

DECISION NOTICE

And

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

For The

ELDERBERRY TIMBER SALE

And

ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

YAKIMA COUNTY, WASHINGTON

UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE

NACHES RANGER DISTRICT

OKANOGAN AND WENATCHEE NATIONAL FORESTS

INTRODUCTION

The U.S.D.A. – Forest Service has analyzed the environmental effects of vegetation management activities and travel management changes within the Elderberry Analysis Area under the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment (EA). The analysis area is approximately 20,764 acres in size and located approximately 13 air miles east of Naches, Washington. The area occurs in portions of T. 14 N., R. 14 E., Sections 1 to 3, 10 to 15, and 22 to 27; T. 14 N., R. 15 E., Sections 1 to 24, and 28 to 30; and T. 15 N., R. 14 E., Section 36; Yakima County, Washington. The analysis area overlies lands administered by the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests and land held in private ownership (approximately 7,451 acres). Treatments will occur in federal lands only. Landmarks within the analysis area include Bear and Lynne Lakes, Bear Canyon, State Highway 12 (White Pass), Windy Point Campground, Rimrock Retreat, Wild Rose Campground, and Forest Service System Four Wheel Driveways 652, 671, and 672.

The vegetation management and travel management changes occur in the following land allocations of the Wenatchee National Forest Plan as amended by the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan (AFP):

Key Deer and Elk Habitat (EW-1) / Matrix
Scenic Travel Retention (ST-1) / Matrix
Riparian-Aquatic Habitat Protection Zone (EW-2)

General Forest (GF) / Matrix,
Scenic Travel Partial Retention (ST-2) / Matrix

The goal of the Key Deer and Elk Habitat (EW-1/ Matrix) land allocation (approx. 52 % of the analysis area acres on Federal lands) is to manage deer and elk winter range to meet habitat requirements for sustaining optimum carrying capacity. Most of this EW-1 land allocation occurs in the vicinity of the intermixed private lands and south slopes above State Highway 12 (White Pass). The General Forest (GF/ Matrix) land allocation (approx. 23 % of the analysis area acres on Federal land) in the northwest corner of the analysis area has as its goal providing for long-term growth and production of commercially valuable wood products at a high level of investment in silvicultural practices. The goal of the Scenic Travel – Retention (ST-1/ Matrix) land allocation (approx. 15 % of the analysis area acres on Federal land) along State Highway 12 (White Pass) is to retain or enhance the viewing and recreation experiences along scenic travel routes. The Scenic Travel – Partial Retention (ST-2/ Matrix) land allocation (approximately 10 % of the analysis area acres on Federal land) along Bethel Ridge in the vicinity of Forest Road 1500 325 has as its goal to provide a near natural appearing foreground and middleground along scenic travel corridors. The Riparian-Aquatic Habitat Protection Zone (EW-2) land allocation (approx. 17 % of the analysis acres on Federal land within Riparian Reserves) near streams, seeps, and other riparian areas. The purpose of the Riparian Reserves is to protect the health of the aquatic system and its dependent species, enhance habitat conservation for organisms dependent on the transitional zone between upland and riparian areas, improve travel and dispersal corridors for a wide variety of animal and plant species, and provide for habitat connectivity needs.

The vegetation management activities described herein are intended to reduce the risk of tree crown wildfires, reduce fuel loadings, promote long-term ecosystem sustainability, prevent and control noxious weeds to the extent possible, improve wildlife habitat (primarily forage and big game browse), improve soil productivity, and improve watershed health within the project area.

The road management actions described herein are designed to improve security areas for deer and elk, reduce risk of stream sedimentation, reduce road maintenance costs, and provide a transportation system that meets future resource management needs and private land access needs within the project area.

Vegetation management activities to be implemented include commercial timber harvest and removal, intermediate stand treatments, natural fuel treatments, noxious weed control, and related resource enhancement opportunities. Activities associated with the timber sale include such items as temporary road construction, temporary opening of closed roads, road closures, road obliterations, tree felling and yarding, log hauling, slash burning and/or chipping, and tree planting. Intermediate stand treatments include actions such as tree pruning, hand applied fertilization, and pre commercial thinning. Natural fuel treatments outside of commercial timber harvest units include such treatments as precommercial tree thinning, tree pruning, underburning, and pile burning. Noxious weed control will include items such as grubbing and handpulling weeds, competitive seeding, burning, clipping, mowing, and spot spraying of approved herbicides. Resource

enhancement opportunities include those associated with erosion control, soil improvement, riparian habitat improvement, treatment of firewood slash, big game forage stimulation, vegetative plantings to control off road vehicle travel, wildlife water developments, a mineral block for wildlife, monitoring of heritage resources, and installation of two information sign boards. These vegetation management actions will begin to move the existing vegetation toward an ecologically sustainable condition by reducing the standing fuel hazards and risk of uncontrolled fast moving tree crown fires. Creating a landscape with sustainable vegetation will help meet key deer and elk habitat needs, visual quality objectives, noxious weed control needs, and other resource management objectives in the long term.

Access and travel management changes include reopening, improving, closing year round, closing seasonally, and/or obliterating select Forest Service system roads as well as non system “user” established and maintained roads. These actions are needed to improve security areas for wildlife, meet the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives, the desired future condition proposed in the Tieton Watershed Analysis (WA, 1996), the desired future condition proposed in the Oak Creek Watershed Analysis (WA, 1997), and the Desired Condition (DC) identified in the AFP and the Wenatchee National Forest Late Successional Reserve and Managed Late Successional Area Assessment (1997).

This Decision Notice will not affect the rights and privileges of private landowners within the analysis area. The motorized vehicle restrictions, mitigation measures, or other requirements of this Decision Notice apply only to Federal lands and not the intermingled private lands. This Decision Notice does not make any changes to existing road use easement agreements between the Forest Service and private landowners.

No commercial tree harvesting will occur within the seen area along Highway 12 (White Pass) under the Elderberry Timber Sale. There are no Roadless Areas as defined by Appendix C of the AFP within the Elderberry Project analysis area. The Rattlesnake Late Succession Reserve borders the analysis area on its northwest corner and the Lost Lake Managed Late Successional Area borders the analysis area on its south side. The selected action includes the removal of dead and high risk trees within approximately 200 feet of Forest Road 1500 325 (outside of the Rattlesnake Late Successional Reserve) to reduce fire risk, safety hazards, and future road maintenance costs. The selected action is not expected to have any direct effects on the Lost Lake Managed Late Successional Area. (EA pg. I – 1). This decision will not implement any changes to existing uses on Forest Service System Four Wheel Driveways within the analysis area.

A complete detailed analysis that provides the basis for the selection of Alternative 4 Refined as the alternative to be implemented is documented in the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment (August 1999), and this Decision Notice (DN). This DN and Finding of No-Significant Impact (FONSI) specifically address the proposed actions mentioned above.

