
HIDDEN CEDAR PROJECT
Final Environmental Impact Statement
SUMMARY

CHANGES FROM THE DRAFT TO THE FINAL

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was mailed on May 23rd and 24th to forty four individuals, agencies and groups for review. The draft EIS presented specific information on the proposal, the alternatives to the proposal, and the results of analysis of the information gathered. During the public comment period a total of 3 comment letters were received. The responses to public input can be found in Chapter 4 of the FEIS. The comments were used to further analyze the proposed action, look at new issues and mitigation and prepare the Final EIS.

A significant change was the development of a new alternative (Alternative F) as a result of comments and further review by interdisciplinary team specialists. Highlights of the changes are:

- ❑ The amount of road construction and harvest has been reduced in the Cedar Creek drainage.
- ❑ Approximately 11.7 miles of the proposed road decommissioning is to take place prior to or during project road construction.
- ❑ Due to the concern for low potassium soils, site specific testing was done in the project area and the information was used to support design criteria and mitigation measures related to soils.
- ❑ All units with yarding tops fuels reduction method, were changed to a different method (grapple piling, broadcast burn/jackpot burn, lopping, or hand piling) to address the overwintering of slash.

INTRODUCTION

This project is located on the St. Joe Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. The objective of this project is to improve watershed conditions and move this landscape assessment area toward the desired condition as defined by the Idaho Panhandle Forest Plan goals and objectives. The project is in the St. Maries watershed and Sherwin – Staples Landscape Assessment Area. (See FEIS, Project and Vicinity Map, M-1). Besides National Forest System Lands, the project area contains private industrial land, private residential land, railroad and highway right-of-ways and a powerline corridor.

The project area is approximately 37,000 acres of federal and non-federal lands. It includes the Cedar, Blair, Christmas, and Staples creek drainage in the Upper St. Maries River and the Bechtel, Mazie, Wood, Hidden, Cat Spur, Lower Slim and Keeler Creek drainages in the West Fork of the St. Maries River. The West Fork and the Main Stem of the St. Maries River are on the State of Idaho 303d list as water quality limited for cold water biota.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need was developed through an assessment of the project area and identifying the desired condition as defined by the Idaho Panhandle Forest Plan goals and objectives. The need for the Proposed Action is generated by the difference between the current and desired resource conditions in the project area.

Vegetation

Move vegetation toward historical conditions where feasible and acceptable to other resources.

More Specifically:

- a) There has been a decline in long-lived early seral tree species (western white pine, western larch and ponderosa pine) as a percent of stand composition.
- b) A reduction in mature, large old trees and an increased in pole to medium sawtimber has occurred in the stand structure.
- c) Stand density has increased over historical conditions.

Roads

Reduce the impacts of existing roads. More specifically:

- a) The existing condition of many roads negatively affects water quality by intercepting subsurface flows and increasing water yield.
- b) Roads encroaching on streams lead to stream bank instability, channel erosion and increased sedimentation.
- c) Roads intersecting streams can create fish barriers.
- d) Roads and landings have detrimentally impacted soils.
- e) The existing open road density in the project area increases wildlife species vulnerability to hunting and trapping and increases disturbance levels, which may displace animals. Reductions in road density will increase acres of wildlife security.

Since the project area contains lands owned by private individuals, private corporations and the State of Idaho, coordination of road design, operations and maintenance should occur to provide reasonable access.

MAJOR ISSUES

Internal and external comments revealed issues representing unresolved conflict with the proposed action. The following issues were used to develop alternatives to the proposed action:

Issue #1- Road Construction: Concerns were expressed that new road construction will contribute to an existing problem of adequately maintaining forest roads and the effects of road construction on wildlife security, water quality and fish habitat.

Issue #2 -Existing Road Management: Concern was expressed over restoring the watershed and the obliteration of roads in riparian areas and the negative effects of existing roads on wildlife security.

Issue #3- Commercial logging: A concern was expressed on the use of road building and timber harvest to achieve desired objectives related to watershed rehabilitation.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Seven alternatives were considered for this project and five were carried forward in the DEIS. The two alternatives eliminated from detailed study can be found in Chapter II of the FEIS. Another alternative was brought forward after comments on the DEIS. Alternative F was developed to address water quality in the Cedar Creek drainage. A total of six alternatives were carried forward in the FEIS and include the no action alternative required by NEPA and NFMA, and five action alternatives. The action alternatives were developed based on the issues above, with design features related to analysis issues and public concerns. This section describes the alternatives analyzed in detail.

