

United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



Canyon Creek Research Project

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Priest Lake Ranger District
Idaho Panhandle National Forests

December 2002

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Canyon Creek Research Project

Decision Notice

I. SUMMARY OF THE DECISION

After careful consideration of the alternatives that were analyzed in the Canyon Creek Research Project Environmental Assessment (EA), issued on September 27, 2002, we have decided to select Alternative 2 for implementation. Management actions associated with this alternative were designed to conduct a forestry research study in the Priest River Experimental Forest (PREF). In addition, actions included in this alternative will respond to concerns that some existing roads in the area are threatening water quality and fisheries in nearby streams.

Activities associated with this project will occur within the Priest River Experimental Forest (PREF). This Experimental Forest is located approximately 15 miles north of the community of Priest River, Idaho. The legal description of the project area includes portions of sections 23 and 24, T58N, R4W; and a portion of section 19, T58N, R3W, B.M.

- **Forest vegetation over approximately 329 acres will be manipulated by using several different silvicultural systems and a tree girdling treatment. A percentage of the merchantable trees within the timber stands will be removed over approximately 304 acres through the use of a commercial timber sale.**
- **Fuel and site preparation treatments will occur over approximately 186 acres. Approximately 109 acres will be jackpot burned, 65 acres will be underburned, and 12 acres will be grapple-piled.**
- **Merchantable trees that need to be cut in order to implement the various treatments will be removed using cable (251 acres) and ground based (53 acres) harvesting systems.**
- **Approximately 16.8 miles of existing roads will be treated using four treatment methods. Five miles of these roads will have light maintenance activities, 9.4 miles will have heavy maintenance work, 2.5 miles will be obliterated permanently after sale activities are complete, and 2 miles will be put into temporary storage.**
- **If funding becomes available, the resource improvement opportunities identified on page 2-22 of the EA will be implemented.**
- **All of the project design features and mitigation measures detailed in the EA on pages 2-15 through 2-22 will be implemented.**

II. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Canyon Creek Research Project was proposed to respond to two needs that we have identified. The primary need for proposing the project is to evaluate different silvicultural

strategies to determine if they could be used to restore western white pine type forests to historic conditions. We have also identified a need within the project area to address the concern that aging roads and associated drainage structures in the area are at risk to fail and cause damage to water quality and fisheries. Based on these two needs that we have identified, the specific objectives for the project are:

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Test several specific silvicultural systems and determine their value in promoting forest composition and structures that are similar to historic conditions.
- Reduce the sedimentation risk that the existing road system poses to streams in the area.

Further discussion of the purpose and need for action is described in the EA on pages 1-4 through 1-7, and within Appendix A.

III. ISSUES

Issues surrounding the proposed project were identified through a public and internal scoping process (page 2-1 of the EA describes this process). The following five issues were determined to be the most important and relevant to the proposed project and these were considered in detail within the EA.

- Effects of project activities on water quality and fish habitat.
- Effects of project activities on threatened, endangered, sensitive and management indicator wildlife species.
- Effects of project activities on sensitive plants and forest species of concern.
- Effects of project activities on soil productivity.
- Effects of project activities on noxious weed invasion and spread.

Each of the issues listed above are described in more detail on pages 2-2 through 2-5 of the EA. In addition, other issues were initially considered but were eventually eliminated from detailed analysis. These issues and the reasons for eliminating them are provided in Appendix C of the EA, pages C-1 through C-9.

IV. ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

In addition to those alternatives what were analyzed in detail within the EA, six other alternatives were initially considered. However, it was determined that these other alternatives would not fulfill the purpose and need for the project and therefore they were eliminated from detailed analysis.

1. Watershed restoration only.
2. Watershed restoration and prescribed fire.
3. Implement the proposed action without a commercial timber sale
4. Conduct the proposed research somewhere else where harvesting has already occurred.
5. Implement the proposal without manipulating vegetation within any Old Growth stands.
6. Conduct the proposed research activities and only the road work needed for the research.

A more detailed description of the first five of the six alternatives that are listed above, is provided on pages 2-6 through 2-9 of the EA.

The sixth alternative that is listed above was inadvertently left out of the discussion within the EA itself. Therefore, we will elaborate on this alternative here. This sixth alternative would have involved conducting all of the research activities and just the amount of road treatments that were necessary to accomplish the research activities. In other words, the road treatments (including the road related improvement opportunity listed on page 2-22 of the EA) that were included into the proposed action that were designed to address the risk of sedimentation would not be included into this alternative. This alternative was initially considered by the Interdisciplinary Team. However, when it became apparent that there was an important need within the project area to address the risk of road-related sedimentation, this was added to the purpose and need statement for the project. Therefore, without measures to reduce the sedimentation risk, this alternative will not have fully met the purpose and need for the project and it was eliminated from further consideration.

V. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Two alternatives were considered in detail within the EA, the No Action alternative (Alternative 1) and the proposed action (Alternative 2). As described in more detail on page 2-6 of the EA, no other action alternative was identified by the public or the Interdisciplinary Team that would fulfill both the needs and the purposes for proposing the project. The research portion of the purpose and need is very specific in nature and this greatly reduced the range of alternatives that were feasible.

Alternative 1 (No Action)

This alternative is required by law and serves as a baseline for comparison of the effects of the action alternative. Under this alternative, no actions will be undertaken to respond to the needs for proposing the project, and therefore the purposes for the project will not be achieved. Under this alternative, the research study will not be conducted at this time. In addition, road treatments designed to improve water quality and fishery habitat will not occur and the resource improvement projects will not be implemented.

Alternative 2 (the selected alternative)

As the Responsible Officials for this project, we have decided to select this alternative. The alternative is described in the following paragraphs. Note that all of the acre and road length figures we use to describe this alternative are considered estimates and may be slightly different when treatment areas are actually measured and located on the ground. We do not expect variations in acres, lengths, or locations of treatment areas to be consequential.

Silvicultural Treatments and Logging Methods

Approximately 329 acres will be treated using group selection, free selection, strip shelterwood, and girdling treatments (see p. 1-4 in the EA for definitions). A portion of the trees will be removed or girdled in these treatments to create a variety of stand structures. Figure 1 shows the location of these treatment units within the project area.

As shown in Table 1, there are a total of 13 units and some form of vegetation manipulation will occur in 12 units. Unit #7 will act as a control for the research and will not be treated.