DECISION NOTICE

Based on the analysis documented in the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment and the desired condition identified in the Tieton Watershed Analysis, Oak Creek Watershed Analysis, the Wenatchee National Forest Late Successional Reserve and Managed Late Successional Area Assessment (1996), and the information presented in the Appendices for this Decision Notice; *it is my decision to adopt Alternative 4 with the following refinements (see also pages II-31 through II-37 of the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment for a description of this Alternative):*

1. Areas of commercial timber harvest are adjusted to approximately 1,449 acres (down approximately 291 acres or – 17 % from that in EA Alternative 4) and include approximately 1,254 acres of commercial tree thinning, approximately 139 acres of shelterwood tree harvest prescription, and approximately 56 acres of seed tree harvest prescription. Minor changes to commercial timber harvest unit boundary locations (additions and deletions) have been made to better reflect more detailed site specific information, make more logical timber harvest units, and provide protection for riparian areas and wildlife habitat. (Please refer to the Vegetation Treatment Map in Appendix DN-4).
2. Commercial tree thinning harvest acres are reduced approximately 267 acres or – 18% from that in EA Alternative 4. More detailed surveys have determined that portions of these areas should be dropped in this Decision from timber harvest consideration because of one or more of the following conditions:
 - a) uneconomical timber volumes per acre,
 - b) blind lead cable yarding areas,
 - c) additional riparian/ soil areas that need protection,
 - d) northern spotted owl nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.
3. Shelterwood regeneration harvest acres within commercial thinning units are adjusted down approximately 30 acres or – 18 % from that in EA Alternative 4. This reduction is proportional to the reduction in commercial thinning acres mentioned above.
4. The seed tree harvest areas are increased to total approximately 56 acres (a 6 acre or + 12 % increase). This increase was needed to refine the proposed timber harvest prescriptions and form more logical timber harvest units. The timber harvest prescription for these six acres in the EW-1 / Matrix land allocation was changed from that of commercial thinning and shelterwood to shelterwood and seed tree. Note: The net change in regeneration harvest acres (Item 3. and 4. above) is a reduction of 24 acres or – 11 % from that presented in EA Alternative 4.

5. Natural fuel treatment acres outside of commercial timber harvest areas are decreased to approximately 2,901 acres (down approximately 78 acres or - 3 % from that in EA Alternative 4). These reductions occurred due to the removal of spotted owl nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat from treatment consideration under this Decision.
6. Portions of tree stands scheduled commercial tree thinning and fuel treatments under EA Alternative 4 will receive no treatment under the selected Alternative 4 Refined. Most of the larger tree stands removed from commercial tree thinning and fuel treatment consideration occur in Section 2, Township 14 North, Range 15 East and in the northwest corner of Section 13, Township 14 North, Range 14 East. Removing these areas from treatment consideration will not reduce the overall effectiveness of the fuel breaks being created while also providing increased hiding cover and security areas for big game and increased protection for soil and riparian resources. The timber harvest acres (Item 1. above) and commercial thinning acres (Item 2. above) have been adjusted to reflect these changes.
7. Winter logging may be allowed on approximately 527 acres (down approximately 75 acres or - 12 % from that proposed in EA Alternative 4). Most of the area removed from winter logging was located near the northwest corner of Section 13, T. 14 N., R. 14 E. in order to protect a sensitive soil and riparian feature while increasing the quality of a travel corridor and hiding cover for big game. These adjustments to timber harvest acres and commercial thinning acre figures have been included above (Items 1. and 2.).
8. All northern spotted owl nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat is removed from commercial timber harvest and mechanical natural fuel treatment consideration under this Decision. This is being done to reduce potential adverse effects on spotted owl habitat and allow completion of informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Endangered Species Act. Alternative 4 Refined will implement approximately 5 fewer acres of commercial thinning harvest and approximately 78 fewer acres of mechanical natural fuels treatment due to northern spotted owl habitat considerations. Removing these areas from treatment consideration will allow completion of informal consultation requirements and not reduce the overall effectiveness of the fuel breaks being created. The acreage figures presented earlier for timber harvest, commercial tree thinning, and natural fuel treatments have been adjusted to reflect these changes.
9. The miles and estimated acres of mechanical fuel treatments within riparian reserves have been updated to reflect better data. Alternative 4 Refined will mechanically treat fuels along approximately 3.5 miles of riparian reserve covering an estimated 109 acres. These figures are a refinement of the data mapped in the Elderberry EA and its analysis file. There are no additional areas being treated from those analyzed in the Elderberry EA.

10. The firewood collection along Forest System Road 1500 325 will occur on approximately 79 acres (approximately 6 fewer acres or – 7 % from that described in EA Alternative 4). The acres dropped from treatment consideration are located directly adjacent to areas within the Rattlesnake LSR land allocation. These areas were dropped from treatment consideration to reduce the risk of unauthorized firewood cutting within the LSR.

Alternative 4 Refined

Alternative 4 Refined consists of vegetation management (tree harvest prescriptions, fuel hazard reduction treatments, logging systems, noxious weed control, timber sale related connected actions), resource enhancement opportunities, and access and travel changes (system roads, non system roads). Each is explained in more detail in the sections that follow.

Vegetation Management – Tree Harvest Prescriptions

The selected alternative will harvest approximately 7.0 MMBF of timber from approximately 1,449 acres of National Forest lands using both ground based (76% harvest acres) and skyline yarding systems (24 % harvest acres). The timber sale is scheduled to be offered for sale in August, 2001 with logging expected to begin in 2001 or 2002 and continue until about 2006. The acreage and estimated timber volume have been adjusted to reflect better field data (estimated unit acres and more accurate timber inventory surveys). Under Alternative 4 Refined approximately 1,254 acres will be commercially thinned and approximately 195 acres will be regeneration harvested (shelterwood or seed tree). Commercial thinning will thin from below to remove the smaller dense, dry forest vegetation and leave the larger diameter, fire tolerant, drought tolerant, and insect and disease resistant species (especially ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch). Commercially thinned areas (those that have not previously been precommercially thinned) will require precommercial thinning following commercial thinning activity. Within the areas mapped as commercial thinning, approximately 10% or 139 acres contain concentrations of bark beetles, heavy mistletoe, and/or root rot areas which require regeneration harvest in the form of either shelterwood or seed tree harvests. These areas are generally less than 10 acres in size and will be planted with fire and drought tolerant, insect and disease resistant tree species such as ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. They have not been mapped separately because they occur as small pockets scattered throughout the commercial thinning areas. There will also be approximately 56 acres of additional regeneration harvest (seed tree mixed with some shelterwood) in two commercial timber harvest units as presented on Map A4-1 Refined in Appendix DN – 4. The tree stands in these two harvest units are dominated by insect and disease prone grand fir. The mortality rate is escalating rapidly and stand regeneration is needed to improve tree vigor and forest health. Leave tree spacing on these units will average 75 to 90 feet. These two units will also be planted with drought tolerant, insect and disease resistant tree species such as ponderosa pine and western larch.

The regeneration harvest acreage totals presented earlier include both the acres of shelterwood or seed tree harvest within commercial thinning areas (Item 3. above) and

the two areas of mapped shelterwood or seed tree harvest (Item 4. above) identified on Map A4-1 Refined.

Alternative 4 Refined will provide hiding cover along main open roads in Section 2 (Forest Road 1400 and 1400 216), Section 4 (Forest Road 1400 225), and Section 16 (Forest Road 1301 and 1410). The timber harvest prescription in these critical cover areas will include leaving a more clumpy distribution of trees with heavier crown canopy to provide screening and hiding cover for big game and retention of more small diameter trees (less than 7 inches in diameter at Diameter Breast High - DBH or 4.5 feet above ground level).