ALTERNATIVE A – NO ACTION

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that an EIS include a “no action” alternative to serve as a baseline to compare action alternatives (36 CFR 1502.14). The no action alternative is based on the premise that ecosystems change, even in the absence of active management.

No timber harvest, pre-commercial thinning, road construction or road decommissioning would be initiated at this time. This alternative provides the basis for which to compare effects of action alternatives. It does not meet the purpose and need for reasons described in Chapter 1 of the FEIS.

ACTIVITIES COMMON TO THE ACTION ALTERNATIVES

This section describes the activities common to the action alternatives. Design features and mitigation measures for these activities were developed to protect resources. These are described by resource in Chapter II of the FEIS. The features would be incorporated into the project design, timber sale contract, and other contracts and project plans. Alternative E has no timber harvest proposed so the activities specific to timber harvest will not apply to Alternative E.

TIMBER HARVEST AND FUELS TREATMENT

All harvest is on lands identified as suitable for timber production or where timber harvest is allowed according to the Forest Plan.

Various harvest methods are proposed to meet the purpose and need to improve timber stands including commercial thinning, clearcut with reserves, group shelterwood, irregular shelterwood, shelterwood removal, shelterwood seed tree, and shelterwood preparatory cuts. See Appendix A of the FEIS for a detailed description of treatments, objectives, and harvest methods by unit.

Slash and fuels reduction treatments include broadcast and jackpot pile burning, excavator piling, hand piling and lopping. Appendix A of the FEIS lists fuels reduction methods for each unit by alternative.

Where regeneration harvest is proposed, planting would supplement the natural regeneration anticipated. Planted conifer seedlings will enhance species diversity, assure timely reforestation, and contribute towards long-term desired habitat conditions. Reforestation of harvested areas would be designed to achieve a mixture of native tree species appropriate to the specific site. Gopher control would also be initiated when necessary on regeneration harvest units.

There is construction, reconstruction, and temporary road construction associated with timber harvest. All temporary road construction will be re-contoured upon completion of activities. All new road construction proposed on NFS lands will be put into road management prescriptions C (long term storage), D (partial re-contour) or E (full re-contour). Existing roads that require reconstruction will be done to specifications to allow for safe timber haul, improved drainage, and to meet state water quality standards.

ACCESS REQUESTS – ADJACENT LANDOWNERS AND JURISDICTIONS

Access requests across National Forest lands from adjacent landowners (State of Idaho and Potlatch Corporation) are included in all action alternatives. The road construction of approximately 2.2 miles will be analyzed as a direct/indirect effect in the FEIS. Actions taking place on corporate or State lands associated with request are analyzed under cumulative effects.

PRECOMMERCIAL THINNING

For all action alternatives, approximately 615 acres of precommercial thinning is proposed to improve the growing conditions of the selected trees by eliminating competition for light and nutrients. These are previously harvested units of sapling size, which are overstocked with trees.

FISH POND

The development of a recreational fish pond in partnership with the Idaho Fish and Game and Potlatch Corporation will be pursued. This involves expanding water in the area to about one acre in size.

WATERSHED RESTORATION WORK

To meet the purpose and need to: 1) protect and improve aquatic habitat and maintain and improve water quality conditions, work will take place that will show improvements to watersheds, such as: roads would be decommissioned, placed in long-term storage, and maintained and improved. Amount (miles) varies by alternative.

Watershed restoration work will be implemented in several ways. Road decommissioning utilizes appropriated funds, KV, and other funding. Additionally, as funding becomes available, riparian planting will occur on approximately five miles (20-30 acres) of stream (Wood Cr., Hidden Cr., and the West Fork of the St. Maries River) and large woody debris placement would occur on approximately 1.2 miles of the West Fork of the St. Maries river.

ALTERNATIVE B – PROPOSED ACTION

This alternative includes timber harvest, fuels treatment, road construction and road decommissioning. See table below.