CANYON CREEK RESEARCH PROJECT

Treatment Areas

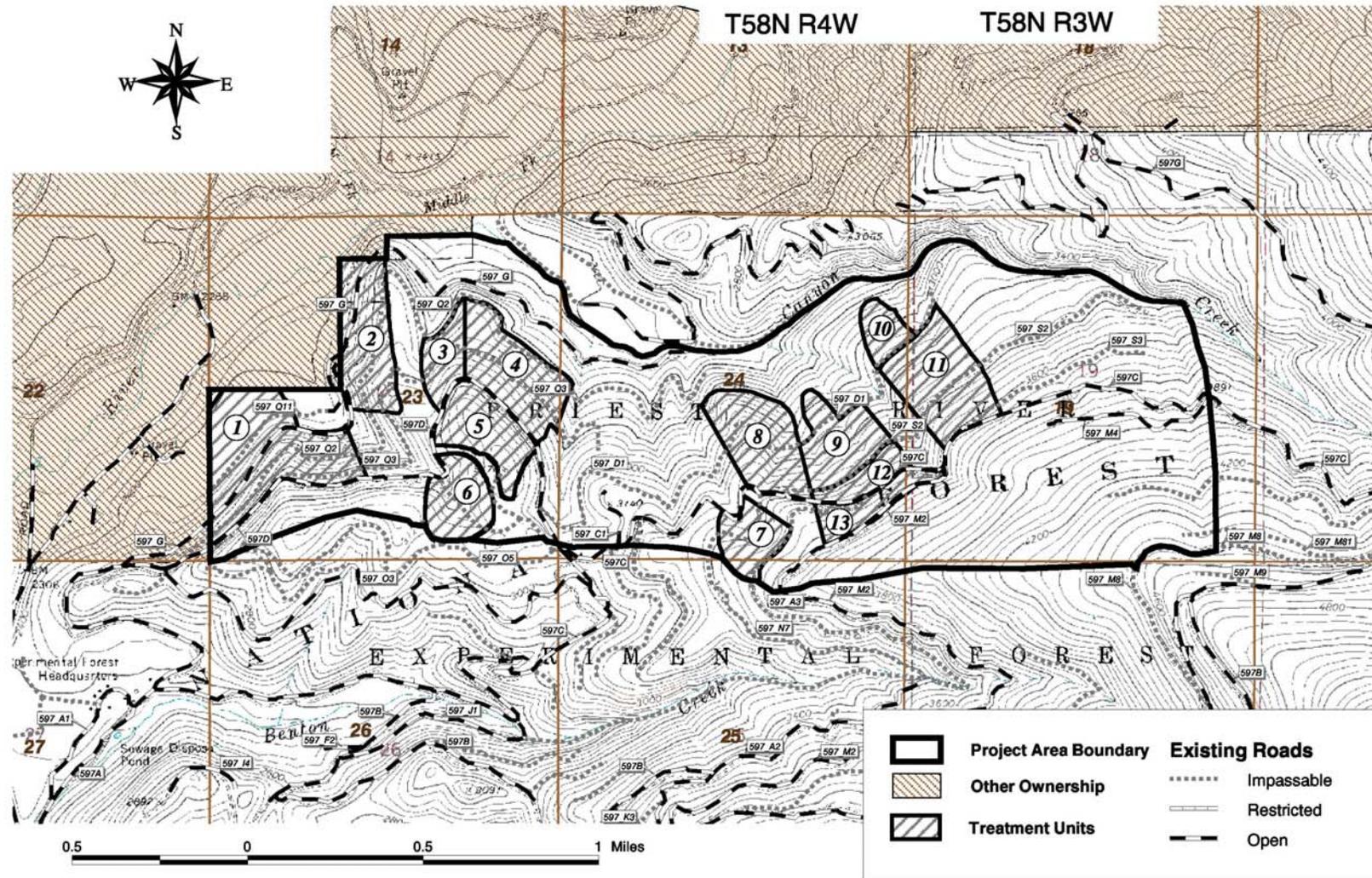


Figure 1. Map of vegetation treatment areas.

Table 1: Description of Stand Prescriptions

Prescription and Treatment Acres by Unit #	Current Canopy Cover	Residual Canopy Cover	Logging Method	Fuel Treatments And Site Preparation	Regeneration Method
Unit 1: Free Selection (68 Acres)	80%	40 to 65%	Skyline (68 acres)	Jackpot burn (5 acres);	Mixture of natural and artificial western white pine
Unit 2: Free Selection (40 acres)	65%	50%	Skyline (40 acres)	Underburn (40 acres)	Mix of natural and artificial ponderosa regeneration
Unit 3: Free Selection (15 Acres)	80%	40 to 65%	Skyline (15 acres)	Jackpot burn (3 acres);	Mixture of natural and artificial western white pine
Unit 4: Strip Shelterwood (20 acres); Free Selection (5 acres)	70%	20% (Strip Shelterwood); 40-60% (Free Selection)	Skyline (17 acres); Ground (8 acres)	Jackpot burn (20 acres); Grapple Pile (5 acres)	Interplant with a mixture of western white pine, western red cedar and western larch
Unit 5: Group Selection (6 acres); Free Selection (25 acres)	70%	55% (Free Selection); 25% (Group Selection)	Ground (31 Acres)	Jackpot (31 acres)	Mixture of natural and artificial western white pine and western larch
Unit 6: Tree Girdling (25 acres)	70%	35%	N/A	Underburn (25 acres)	Natural
Unit 7: No harvest (control)	90%	90%	N/A	None	Natural
Unit 8: Free Selection (39 Acres)	80%	40 to 65%	Skyline (39 acres)	Jackpot burn (5 acres);	Mixture of natural and Artificial western white pine
Unit 9: Strip Shelterwood (10 acres); Free Selection (3 acres)	70%	20% (Strip Shelterwood); 40-60% (Free Selection)	Skyline (10 acres); Ground (3 acres)	Jackpot burn (10 acres); Grapple Pile (3 acres)	Interplant with a mixture of western white pine, western red cedar and western
Unit 10: Free Selection (20 acres)	80%	60%	Skyline (20 acres)	None	Natural
Unit 11: Strip Shelterwood (20 acres); Free Selection (10 acres)	70%	20% (Strip Shelterwood); 40-60% (Free Selection)	Skyline (22 acres); Ground (8 acres)	Jackpot burn (26 acres); Grapple Pile (4 acres)	Interplant with a mixture of western white pine, western red cedar and western larch
Unit 12: Group Selection (3 acres); Free Selection (10 acres)	70%	55% (Free Selection); 25% (Group Selection)	Skyline (10 acres); Ground (3 acres)	Jackpot burn (3 acres);	Mixture of natural and artificial western white pine and western larch
Unit 13: Strip Shelterwood (6 acres); Free Selection (4 acres)	70%	20% (Strip Shelterwood); 40-60% (Free Selection)	Skyline (10 acres)	Jackpot burn (6 acres);	Interplant with a mixture of western white pine, western red cedar and western larch

The residual stand densities shown in Table 1 will range from a low density favoring mature pines and other species to a higher density containing a mixture of western red cedar, western

hemlock, western larch, western white pine and a mix of other seral species depending on what conditions are present in existing stands.

For each unit, Table 1 illustrates the prescription for the unit, the current canopy closure and the residual cover after treatment. In addition, the table lists what kind of logging method, fuel treatment and regeneration method will be used. Table 2 presents a summary of the acres that will be treated by each silvicultural prescription, fuel/site preparation treatment, and logging system.

Table 2: Total Area of Prescribed Activities by Application Type and Treatment.

Activities	Treatment	Total Acres
Silvicultural Prescription	Free Selection	239
	Strip Shelterwood	56
	Group Selection	9
	Tree Girdling	25
Fuel Treatments/ Site Preparation	Jackpot Burn	109
	Underburn	65
	Grapple Piling	12
Logging Systems	Skyline	251
	Ground Based	53

Road Treatments

Under this alternative, 16.8 miles of road will be treated using four levels of treatment. These include a light maintenance treatment called retention maintenance, a more intensive maintenance activity called restoration maintenance, a road storage treatment and a road decommissioning treatment. Abbreviated definitions and descriptions of these treatments are provided below. Appendix B in the EA contains a more thorough discussion of these treatments as well as a description of the proposed activities for each road. Figure 2 displays the roads that will be treated by various treatment methods.

In order to conduct the proposed road treatments, it will be necessary to remove rock material from an existing gravel pit and a borrow site. Both of these areas are located on the PREF (the project file contains a map of these areas). Within the existing gravel pit, rock material will be removed from the area that has already been cleared. In addition, this gravel pit will be expanded to the north by approximately 0.1 acres to provide the necessary quantity of rock. A small amount of rock material of a larger size will also be removed from an existing borrow site along Forest Service Road 597C. No additional clearing will be necessary at this site.

Retention Maintenance - Retention maintenance is the ongoing upkeep of a road that is necessary to retain the road at the approved management level. The work is generally minor in nature and most work includes activities such as; road blading, cleaning drainage structures, removal of minor slide material, roadway brushing, spot graveling and dust abatement.

