and Forest Land

No prime farmlands, rangelands, or forest lands are located on the Forest, therefore, no effects to prime farmland, rangeland, or forest lands will occur with the implementation of Alternative B (EA Chapter 3).

Best Available Science

The conclusions summarized in the EA are based on a review of the project record, which considers relevant scientific information and responsible opposing views, where raised by internal or external sources, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and/or risk, where pertinent to the decision being made.

For further information on how I considered the best available science in making this decision, refer to the project record for detailed Agency responses to comments and review of opposing views literature received on the EA, the literature cited sections in the EA and each resource technical report, EA Chapter 3 introduction, and the final environmental impact statement and technical reports supporting the 2010 Forest Plan amendments.

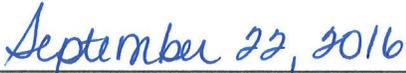
Implementation

Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.12, the objector has been responded to in writing, thus I am proceeding with issuing the decision. To allow for distribution of the DN/FONSI, implementation of this project may begin 5 business days following the signature date of this DN/FONSI.

For further information on the EA and this DN/FONSI, please contact Richard Newton, District Ranger, by phone at 208-365-7000.



CECILIA R. SEESHOLTZ
Forest Supervisor
Boise National Forest



Date

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Appendix A: Design Features

Design Features for Alternative B

Botanical

BT-1—Pre-disturbance surveys will be conducted within potential habitat areas for sensitive and watch species (e.g. small phacelia, moonwort species) by a qualified botanist prior to ground disturbing activities. If plants are identified during pre-disturbance surveys within a proposed disturbance area, an appropriate plant conservation area (PCA) will be delineated and activities will be modified to avoid impacts to individual plants to the maximum extent practicable. (Forest Plan Standard BTST01, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-35).

Cultural Resources

CR-1—Avoid and protect all known historic properties during project implementation.

CR-2—Contract provisions shall include requirements that in the event new cultural sites are discovered, ground-disturbing activities in the area shall stop until a qualified archaeologist is consulted and appropriate mitigation identified, as needed, to avoid/protect these sites. These provisions will be included as stipulations in any contracts associated with the project.

Fire and Fuels

FF-1—Construct no fire line and/or hand line within RCAs.

FF-2—Store hazardous material utilized for burning activities outside of Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs) [Forest Plan Standard SWST11, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-22 and Idaho Forest Practice Act (IDAPA 20.02.01.60)].

FF-3—Restrict burning activities to early spring or fall to avoid nesting periods for ground-nesting birds. The wildlife biologist will be consulted during development of the burn plan.

FF-4—Do not actively ignite broadcast fires or slash piles within 75 feet of the stream [Forest Plan Guideline FMGU06, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-42 and Idaho Forest Practice Act (IDAPA 20.02.01.030.07 (f))]. Allow broadcast burns to back into this portion of the RCA or adjacent stands, where they will either go out by themselves or be extinguished if burning would be expected to result in unanticipated adverse effects.

FF-5—Landing slash piles created as a result of harvest activities will be available for biomass utilization and/or firewood opportunities to the public. Burn material left on site in the future.

Noxious Weeds

NX-1—Avoid or reduce the introduction and spread of weed seeds and propagates by including provisions in all contracts to ensure appropriate off-road equipment is cleaned. All contractors and/or purchaser of any timber sale shall be required to ensure that, prior to moving onto the sale area, all off-road equipment are cleaned and free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain seeds (Forest Plan Standard NPST03, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-38).

NX-2—Ensure seed mixes and/or plant materials used during restoration and soil erosion prevention activities shall be comprised of certified weed-free native or desirable non-native seed mixes and/or native cultivars, as recommended by the Forest or District botanist (Forest Plan Standard NPST02 and BTST05, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-38 and III-36).

NX-3—Require all straw and/or hay, brought to the Project Area for land management purposes, be certified weed-free (Forest Plan Standard NPST01 and NPST06, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-38).

NX-4—Evaluate aggregate source(s) for noxious weed presence under the direction of the Forest or District Noxious Weed Specialist. If noxious weeds are present at the aggregate source(s), treat noxious weeds as provided for in existing plans and environmental documents in effect at the time of implementation, remove and set aside the material to a depth of 6 inches, and use aggregate from depths greater than 6 inches for project activities (Forest Plan Standard NPST07 and NPST08, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-39)..

