

Sparrow Blowdown Salvage and Siuslaw Forest Plan Amendment #12

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Siuslaw National Forest
South Zone, Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area
Douglas County, Oregon

August 22, 2002

Lead Agency:	USDA Forest Service
Responsible Official:	Gloria Brown, Forest Supervisor Siuslaw National Forest 4077 Research Way Corvallis, OR 97333 (P.O. Box 1148, 97339)
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Project Background, Area and Needs

The Sparrow Blowdown Salvage project will harvest about 45 acres of trees that were blown down during a windstorm in February 2002. The harvest will reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire near Gardiner, Oregon and replace timber volume that is currently under contract in mature and old growth timber.

The project area is within the Threemile 5th-field watershed about 2 miles northwest of Gardiner. The project is located on the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area (ODNRA) in Township 21 South, Range 12 West, N1/2 SW1/4, and S1/2 NW1/4 of section 17, Douglas County, Oregon.

Two needs were identified and are described in detail in Chapter 1 of the environmental assessment (EA):

1. Reducing the threat of a wildfire spreading onto adjacent private lands while minimizing impacts to the character of the Umpqua Spit Inventoried Roadless Area.
2. Meeting the Forest Service obligation to replace contracted timber volume while reducing the harvest of mature and old growth natural stands used to provide replacement volume on other National Forests.

The decision to be made is whether to implement actions designed to meet these needs by selecting Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), or to withhold any action by selecting Alternative 2 (No Action).

My Decision

I have decided to implement Alternative 1, Proposed Action, of the Sparrow Blowdown Salvage EA with some minor design changes. In making this decision, I have reviewed the EA and its analysis file—including the associated biological evaluations. Project actions are as follows:

- Issue a temporary non-significant amendment to the Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan that changes the management area prescription for the 45-acre blow down area from *Management Area 10(F) – Plant, Fish, and Wildlife Habitats* to *Management Area 15 – Timber/Wildlife/Fish/Dispersed Recreation*. This temporary amendment will be in effect until the blown down timber is salvaged. Upon completion of harvest operations, the area will revert back to MA 10(F).
- Commercially harvest 45 acres of blown down timber with cable skyline systems from existing roads;
- Prescribe burn remaining fine fuels and logging slash piles;
- Utilize natural regeneration and plant mixed conifer stock to establish a new stand;
- Seed disturbed sites lacking canopy cover (tractor roads, landings) with native grass mix to reduce noxious weed competition.
- Offer the Sparrow Salvage Sale to a purchaser qualified for replacement volume.

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Minor design changes to the Proposed Action are intended to reduce impacts to roadless character, soils, and visual quality. Changes incorporated into the proposed action by this decision include:

1. Slash in the unit will be hand piled and “swamper” burned in the early spring in wet conditions to reduce the impacts to soils. Piled material will be forced-burned or covered in place and burned in late fall when the rainy season sets in.
2. No fire line will be constructed under this treatment regime, reducing the impacts to the roadless area and causing less impact on visual quality.

The Proposed Action meets the Project needs by:

- Reducing the threat of a wildfire spreading onto adjacent private lands while minimizing impacts to the character of the Umpqua Spit Inventoried Roadless Area.
- Allowing the removal of the majority of the large fuel load by removing most of the blown down trees. This will greatly improve fire control and provide better access if fire suppression is needed. Provided the area can be logged safely, all standing trees will be retained. In addition, about 1000 to 1500 cubic feet per acre of down trees and snags will be retained on the site (which equates to 25 to 30 16 inch trees). Harvest activities will be conducted from existing roads; no new roads will be constructed.
- Meeting the obligation to replace contracted timber volume while minimizing the amount of harvest on mature natural stands used to provide the replacement volume on other National Forests. Mature and old growth natural stands will not be harvested to the extent that trees will be removed from this site (most average 60 years old).

Alternatives Considered

There were two alternatives developed and analyzed in detail. These alternatives, the Proposed Action and No Action, are described in the Sparrow Salvage EA under Chapter 2. Discussions of the effects of these alternatives are also included in the EA, Chapter 3. The No Action alternative would not meet the purpose and need for action, but was evaluated because it is required. The No Action alternative also provides a basis for showing the effects of not undertaking the proposal.