CANYON CREEK RESEARCH PROJECT

Road Treatments

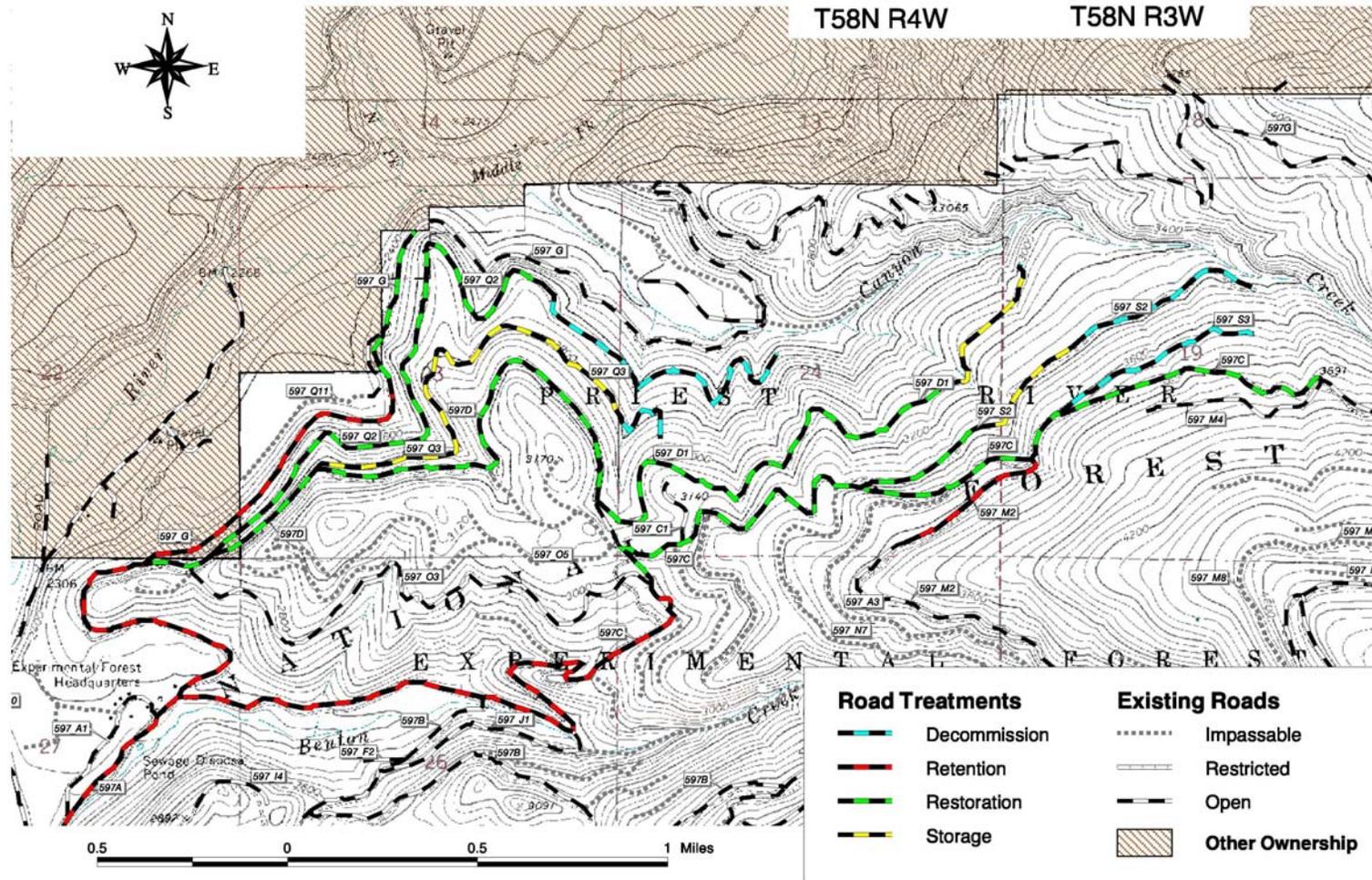


Figure 2. Map of proposed road treatments.

Under the selected alternative, retention maintenance activities will be performed on 5.0 miles of road. All of these roads are currently drivable. On these roads, the majority of the work will include blading and brushing the roads and cleaning drainage structures.

Restoration Maintenance - Restoration maintenance is the work that is necessary to restore the road to the approved road management level. This involves work that is needed to open up the road, repair damage, improve drainage, stabilize the roadway, or provide for user safety. This may include much of the same work as described under retention maintenance. However, more intensive work may be needed, such as removal and/or installation of culverts, rolling dips, catch basins and ditches; placement of gravel on the roadbed; clearing and grubbing.

Restoration maintenance will occur on 9.4 miles of roads under this alternative. Approximately 3.7 miles of these roads are currently drivable and 5.7 miles are currently brushed closed. On these roads the majority of the proposed work includes removal and replacement of culverts, adding additional drainage structures, roadway brushing, clearing and grading roadbeds, drainage excavation, gravel placement and gate installation. The roads that are currently brushed in will be re-opened for project activities and closed with gates at the end of the project.

Decommissioning - Decommissioning results in the stabilization and restoration of unneeded roads to a more natural state. Decommissioned roads are removed from the Forest Transportation System. Treatments to decommission a road may include one or more types of activities and these are listed in Appendix B. Under this alternative, 2.5 miles of road will be decommissioned. The roads will be treated by the removal and recontouring of all stream crossings and, as needed, recontouring of unstable fill slopes, cutslope stabilization, ripping and placement of woody debris and mulch on the roadbed, installation of cross ditches and grass seeding.

Storage – Storage is the activity that results in the stabilization or restoration of classified roads to a more natural state until the road is needed again. Storage may include one or more of the treatments described under decommissioning. Roads will be effectively blocked.

Under this alternative, approximately 2.0 miles of roads will be put into storage; these roads will be treated in a similar fashion as those described above for decommissioning.

Design Criteria And Mitigation Measures

Design criteria are features that direct the location and extent of the activities, while mitigation measures are features designed to reduce the environmental effects of the proposed activities.

For mitigation measures, the resource specialists and IDT predicted the effectiveness of the measures. In general, effectiveness ratings are based on literature and research, administrative studies, professional experience and logic, and results of previous monitoring.

Prescribed Fire Activities and Air Quality - Most of the prescribed burning proposed for this project could be accomplished without constructing mechanical fire lines. However, a short segment of excavator fireline may be necessary where unit #2 abuts private property at the bottom of the unit. Construction of hand fireline may be necessary around a small portion of unit #2 and unit #6.

All burning activities will comply with Idaho air quality laws and guidelines. Burning is permitted only when air quality, atmospheric conditions and proposed prescribed burning amounts and locations will allow smoke production to be in compliance with the Clean Air Act. Procedures outlined in the North Idaho Smoke Management Memorandum of Agreement (1990) will be

followed, and restrictions imposed by the monitoring unit will be accepted. If there is a restriction on burning, the restrictions are followed in accordance with direction from the local airshed coordinator. These restriction procedures enable the monitoring unit to reduce burning, stop burning in specific areas, or cease burning entirely when meteorological or existing air quality conditions warrant cessation (North Idaho Cooperative Smoke Management Plan, 1990).

Restrictions on prescribed burning for local air quality reasons also may be implemented in addition to those imposed by the smoke management, monitoring unit. The Idaho Division of Environmental Quality recognizes this process as the Best Available Control Technology for prescribed burning. This mitigation has a high degree of effectiveness to keep air pollution from smoke at acceptable levels and ensure that air quality standards will be met.

Aquatic Resources - Site-specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be incorporated to ensure protection of aquatic and soil resources. Best Management Practices are the primary mechanism to enable the achievement of water quality standards. The Forest Service Handbook 2509.22 (Soil and Water Conservation Handbook) outlines Best Management Practices that meet the intent of the water quality protection elements of the Idaho Forest Practices Act. State-recognized BMPs that will be used during project design and implementation are contained in these documents:

- Rules and Regulations Pertaining to the Idaho Forest Practices Act (IFPA), as adopted by the Idaho Land Board.
- Rules and Regulations and Minimum Standards for Stream Channel alternations, as adopted by the Idaho Water Resources Board under authority of the Idaho Stream Channel Protection Board (ISCPA).

The selection and design of BMPs are an integral part of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' Land and Resource Management Plan Standards and Guidelines for Water (Forest Plan, pages II-33 and Appendix S). The BMPs applicable to this project are included in Appendix G of the EA. The objective of this appendix is to provide conservation practices for use on National Forest Lands to minimize the effects of management activities on soil and water resources. The conservation practices were compiled from Forest Service manuals, handbooks, contract and permit provisions, to directly or indirectly improve water quality, reduce losses in soil productivity and erosion, and abate or mitigate management effects, while meeting other resource goals and objectives. Roading and yarding mitigation will have a moderate to high level of estimated effectiveness. The measures that will be required in the contract will have a high level of effectiveness.

The Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS) will be implemented to avoid potential negative impacts to aquatic resources. The Forest Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests provides management goals and objectives for the protection of the fisheries resource. The Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS) amended the IPNF Forest Plan management area direction in August 1995, and added standards and guidelines to protect water and aquatic biota. Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) are portions of watersheds where riparian-dependent resources receive primary emphasis and where management activities will follow these standards and guidelines. RHCAs include riparian corridors, perennial fish and non-fish bearing streams, intermittent streams, wetlands, and other areas that help maintain the integrity of aquatic ecosystems by:

- Influencing the delivery of coarse sediment, organic matter, and woody debris to streams.
- Providing root strength for channel stability.

- Shading the stream
- Protecting water quality (USDA, 1995, p.A-4).

Buffer widths were determined for RHCAs in the project area and are based on the INFS (1995). In one instance (Unit #6), a standard RHCA buffer width was modified by aquatic specialists to better meet research objectives. Proposed activities for this unit include girdling some trees and underburning the unit; these activities will occur within the standard 50-foot buffer for the intermittent channel in this unit. The riparian management objectives will be met in this area. These standards and guidelines have a high effectiveness in maintaining the integrity of aquatic ecosystems. Applicable INFS standards and guidelines are addressed in Appendix H of the EA.