NX-5—During project implementation, report the identification of undocumented noxious weed populations in the Project Area to the District Weed specialist for inclusion in noxious weed treatment plans as provided for in existing plans and environmental documents in effect at the time of implementation.

Range

RG-1—Notify the District Range Management Specialist of the timing of project activities, including commercial harvest, fuel abatement, prescribed fire, non-commercial thinning, and road activities. Inform permittee(s), through the allotment annual operating instructions (AOI), of pending project activities to minimize the potential for conflicts and allow for short-term modification of grazing practices where necessary. Short-term modifications of grazing practices during project implementation should be coordinated with the hydrologist, fish biologist, and soil scientist to ensure compliance with the Forest Plan Rangeland Resource direction.

Road Management

RM-1—Road decommissioning may include, but is not limited to, some or all of the following activities: scarification of road bed, partial to full re-contour, removal of culverts and stabilization of stream crossings, elimination of access from connecting roads, and seed/mulch all disturbed areas with approved seed mixture (NX-2). In addition, to deter future use of these routes, access points may be recontoured or partially recontoured, and barrier devices, such as boulders, berms, slash material at access points, and/or some combination of barriers, may be used. All NFS roads proposed to be decommissioned from the Forest NFS Transportation System will be removed once decommissioning activities are complete. Determination of methods to be used will be completed on a site-by-site basis during project implementation.

RM-2—On decommissioned roads, remove culverts with the objective of providing a stable, self-maintaining site. However, IDT analysis may determine if culverts may be left when risks and consequences are weighed against the costs of culvert removal (Refer to Regional Policy on Treatment of Culverts for Decommissioned and Obliterated Roads, File Code 2520, letters of August 14 and December 13, 2000). Other site-specific actions may be performed to reduce risks.

RM-3—Install erosion control devices as required to minimize sediment delivery to streams from road management activities, including new roadbed construction, road maintenance, and/or road decommissioning activities where activities occur in RCAs. Erosion control devices may include, but are not limited to, certified weed-free straw wattles or bales, slash filter windrows, and/or biodegradable erosion cloth. The District Hydrologist or Fisheries Biologist in consultation with the Engineering Representative/Timber Sale Contract Administrator shall determine the locations within the RCAs where erosion control devices are required and the most cost effective sediment control method. Erosion control materials will be allowed to deteriorate in place.

RM-4—Construct all road realignment segments prior to decommissioning the original routes in order to maintain motorized access.

RM-5—Public motorized access shall be restricted on all permanent and temporary roads built for the purpose of supporting of vegetation management during activity implementation. Temporary roads will be fully obliterated within three years from when the project is completed (Forest Plan Management Area 16 Road Guideline 1671, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-316).

Recreation and Scenic Resources

RR-1—Prohibit snow plowing on established groomed snow routes within the Project Area, including associated haul routes, from December 15 to March 15 where plowing would conflict with established winter recreation use periods.

RR-2—The ridgeline silhouette should have a textural effect of small, natural-appearing openings rather than large, thinned areas and unnatural-appearing breaks.

RR-3—Ensure that forest stand composition changes as viewed in foreground/ middleground/ background are textural, with small, natural openings and not symmetrical in shape. Avoid straight lines and right angles. Ensure that openings resemble the form, line, and texture of those found in the surrounding natural landscape with edges feathered to avoid a shadowing effect.

RR-4—Design skyline corridors for cable yarding without linear edges by utilizing existing openings and clearing the vegetation to promote meandering edges.

RR-5—To meet visual quality objectives in the Forest Plan (Management Area 16 Scenic Environment Standard 1665, p. III-321), do the following within the immediate foreground (300 feet) of National Forest System road 643:

- Cut stumps to 12 inches or less on the uphill side to reduce visibility.
- Lop and scatter slash below 36 inches (less if visually intrusive). Remove material in excess to other resource needs or pile and burn within one field season.
- After project completion, spread remaining slash so that it appears to be naturally occurring downed material.

