



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Region 1

200 East Broadway
P. O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

File Code: 1570 (215)

Date: June 9, 1998

Route To:

Subject: Winter Damage Salvage Project, Appeal # 98-01-00-0044

To: Appeal Deciding Officer

This is my recommendation on disposition of the appeal filed by Jeff Juel on behalf of The Ecology Center, Inc. and The Lands Council protesting the Winter Damage Salvage Project Decision Notice signed by the Priest Lake District Ranger (Idaho Panhandle National Forests).

The District Ranger's decision adopts Alternative II, which includes salvaging trees over approximately 3,037 acres. Most of the trees planned for cutting were damaged from snow and windstorms that occurred during the winter of 1996 and spring of 1997. The salvaging would occur in 17 separate areas. Approximately 3 miles of temporary roads would be constructed. In addition, approximately 3.8 miles of roads would be improved with the project and approximately 6.9 miles of roads within the project areas would be closed.

My review was conducted pursuant to, and in accordance with, 36 CFR 215.19 to ensure the analysis and decision are in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policy, and orders. The appeal record, including the Appellants' objections and recommended changes, has been thoroughly reviewed.

FINDINGS

My recommendation is based upon the following evaluation:

Clarity of the Decision and Rationale

The Decision Notice (DN) is clear, understandable and written with a minimum of jargon. The analysis of multiple sales in a number of drainages is difficult to portray, but the DN does a good job of summarizing the variables. The addition of a fourth project objective is clearly explained in the decision.

Purpose of the Proposal and Comprehension of Benefits

The purpose and need for the proposal is clearly described, as are the benefits to be obtained. The decision documents the use of public comment and how it is incorporated. The no-action alternative is adequately evaluated but could have been expanded upon for clarity.

Consistency with Policy, Direction, and Supporting Information

The purpose and need for management action are well defined. Ecosystem management principles are used for developing the project and there is a good tie with ICBEMP. The

determination for the FONSI is clear and supported in the EA. The rationale for the decision is clearly stated.

Effectiveness of Public Participation Activities and Use of Comments

Efforts to involve the public were extensive. The Responsible Official did an excellent job in responding to public concerns expressed throughout the comment period. Consideration of issues and concerns is clearly demonstrated.

Appeal Review Findings

The Appellants allege violations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act (CWA), and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). They request a full remand of the DN to implement the project, a full inventory of roads in the salvage areas and necessary road obliteration.

Objection I: Additional roads in the project area be removed in accordance with Chief Dombek's statement on March 2, 1998 to "Make maintenance and restoration of watershed health an overriding priority..."

Response: The Appellants contend that the District should remove additional roads from the project area besides those already designated for removal. The District added the removal of 4 miles of road during project planning in addition to the initial plans to obliterate 3 miles of temporary roads, remove 3 miles of roads and 25 channel crossings in the southern half of Section 16 and close 4 miles of roads used in the project. These road closures will result in a net decrease of approximately 6.9 miles of roads from the project area (DN, pp. 4-5). Before more roads are removed, an analysis is needed to determine which, if any, roads to decommission.

Objection II: New roading and logging in the Lower West Branch will result in additional sediment projection, in violation of the CWA and the Forest Plan.

Response: The DN approved temporary road construction and reconstruction within the Lower West Branch drainage, which is a Water Quality Limited Segment. The EA discloses that there would be limited increases in sediment and water yield to the Lower West Branch with the implementation of the action alternative. The majority of the increases would be in the Ojibway Sale area (in the headwaters of the Lower West Branch). The proposed actions within the sale area include closure of 3 miles of road and removal of 25 channel crossings. Over time, this action will reduce sediment delivered to Ojibway Creek. Of continuing concern, however, is the possibility of increased water yield from proposed harvest, which could exacerbate the instability of this Creek. I recommend that the District re-evaluate the proposed units in the Ojibway drainage to assure that there will be no increase in water yield from the proposed harvest.

Objection III: The EA has no genuine cumulative effects analysis of all the activities and has not taken a hard look at cumulative effects.

Response: The project file and the EA identify the cumulative effects area for each major tributary but don't disclose the rationale why effects would be limited to just those areas. The Lower West Branch of the Priest River is the watershed that will be affected by the proposed activities and is already experiencing some problems with instability. Because of concern for cumulative effects, and a lack of clear documentation supporting the conclusion of no cumulative effects, I recommend the timber harvest in the Ojibway Salvage Area and the Gleason Meadows Salvage Area be dropped from the proposed activities. Other proposals in the Lower West Branch watershed do not appear to have the same potential for adverse effects as those in Ojibway and Gleason Meadows.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend the District be instructed to drop and re-evaluate the proposed harvest units in the Ojibway and Gleason Meadows areas. I recommend the remainder of the proposal as described in the Decision Notice be affirmed.

/s/ Katherine Q. Solberg

KATHERINE Q. SOLBERG
Reviewing Officer