Heritage Resources - A goal of the Forest Service heritage resource program is to manage heritage resources to prevent loss or damage before they can be evaluated for scientific study, interpretive services or other appropriate uses. If any heritage resource sites or human remains are located during project implementation, activities will be altered or stopped to ensure protection measures are taken. The standard heritage resources protection provision (Protection of Cultural Resources, 1/93) will be included in the project contracts. The provision requires that the contractors and the Forest Service representatives work together to protect historic properties. Failure of the contractor to identify historical properties that are encountered will constitute a breach of contract. The provision specifically requires the contractor to notify the Forest Service of any discovery. Mitigation of impacts will include, but are not limited to:

- Establishment of buffer zones,
- Directional falling,
- Alteration of unit boundaries,
- Changes in road locations,
- Designation of skid trails away from historic properties,
- Limiting the harvest methods in certain areas,
- Seasonal limitations, and
- Limiting slash disposal and tree planting activities.

This mitigation will have a high estimated effectiveness. Special contract provisions for protection of cultural resources are used in all contracts and have been effective in protecting heritage resources.

Noxious Weeds - Noxious weed treatment will be conducted according to guidelines and priorities established in the Priest Lake Weed Control Project FEIS (USDA 1997). Methods of control may include biological, chemical, mechanical and cultural methods.

Gravel or borrow pits to be used during road construction or reconstruction will be free of new weed invader species (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist). A list of weed species considered to be potential new invaders is included in the project file.

Any priority weed species (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist) identified during road maintenance will be reported to the District Weed Specialist. A list of priority weed species is included in the project file.

Weed treatment of all haul routes and service landings will occur prior to ground disturbing activities where feasible. If the timing of ground disturbing activities will not allow weed treatment to occur when it will be most effective, it will occur in the next treatment season following the disturbance.

All timber sale contracts will require cleaning of off-road equipment prior to entry onto National Forest lands. If operations occur in areas infested with new invaders (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist), all equipment will be cleaned prior to leaving the site.

All newly constructed skid trails, landings or other areas of disturbance (including maintenance on existing roads) will be seeded with a weed-free native and desired non-native seed mix and fertilized as necessary.

All straw or hay used for mulching or watershed restoration activities will be certified weed-free.

Road segments identified for weed treatment and proposed for storage or decommissioning will be treated prior to decommissioning.

For new weed invaders, the estimated effectiveness of the above measures is high; the measures are expected to be very effective at preventing establishment of new invaders. For existing infestations estimated effectiveness is moderate to high; the measures are expected to be somewhat to very effective at reducing the spread of these in the project area.

Soil Resources - The following practices are designed to minimize the detrimental soil impacts of soil compaction, displacement, severe burning, and nutrient and organic matter depletion on long-term soil productivity. The use of these practices will insure that the soil quality standards listed in the Forest Plan will be met.

The following tractor skidtrail spacing will be used:

- All new skid trails will be designated.
- Where terrain is conducive, trails will be spaced 100 feet or more apart, except where converging.
- Skidtrail spacing closer than listed above may be planned when winter logging occurs on at least two feet or more of snow or on frozen ground.

This measure will have a high effectiveness in meeting Forest Plan standards for soil disturbance to less than 15% of the activity area. Forest plan monitoring has shown that by using these measures, less ground will be impacted (Niehoff 2002c).

To reduce the potential from hot burns, burning will be limited to those times when the surface inch of mineral soil has soil moisture exceeding 25 percent. This measure is highly effective in retaining the fine soil organic component, based upon past IPNF soil monitoring (Niehoff 2002c).

Nutrient cycling will be provided by leaving the following amounts of down woody debris and organic material on-site. The woody debris left will have a sizable component of 6-inch+ diameter material distributed across the unit. Management of coarse woody debris and organic matter in cutting units will follow the research guidelines contained in Graham and others (1994). By habitat types, the following amounts of down woody debris will be maintained:

Douglas-fir/ninebark (dry-sites)	6.6 to 13.2 tons/acre
Western hemlock/queencup beadiily (wet sites)	16.5 to 33 tons/acre

This measure will have a high estimated effectiveness, based on research recommendations, in maintaining long-term soil productivity (Graham et al. 1994).

In order to protect the general nutrient capital of the site, as well as the specific nutrient potassium, the Intermountain Forest Tree Nutrition Cooperative (IFTNC) has developed management recommendations. These will be followed and include:

Practice conventional removal rather than whole tree removal.

Let slash remain on site over winter so mobile nutrients such as potassium can leach from fine materials back to the soil.

Light broadcast burn or underburn for release of potassium and other nutrients.

Avoid mechanical site preparation on ground not protected by snow or slash.

Plant species appropriate to site.

The estimated effectiveness of this measure is high, based on research recommendations (Garrison and Moore 1998), in retaining potassium and other nutrients on the site.

Sensitive Plants and Forest Species of Concern - Sensitive plant surveys will be conducted as needed prior to weed treatment activities.

The documented occurrences of *Buxbaumia viridis* and *Blechnum spicant* will be protected by project design.

Any changes to the selected alternative that may occur during layout will be reviewed, and TES plant surveys will be conducted as necessary prior to project implementation. Newly documented occurrences will be evaluated, with specific protection measures implemented to protect population viability. Such measures could include the following;

Dropping units from harvest activity

Modifying unit boundaries to exclude documented occurrences from project activities

Modifying harvest methods, fuels treatment or logging systems to protect TES plants and their habitat

Implementing, if necessary, Timber Sale Contract provisions B(T)6.251, Protection of Endangered Species, and C(T)9.51, Settlement for Environmental Cancellation.

Effectiveness of the above measures is expected to be high; the measures will protect documented populations of green bug-on-a-stick moss (*Buxbaumia viridis*) and deerfern (*Blechnum spicant*). The above measures will also assure protection of any newly documented occurrences.

Wildlife Habitat - Legal and biological requirements for the conservation of Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive (TES) species will be met. If any TES species were located during project implementation, management activities will be altered if necessary so that proper protection measures are taken. Timber sale contract clause, Protection of Endangered Species, will be included in the contract. This contract clause will be highly effective in protecting TES species.

Wildlife Tree Retention: The following minimum amounts of standing trees will be retained within harvest areas. In harvest areas less than 5 acres in size, surrounding stands of trees may be used to meet retention objectives provided that the minimum amounts of snags and green tree replacements can be met when averaged within a 25-acre zone adjacent to and surrounding the harvest area. Provide equal proportions of live trees and snags:

Dry Forest: 4 snags and 4 live replacements/acre from the largest dbh size class.

Moist Forest: 6 snags and 6 live replacements/acre from the largest dbh size class.

Selection of snags and live tree replacements will emphasize practices that assure the highest probability for long-term retention (Bull, et al. 1997). The higher hazard, higher failure probability snags (advanced decay) will not be used to meet retention objectives. Large diameter snags (greater than 15 inches diameter) that are felled for safety reasons will remain on site to provide for wildlife habitat and long-term site productivity. Minimum height for snags designated for retention will be 40 feet.

Retention practices should focus on ponderosa pine, western larch and recently dead or dying Douglas-fir. Snags should be provided on every 5 to 25-acre area, in clusters or patches, where feasible. It is also desirable to leave live tree replacements in the same patches.

Logs: Coarse woody debris is important to a wide variety of wildlife species; it is also essential for soil productivity, and supplies food and habitat to a large number of invertebrates and microorganisms. The following minimum amounts of logs should be retained within harvest areas. In areas where these numbers are not attainable, provide amounts as close as possible to those listed. It is not the intent of this direction to require felling of snags or live trees to meet this requirement.

Dry Forest: 3-6 logs/acre; each piece 12" or greater in small-end diameter and at least 6 feet in length (20 - 40 total lineal feet).

Moist Forest: 15-20 logs/acre; each piece 12" or greater in small-end diameter and at least 6 feet in length (100 - 140 lineal feet)

If a goshawk nest site were located within the project area the following will occur:

The integrity of any nest sites that lie within the treatment area will be maintained by establishing a 30-acre no-activity buffer around the nest tree.

For nest sites that lie outside treatment areas within a disturbance risk area, purchaser's operations and related activities will be suspended within one-quarter mile (approximately 400 meters) of known nest sites during March 15 - August 15 to reduce risk of nest abandonment caused by disturbance. Activity restrictions can be removed after June 30 if nest site is determined to be inactive or unsuccessful.

