

DECISION MEMO

Stockfarm Forest Health and Fuel Reduction Project 2004

USDA Forest Service
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
Great Divide Ranger District
Ashland County, Wisconsin

T 41 N, R 3 W Section 10

I. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED

A. Description of Decision

My decision is to commercially thin through the use of a 2400-6T Timber Sale Contract, a 35 acre over mature jack pine stand. The stand is located off of Forest Road (FR) 164, approximately ¼ miles NW of the Stockfarm Bridge Campground. It is also adjacent to the 1/2 mile wide East Fork Chippewa River corridor and is very near a Special Management Area. Refer also to Attachments 1 and 2 (the vicinity and project area maps). The timber sale will be advertised and sold in July/August 2004. Harvest will occur between September 2004 and March 2005.

The 68-year old stand is comprised of 13-inch average diameter, 165 Basal Area, mixed red and jack pine trees. The red pine component of the stand is suppressed. "B" level stocking (the minimum recommended for optimum growth) for red pine this size, is 95 square feet per acre. This is the level that would remain if all the jack pine were to be removed. There are a few areas, notably along FR 164, where stocking is heavier to jack pine. A few of the healthier jack pine would be retained in these areas to maintain overall stocking levels.

My decision includes treating the dead and dying jack pine fuels, both on the ground and standing, as well as the slash generated by the timber sale. This would be accomplished by either chipping or burning. Whole tree skidding to a landing would be required. The logs would be processed and the slash piled for spring burning or for chipping. The stand would be accessed from adjacent FR 164 and FR 327 and an old railroad grade. There would not be a need for temporary road construction.

B. Purpose of Decision

Introduction

Over the past several years the current administration has placed great emphasis on restoring healthy ecological conditions to Federal Lands, (Healthy Forests Initiatives (HFI), 2002) and through the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA, 2003) of reducing hazardous fuel conditions on certain types of at-risk National Forest System (NFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands and also provides other authorities and direction to help reduce hazardous fuel and restore healthy forest and rangeland conditions on lands of all ownerships.

The purpose of the Stockfarm Project is to improve forest health and provide for visitor safety. There is a lot of mortality in the jack pine component. There are dead trees lying on the ground, as well as standing dead and dying jack pine trees. The over mature decadent condition of the jack pine poses a hazardous fuels risk to the Stockfarm Bridge Campground. A fire started in this stand driven by a northwest wind, could result in human injury to forest visitors and significant resource damage, including the East Fork Chippewa River corridor and the Special Management Area.

The stand is located in the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Plan (Plan) Management Area (MA) 2A and is adjacent to MA's 8D and 8F. The Desired Future Condition for MA 2A is that uneven-aged interior Northern Hardwood-hemlock forests dominate the landscape. Pine is present. The forest composition objectives for MA 2A call for 0-2 percent of jack pine and a range of 5-20 percent of red and/or white pine. (Plan, p.3-7 & 8)

MA 8D is characterized by free-flowing rivers and their associated corridors in a natural condition identified for special management on a federal or state level (Plan, p. 3-44). The East Fork Chippewa River is identified as having potential classification for an eligible national wild, scenic and recreation river segment (Plan, p. 3-49). Plan prescriptions call for protection and enhancement of such rivers and corridors (Plan, p. 3-42) as well as the encouragement of long-lived species such as red pine (Plan, p. 3-53). The Plan also states that "timber harvesting can occur within scenic segments for the purpose of restoring or enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, visual quality, forest health, tree vigor, and long-lived large diameter trees (Plan, p. 3-46).

Unique areas of physical, biological, and cultural features of Forest wide or Regional significance characterize MA 8F, a Special Management Area. Included are examples or representatives of scenic, historical, geological, botanical, zoological, paleontological, and archeological values. Management emphasizes the protection of these values and opportunities for public use and interpretation. (Plan, p. 3-53)

Removing the jack pine and emphasizing the red pine in this stand will not only enhance forest health and reduce hazardous fuels, but it will also move the area toward the Forest Plan DFC for MA 2A. The project would also meet DFC for the adjacent 8D and 8F MA's by providing for enhancement and protection of the East Fork Chippewa corridor to the south and the Special Management Area to the east.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

I have concluded that this decision is appropriately categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is a routine activity within a category of exclusion and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Record.

A. Category of Exclusion

The decision is within the category of exclusion 1909.15 Section 31.2 – Categories of action for which a project or case file and decision memo are required:

12. Limited timber harvest: Live trees. Commercial thinning of overly dense stands of trees to improve the health of the remaining trees; removing individual trees for forest products or fuel wood. Not to exceed 70 acres. Requires less than one-half mile of temporary road construction.