Firewood collection in the form of partial cut salvage harvest will occur on approximately 79 acres along Forest Road 1500 325 outside of the Rattlesnake Late Successional Reserve to capture expected tree mortality in nearby stands, reduce fuel hazards, reduce safety hazards, and reduce future road clearing costs.

Under this alternative, a total of approximately 1,256 acres of non-merchantable, dense, dry forest vegetation will be precommercially thinned within both commercial timber harvest areas and natural fuel treatment areas (see Appendix DN-4, Map A4-1 Refined).

Alternative 4 Refined will 1) maintain critical hiding cover in the two small stands of trees south of Bear Lake that provide hiding cover along a critical big game travel corridor, 2) remove from treatment the big game security habitat in Section 13 in the vicinity of Forest Road 1400 286, and 3) retain 15 % or more of the green trees in tree stands where the two mapped seed tree harvest units are located.

Vegetation Management – Fuel Hazard Reduction Treatments

Under Alternative 4 Refined, fuel hazard reductions will occur on approximately 4,608 acres. Fuel treatments will include those within selected timber harvest units (approximately 1,449 acres), those outside of proposed commercial timber harvest units (approximately 3,159 acres) as detailed in Table DN II – 5 that follows.

Natural barriers, topography, previously treated acres, and selected vegetation treatment areas will be utilized to create continuous fuel breaks to more quickly control wildfires. Reducing fuel loadings, reducing ladder fuels, and creating a tree stand with more open tree crown canopy will reduce the risk of a fire entering the tree crowns and increase the chances of keeping the fires small and on the ground instead of getting into the tree crowns and creating high intensity tree stand replacement fires.

Alternative 4 Refined will underburn a total of 3,637 acres. Underburning will occur in harvest areas, in natural fuel treatment areas outside of harvest units, and in precommercial thinning areas to reduce fuel loadings, eliminate undesirable tree species, and improve understory vegetation. Spring underburning will occur on approximately 1,643 acres or 45 percent of the underburn acres. The areas scheduled for spring underburning include all of the commercial timber harvest acres, approximately 9 acres

of precommercial thinning, and approximately 185 acres of natural fuel treatment areas intermixed with more forested areas. Fall underburning will occur on approximately 1,994 acres or approximately 55 percent of the underburn acres. The areas scheduled for fall underburning are the natural fuel treatment areas dominated by grass, forbs, and shrubs, some of which are also important as plant gathering areas for local treaty tribes. Fall underburning of these less forested areas will more closely mimic pre settlement fire occurrences and have less conflict with native tribal uses than spring burning.

Trees on an additional 170 acres will be precommercial thinned and pruned followed by either handpiling and burning handpiles or chipping. Precommercial thinning will occur in harvest areas and in fuelbreak areas outside of harvest areas to reduce ladder fuels and risk of tree crown fires. Handpiling or chipping of tree residues will also occur along sensitive visual areas such as roads, dispersed camping sites, etc. and in the firewood collection area along Forest Road 1500 325.

Alternative 4 Refined also will mechanically treat fuels (precommercial thin, prune, handpile, and burn handpiles, or chip) on less than approximately 109 acres along 3.5 miles of streams within mapped natural fuel treatment areas where streams are located within or adjacent to other proposed mechanical fuel treatment areas. This will treat fuels on approximately 4 percent of the inventoried riparian area within the project analysis area. These fuel treatments will reduce the risk of tree crown fires in the treated areas and help improve its long term sustainability.

Table DN II – 5, Fuel Treatment Acres --- Alternative 4 Refined

Selected Alt. 4 Refined Vegetation Treatment	Selected Alt. 4 Refined Fuel Treatment	Approximate Acres
Commercial Thin	Yard Tops / Spring Underburn	1,038
Commercial Thin	Yard Tops / Precommercial Thin / Prune / Spring Underburn	355
Seed Tree	Yard Tops / Stand Cleaning / Spring Underburn	56
Precommercial Thin	Handpile	170
Natural Fuels Underburn	Spring Underburn	185
Natural Fuels Underburn	Fall Underburn	1,994
Natural Fuels Mechanical Treatment	Precommercial Thin / Prune / Handpile or Chip	722
Precommercial Thin and Underburn	Precommercial Thin and Spring Underburn	9
Firewood Collection	Handpile	79

Vegetation Management – Logging Systems

Both tractor and skyline logging systems will be utilized to accomplish the timber harvest treatments described above. Generally, ground based systems will be used in areas of less than 35 percent slope. In areas with slopes greater than 35 percent and more than 200 feet long, skyline systems will be used. A majority (76 %) of the harvest acres are suitable for ground based systems. The skyline cable portion (approx. 24 %) will have a

maximum yarding distance of approximately 1000 feet. A logging system map displaying the locations of proposed ground based systems and skyline systems is contained in the Elderberry Project analysis file.

Winter logging will be allowed on approximately 527 acres as indicated on the enclosed Vegetation Treatment Map in Appendix DN-4 (approximately 75 fewer acres or – 12 % from that proposed in EA Alternative 4) . These winter logging areas occur in higher elevation tree stands that receive more snow cover and provide lower quality winter range for deer and elk. Use of winter logging will reduce risk of soil compaction, make the timber sale more economical, and reduce potential motorized vehicle delays during logging operations. A gate tender will be used on Forest Road 1400 to prevent unauthorized motor vehicle entry into the Oak Creek Wildlife Area during winter logging activities. Roads snow plowed under the Elderberry Timber Sale will require that berm holes be cut in snow banks to allow elk safe escape routes per directions from the District Wildlife Biologist or their representative. Efforts will be made to consult with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife to determine the best locations for these escape routes. The District Ranger in consultation with the District Wildlife Biologist will also determine when winter logging should be curtailed due to unusual stress on elk populations (extreme cold, unusual snow conditions, animal injuries due to collisions with logging equipment, etc.). If requested by the timber sale purchaser, winter logging may be authorized for the period when there will be the least amount of disturbance to migrating elk (December 26 through February 28 each year).

Vegetation Management – Noxious Weed Control

Alternative 4 Refined will implement an integrated weed management strategy to contain existing noxious weed populations and prevent weed encroachment into presently unoccupied areas. Weed management will be fully integrated. The control strategy will include the use of one or a combination of grubbing and hand-pulling, mowing and clipping, burning of seed heads and floral stalks, competitive seeding with desirable species and fertilization, and chemical control. Previously disturbed upland sites supporting severe concentrations (greater than 25 percent) of noxious weeds and roadside corridors outside of Riparian Reserves may be treated using chemical methods. The herbicides glyphosate, picloram, dicamba, and/or triclopyr, may be applied to target weed species with hand held nozzles attached to backpack sprayers or to tanks mounted on trucks. Individual plants outside of concentrations may be treated by wick application of herbicide to individual plants or direct application to weed plants with a hand held nozzle, grubbing and hand-pulling, and/or mowing and clipping. Riparian Reserves and other sensitive locations may be treated by grubbing and hand pulling, clipping, and/or burning of floral stalks and seed heads to remove the potential for annual seed development, and competitive seeding. Initial treatments that result in the creation of bare soil will be followed with competitive seeding using native species. Fertilization may occur in one to two years to enhance growth. All initial treatments may be followed with one or a combination of other treatments over time.