Flammulated Owl: Habitat manipulation within flammulated owl habitat will be designed to achieve conditions that will provide for both the short-term and long-term benefit of this species. If nest trees are found a minimum 200-foot buffer will be provided. Because this feature will be specified in the contract, it will have a moderate to high effectiveness in maintaining coarse woody debris.

Improvement Opportunities

The following are projects that could improve resource conditions within the project area. These projects are not mandatory for project implementation and there is no guarantee they will be implemented; they may be accomplished if funding becomes available. The anticipated effects of implementing these activities are discussed by resource in Chapter 3.

Culvert Replacement - During field reviews of the project area, an undersized culvert was identified in Canyon Creek on Road 597G. During very high flows, the creek backs up and flows over the road surface. In addition, the culvert acts as a fish barrier to fish passage during high flows. By

replacing this undersized pipe, there is an opportunity to decrease the risk that a road failure will lead to sedimentation of the creek. In addition, the fish blockage could be removed. The funding to replace this pipe is not yet identified yet but it will likely come from appropriated or grant funds. Please refer to the project file for additional notes on this site.

Noxious Weed Treatment and Monitoring - In addition to the noxious weed mitigation measures that are identified above, other monitoring and treatment of weeds may occur in the project area if funding is available. The full extent of surveying, monitoring and treatment and the availability of funding (KV or appropriated) is not known at this time, therefore these activities are identified as opportunities that could be accomplished if funding became available. Treatment will be conducted under the guidelines of the Priest Lake Noxious Weed Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (USDA Forest Service 1997).

Project Monitoring

The following monitoring will be conducted. This monitoring is designed to verify that the projects are implemented as designed, and are effective and efficient in meeting project and Forest Plan objectives.

In addition to Forest Plan monitoring (see Forest Plan), monitoring is conducted on projects to ensure that implementation is consistent with established standards and guidelines as well as the design features and mitigations of the specific project. For example, all harvest operations; road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance; fuel reduction piling and burning; and planting will be monitored by Forest Service representatives to ensure compliance with contract specifications in addition to implementation of any resource improvement project included in the project. This monitoring is documented on contract inspection reports.

Project implementation generally involves the efforts of a variety of individuals with both specialized and general skills and training. Employees are accustomed to working together to achieve the desired project objectives. For example, it is common for a sale preparation forester or sale administrator to discuss specific ground or project conditions with the wildlife biologist or hydrologist to apply the best practices on the ground. Joint field reviews are taken as needed. This steady informal communication allows for incremental adjustments throughout layout and project implementation to achieve the desired results. In addition to these less formal monitoring procedures, the following monitoring items will be conducted:

Noxious Weeds: Pretreatment of roads and equipment as proposed (Features Common to All Action Alternatives) will be documented on sale inspection reports. The effectiveness of seeding disturbed areas will be evaluated upon completion of the activity. Treated areas will be surveyed and monitored according to treatment priorities established in the Priest Lake Noxious Weed Control Project FEIS.

TES Plants: Monitoring of sensitive plant populations where the proposed activity was modified by buffering to avoid adverse effects will be conducted by a botanist to validate the effectiveness of mitigation measures during and following the activity.

Vegetation: All regeneration-cutting units will be monitored for regeneration success. This is a requirement of the National Forests Management Act. Each active harvest unit will be visited at a frequency necessary to assure compliance with the contract. Minor contract changes or contract modifications will be enacted, when necessary, to meet objectives and standards on the ground. This monitoring is documented on inspection reports.

Best Management Practices: Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be incorporated into many different phases of the project. The Zone Hydrologist will review the planned design of all temporary roads and all road maintenance to assure compliance with BMPs. The engineering representative and the Zone Hydrologist will monitor all temporary and reconditioned roads to ensure that they were built or restored to specifications.

Each active cutting unit will be visited by a sale administrator at a frequency necessary to assure compliance with the BMPs and the timber sale contract. Minor contract changes or contract modifications will be agreed upon and enacted, when necessary, to meet objectives and standards on the ground.

Air Quality: During the burning of timber cutting residues (slash), smoke management guidelines will be followed as prescribed in the Idaho Smoke Management Memorandum of Agreement (1990), and the North Idaho Cooperative Smoke Management Plan (1990). Each airshed has a coordinator responsible for reporting all planned activity to a monitoring unit. The monitoring unit regulates the prescribed burning activities of all participants in the program. The Idaho Division of Environmental Quality recognizes this process as Best Available Control Technology for prescribed burning.

Air Quality is monitored by the North Idaho and Montana Airshed Groups during the fall and spring burning seasons and yearlong by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Visuals: The project will be reviewed before, during and after cutting operations are complete to assess whether visual quality objectives (VQOs) are met.

Decommissioned Roads: Decommissioned roads will be checked periodically during the first year (and periodically thereafter if no problems are noted) to monitor effectiveness of erosion control, noxious weed control, and wildlife security.

Fisheries: Buffer widths for RHCAs in the project area will be monitored prior and during the project to ensure that they are applied. During project activities, the contract administrator will do monitoring of RHCAs.

Heritage Resource: Special contract provisions are used in all contracts. These provisions provided for the protection of all existing recorded heritage resources. They also require that the contractor promptly notify the Forest Service upon discovery of a previously unidentified cultural resource.

VI. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

The criteria that we used for making a decision on which alternative to select was based on how well the alternative addressed the following:

- The purpose and need for action
- The environmental issues and concerns
- The Forest Plan and other legal mandates

Meeting the Purpose and Need

Table 3 summarizes how the alternatives respond to the purpose and need. The proposed action (Alternative 2) would fully respond to the needs that were identified for the project as well as meet

the specific objectives. Conversely, the No Action alternative (Alternative 1) would not meet any of the needs. A major reason that we selected Alternative 2 was that it met the purpose and need and did so without causing substantial deleterious effects to other resources.

Consideration of the Issues and Concerns

A variety of issues were considered by the interdisciplinary team in the process of preparing the EA. Table 3 provides a list of these issues and the effects that would result from implementing each alternative.

In comparison to Alternative 1, Alternative 2 would have small negative effects to soil productivity, sensitive plants and the spread of noxious weeds. Alternative 2 would have small, mixed effects (depending upon the particular species) to wildlife species and this alternative would produce beneficial effects to water quality and fishery resources.

Compared to the other resources that are present in the project area and that could be affected by the proposal, we consider water quality and fisheries as the most important. As discussed in more detail on page 2-2 of the EA, the streams in and near the project area have a special water quality designation for them and they also contain bull trout (threatened species) and westslope cutthroat trout (sensitive species). Alternative 2 will have beneficial effects to these resources and that is an important reason for our decision to select this alternative.

A more thorough comparison of effects is presented in Table 2-3 and within Chapter 3 of the EA.

Consideration of the Forest Plan and Other Legal Mandates

Another reason for selecting Alternative 2 is that we believe this alternative is more consistent with the intent and direction provided by the Forest Plan for the area. More importantly, this alternative responds to legal mandates associated with the aquatic resources while Alternative 1 does not.

Forest Plan: The Canyon Creek Research Project area is located in an area that is designated as Management Area #14 in the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan identified that the purpose of these lands was for manipulative, scientific research. Forest researchers from the Rocky Mountain Research Station, in partnership with staff from the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, have identified the need to conduct this specific long-term research study and implement the study within the Priest River Experimental Forest. Alternative 1 (the No Action alternative) would not be responsive to this need and therefore it would be inconsistent with Management Area direction in the Forest Plan.

Clean Water Act and Other Aquatic Resource Mandates: As discussed in more detail on pages 3-1 through 3-3, and within Appendix G (pages G-1 through G-2) of the EA, the Clean Water Act, the Idaho State water quality standards and associated Best Management Practices, all serve to eliminate the discharge of pollutants into the nation's waters and achieve standards so that water bodies are able to meet beneficial uses. In addition, as discussed on page 3-3 and 3-4 of the EA, the National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act, Executive Order 12962, the Governor's Bull Trout Plan, and the Inland Native Fish Strategy, all require the Forest Service to protect and enhance the fishery resources.

Table 3: Summary of the Response of the Alternatives to the Purpose and Need and Issues.