Timber Harvest Method	Acres
Intermediate Harvest	
Commercial Thin	843
Shelterwood Prep Cut	207
Regeneration Harvest	
Shelterwood Seed Cut	40
Shelterwood Removal Cut	16
Irregular Shelterwood Cut	73
Group Shelterwood Cut	58
Clearcut with Reserves	131
Total Acres treated with timber harvest to meet objectives	1,368
Fuels Treatment*	
Acres	
Jackpot and Broadcast Burning	188
Excavator Piling	556
Lopping	114
Hand piling	12

*Fuels treatment acres do not equal harvest acres since some units have more than one type treatment and several units have multiple objectives, not all acres are treated.

Road Activity	NFSR Miles	Private miles
Construction/Reconstruction:		
Temporary Road Construction	3.0	
New Road Construction (NFSR)	6.2	
Road Reconstruction	7.3	
NFSR Cost share Construction	2.2	
Private Construction* (Access Request-cumulative action)		5.6
Total	18.7	5.6
Stabilization and Restoration:		
Existing NFSR put into long term storage	7.7	
Existing Classified NFSR decommissioned *	1.1	
Existing Unclassified road decommissioned	10.2	
Total	19.0	

*for display purposes only

NFSR – National Forest System Roads

*Existing NFSR decommissioned = road # 1452 - .5 miles and road #341a - .6 miles.

ALTERNATIVE C

Alternative C, there would be no new road construction except that required for access to private land. This alternative includes timber harvest, fuels reduction and road decommissioning. This alternative has approximately 83% of harvest units harvested by helicopter.

Timber Harvest Acres by Harvest Method	Acres
Intermediate Harvest	
Commercial Thin	871
Shelterwood Prep Cut	207
Regeneration Harvest	
Shelterwood Seed Cut	40
Shelterwood Removal Cut	16
Irregular Shelterwood Cut	73
Group Shelterwood Cut	58
Clearcut with Reserves	131
Total Acres treated with timber harvest to meet objectives	1,396
Fuels Treatment Acres*	
Acres	
Jackpot and Broadcast Burning	188
Excavator Piling	556
Lopping	119
Hand piling	19

*Fuels treatment acres do not equal harvest acres since some units have more than one type treatment and several units have multiple objectives, not all acres are treated.

Road Activity	NFSR Miles	Private miles
Construction/Reconstruction:		
Temporary Road Construction	0.0	
New Road Construction (NFSR)	0.0	
Road Reconstruction	7.3	
NFSR Cost share Construction	2.2	
Private Construction* (Access Request-cumulative action)		5.6
Total	9.5	5.6
Stabilization and Restoration:		
Existing NFSR put into long term storage	7.7	
Existing Classified NFSR decommissioned *	1.1	
Existing Unclassified road decommissioned	10.2	
Total	19.0	

NFSR – National Forest System Roads * for display purposes only

**Existing NFSR decommissioned = road # 1452 - .5 miles and road #341a - .6 miles.

See alternative maps for locations of road construction and reconstruction.

ALTERNATIVE D

Alternative D includes: timber harvest, fuels reduction, no new road construction on Forest Service Lands (except that associated with access to private land and the Upper Hidden Creek/Emerald Creek alternative access due to Hidden Creek road obliteration). There are less acres of timber harvest, due to dropping the units associated with new road

construction. See table below for miles of road decommissioned, which includes two roads in riparian areas: Wood Creek and Hidden Creek Roads.

Timber Harvest Acres by Harvest Method	Acres
Intermediate Harvest	
Commercial Thin	333
Shelterwood Prep Cut	118
Regeneration Harvest	
Shelterwood Seed Cut	
Shelterwood Removal Cut	
Irregular Shelterwood Cut	
Group Shelterwood Cut	43
Clearcut with Reserves	109
Total Acres treated with timber harvest to meet objectives	603
Fuels Treatment Acres*	Acres
Jackpot and Broadcast Burning	123
Excavator Piling	221
Lopping	38
Hand piling	14

*Fuels treatment acres do not equal harvest acres since some units have more than one type treatment and several units have multiple objectives, not all acres are treated.