RR-6—Blend temporary roads and skid trails into the characteristic landscape of the surrounding area. Create cut and fill banks to be sloped to accommodate natural revegetation and to reduce sharp contrasts viewed from any distance. Where temporary roads and skid trails meet a primary travel route open to motorized use, they should intersect at a right angle and, where practicable, curve after the junction to minimize the length of route seen from the primary travel route.

Soil, Water and Fisheries

SW-1—Consistent with Forest Plan standard SWST10 (USDA Forest Service 2010, p III-22), trees or snags that are felled within RCAs (commercial or non-commercial) will be left unless determined not to be necessary for achieving soil, water, riparian, and aquatic desired conditions as described in Appendices A and B of the Forest Plan. Felled trees or snags that are left in RCAs shall be left intact unless resource protection (e.g., the risk of insect infestation or wildfire is unacceptable) or public safety requires bucking them into smaller pieces.

SW-2—Allow commercial harvest within the second site potential tree height of RCAs, but do not allow commercial harvest within one site potential tree height of stream channels, ponds, lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands (Refer to Figure 2 in EA Chapter 2). Keep heavy mechanical equipment, such as skidders, out of the entire RCA. Allow thinning of non-commercial trees within RCAs except within 30 feet of stream channels, ponds, lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands.

SW-3—Provide fish passage at all new and reconstructed stream crossings of existing and potential fish-bearing streams [Forest Plan Standard SWST08, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-22 and Idaho Forest Practice Act (IDAPA 20.02.01.040.02 (e)(i))]. Acceptable ranges for gradient, water flow velocity, jump/drop height, and other parameters will be based on the best scientific data available.

SW-4—Water drafting locations, methods, and timing shall be approved by the Engineering Representative/Timber Sale Contract Administrator in consultation with the fisheries biologist and/or hydrologist. Screen opening size for intake hoses shall be the standard 3/32 inch or smaller. (Forest Plan Standard FRST01, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-61).

SW-5—Seed disturbed areas with an approved seed mixture (Design Feature NX-2). Erosion control devices, such as certified weed free straw wattles or bales, slash filter windrows, and biodegradable erosion cloth, should be maintained during all road management activities adjacent to streams to minimize delivery of sediment, and natural materials will be allowed to deteriorate in place [Forest Plan Standard NPST03, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-38).

SW-6—Store no fuel in RCAs. Refueling or servicing of vehicles or equipment should not take place within RCAs unless there is no other alternative. In the event there is no acceptable alternative site for these activities, refueling or servicing sites must be approved by Engineering Representative/Timber Sale Contract Administrator in consultation with District Hydrologist and/or Fish Biologist. All equipment shall be in good repair and free of leakage of lubricants, fuels, coolants, and hydraulic fluid [Forest Plan Standard SWST11, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-22 and Idaho Forest Practice Act (IDAPA 20.02.01.60)].

SW-7—All log landings should be located outside of RCAs ([Forest Plan Guideline FRGU06, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-62 and Idaho Forest Practice Act (IDAPA 20.02.01.030.03 (d))]. Consult the District Hydrologist or Fish Biologist and the Forest Archeologist, if site-specific circumstances necessitate a log landing to be located within the RCAs. For log landings located within the RCA, erosion control devices such as erosion cloth, biologs, and/or certified weed-seed-free straw bales should be installed between the landing and the stream to prevent delivery of sediment (Burroughs and King 1989). The District Hydrologist or Fisheries Biologist will assist the Timber Sale Contract Administrator in determining the most effective sediment control method. Soil erosion control measures will be allowed to deteriorate in place.

SW-8—Upon completion of harvest activities, reshape constructed landings used in association with this project to provide adequate drainage. Landings should be ripped to a depth of 12–18 inches, slash will be spread over at least 30% of the landing area, and the area will be planted with a Forest Service approved seed mixture (Design Feature NX-2).

SW-9—Use the SINMAP analysis results in addition to guidelines developed by Chatwin et al. (1994) during project implementation to field-verify or identify moderate- and high-hazard landslide prone areas where commercial timber harvest and road construction is proposed. Site-specific management measures or mitigations shall be required where the proposed activities might initiate landslides (Forest Plan Standard SWST12, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-22).