<u>Project Objective or Issue</u>	<u>Current Condition</u>	<u>Alternative 1</u> (No Action Alternative)	<u>Alternative 2</u> (Proposed Action)
<p><u>Objective</u></p> <p>Test silvicultural systems (those that would not create large openings) and determine their value in promoting forest composition and structures that are similar to historic conditions.</p>	<p>Currently there are no comprehensive long-term forestry studies that are designed to determine how different silvicultural systems could be used in the western white pine timber type to trend stands toward historic conditions without creating large openings.</p>	<p>This alternative would not help to answer the research questions. Foresters working in the western white pine type forest, who wished to manipulate the vegetation for a vegetative restoration objective would either continue to do so without scientific results from comprehensive studies, or Foresters would avoid trying treatments such as these because of the unknown efficacy.</p>	<p>This alternative would begin to implement a long-term study to help answer these questions. Once results become available, Foresters would become more knowledgeable in the effectiveness of these treatments in meeting vegetative restoration objectives and what the effects are on other ecosystem elements.</p>
<p><u>Objective</u></p> <p>Reduce the sedimentation risk that the existing road system poses to streams in the area</p>	<p>Aging roads and associated drainage structures, coupled with insufficient maintenance budgets have lead to increasing risks for stream sedimentation and subsequent harm to water quality and fisheries.</p>	<p>This alternative would not make progress towards meeting this objective and the underlying need.</p>	<p>By improving and maintaining road drainage structures, applying gravel to some road segments and obliterating unneeded roads, this alternative would lessen the risk that roads could harm the streams.</p>
<p><u>Issue</u></p> <p>Maintain water quality and fish habitat</p>	<p>Streams within the analysis area currently have good water quality and fish habitat.</p>	<p>Sediment inputs into the streams would increase in the future due to failures of road drainage structures. Water quality and fish habitat would slowly degrade and eventually Forest Plan direction regarding these resources would not be met.</p>	<p>There would be a net improvement to water quality and fish habitat due to the road improvements that would be implemented and the removal of some roads that could fail. Over the long-term, Forest plan direction for these resources would be better met with this alternative than with Alternative 1.</p>

<u>Project Objective or Issue</u>	<u>Current Condition</u>	<u>Alternative 1</u> (No Action Alternative)	<u>Alternative 2</u> (Proposed Action)
<i>Issue</i> Wildlife species of concern	Except for the two species discussed below, there is abundant habitat available in the analysis area for wildlife species of concern. However, very little habitat is currently available to the flammulated owl and the white-headed woodpecker because the timber stands are too dense.	This alternative would not have significant effects on wildlife species of concern and the alternative would meet Forest Plan objectives, standards and guidelines concerning wildlife.	Small reductions of goshawk, fisher and marten habitat would occur. Habitat for flammulated owl and white-headed woodpecker would increase slightly and the quality of a small amount of habitat for black backed and pileated woodpeckers would improve. The effects to these species would not be significant and the Forest Plan objectives, standards and guidelines concerning wildlife would be met.
<i>Issue</i> Plant species of concern	A sensitive moss species was located within proposed treatment areas. Past management practices have impacted some habitat for this moss but a high percentage of habitat has not been impacted. Suitable habitat exists for other rare plants that occur in moist/wet areas.	This alternative would not result in any changes to plant species of concern or their habitat. This alternative would meet Forest Plan direction regarding these plants.	Individual moss plants and/or habitat for the moss may be affected, but populations would not be reduced below levels necessary to support the species. Impacts to other species of concern that use moist/wet habitats would be low to moderate. This alternative would meet Forest Plan direction regarding the management of sensitive and rare plant species.
<i>Issue</i> Soil productivity	Past management activities have had a very small impact on soil productivity through compaction.	This alternative would not result in any changes to the productivity of the soil.	This alternative would reduce soil productivity by a small amount within some of the treatment areas. Approximately 7 acres would be detrimentally disturbed by the use of ground based harvest systems and slash piling machinery. In addition, potassium levels on the site may be reduced through the removal of some tree boles on approximately 141 acres of soils where the nutrient potassium may be limiting tree growth/health.
<i>Issue</i> Noxious weeds	Oxeye daisy, goatweed, spotted knapweed and meadow hawkweed occur on existing roads within the area. No weeds were observed in proposed treatments areas.	This alternative would not change the risk of additional weed invasion and spread. Would meet Forest Plan direction.	The risk is low that this alternative would cause new weed species to become established. The risk is low to moderate that existing weed infestations would increase.

As discussed earlier in this Decision Notice, during the early stages of planning for this project it was apparent that the existing road system in the area was aging and deteriorating to the point that it is beginning to threaten the aquatic resources with an increasing risk of road drainage failures and sedimentation. We feel that it would be irresponsible for us to ignore this situation and to do so would be inconsistent with the aquatic laws that we cited earlier. Therefore, one important reason that we selected Alternative 2 was that this alternative would implement many actions designed to aggressively respond to this situation while Alternative 1 would not.

VII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public scoping for this project was initiated in January of 2001 with publication in the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions. In March of 2001, a letter announcing the initiation of the research project was mailed to 37 adjacent landowners and 59 agencies, organizations and individuals interested in receiving project proposals. Three local newspapers were also sent copies of the scoping notice. In response to these efforts, we received twelve letters; eleven submitted comments and one requested future information. The project has continued to be listed on the quarterly schedule.

We considered these comments and incorporated them into the project and analysis. A list of the comments and a description of how they were used in the development of the project is provided in Appendix C of the EA.

Once the EA was complete, it was mailed to all those who had previously expressed interest and a legal announcement was published in the Spokesman-Review on September 27, 2002. One environmental group submitted comments on the EA. Their comments and our responses are contained in Appendix 1 of this document.

VIII. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICIES

We have determined that this decision is consistent with the laws, regulations, and agency policies related to this project. The following summarizes findings required by major environmental laws:

National Forest Management Act (16 USC 1600 et. seq.)

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and accompanying regulations require that several specific findings be documented at the project level. These are outlined below:

Timber Resource Land Suitability:

NFMA requires that if timber harvesting is being conducted for the explicit purpose of timber production, that it be done on lands that are suitable (as defined in 36CFR219.14) for this purpose. The Forest Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests identified the forested lands within the Priest River Experimental Forest as not being appropriate, and therefore suitable, for timber production. The primary purpose of the experimental forest was identified as serving as an area for manipulative research, not timber production. However, as noted on page III-64 of the Forest Plan, timber harvesting is allowed for research purposes in this area. Since the purpose of this project is for research objectives and not solely for timber production, we find that Alternative 2 is consistent with this provision of NFMA.

Clearcutting and Even-aged Management:

NFMA directs that clearcutting be used only where “it is determined to be the optimum method”. Other even-aged silvicultural methods may be used where “determined to be appropriate.” Although no clearcutting is being conducted with this project, a form of even-aged management (strip shelterwood) will be implemented on 56 acres. In order to conduct the desired research, this even-aged management is necessary and we have determined that it is appropriate as required by NFMA.

Vegetative Manipulation:

All proposals involving vegetative manipulation of tree cover for any purpose must comply with the seven requirements found in 36 CFR 219.27(b).

1. Management prescriptions shall be best suited to the multiple-use goals established for the area with impacts considered in the determination.

All of the vegetative treatments specified in Alternative 2 meet the goals and objectives in the Forest Plan for Management Area #14. The impacts of the treatments have been considered in the EA and the treatments will help meet the projects needs and objectives.

2. When trees are cut to achieve timber production objectives, the cuttings shall be made in such a way as to assure that the areas can be adequately restocked as provided in 36 CFR 219.27(c)(3) “...assure that the technology and knowledge exist to adequately restock the lands within 5 years after final harvest” (16 USC 1604(g) (E)(ii)).

As previously mentioned, the harvesting that will occur in Alternative 2 is not being done for timber production purposes. Rather, it is being done for research reasons. Therefore, this NFMA requirement does not apply. However, the alternative does include some artificial and natural regeneration of small openings. The technology exists to restock these openings. These areas occur on productive moist sites and on similar areas, reforestation success on the IPNF (and on PREF) has been very good.

3. Management prescriptions shall not be chosen primarily because they will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber.

Management prescriptions were selected to meet specific research objectives and were not chosen for the greatest dollar return or output of timber.

4. Management prescriptions shall consider the effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.

In the selection of management prescriptions, effects to residual trees and adjacent stands were considered. In fact, one portion of the research will study these effects so that managers can better predict the effects in the future.

5. Management prescriptions shall avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources.

The effects of Alternative 2 on soil and water resources are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA. The project design criteria/mitigation measures and BMPs that will be followed will help protect the soil

and water resources. In addition, some of the road work that will occur is being conducted in order to reduce the future risk that current roads could harm the water resources.

6. Management prescriptions shall provide the desired effect on water quantity and quality, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation use, and aesthetic values.

The desired effects that the management prescriptions will have upon these resources are displayed in the EA.