Road Activity	NFSR Miles	Private miles
Construction/Reconstruction:		
Temporary Road Construction	0.0	
New Road Construction (NFSR)	0.7	
Road Reconstruction	6.3	
NFSR Cost share Construction	2.2	
Private Construction* (Access Request-cumulative action)		5.6
Total	9.2	5.6
Stabilization and Restoration:		
Existing NFSR put into long term storage	16.8	
Existing Classified NFSR decommissioned **	7.5	
Existing Unclassified road decommissioned	13.9	
Total	38.2	

NFSR – National Forest System Roads * for display purposes only

**Existing NFSR decommissioned = road # 1452 - .5 miles, road #341a - .6 miles, #3380 - .6, #3499-1.3 miles, #1457A- .2 miles, #498 – 1.4 miles, #341 – 1.0 miles, #3334 – 1.5 miles, #3321 - .3 miles, and #1457 - .2 miles.

ALTERNATIVE E

Alternative E was developed to look at watershed restoration without timber harvest. No road construction other than that associated with the access requests.

No commercial timber harvest or associated activities is proposed.

Road Activity	NFSR Miles	Private miles
Construction/Reconstruction:		
Temporary Road Construction	0.0	
New Road Construction (NFSR)	0.0	
Road Reconstruction	1.8	
NFSR Cost share Construction	2.2	
Private Construction* (Access Request-cumulative action)		5.6
Total	4.0	5.6
Stabilization and Restoration		
Existing NFSR put into long term storage	16.8	
Existing Classified NFSR decommissioned **	7.5	
Existing Unclassified road decommissioned	14.6	
Total	38.9	

NFSR – National Forest System Roads * for display purposes only

** Existing NFSR decommissioned = road # 1452 - .5 miles, road #341a - .6 miles, #3380 -.6, #3499-1.3 miles, #1457A- .2 miles, #498 – 1.4 miles, #341 – 1.0 miles, #3334 – 1.5 miles, #3321 - .3 miles, and #1457 - .2 miles.

See alternative maps for locations of road construction and reconstruction.

Alternative F – Selected

Alternative F includes timber harvest, road construction, road decommissioning, fuels reduction as described in the tables below. To maintain access to existing transportation system and lands on Forest Service and Non Forest Service ownerships .7 miles of road construction to replace the access that would be lost when Road 498 is decommissioned.

Table 2-5 – Harvest Treatment Summary

Timber Harvest Method	Acres
Intermediate Harvest	
Commercial Thin	852
Shelterwood Prep Cut	207
Regeneration Harvest	
Shelterwood Seed Cut	40
Shelterwood Removal Cut	16
Irregular Shelterwood Cut	22
Group Shelterwood Cut	58
Clearcut with Reserves	105
Total Acres treated with timber harvest to meet objectives	1300
Fuels Treatment*	
Jackpot and Broadcast Burning	188
Excavator Piling	500
Lopping	144
Hand piling	19

*Fuels treatment acres do not equal total harvest acres since some units have more than one type treatment. (Several units have multiple objectives)

Table 2-6 – Road Construction, Reconstruction and Decommissioning

Road Activity	NFSR Miles	Private miles
Construction/Reconstruction:		
Temporary Road Construction	2.0	
New Road Construction (NFSR)	6.2	
Road Reconstruction	4.6	
NFSR Cost share Construction	2.2	
Private Construction* (Access Request-cumulative action)		5.6
Total	18.7	5.6
Stabilization and Restoration:		
Existing NFSR put into long term storage	17.5	
Existing Classified NFSR decommissioned *	5.7	
Existing Unclassified road decommissioned	10.2	
Total	19.0	

NFSR – National Forest System Roads * for display purposes only

*Existing NFSR decommissioned = road # 1452 - .5 miles and road #341a - .6 miles.

DECISION CRITERIA

This environmental impact statement is not a decision document. The FEIS discloses the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action or alternatives to that action. The Forest Supervisor is the Deciding Official for this project. Her decision and the rationale for that decision are stated in the Record of Decision. The Forest Supervisor will select an alternative for implementation based on how well the alternative: (1) addresses the Purpose and Need, (2) protects resources (3) addresses key issues and public concerns, (4) is consistent with applicable laws, plans and policies.

The next table shows how the alternatives meet purpose and need.