A detailed list of potential treatments and treatment locations is contained in the Elderberry Project analysis file. Within the areas identified for noxious weed treatment, an estimated 150 acres may be treated using herbicide application with a combination of approved herbicides. Approximately 350 acres may receive cultural (seeding, burning), mechanical (mowing and clipping), and/or manual (grubbing and hand-pulling) treatment.

The analysis addressing the points identified in the prevention strategy (Part C of Exhibit A to the Mediated Agreement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation dated May 24, 1989) is documented in the analysis file for the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment.

Vegetation Management – Timber Sale Related Connected Actions

In addition to the proposed actions described above, Alternative 4 Refined will implement the following connected actions within the project area (see EA pgs. II-10, II-11, and II-37) using timber sale generated values (timber sale contract requirements, Essential Knutson – Vandenberg collections or timber sale deposits):

- Hazard tree removal along area haul roads.
- Construction of approximately 5 miles of hand firelines for slash disposal around commercial timber harvest areas.
- Installation of erosion control structures and grass seeding in areas vulnerable to erosion such as firelines, roads, etc. within selected timber harvest units.
- Subsoiling skid trails and landings with a winged subsoiler on approximately 350 acres within selected commercial timber harvest areas.
- Seeding and planting approximately 700 acres within selected timber harvest areas with a suitable native grass/forb/herb mixture to provide competition to weeds on disturbed sites.
- Planting of approximately 195 acres of fire resilient, drought tolerant, and insect and disease resistant tree species within regeneration timber harvest areas.
- Dust abatement for road dust along timber haul routes using either water or lignin sulfide.
- Commercial and/or personal use firewood cutting within selected timber harvest units where compatible with other resources and management direction.

Resource Enhancement Opportunities

The following resource enhancement opportunities are listed in order of priority and will be funded through Knutson – Vandenberg (KV) collections or other authorized funding as it becomes available:

1. Installation of erosion control structures and grass seeding in previous timber sale areas or other areas vulnerable to erosion from previous timber harvest activities such as firelines, roads, etc.

2. Subsoiling or scarifying and seeding on approximately 100 acres of compacted soil on skid trails and temporary spur roads in old timber harvest areas.
3. Planting approximately 10 acres of riparian vegetation (grass, forbs, and trees) along portions of the South, Main, and North Forks of Oak Creek to reduce stream bank erosion and improve aquatic habitat.
4. Handpiling slash created from personal and/or commercial use firewood collection along Forest Road 1500 325.
5. Pruning / cutting shrub species such as willows and elderberry on approximately 70 acres to stimulate big game forage that has grown out of reach.
6. Planting approximately 10 acres of vegetation (shrubs such as roses) around dispersed sites to help rehabilitate soil and control unwanted vehicle travel.
7. Developing six water collectors / catchment basins for wildlife (approx. 1 in each section of Federal land) along the breaks of the Tieton River.
8. Distributing a trace mineral/ selenium block for bighorn sheep in Section 22 (NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$).
9. Collecting monitoring data from a cultural site.
10. Installation of two simple interpretive signs along Forest Road 1400 or other suitable locations with information about the timber sale, harvest units, vegetation management objectives and road access changes.

Specific locations of these resource enhancement opportunities are identified on maps in the Elderberry Project analysis file.

The acreage figures presented in this Decision Notice are refinements of those presented in the EA based on more accurate field data. Additionally, variations in acreages can be expected during implementation due to differences between Geographic Information System (GIS) produced reports and actual on the ground validation.

Access and Travel Changes

System Roads

Forest Service system roads include those signed and numbered roads that are part of the “official” transportation system that have specific road management objectives and a schedule for maintenance (inspection, clearing, surface blading, etc.).

Alternative 4 Refined will obliterate approximately 1.35 miles of system roads, change 0.41 miles of Forest Road 1400 238 from a seasonal motorized vehicle closure to a year round motorized vehicle closure, and implement seasonal motorized vehicle closures on approximately 9.65 miles of Forest Service system roads. These seasonal closures will restrict the use of motorized vehicles on selected system roads during the fall hunting seasons from the beginning of the modern deer rifle season through the end of the archery elk season (generally from mid October through the end of November). The identified seasonal road closures could directly affect public motorized access to approximately 1.56 miles of road on private lands due to restrictions on adjoining Forest Service system roads. These seasonal motorized vehicle closures will not infringe upon the right of the

Forest Service or private landowners to enter or authorize entry into the closed areas with motorized vehicles for administrative, emergency, law enforcement, or other management needs. Applicable restrictions on use of Forest Service vehicles during critical closure periods such as hunting seasons are specified under mitigation measures in Appendix DN-2 (Items 4. and 5. under the heading Recreation and subheading System Trails and Forest Roads). These restrictions were developed to reduce conflicts between hunter expectations and Forest Service vehicle use on roads closed to public motorized vehicle travel.

System Road Obliterations

Alternative 4 Refined will obliterate a total of 1.35 miles of Forest Service system road as specified in the System Road Access and Management Change Table that follows. Road access will be maintained to the inventoried dispersed camping site off Forest Road 1400 669.

System Road Year Round Motorized Vehicle Closures

The beginning 0.41 miles of Forest Road 1400 238 will change from a seasonal motorized vehicle closure to a year round motorized vehicle closure to enhance wildlife security habitat. This road will be closed with a guard rail barricade, earthen berm, gate, or other suitable closure device.

Seasonal Motorized Vehicle Closures

Seasonal motorized vehicle closures will be implemented on approximately 9.65 miles of existing open Forest Service system roads to increase security areas for big game. Access to most heavier use dispersed camping sites (hunter camps) during the fall hunting seasons will be maintained. Alternative 4 Refined will maintain existing access to hunter camps on Forest Roads 1400 282, 1400 283, 1400 619, and maintain access to select inventoried dispersed camping sites on Forest Roads 1301, 1301 275, 1400 666, and 1410 250. All road closures will be evaluated for dispersed camping opportunities and where suitable and practical the beginning of the closed road (generally less than 100 feet) may be left open for dispersed camping.

Alternative 4 Refined will implement a seasonal motorized vehicle closure on all or portions of the system roads as indicated on the Road Action Map in Appendix DN-4 and in Table DN II – 6 that follows. Those roads that have changes likely to be implemented through the Elderberry Timber Sale are indicated in bold print.