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

I have considered conclusions by resource specialist reviews of conditions at the affected sites (Attachment 3). I find there are no extraordinary circumstances that may result in significant and adverse, individual or cumulative environmental effects on the following:

1. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat - The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat. All sites have been evaluated for Federally listed or proposed species, or their critical habitat. There is wolf use documented in the general area, but no effects are predicted for threatened or endangered species (Attachment C).

2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds -

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, “. . . the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year.”

The project is not located in or near floodplains. This has been validated by map and site-review.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, “. . . areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.”

Wetlands are not present in the project area.

Municipal Watersheds: Municipal watersheds are managed under multiple use prescriptions in land and resource management plans. There are no municipal watersheds on the Forest. This decision will not affect municipal watersheds.

3. Congressionally Designated Areas - There are no wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, or other congressionally designated areas in or near the project area (Forest Plan, p. 3-26; Plan FEIS, p. 3-199, 201, 251; Selected Alternative map). This decision will not affect such areas. The southern tip of stand 15 is within the 1/2 mile river corridor for East Fork Chippewa River. This segment of the river is eligible for potential classification for eligible national wild, scenic and recreation river segments (Plan, p.3-49). The project would not effect this eligibility and may further enhance and protect the corridor, as described in Section I-B of this document.

4. Inventoried Roadless Areas - There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas (RARE II or Forest Plan) in the decision area (Forest Plan Appendices, p. C-10-12). This decision will not affect Inventoried Roadless Areas.

5. Research Natural Areas - There are no Research Natural Areas in the decision area (Forest Plan FEIS, p. 3-111, 119, 120; Selected Alternative map). This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect Research Natural Areas.

6. American Indian and Alaska native religious or cultural sites -The Federal government has trust responsibilities to Tribes under a government-to-government relationship to insure that the Tribes reserved rights are protected. Consultation with tribes helps insure that these trust responsibilities are met. The Forest consulted with potentially affected tribes (Project Record, Tribal Consultation). The intent of this consultation has been to remain informed about Tribal concerns. No tribal concerns were identified for this project.

7. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties (prehistoric and historic) that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It affords lawful protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act cover the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through “in situ” preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items. This decision complies with the cited Acts.

Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision. Since no sites or potential for sites were identified, consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office is not required at this time.

8. No other extraordinary circumstances related to the project were identified (Project Record, Scoping).

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement began with a listing of the Stockfarm Project (identified as the “Stockfarm Bridge Campground Fuel Reduction) in the Forest's *Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA) beginning with the 04/01/2004 through 06/30/2004 edition.

12 direct mailings to the tribes and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission were sent on April 27, 2004. The tribes that were contacted included: Lac du Flambeau, Red Cliff, Lac Courte Oreilles, St. Croix, Bad River, Sokoagon, Bay Mills, Keweenaw Bay, Lac Vieux Desert, and the Mille Lacs Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa.

7 direct mailings to other interested individuals, and Town chairmen, local government officials, other agencies, and nearby landowners were sent on June 14, 2004. The state and local governments that were contacted include the Ashland County forester, the Towns of Chippewa and Shanagolden. Other agencies included the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).

Three comments were received in response to the above mailings. The first was from the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, stating that the tribe had no interest in the project. A local WDNR representative stated his support for the project via a phone call. He also made suggestions for potential locations for future forest health and hazardous fuel reduction projects. The Ashland County Forester submitted a letter of support for the project.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

I have considered relevant laws, regulations and agency direction. I find my decision complies with the National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act. I have considered direction in the FSM 1950 and FSH 1909.15 and find the analysis and my decision consistent with that direction.

I have reviewed this action in accordance with Executive Order 12898 (consideration of environmental justice). I find scoping was adequate to inform low income and minority populations that may be affected by this action. No concerns of disproportionate health or environmental effects surfaced. Adverse effects of this action will be very minor or not apparent. Therefore, I find my decision will not disproportionately create high and adverse health or environmental effects to low income or minority populations.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE

My decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f). This decision may be implemented immediately.

VI. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Richard Strauss during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the Glidden Ranger Office (P.O. Box 126, N22223 Hwy 13, Glidden, WI 54527; Phone 715-264-2511; Fax 715-264-3307; e-mail: rstrauss@fs.fed.us) or Debra Sigmund during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the Hayward office (Address: P.O. Box 896, 10650 Nyman Avenue, Hayward, WI 54843; Phone: 715-634-4821; Fax: 715-634-3769; e-mail: dsigmund@fs.fed.us).

Additional information about this decision can be found on the Internet at www.fs.fed.us/r9/cnnf/natres/index.html

VII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

/s/Geoff Chandler

July 6, 2004

GEOFF CHANDLER
Acting District Ranger

Date

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