Vegetation Management

VM-1—Retain all existing forested stands that meet the definition of large tree size class (Forest Service 2010a, Appendix A) or old forest habitat (Forest Service 2010a, Appendix E). Management actions may occur within these stands as long as they continue to meet the definitions of large tree size class and old forest habitat (Forest Plan Standard VEST03, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-32).

VM-2—All ponderosa pine and western larch trees meeting the definition of a legacy tree consistent with the Forest’s Legacy Tree Guide (Forest Service 2015) should be designated for retention during sale preparation except where removal is required for safety mitigation or operational purposes such as landings or yarding trails/corridors and associated with temporary road construction, road reconstruction, and road maintenance activities. In addition, other late seral-to-climax conifer species (e.g., Douglas-fir and grand fir) that exhibit legacy-like characteristics (generally are the very large trees; Van Pelt 2008) should be designated for retention (Forest Plan Guideline VEGU08, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-33).

VM-3—Within units, or portions of units, outside RCAs where commercial product removal is allowed, include contract provisions to haul cull logs back into the units if during the layout process, the large size class of coarse woody debris is determined to be lacking and the addition of the cull logs back into the units is consistent with wildfire hazard reduction objectives within the wildland-urban interface. Refer to SW-1 below for activities within RCAs.

VM-4—Ensure that appropriate contract provision(s) are used to limit the potential buildup or spread of Ips in stands containing ponderosa pine.

VM-5—Prohibit log haul on weekends (all day Saturday and Sunday); all major holidays (New Years, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the day after, Christmas eve and Christmas day); and the opening day of deer, elk, and turkey general hunting seasons.

VM-6—Post warning and/or closure signs on authorized haul routes and adjacent to active logging operations to inform the public of logging operations and truck traffic hazards.

VM-7—Timber Sale Administrator shall approve skid trails prior to development and use, to limit impacts to plantations and/or other resources.

VM-8—Yard trees whole to the landing and manufacture them at the landing from tractor/jammer units to reduce compaction and aid in soil amelioration. After manufacturing, the tops/limbs/branches will be hauled back and utilized as slash material on skid trails where consistent with fuel reduction objectives. Upon completion of project activities, all newly constructed skid trails and existing unauthorized routes used to implement project activities will

be reclaimed by blocking access at all access points; utilizing re-contouring of slope, earthen barriers, and/or placement of barriers such as rock or CWD; scarifying or ripping to a depth of 12 inches; scattering slash over scarified/ripped surface to achieve at least 30% coverage of the surface; and revegetating with certified weed free grasses, shrubs, and/or trees. Any material used for revegetation activities will meet requirements of Design Feature NX-2.

VM-9— If, during implementation of vegetation treatments, the project silviculturist identifies insufficient representation of viable desired tree species, restoration augmentation may be implemented. Restoration augmentation will consist of planting ponderosa pine or western larch seedlings (i.e. desired early seral tree species).

VM-10—Retain trees in group/clump horizontal spatial patterns where feasible to facilitate long-term snag recruitment.

Wildlife

WL-1—Retain all snags ≥ 10 inches dbh and >30 feet tall to meet the desired range as identified in Appendix A of the Forest Plan (Forest Service 2010b, p. A-11) unless they pose safety hazards and have to be felled. Where snags have been determined to be a safety hazard (timber sale OSHA requirements, roadside hazard trees) and must be felled, live trees of sufficient diameter shall be left to provide for snag replacement as needed to achieve desired conditions.

WL-2—Provide snags, snag replacement trees, and CWD, including those with broken tops, cavities, lightning scars, and dead portions, in clusters if available rather than uniformly spaced. Priority should be given to large (≥ 20 inches dbh) snags and trees for snag recruitment over smaller diameter snags and trees.

WL-3—Include protective measures for Threatened, Endangered, and Regional 4 Sensitive (TES) Species against unforeseen events in the timber sale contracts and other project-related contracts (non-commercial thinning). Mandatory provisions of the timber sale contract (currently contract provision B(T)6.24) provide protective measures for any TES plant or animal species identified in the Project Area during the entire period that the sale is under contract (Forest Plan Standard WIST02 and WIST03, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-27).