7. Management prescriptions shall be practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements, and total cost of preparing, logging, and administration.

The specified transportation and harvesting systems to be used in the implementation of this decision have been analyzed in combination with the other requirements of the management prescriptions. Equipment and technology that are commonly available are prescribed. The preparation, logging, and administration are practical for achieving the resource objectives. Revenue generated by this project is not expected to cover all of the costs associated with implementing the project. However, by selling the trees that are merchantable and that will be cut to implement the treatments, some revenue will be generated that will offset the cost of the project.

Consistency With The Forest Plan:

The Forest Plan establishes management direction for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. This direction is described in forest-wide and management area specific standards. Designing and implementing projects consistent with this direction is the means to move the Forest towards the desired future condition as described in Chapter II of the Forest Plan. After reviewing the EA, we find that this decision is consistent with the Forest Plan standards.

We have also reviewed interim direction in the Inland Native Fish Strategy of 1995 and find that Alternative 2 is consistent with this strategy.

Clean Air Act

Upon review of the EA (Chapter 3), we find that activities to be implemented associated with Alternative 2 will be coordinated to meet the requirements of the State Implementation Plans, Smoke Management Plan, and Federal air quality requirements.

National Historic Preservation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

Cultural resource reviews have been completed on all areas to be impacted by ground-disturbing activities. No cultural resources are expected to be affected by this action. Recognizing that the potential exists for unidentified sites to be encountered or disturbed during project activity, special provisions for their protection will be included in all contracts used to implement this project. These provisions will allow the Forest Service to unilaterally modify or cancel a contract to protect cultural resources, regardless of when they are identified. This provision will be used if a site were discovered after a harvest operation had begun. This project is in compliance with the Region 1 programmatic agreement (1995) with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory

Council on Historic Preservation.

The Endangered Species Act (16 USC 1531 et. seq.)

Upon review of the wildlife Biological Assessment (see the project file), we believe the project will have “no effect” on grizzly bears, woodland caribou, and Canada lynx. “No effect” calls do not require concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The wildlife biologist determined that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, wolf and bald eagles (see the BA in the project file). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination (see project file).

A Biological Assessment of effects related to fish species determined that the project would have no effect on white sturgeon. The project may affect, but will not likely adversely affect bull trout. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also concurred with this determination (see project file).

A Biological Assessment of effects to plant species determined that the project would have no effect on water howellia, Ute ladies'-tresses or Spalding's catchfly or their habitats.

Under provisions of this Act, Federal agencies are directed to seek to conserve endangered and threatened species and to ensure that actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any of these species. Upon review of the EA and the three Biological Assessments, we find that the Selected Alternative complies with this Act.

Administration of the Forest Development Transportation System – Roads Policy – 36 CFR Part 212 et al. (published in the Federal Register on January 12, 2001)

During the planning of this project, the ID Team conducted a road analysis as required by the transportation system rule. This analysis is summarized in Appendix B of the EA. The analysis complied with the terms of this new rule and policy. We have used the analysis in our decision to select Alternative 2. We have adopted all of the recommended changes to the road system that were identified by the ID Team in the road analysis and these have been incorporated into the design of Alternative 2.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

On January 10, 2001, President Clinton signed an Executive Order outlining responsibilities of federal agencies to protect migratory birds. We have reviewed the information regarding neotropical migratory birds in the EA (Appendix C, pages C-2 and C-3) and we find that the alternative we have selected complies with this Executive Order.

Environmental Justice

Alternative 2 was assessed to determine whether it will disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations, in accordance with Executive Order 12898 (EA, Appendix C, page C-8). No impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or the effects assessment.

Compliance with other laws, regulations, and policies are listed in various sections of the EA, the

Project Record, and the Forest Plan.

IX. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

We have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and associated project records for the Canyon Creek Research Project. As a result of this review, we conclude that Alternative 2 is not a major Federal action and would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively, with other activities in the general area. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following factors set forth in 40CFR 1508.27:

(a) Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):

The disclosure of effects in the EA found the actions limited in context. The project area is limited in size and the activities limited in duration. Effects are local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

(b) Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27):

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effects will be beneficial.

Impacts associated with the project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. These impacts are within the range of those identified in the Forest Plan. The actions would not have significant impacts on resources identified and described in Chapter 3.

The effect of the decision to be made is non-significant in the long and short term (EA, Chapters 2 and 3).

(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Proposed activities would not significantly affect public health and safety. Timber harvesting activities would be conducted in a safe manner to protect the public. Similar actions have not significantly affected public health and safety. A minor impact for a short period may occur to local air quality from the prescribed burning/underburning treatments and the burning of logging slash. However, burning would be done in accordance to State air quality standards. Prescribed burning can present a risk of escaped fire. Extensive agency experience with similar local projects and conditions show these risks are low (EA, Appendix C, page C-6). The water analysis indicates no degradation of water quality that would constitute a public health threat (EA, page 3-3).

(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no adverse effects to historic places or loss of scientific, cultural, historical, or other

unique resources (EA Appendix C, page C-7). This project is in compliance with the Region 1 programmatic agreement (1995) between the State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

There are no parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers within the affected area.

A proposed Research Natural Area (RNA) exists near the project area. The effects from the proposal on the RNA were considered in the analysis and will be minor in nature (see project file).

(4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

An analysis of the proposed action and alternatives have been conducted using the best information available and the latest methods of analyzing data by professionals in their respected disciplines. Throughout the analysis process, public comments varied in their recommendations on ways to best manage resources within the project area. However, the effects of the proposed alternatives on the various resources (EA, Chapter 3) are not considered to be highly controversial by professionals, specialists and scientists from associated fields of forestry, wildlife biology and management, fisheries, and hydrology. While the selected alternative may be controversial, we do not believe that there is significant controversy over the effects of this action.

(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Scoping did not identify highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks. The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or uncertain risks. The technical analyses conducted for determinations of the impacts to the resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment. Impacts are within the limits that are considered thresholds of concern. Therefore, we conclude that there are no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

(6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This project is not setting a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The sites that would be affected are designated by the Forest Plan for manipulative research and the management practices that we have chosen are compatible with the Forest Plan, and with the capabilities of the land. This action does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

The EA includes all connected, cumulative, and similar actions in the scope of the analysis (page 1-9 through 1-11). The cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions are considered and disclosed in the EA, Chapter 3.

(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or

objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

There are no features in the area affected that are listed or are being considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. A cultural resource inventory has been completed in the area, and all known cultural resources are protected (EA, Appendix C, page C-7). The potential for impacting undiscovered sites is mitigated by compliance with Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and through the use of standard timber sale contract clauses (EA page 2-17 and 2-18).

(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Upon review of the EA and the three Biological Assessments, we find that the Selected Alternative would not adversely affect threatened and endangered species.

(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action does not violate any Federal, State or local laws or permits imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, we have determined that the Canyon Creek Research Project is not a major federal action and that its implementation will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, we have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement does not need to be prepared for this project.

X. APPEAL PROVISIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Copies of the Canyon Creek Research Project EA are available for review at the Priest Lake Ranger District Office, 32203 Hwy 57, Priest River, Idaho, or on the IPNF website (www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/index.html). The supporting Project Record is available for review at the Priest Lake Ranger District Office.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. As stated in 36 CFR 215.11, an appeal may be filed by any person or non-Federal organization (Federal Agencies may not appeal). A written Notice of Appeal must be submitted within 45 days after the date that notice of this decision is published in the Spokesman-Review, Spokane, Washington. Appeals should be sent to:

USDA, Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer
PO Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. For further information on this decision, contact Kathy Murphy, District Ranger, Priest Lake Ranger Station (208-443-6801), or David Cobb, Project Leader (208-443-6854). If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period.

If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

/s/ Ranotta K. McNair
RANOTTA K. MCNAIR
Forest Supervisor
Idaho Panhandle National Forests

12/16/02
Date

/s/ Russell T. Graham
RUSSELL T. GRAHAM
Scientist-in-Charge
Rocky Mountain Research Station

12/16/02
Date

Appendix 1 – Response to Comments

The following are comments from Jeff Juel of the Ecology Center (letter dated 10/28/02) on the EA and our responses to him.

Comment #1- “We incorporate the Ecology Center’s January 25, 2000 letter to the Forest Supervisor, which the Priest River District Ranger received a copy, as comments on this EA. Please place a copy of that letter in the Project File as responsive to your request for comments on this EA. The contents of the letter are based upon many years of experience in the public involvement process on the Priest River Ranger District, the IPNF and the national forests of the region as a whole.”