The following table is a summary of system roads with access changes under this decision as analyzed under the Elderberry Project EA (see also Map A 4 - 4 Refined in Appendix DN-4 for the locations of these road segments):

**Table DN II – 6, Selected System Road Access and Management Changes
Alternative 4 Refined**

System Road Number	Name / Geographic Area	Description of Road Change MVC = New Motorized Vehicle Closure during the fall hunting season to improve big game security habitat
1301	Bear Canyon / Bear Canyon	New seasonal MVC on approximately 1.06 miles
1301 275	Burn / Bear Canyon	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.79 miles
1301 604	/ Bear Canyon	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.41 miles
1400 215	Line Road / Oak Creek Sec. 2	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.38 miles
1400 220	North Fork Oak Creek / North Fork Oak Creek	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.28 miles
1400 221	Hardwood /North Fork Oak Creek	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.28 miles.
1400 238	Water Oak / South of Bear Lake	<u>OBLITERATE</u> approximately 0.36 miles and <u>YEAR ROUND CLOSURE</u> on the remaining approximately 0.41 miles to improve wildlife security habitat and reduce long term road maintenance costs. This entire road is currently closed to motorized vehicles during the fall season.
1400 619	/ Oak Creek Sec. 4	<u>OBLITERATE</u> approximately 0.19 miles to improve wildlife security cover and reduce long term road maintenance costs.
1400 634	/ Oak Creek Sec. 4	<u>OBLITERATE</u> approximately 0.17 miles to improve wildlife security cover and reduce long term road maintenance costs
1400 639	/ Oak Creek Sec. 6	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.25 miles
1400 653	/ Upper Oak Creek Sec. 13,14,23,24	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.73 miles
1400 669	/Oak Creek Sec. 6	<u>OBLITERATE</u> approximately 0.17 miles to improve wildlife security cover and reduce long term road maintenance costs.
1400 673	/ Oak Creek Sec.13	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.15 miles.
1401 646	/ South Fork Oak Creek Sec. 20	<u>OBLITERATE</u> approximately 0.46 miles to reduce long term road maintenance costs.
1410 250	Tanbark / Oak Creek Sec. 2	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.42 miles.
1410 254	No Road / Oak Crk. & Bear Canyon Sec. 2	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.97 miles.
1410 255	Last Road / Bear Canyon Sec. 10 & 11	New seasonal MVC on approximately 1.87 miles.
1410 621	/ Bear Canyon Sec. 10	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.28 miles.
1410 631	/ Oak Creek Sec. 2	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.23 miles.
1410 636	/ Oak Creek Sec. 2	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.17 miles.
1410 641	/ Bear Canyon Sec.10	New seasonal MVC on approximately 0.32 miles.
1410 655	/ Bear Canyon Sec.15	New seasonal MVC on approximately 1.06 miles

Those road number in bold print (such as **1410 636**) in the preceding table can be implemented under the timber sale. Other road changes will require funding from other sources.

The year-round closure on Forest Road 1400 238 will be implemented with an earthen berm, guard rail barricade, gate, or other suitable closure device.

The existing year-round motorized vehicle closures and fall seasonal closures (identified in EA Appendix A, Map A1-4) will remain in effect except for the change noted above for Forest Service Road 1400 238.

Note:

The Forest Service is in the process of renumbering many of these system roads due to road changes implemented under the Oak Creek Transportation System Flood Damage Analysis and Decision Notice dated April 25, 1997. Posting of the new road numbers will occur after the new road maps are published and available for general distribution. This is expected by the fall of 2001.

The old familiar road numbers have been used in this analysis and documentation to reduce confusion. A map of the new road numbers and reference table of road changes is available for review in the Elderberry Project analysis file.

Non System Roads on Federal Lands

Alternative 4 Refined will close to motorized vehicle use during the fall hunting seasons approximately 12.39 miles of user established/maintained roads currently not part of the official transportation system. This includes all inventoried non-system roads on Federal lands within the Elderberry Project analysis area. Alternative 4 Refined will also obliterate approximately 2.13 miles of non-system roads within proposed timber harvest units. The Alternative 4 Refined Map of Selected Road Actions in Appendix DN-4 shows the approximate locations of the affected non-system roads.

Private Roads

Alternative 4 Refined will reduce existing public motorized vehicle access on approximately 1.56 miles of roads on private lands through seasonal closures of the connecting segments. These roads on private lands are not included in easement agreements with the Forest Service and may be closed by the private landowner at anytime.

The road mileages presented in the travel and access management section are refinements of those presented in the EA based on more accurate field data. Additionally, slight variations in mileages can be expected during implementation due to differences between GIS produced reports on actual on the ground validation.

Public Involvement

Public Involvement began in January of 1997 and involved the activities in the following table as well as the posting of project information at the Oak Creek Feeding Station and at the junction of Forest Road 1400 and the U.S. Highway 12 (White Pass).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Date of Activity	Type of Activity and Remarks																																										
January – March 1997	Elderberry Timber Sale is listed on the Wenatchee National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA).																																										
November 19, 1998	Field Trip with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding Oregon White Oak management in Oak Creek.																																										
February 16, 1999	Meeting with the Yakama Nation to explain the proposal and receive comments.																																										
February 26-28, 1999	Yakima Sportsman Show Display – Maps of proposed road actions and project fact sheet available for review.																																										
March 11, 1999	Meeting with the Yakama Nation as a follow up to the February 16 meeting with emphasis on cultural resource concerns.																																										
March 29, 1999	Scoping letter mailed to over 300 individuals thought to have an interest in the project.																																										
April 1999	Meeting with the Washington State Department of Wildlife to discuss pending projects. The preliminary proposal was presented for their review and comment.																																										
April 23, 1999	A second scoping letter was mailed that outlined in more detail the proposed road management changes for the Elderberry Analysis area.																																										
May 5, 1999	An open house was held from 3:00 – 4:30 p.m. and public meeting from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Naches Ranger District Office. Public notices were placed in local newspapers as well as a legal notice.																																										
May 24, 1999	A meeting was held with local and nearby private landowners to discuss the project, and other management issues in the Oak Creek drainage.																																										
June 2, 1999	A field trip was taken with the Yakama Nation to further discuss their concerns.																																										
Scoping Summary	<table border="0"> <tr> <td><u>Individuals Providing Input</u></td><td><u>Organizations Providing Input</u></td></tr> <tr> <td>Patricia Young</td><td>The Yakama Nation</td></tr> <tr> <td>Don Witke</td><td>The Forest Guardians</td></tr> <tr> <td>Don Rotell</td><td>The Blue Ribbon Coalition</td></tr> <tr> <td>T.H. Coleman</td><td>The Yakima Regional Clean</td></tr> <tr> <td>Brad Hernandez</td><td>Air Authority</td></tr> <tr> <td>Daniel E. Schuabel</td><td>The Washington State Dept.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Tom Telford</td><td>of Fish and Wildlife</td></tr> <tr> <td>R.L. Baxter</td><td>The Sierra Club Cascade</td></tr> <tr> <td>Ronald J. Zarembo</td><td>Chapter</td></tr> <tr> <td>E.M. Sterling</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Marty Ebert</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>William A. Kinsel</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Michael Callahan</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Joel G. Bond</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Gale V. Grow</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Earl Brown</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Marlene White</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Ken Dodd</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Rich Farr</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Brian Kirk</td><td></td></tr> </table>	<u>Individuals Providing Input</u>	<u>Organizations Providing Input</u>	Patricia Young	The Yakama Nation	Don Witke	The Forest Guardians	Don Rotell	The Blue Ribbon Coalition	T.H. Coleman	The Yakima Regional Clean	Brad Hernandez	Air Authority	Daniel E. Schuabel	The Washington State Dept.	Tom Telford	of Fish and Wildlife	R.L. Baxter	The Sierra Club Cascade	Ronald J. Zarembo	Chapter	E.M. Sterling		Marty Ebert		William A. Kinsel		Michael Callahan		Joel G. Bond		Gale V. Grow		Earl Brown		Marlene White		Ken Dodd		Rich Farr		Brian Kirk	
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August 10, 1999	A Notification of Environmental Assessment Availability letter was sent to those interested publics that had not made site specific comments about the proposed action.																																										
August 10, 1999	A cover letter and copy of the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment was mailed out to those organizations and publics that had either requested a copy or made site specific comments about the proposed action.																																										