WL-4—Restrict vegetation treatment within a 650-foot radius of an active goshawk nest tree to retain vegetative structure around the nest site (Forest Plan Standard WIST05, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-27). In addition, no commercial harvest, non-commercial thinning, mechanical fuel abatement, or road construction/reconstruction activities should occur within a 1,500-foot buffer (Jones 1979) around active goshawk nest tree(s) from March 1 to August 15 to avoid disrupting nesting activities. Timing restrictions shall only be required for active nest sites. Timing restrictions shall not restrict planned road use patterns, public access, or log hauling. Because goshawks commonly move to alternate nest sites within a territory, the nest site location must be re-identified annually.

WL-5—The following timing restriction shall be implemented in treatment units that have been identified to have occupied flammulated owl habitat in 2013-2015 surveys in order to minimize disruption of reproductive activity. This includes not implementing commercial harvest, non-commercial thinning, fuel abatement, or road construction/reconstruction activities from May 1

to August 15 (Forest Plan Standard WIST02 and WIST03 and Guideline WIGU05, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-27-28), based on the 2013-2015 flammulated owl occurrence map.⁵

WL-6—Upon discovery of an active bald eagle nest during project implementation (Forest Plan Standard WIST02 and WIST03, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-27), the following timing and spatial restrictions on proposed activities shall be implemented to minimize or avoid disruption of reproductive activity:

1. No commercial harvest, non-commercial thinning, mechanical fuel abatement, or road construction/reconstruction activities shall occur within 660 feet of the nest tree (USFWS 2007) for the duration of the nesting period (February 1 through August 31) (Kaltenecker 2000);
2. Removal of overstory trees should not occur within 330 feet of the nest tree (USFWS 2007) to retain nesting stand characteristics including perch trees. Thinning of trees in the understory should occur outside of the nesting period or when eagles are otherwise not present as determined by the project wildlife biologist. Nest trees shall not be harvested.

WL-7—In occupied flammulated owl medium to large tree size class stands in PVG 6 where, following mechanical treatment, it is estimated that canopy cover would be reduced to the low class (<40%), select 1 snag > 20" DBH per 10 acres (where available) to receive an 83-foot no treatment buffer where snag densities permit. This prescription will retain the structurally diverse vegetative condition that currently exists around that snag important to flammulated owl source habitat.

WL-8—Existing vegetation will be maintained within one site potential tree height of elk wallows and natural licks ((Forest Plan Guideline WIGU 13, USDA Forest Service 2010, p. III-29) identified in RCAs (Refer to Figure 2 in Chapter 2). The Wildlife Biologist will be notified as soon as possible if a wallow is discovered by layout and marking personnel. The wildlife biologist or representative will review the site on the ground and determine whether the silvicultural prescription adequately protects the site and provides cover for wildlife use. Prescriptions may be modified to provide adequate cover if needed. This design feature applies to commercial and non-commercial vegetation treatments. Exceptions include the location of wallows on established road prisms (authorized or otherwise) required for harvest implementation.

⁵ Refer to the project record for a detailed listing of the applicable stands, include map which displays spatial locations.

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Appendix B: High Valley Integrated Restoration Project EA Errata

The purpose of this errata sheet is add Purpose 3 into the June 2016 High Valley Integrated Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (EA). Purpose 3 was mistakenly deleted from the June 2016 (EA). This purpose statement was included in the March 2016 EA on pages 6 and 7 and in the Draft Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact (DN/FONSI) on pages 4 and 7 published for the objection period in June 2016.

The following text should be included on page 6 of the June 2016 High Valley Integrated Restoration Project EA.

Purpose 3

Improve watershed function through restoration of aquatic resources and road-related impacts to wildlife, fish, soil, and water resources while providing for the transportation system necessary to meet short and long-term management needs.

Need 1

Address undesirable impacts to soil and water quality and restore hydrologic function and riparian habitat. The wetland in the Little Squaw Creek drainage is degraded due to the current road design, culvert placement, removal of beaver, and impacts from livestock grazing. The need exists to raise the water table, moderate peak flows, and increase summer flows in this tributary perennial stream.

Need 2

Reduce degradation resulting from road-related impacts to improve the quality of soil, water, fish and wildlife habitat. Several roads within RCAs are producing fine sediment into streams, which can impair aquatic function and degrade riparian habitat.