Response -During the past two years, Mr. Juel has made similar requests to incorporate letters he had written to Forest Supervisor David Wright regarding his desires for management of the National Forest. The Forest Supervisor has consistently responded that such an approach to public comment was insufficient, and does not meet the requirements for commenting on Forest Service proposals. As required by 36 CFR 215.6, persons submitting comments on a proposal have the responsibility to provide specific facts and reasoning. Mr. Juel was previously advised that many of the concerns he raised in his January 25, 2000 letter are more appropriately addressed at the Forest Plan scale or at an even more broad scale. In addition, Mr. Juel was asked to respond individually to project level proposals and to be as specific as possible with the comments (letter to Jeff Juel from Forest Supervisor David Wright dated February 11, 2000).

Responsible Officials are required to address comments that are received during the comment period and that are specific and relevant to the proposal. The comments that Mr. Juel has requested be incorporated into his response to this project are neither specific to this proposal, nor were they received during the comment period for this project. Therefore, we will not address them here and they will not be placed into the project file.

Comment #2- “The EA states you propose to log old growth, however this is not wise because the Forest Service has not demonstrated consistency and compliance with all the Old growth and wildlife Forest Plan Standards.”

Response - The Forest Plan standards regarding Old Growth Habitat Management are listed on page II-29 of the Forest Plan. Within Appendix C (pgs C-1 and C-2) of the EA, there is a discussion of how the proposed action will affect Old Growth and the reasoning for the determination that the proposed action is consistent with Forest Plan Old Growth Standards.

In addition to the specific Old Growth Habitat Management standards discussed on pages C-1 and C-2, the project file contains information on how the project is consistent with the other Old Growth standards.

The Forest Plan standards regarding the management of wildlife habitat are listed on page II-26 through II-28 of the Forest Plan. The standards that are relevant to this project are: #2 a-d (these relate to the general management of Threatened and Endangered species), #5 a-c (these are specific to Bald Eagle management), #6 a-c (these are specific to the management of Gray Wolf habitat), #7 a-b (these involve the maintenance of viable populations of management indicator and snag dependant species), and #9 (involving the management of habitat for sensitive species). The wildlife analysis that was conducted and is presented on pages 3-38 through 3-65 of the EA addresses the general consistency of the proposal with Forest Plan standards. The project file contains more specific information on individual standards and how the project is consistent with them.

Comment #3 – “The EA does not demonstrate consistency with the Terms and Conditions set by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Biological Opinion.”

Response - It is not clear if Mr. Juel is referring to a specific Biological Opinion that has been written on some other project or issue, or whether Mr. Juel is stating that a Biological Opinion is necessary for this proposal, and that the EA needs to demonstrate how the project is consistent with it. At the time that this EA was released for public comment, the biological assessments, evaluations and the appropriate concurrence letters from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had not been developed. This is not abnormal. Typically these documents are prepared after the public comment period is over and the Responsible Official has identified a preferred alternative. These documents are then developed for the preferred alternative and depending upon conclusions reached in these reports, the Responsible Official makes a decision. These documents have now been prepared for the selected alternative (Alternative 2) and they are included in the project file.

Comment #4- “The EA does not demonstrate consistency with Forest Plan MIS wildlife and fish population and habitat monitoring provisions.”

Response - Monitoring that is conducted for the implementation of the Forest Plan is outside the scope of this site-specific proposed project. Forest Plan monitoring will continue to occur regardless of the decisions that are made on this particular project. This EA and Forest Plan monitoring provisions are not connected. Therefore, there is no need to demonstrate consistency.

Forest Plan monitoring requirements are listed in Table IV-2 of the Forest Plan. As indicated on page IV-8 (first paragraph) of the Forest Plan, some of the monitoring items are applicable to specific management areas and some are applicable to broader areas or across the whole Forest. Those that are applicable to the PREF (management area #14) are listed on page III-64 of the Forest Plan. Of these, there is only one that involves wildlife and/or fish monitoring. This is standard F-1, population trend of wildlife indicator species. This Forest Plan monitoring item is one that is required every five years. The last time this item was reported on was in 1998. Pages 23 through 40 of the 1998 Forest Plan monitoring report present information on this monitoring item. The two wildlife management indicator species that are applicable to this proposed project, American Marten and Pileated Woodpecker (see page 3-39 of the EA for a discussion of how applicable MIS were selected) are discussed on pages 38 through 40 of the 1998 Forest Plan Monitoring report.

Monitoring items that are more applicable to broad areas or forest-wide are listed on page IV-8 (second paragraph) of the Forest Plan. Of these, item G-4 is the only item that is applicable to wildlife or fish monitoring and that was not already mentioned above. This item is one that is reported every two years. The last time this monitoring item was reported was in 2000. Pages 41 through 43 of the 2000 Forest Plan Monitoring Report contain information on this monitoring item.

Comment #5- “The EA does not cite any monitoring or studies that show the mitigation measures proposed for soil productivity production actually work here. The EA also does not disclose that the FS has yet to adequately monitor soil productivity following logging activities.”

Response - The soil related mitigation measures that are proposed for the project are listed on pages 2-19 and 2-20 of the EA. The effectiveness of the mitigation measures, and the monitoring and/or studies that the measures were developed from, are also described on those pages.

We disagree with Mr. Juel’s statement that, “...the FS has yet to adequately monitor soil productivity following logging activities.” The Idaho Panhandle National Forest has done a significant amount of monitoring of a variety of logging activities. The Forest Plan monitoring item that relates to soil productivity is K-1, prescriptions and effects on land productivity. Annual monitoring takes place on

this item and is documented in the Forest Plan Monitoring Reports. These past monitoring efforts have enabled the IPNF to develop a procedure to determine how past, as well as proposed activities affect soil productivity. Page 3-79 (second paragraph) of the EA discusses this process.

Comment #6- “The FS has yet to design conservation strategies that insure viable populations of Sensitive species are being maintained forestwide. The FS does not cite any forestwide population trend monitoring, nor the results of surveys for MIS or TES in the project area.”

Response – The evaluation of population trends is beyond the scope of project level analysis and species viability is not analyzed at the project scale. However, to address your first comment, the current forest service strategy (USDA 1987) for the management of viable populations of sensitive species is to maintain habitat greater than 40 percent of maximum potential. In order to maintain viable populations of all species, the habitat will be managed for selected indicator species. Since the development of the IPNF forest plan, several conservation strategies have been developed and have been incorporated into the management strategy. These include strategies for such species as Canada lynx, harlequin duck and Townsend’s big-eared bat. Other strategies will be incorporated as these are developed and approved.

Wildlife technicians conducted surveys for MIS species such as the northern goshawk in June and July 2000 for the Canyon Creek project. Surveys were conducted using established protocol. No visual or acoustical responses were documented. During the same time period, a survey of identified habitat for flammulated owl was also conducted, with the intent of verifying habitat suitability. Each year, mid-winter surveys for wintering bald eagles are conducted within the Priest River drainage, which includes habitat directly adjacent to the proposed Canyon Creek project area. The most recent survey was conducted January 2002.

Comment #7- “The EA lists several research studies under 1.31 upon which the Purpose and Need are based. The EA should indicate which of those studies were undertaken in the District, on the Forest, just where they were undertaken, and where they’re not why the science should properly be extrapolated to the proposal area.”

Response – Appendix D contains a list of the references that were cited for this EA. Pages D-9 and D-10 contain those references that were cited in the discussion of the purpose and need for the project. All of the studies and/or evaluations that were cited occurred in the Inland West. The study/report that was cited as Neuenschwander et al. 1999, was very specific to the western white pine forests that this project area occurs within.

Comment #8 - “The EA does not disclose how much detrimentally disturbed soil is in the Project Area or watershed (cumulative effects analysis area). The EA does not disclose the level of detrimentally disturbed soils in any past “activity area” in the project area or watershed, nor does it seem that the activity area boundaries have been kept constant, as is the proper way. Therefore the EA does not demonstrate consistency with the Forest Plan or Regional Standards for detrimentally disturbed soils, for activity areas.”

Response - On page 3-73 (paragraph 4) of the EA, we explain that the analysis area for the soil resource is the immediate vicinity of the proposed management activities and we provide the rationale for that decision. On page 3-82 of the EA, we provide a table containing the cumulative detrimentally disturbed soil levels by proposed unit and an average for all of the units. As presented on page 3-79 (paragraph 3) of the EA, there are a few old skid trails present within two of the proposed vegetative treatment units and these were considered in the calculations for detrimentally disturbed soils.