Date of Activity	Type of Activity and Remarks	
EA Comment Summary	<u>Individuals with comments</u> Ronald J. Zaremba	<u>Organizations with comments</u> Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife Forest Conservation Council

Public scoping during the development of the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment identified the following site specific issues for special consideration (listed in general order received):

- Affects of herbicide treatments on food gathering practices by the Yakama Nation.
- Adverse effects of vegetative plantings on the local vegetative gene pool.
- Adverse effects of winter logging on elk and deer.
- Adverse economic effects of the project and loss of ecosystem service values.
- Objections to the proposed motorized vehicle closures.
- Support for the proposed road obliterations.
- Conflicts with implementing the “Dry Site Strategy” and the cover objectives in key deer and elk habitat.
- Proposal to close more roads to motorized vehicles.
- Protecting existing 4x4 Driveways.
- Protecting the old log cabin.
- Effects of the project on the Yakima Wood Smoke Control Zone.
- Reducing the elk and deer populations to reduce the damage they are causing.
- Permanent closing of Forest Road 1401 and 1301.
- Converting Forest Road 1301 into a motorized trail.
- Impact of herbicides on streams and lakes.
- Potential problems of slash creating barriers for cross country horse travel.
- Reducing fuel levels and fire risk while maintaining scenic quality.
- Lack of adequate access for fire fighting if too many roads are closed.
- Maintaining motorized access to all heavy use dispersed campsites.
- Roads closed to public motorized vehicle travel should also be closed to administrative motorized traffic.
- Maintaining big game security cover along ridge tops and open roads.
- Improving dispersed camping opportunities around Bear and Lynne Lakes.
- Closing roads to motorized vehicles will concentrate hunters and increase their impacts.
- Winter logging causing increased stress on elk in critical snow years.
- Reduced snag densities for wildlife and the need for a year round firewood cutting closure.
- Road closures must be physical to be effective. Signing will not be effective.
- Expanding the year round closure in the Oak Creek Area to include all of the selected roads in the Elderberry Analysis area.

- Retaining most of the large diameter overstory trees and snags to mimic the natural vegetation regime.
- Buffering all channeled waters with no entry buffers.

These and other issues were addressed in the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment and helped to generate both the design of the alternatives and the mitigation measures described on pages II - 11 through II – 26, and page II – 37 of the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment for Alternative 4. Issues relating to economics, cumulative watershed effects, deer and elk habitat and dispersed camping access were the major issues that helped to generate the range of alternatives and alternative design in the Elderberry Project EA.

On August 10, 1999 a notification of environmental assessment availability letter was sent to those publics that were thought to have an interest in the project but had not provided site specific comments. That same date, a cover letter and copies of the Environmental Assessment were sent to all individuals or organizations that had requested a copy or had provided site specific comments during the public scoping phase of the project. These were done to provide interested parties with an opportunity to comment prior to my final decision. The public comment period ended on September 14, 1999, thirty days after a similar notification was published in the *Wenatchee Daily World* and the *Yakima Herald-Republic* newspapers. These comments were reviewed and considered prior to my final decision to implement Alternative 4 Refined as described herein. The comments as they relate to the proposed actions and my responses are summarized in Appendix DN-1.

Those groups or individuals that have either provided comments at anytime during project analysis or have specifically requested a copy of the Decision Notice will receive a copy of the following documents:

- Elderberry Timber Sale and Associated Activities Decision Notice
- Appendix DN-1 – Response to Public Comments
- Appendix DN-2 - Required Mitigation Measures
- Appendix DN-3 – Additional Clarification and New Information / Changed Circumstances
- Appendix DN-4 - Maps

Others wishing a copy this Decision Notice and its Appendices may contact the Naches Ranger District at the address and phone given at the end of this Decision Notice.

Mitigation Measures

I am selecting for implementation the mitigation measures presented in attached Appendix DN-2 for Alternative 4 Refined. The mitigation measures I am modifying from those presented in Elderberry Project EA are *italicized and underlined*. The special protection measures of Appendix DN-2 will be implemented to protect soil, water and aquatic/riparian resources, wildlife resources, recreation, heritage properties, reduce noxious weeds and reduce the impacts of noxious weed treatment methods. These mitigation measures will be implemented using timber sale contract provisions, timber sale deposits or program funding. Monitoring provisions are also included on EA pages II – 26, II – 27 and II – 37.

New Information Since Environmental Analysis

Appendix DN-3 has been included to provide updated information regarding corrections and inconsistencies in the Elderberry Project EA text relevant to the decision, environmental changes related to the recent western spruce budworm outbreak, environmental conditions and consequences related to Survey and Manage Species inventories (including the listing of the North American Lynx as a T & E Species), identification of mitigation measures added during informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an update concerning bird species and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, an update concerning environmental conditions and consequences related to soil resources, an update regarding the timber harvest volume estimates, a notice of short term delays or temporary motor vehicle closures on a few select Forest Service system roads during logging operations, and an update concerning the existing winter motorized vehicle closure on Forest Road 1400.

Based on Interdisciplinary Team review and consideration of this new information, I have determined that changes in the selected alternative fall within the scope of the original analysis, and that revision of the Elderberry Project EA is not necessary.

Rationale for this Decision

I selected Alternative 4 Refined because it best provides a balanced response to the following key issues identified during the analysis process and analyzed in the Elderberry Project EA:

Cumulative watershed effects (EA, pgs III – 3 to III – 6): This alternative addresses the potential for adverse impacts to soil and water quality and meets the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy identified in the Wenatchee National Forest Plan as Project design (utilization of skyline logging on steeper slopes, obliteration and closure of roads, restoration of soil productivity) and implementation of appropriate mitigation measures (described in Appendix DN-2) are intended to ameliorate potential cumulative watershed effects.

Habitat effectiveness in key deer and elk habitat (EW-1) (EA, pgs. III – 12 to III – 14): This alternative improves the cover/forage ratio and Habitat Effectiveness Index for elk and provides for connectivity as it relates to big game habitat and travel corridors. Over the long-term, this alternative provides for the continuation of key deer and elk habitat.

Effect on dry forest vegetation (EA, pgs III – 26 to III – 29): The selected alternative moves the landscape toward a sustainable vegetative condition faster than all other alternatives except Alternative 2. It reduces tree stocking to sustainable levels and promotes healthier trees (fire and drought tolerant, and insect and disease resistant). This will improve tree vigor and reduce tree mortality in the long term (30 years or more). The proportion of single layered tree stands would increase as well as average tree diameter and the proportion of early successional tree stands. The implementation of these treatment blocks will also reduce the likelihood of losing all the remaining wildlife travel corridors at one time.

Effect on the spread of noxious weed species (EA , pgs. III – 33 to III – 37): The selected alternative begins the effective control of noxious weeds and reduces the risk that the rate of weed spread will be accelerated due to project implementation. The analysis addressing the points identified in the prevention strategy (Part C of Exhibit A to the Mediated Agreement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation dated May 24, 1989) is documented in the analysis file for the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment

Effects on the risk of large uncontrollable tree crown fire and associated impacts on air quality vs. impacts from hazard reduction modifications (EA, pgs. III – 49 to III- 55): This alternative modifies fuel loading and distribution within the analysis area such that the resulting fire behavior may allow successful fire suppression within critical deer and elk habitat and reduce the risk that catastrophic tree crown fires will damage nearby private lands and late successional areas. This alternative removes the standing fuel hazard and reduces the risk of a fast moving tree crown fire. It also moves the landscape toward the desired future condition with respect to burn intensity and fire return interval.