	Alt. A	Alt B	Alt C	Alt D	Alt E	Alt F
Move Vegetation Toward historical conditions						
Increase long lived seral species (%)	9%	10	10	9	9	10
Reduced acres of stand densities	none	1132	1160	478	0	1059
Improve water quality, aquatic habitat, soil conditions and wildlife security						
Increased soil productivity (acres)	No roads decommissioned	69	69	82	86	99
Miles of road in RHCAs	18.8 miles	13.1	13.1	8.7	8.5	8.6
Road Storage/Decommissioning (miles)	No storage or decommissioning	18.8	18.8	38.2	38.9	37.3
Number of stream crossings remaining*	144 crossings	92	90	78	70	78
Acres of wildlife security	455 acres	1009	1009	2240	2240	1860
Reduction in sediment** - (%) from road decommissioning	No change from existing condition	9.4	21.2	35.5	36.7	26.3
Provide Access to State and Potlatch lands						
	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

*Forest Service administered roads ** from decommissioned roads

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

A summary of the determination of environmental effects for the alternatives considered in detail is presented in the following table. The effects analysis for the issues discussed above is presented in the FEIS – Chapter III – Affected Environment and Environmental consequences. The effects analysis for the Water Resource indicates high sediment production in Alternatives B and F; however, the road decommissioning compensates for this to show an overall reduction for all activities (Forest Service and private) in Alternative F, the selected alternative. Alternative B does not meet the Clean Water Act when cumulative effects are taken into account, however; Alternative B meets the Clean Water Act when just looking at the proposed Forest Service Action. All alternatives meet Forest Plan Standards and all other Laws and Regulations when considering Forest Service activities and the cumulative impacts from private land activities (See Watershed Analysis – Chapter 3 and Project File).

The Summary Table below displays the alternatives issue by issue and is National Forest System lands and roads unless noted differently.

NOTE for the following table, miles of road by management prescription (under Issue 2) **includes** proposed miles of new road construction and the connected action (access request) of 5.6 miles construction on private land.

Summary Table – COMPARISON OF ISSUE INDICATORS by ALTERNATIVE

Indicators	A	B	C	D	E	F
Issue #1 – Road Construction Activity						
Miles of new road construction (FS)		11.4	2.2	2.9	2.2	8.8
Sediment production (% increase in sediment)		14.6	2.8	3.7	2.8	13.3
Wildlife security (total road density – mi/sq.mi. in wildlife analysis area)	3.5	3.4	3.0	2.8	2.8	3.1
Issue #2 – Road Management						
Miles of road by road management prescription:						
Open road	94	91.1	91.1	82.9	82.9	83.8
Gated – Mgmt. Prescription A	76.5	76.5	76.5	74.4	73.2	78.3
Barrier – Mgmt. Prescription B	61.1	52.1	52.1	52.0	51.7	52.1
LTS ¹ – Mgmt. Prescription C	57.5	82.3	75.3	68.6	69.4	73.6
Recontour ² - Mgmt. Prescriptions D & E	9.2	13.2	11.1	29.0	29.0	29.1
TOTAL	298.4	315.3	306.2	306.8	306.2	313.0
Miles of road in project area in long term storage, partial or full recontour (road prescriptions C, D, or E). to address soil and water issues.	66.7	95.5	86.4	97.6	98.4	102.7
Trend of fish habitat in functioning condition:						
Total number of stream crossings ³	141	92	90	78	70	78
Miles of road in RHCA's	18.8	13.1	13.1	8.7	8.5	8.6
Sediment Yield: % reduction of sediment from road decommissioning	0	9.4	21.2	35.5	36.7	26.3
Acres of wildlife security	455 acres	1009	1009	2240	2240	1860
Issue #3 – Commercial Logging						
Water Yield ⁴ (% change in peak flow)	0	3.1	3.2	1.6	0	3.0
Acres impacted by timber harvest	0	1,368	1,396	603	0	1300

¹ LTS = long term storage (includes: de-compaction, culvert removal, and revegetation)

² Recontour = Mgmt. Prescription D are decommissioned roads using re-contouring or partial pullback of fill; also stabilizing slopes to restore site productivity, and re-establish natural water infiltration and drainage. Mgmt. Prescription E roads are decommissioned to restore slopes and drainages to near pre-road conditions.

³ For the action alternatives (example for ALT. B): take ALT. A stream crossings (141) add new construction stream crossings (9) and subtract number of stream crossings removed (58) = 92 stream crossings.

⁴ For the St. Maries River. Increase displayed is an average of Packer and Kapperser (harvest only) and Watsed (harvest and roads).