Forest Plan Amendment #37

The Custer National Forest and National Grasslands Land and Resources Management Plan indicates suitable ponderosa pine acreage occurs on the moist ponderosa pine/chokecherry and ponderosa pine/snowberry habitat types on the Ashland District (Pfister et. al. 1977). These types would meet National Forest Management of 1976 (NFMA) timber suitability criteria (36 CFR 219.14, 36 CFR 219.3, and Forest Plan Record of Decision). The NFMA timber suitability criteria (1982) include lands that can produce 20 cubic feet per acre per year of timber, are classified as forest land, have technologically feasible opportunities, have assured ponderosa pine restocking to desired levels within five years of final treatment, and have not been administratively withdrawn.

This Forest Plan Amendment reclassifies all suitable timber land in Management Area B of the Ashland Post-Fire Project area (estimated 7,963 acres) to unsuitable (see Final EIS Map Package, Maps E and F). These are lands that meet Forest Plan and NFMA suitability criteria, but are being reclassified to allow for the preferred reforestation strategy of delayed natural regeneration over time, rather than reforesting by planting ponderosa pine. In 5 to 100 years or more, tree growth in these areas will return to moderate to densely stocked conditions. Without this amendment, reforestation would be required within five years (NFMA). Reclassification within Management Area B of the project area supports Forest Plan management Area B goals of perpetuating or enhancing forage and wildlife habitat values (Forest Plan, p. 46).

Pertinent to the project area, the Forest Plan currently states that lands suitable for timber production occur in Management Areas B, D, G, M, and does not occur in Management Area P. The Forest Plan does not state if Management Area J has suitable lands. This amendment would change suitable lands to unsuitable in Management Area B within the project area (see Final EIS Map Package, Maps E and F).

The environmental effects are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the Final EIS. A determination was made in the associated Record of Decision that this amendment will not result in a significant change to the Forest Plan. This determination was based on an evaluation of timing, location and size, goals/objectives/outputs, and management prescription. Other assessments indicate that the Forest Plan suitable timber lands may be under-estimated.

Analysis for the Forest Plan (1986) determined that 19,500 acres suitable timber lands occurred on the Ashland District and 72,360 acres occurred on the Custer National Forest. This amendment will remove 7,963 tentative acres from that suitable base. This is approximately 11 percent of the suitable base on the Custer National Forest.

In contrast to the Forest Plan level of 19,500 suitable acres on the Ashland District, a recent assessment (October 2000) indicated that approximately 85,112 acres are considered tentatively suitable for timber production. The forested stands in the Ashland Post Fire Project area are found where 10 percent stocking or higher exists. The tentatively suitable forested sites (16,438 acres, 42 percent of the ponderosa pine forested acres in the project area) are found primarily on moister, slightly cooler aspects and slopes, and on lower slopes of larger draws. The tentatively unsuitable timber sites (22,287 acres, 58 percent of the ponderosa pine forested acres in the project area) are commonly on drier, warmer aspects and slopes, and represent the driest ponderosa pine habitat types,including ponderosa pine/bluestem and ponderosa pine/bluebunch wheatgrass (Pfister, 1977).