Access to National Forest administered lands(EA, pgs. III – 61 to III – 64): This alternative reduces open road densities during a critical time period and begins movement of the transportation system toward the recommended future condition for road densities while still allowing for necessary administrative and desired public access to most heavy use dispersed camping sites.

Effects on recreation opportunities (EA, pgs. III – 65 to III – 69): Alternative 4 Refined, like Alternative 4 provides the most access to dispersed campsites of any action alternative (86%). The reduction in motorized access to 13 dispersed campsites is more than offset by the long-term benefits to soil, riparian, and aquatic resources; increase in quality of deer and elk habitat; increases in ecosystem sustainability, reduced spread of noxious weeds, and reduced risk of catastrophic tree crown fires.

In summary, Alternative 4 Refined was selected for implementation because it best creates a sustainable landscape, reduces standing fuel hazards and risk of fast moving tree crown fires at the landscape level, improves deer and elk habitat, and begins the prevention and control of noxious weeds. Alternative 4 Refined does this while protecting watershed, key deer and elk habitat, air quality, scenic quality values and maintaining motorized access to the most dispersed campsites of any action alternative (81 dispersed campsites or 86%). Alternative 4 Refined best begins the development of the desired future condition described in the Tieton Watershed Analysis, the Oak Creek Watershed Analysis, the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Plan (1990, as amended in 1994 and 2001), and the Wenatchee National Forest Late Successional Reserve and Managed Late Successional Area Assessment (1997).

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The other alternatives considered with full detailed analysis are briefly described below. A tabular summary of their differences is contained in the Environmental Assessment in Table II - 7 at the end of Chapter II in the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment. A complete description of the alternatives considered in detail can be found on pages II - 1 through II - 37 of the Elderberry Project Environmental Assessment.

Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative. No timber would be harvested and no activity relative to stand management would occur at this time. There would be no opportunity to begin implementation of the Dry Site Strategy, no movement of the landscape toward a more sustainable condition, and no fuel treatments at the landscape level. It would maintain the largest intact wildlife corridors in the short term but not improve security habitat for wildlife. Alternative 1 would also not implement any noxious weed control treatments. Like all the other alternatives, ongoing resource management activities such as road maintenance, trail maintenance, etc. (as described on EA page II – 3) would continue.

Alternative 1 was not selected because it would not meet the purpose and need for the project as described on page I – 3 of the Elderberry Project EA. While Alternative 1 did retain the most motorized access to dispersed camping sites, it did nothing to reduce the risk of tree crown wildfires or reduce fuel loadings and promote long term ecosystem sustainability. Alternative 1 also did nothing to control noxious weeds, improve wildlife habitat, or improve soil productivity and watershed health.

Alternative 2 is the same as the selected alternative except that it would implement the Wenatchee National Forest “Dry Site Management Strategy” on the maximum available acres (approximately 5,190 acres) within the analysis area. This would include treatments that could reduce the effectiveness of a critical elk travel corridor and a critical big game

security area. Alternative 2 also proposes to improve wildlife security habitat along roads the most by seasonally closing the most roads (approximately 13.63 miles) that would have reduced motorized vehicle access to approximately 21 inventoried dispersed camping sites.

Alternative 2 was not selected because the increased benefits for reducing risks of tree crown wildfires and reducing fuel hazards were not high enough to offset the increased level of adverse effects on a critical elk travel corridor and a critical big game security area. It also reduced motorized access to dispersed campsites at an excessive level.

Alternative 3 Alternative 3 was developed to begin implementation of the Dry Site Strategy without the use of a timber sale to reduce adverse cumulative watershed effects. No commercial sale of timber products would occur. Instead, tree stands would be treated by a combination of precommercial thinning, tree pruning, handpiling, chipping, and burning of handpiles and underburning. The proportion of mechanical natural fuel treatments would increase substantially under Alternative 3. All mitigation measures relating to the timber sale would be made inapplicable and all costs of the remaining applicable mitigation measures would be dependent upon other sources. The KV projects of Alternative 3 would be dependent upon other sources of revenue than a timber sale for implementation. Alternative 3 would allow firewood collection along Forest Road 1500 325, implement the same road management changes and noxious weed treatments as Alternative 2. Connected actions for Alternative 3 would include the removal of hazard trees along area roads and the installation of erosion control structures and grass seeding in areas vulnerable to erosion such as firelines.

Alternative 3 was not selected because the increased benefits for reducing the risk of adverse cumulative effects on watershed resources were insufficient to offset its delays in reducing the risk of tree crown wild fires, reducing fuel hazards and improving long term ecosystem sustainability. Most of the tree stands have tree crown canopy levels too dense to allow for underburning without removal of trees 7 inches or greater in diameter at dbh (4.5 feet above ground level). The use of mechanical fuel treatments (precommercial tree thinning, pruning, etc.) alone is not as effective as commercial tree thinning and underburning in meeting fuel hazard reduction objectives. Alternative 3 would also reduce motorized access to dispersed campsites at an excessive level and require additional congressionally authorized funding to implement.

Alternative 4 Alternative 4 is the same as Alternative 4 Refined except for those items listed on pages 4, 5, and 6 of this Decision Notice and enclosed Appendices. These refinements were the result of obtaining more accurate field data and desire to conclude informal consultation

requirements with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Alternative 4 was developed to reduce adverse effects on a critical wildlife corridor and critical wildlife security area while allowing more motorized hunter access to approximately 8 heavier use dispersed campsites than the other action alternatives.

All of the action alternatives begin the implementation of the Wenatchee “Dry Site Strategy” but do so at different rates. Alternative 2 was rated as the fastest, followed closely by Alternative 4 and Alternative 4 Refined, and distantly by Alternative 3.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined through the Environmental Assessment that this action is not a major Federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making this determination of significance. Beneficial effects have not, however, been used to offset or compensate for potential adverse effects (EA pages III – 1 to III – 78).
2. This project will have an overall positive effect on public health and safety through the reduction of the potential for high intensity wildfires. The effects of prescribed burning on air quality are expected to be short term and of low severity (EA pages III – 49 to III – 61). There are no roadless areas and the project has been designed to avoid the Managed Late Successional Area and nearby Late Successional Reserve.
3. The physical and biological requirements of the activities are limited to this analysis area. This project will not affect any unique characteristics, such as prime farmlands, parklands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, or ecologically critical areas. Known wetlands were delineated and removed from commercial timber harvest consideration (EA pages II – 12 to II – 13, II – 37, and III – 77).
4. There will be no apparent significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to soil, water, fisheries, or wildlife resources or other components of the environment. The analysis considered cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within the National Forest lands in potentially affected areas (EA pages III – 1 to III – 78).
5. The environmental analysis for the area indicates that the proposed project will have no effect on heritage properties, given the design criteria (mitigation

measures) associated with the selected alternative. The Washington State Historic Preservation Officer has been consulted and concurred in a statement dated September 3, 1999 with the finding of no effect on heritage resources (III – 74 to III – 77). The Yakama Nation has been consulted with several times during project development and has concerns that have been addressed. (EA pages III – 74 to III – 77, EA page V – 1 V – 2).

6. Evaluations for Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive (PETS) Plants found no potential for direct or indirect effects (EA pages III – 30 to III – 32 and DN Appendix DN – 3 page 5 To 8) to currently listed PETS plants (1999 USDA).
7. A Biological Evaluation was done for Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive (PETS) wildlife and fish species. Habitat is present for a number of these species within or adjacent to the analysis area. Informal consultation has been completed with the USDI – Fish and Wildlife Service. It has been determined that this project “may effect, not likely to adversely effect” the gray wolf, grizzly bear, northern bald eagle, northern spotted owl, Canada lynx; “no effect” to the American peregrine falcon, marbled murrelet, and Designated Critical Habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl. This project will not affect the future viability of the California bighorn sheep, California wolverine, northern sagebrush lizard, northwestern pond turtle, long-legged myotis, Cascades frog, harlequin duck, Pacific Western big-eared bat, spotted frog, tailed frog, fringed myotis, loggerhead shrike, long-eared myotis, northern goshawk, olive-sided flycatcher, Pacific fisher, small-footed myotis, black backed woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, flammulated owl, pygmy nuthatch, great gray owl, mountain goat, pileated woodpecker, primary cavity nesters, Rocky Mountain elk, ruffed grouse, and three-toed woodpecker (EA pages III – 11 to II – 25 and DN, Appendix DN – 3, pages 8 To 12). It has been determined that this project “may effect, not likely to adversely effect” steelhead/redband rainbow trout, bull trout or West slope cutthroat trout (EA pages III – 7 to III – 11). The project will not jeopardize the existence of steelhead/redband rainbow trout, bull trout or West slope cutthroat trout. Based on the information contained in the EA, the biological evaluations, and the interagency reviews and consistency findings, I have determined that there will be no significant effect on any of the listed species as a result of this Decision.
8. The proposed actions will be in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements designed for the protection of the environment (EA pages I – 27 to I – 29).
9. These actions do not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented to meet the goals and objectives of the Wenatchee National Forest Plan as amended (AFP) (EA pages III – 1 to III – 78).

10. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Of those 20 individuals and six organizations that provided initial comments during alternative development, only one individual and two organizations had any comments on the EA. These comments and my responses to comments are contained in Appendix DN-1 of this Decision Notice.
11. Due to the long history of vegetation management in the eastern Cascades and the body of science developed relating to ecosystem management, there are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (EA pages III – 1 to III – 78).
12. Sufficient information is available to make a reasonable choice among the alternatives based on the analysis information in the environmental assessment and past actions of similar context (EA pages III – 1 to III – 7, and DN Appendix DN-3).
13. The timber harvest prescriptions selected for implementation will reduce the long term risk of damage due to western spruce budworm defoliation since the proportion of prime western spruce budworm habitat (multi-layered tree stands with a high component of grand fir) will be reduced (EA pages III – 26 to III – 29, and DN Appendix DN-3).

This project complies with Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice. Scoping did not identify any potential disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects that would adversely affect minority or low-income populations as a result of this project (EA pages III – 77 to III – 78).

These actions are consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Wenatchee National Forest as amended by the April 13, 1994, Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and Record of Decision for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards, and Guidelines signed January 2001 (AFP). This determination of consistency is based on the following items:

1. The project has been preceded by a comprehensive watershed analysis (Tieton WA and Oak Creek WA) and a late successional reserve / managed late successional area assessment (Wenatchee National Forest Late Successional Reserve and Managed Late Successional Area Assessment), (EA pages I – 3 to I – 24 and I – 28).
2. Riparian Reserves are designated for all perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral streams, springs, and wet areas, within or adjacent to ground disturbing activities. Aquatic Conservation Strategies specified in the Wenatchee

National Forest Plan as amended will be met in all Riparian Reserves (EA page II – 4, pages II – 12 to II – 14 and DN Appendix DN – 2, pages 1 to 5).

3. Green tree and snag retention standards are consistent with those prescribed by the AFP (EA pages II – 14 to II – 15, DN Appendix DN – 2, pages 5 to 7). Wenatchee National Forest snag guidelines will be implemented and it is expected they will provide the large snag and downed log levels needed for snag and log dependent species.
4. The treatment area outside of Riparian Reserves is entirely within the Matrix land allocation. The goal of this land allocation is that most timber and other silvicultural activities would be conducted in the portion of Matrix with suitable forest lands according to standards and guidelines (EA page I- 26 to I – 29). Also, the green tree retention standard of 15% for Matrix allocation will be met for all regeneration harvest treatment areas (EA pages I – 27 and I – 28).
5. All required management recommendations (USDA / USDI 1994, USDA / USDI 1998) for survey and manage (S & M) species will be implemented and it is anticipated that no survey and manage species will be disturbed by the proposed activities (EA page III – 17, pages III – 30 to III – 32 and DN Appendix DN – 3 pages 5 to 12). The “Harvest Prescription” is generally one of commercial and precommercial thinning where the thinnings will leave the larger diameter dominant and codominant tree species that are fire resilient, drought tolerant, and insect and disease resistant. Trees per acre and spacing will be variable, depending upon the size of the tree and species. These treatments are designed to leave canopy cover on the landscape, while reducing the risk of habitat loss to catastrophic fire or large scale insect or disease outbreaks. This reduced risk of catastrophic fire and insect caused tree mortality increases the likelihood of maintaining existing Survey and Manage (S&M) habitat in the long term. The implementation of these management recommendations will not increase the risk of catastrophic fire or insect and disease outbreaks for the Elderberry Project analysis area (EA pages III – 49 to III – 61).

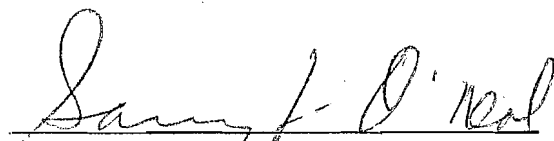
The actions are also consistent with direction found in the Record of Decision (December 1988) for the Region 6 Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation Environmental Impact Statement, the associated Mediated Agreement (May 1989), the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Executive Order for Environmental Justice, the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act, and with the requirements of NFMA and 36CFR 219.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

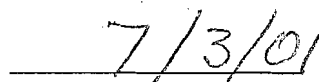
Implementation of this decision shall occur no sooner than 50 days after the publication of the legal notice of the decision in the *Wenatchee Daily World* newspaper. A similar notice will be placed in the *Yakima Herald-Republic* as a courtesy.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations 36 CFR 215.7. Any written appeal must be postmarked or received by Regional Forester Harv Forsgren, Attn: Appeals 1570, USDA Forest Service, Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623 within 45 days of the date the legal notice of this decision appears in the *Wenatchee Daily World* newspaper. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

For further information, contact District Ranger, U.S.D.A. – Forest Service, Naches Ranger District, 10061 Highway 12, Naches, Washington 98937, (509) 653-2205. The analysis file for the Environmental Assessment and resulting Decision Notice and FONSI is located at the Naches Ranger District Office in Naches, Washington.



SONNY J. O'NEAL
Forest Supervisor



Date