Under the no action alternative, the area would remain in its current condition and is expected to be an extreme fire hazard and risk for the next 5-7 years. The fire behavior models show this area to exhibit 350 to 400 tons per acre of generated slash with anticipated flame lengths of 20-30 feet and spotting of up to .5 miles. Resistance to fire control in an untreated condition is beyond the capabilities of any handwork and would require mechanized machinery to penetrate the down woody fuels. Left untreated, adjacent to a highly used public access point to the beach, the stand poses an extreme risk of human caused wildfire ignition.

During scoping, an alternative was suggested that all standing trees be cut. This alternative was proposed due to safety concerns for logging crews working near retained standing wind firm trees and snags. The Proposed Action objective is to retain all sound standing live trees and all snags greater than 14 inches dbh and 20 feet in height while providing for the safety of

the operation. To address the safety concern, any trees and snags in close proximity to landings and skyline corridors will be cut as well as any other tree and snag that would put any person connected with the harvest operation at risk.

This objective was discussed on-site with a Safety Compliance Officer from the State of Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services. The Safety Officer concurred that the Proposed Action is consistent with state safety regulations. Therefore, an alternative that would cut all snags and standing green trees was not fully developed. Refer to EA page 3.

Reason for the Decision

In making my decision I gave much weight to the impacts of this proposal on the Umpqua Spit Inventoried Roadless Area. After studying the maps and aerial photos of the area it was apparent that the quality of the roadless area has already been compromised by private road construction and clearcutting on adjacent lands. The project area is located in a small “finger” of the roadless area surrounded by private and county lands under intense forest management. Only a small strip of land connects the project area with the remainder of the inventoried roadless area. In addition, due to a pre-existing road easement, Douglas County recently constructed a road through the middle of the project area in order to salvage blown down timber on a county parcel. I weighed these facts against the value of using the blown down timber as replacement for standing mature and old growth forests elsewhere and thereby reducing the acreage of green standing forest needed to meet federal obligations to provide volume under the Rescissions Act (Public Law 104-19) and the September 17 settlement agreement in Northwest Resources Council vs. Glickman. I also weighed the roadless area impacts against the risk of catastrophic wildfire brought about by the large volume of dead and down wood that the windstorm created. Given that no significant impacts were identified through the environmental analysis I reasoned that the impacts to the roadless area were minor with respect to the benefits of replacing volume and reducing fire risk. Therefore I chose the proposed action over the no action alternative.

This action is in keeping with the Land and Resource Management Plan, Siuslaw National Forest, 1990, and the Management Plan for the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, Siuslaw National Forest, 1994, as amended by this action.

Help from the Public and Other Agencies

To help identify public concerns about the proposed project, interested citizens, organizations, regulatory agencies, and local governments were informed about this proposal. Public input was solicited for the proposed project through the Siuslaw National Forest’s quarterly “Project Update” publication. Letters were also sent to 41 individuals, groups, and organizations on May 21, 2002. Six people responded by June 6, 2002, as requested.

The Douglas county commissioners were concerned about high fire risk and public safety. They fully support the project. While the industrial landowners supported the project, they also expressed concerns about worker safety regarding retention of standing trees and snags and log suspension requirements. Other respondents were concerned about the character of the area after harvest, retention of logs, snags and trees, and potential disturbance to marbled

murrelets and spotted owls. All of these concerns were taken into consideration and analyzed in the EA.

Upon completion of the Project EA, a legal notice was published in the Corvallis Gazette-Times (newspaper of record) on July 5, 2002, informing the public that the EA was available for a 30-day review and comment period. Copies of the EA were made available at the Siuslaw National Forest Headquarters in Corvallis, the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area Office in Reedsport, and the Mapleton Ranger District Office in Florence. Copies of the EA, Analysis File, and a cover letter announcing the 30-day review and comment period were sent on July 3, 2002 to those who commented on the proposed project during the scoping phase and to four persons who had requested a copy of the EA.

The legal notice and letters identified Alternative 1, proposed action, as the preferred alternative and indicated the beginning and end of the comment period. The comment process was described and a Forest Service contact person was identified. The 30-day comment period terminated close-of-business on August 5, 2002. No comments on the Project EA were received.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Based on the site-specific environmental analysis documented in the Sparrow Salvage Environmental Assessment, I have determined that the activities described do not constitute a major Federal action and would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This determination was made in light of the following factors:

Context

This action is very small in terms of society as a whole and is similar to ongoing activities on adjacent private lands. Timber harvest in this area is a common practice and a normal part of life in coastal communities. Project activities similar to this one have been studied and approved in a Regional context through the Northwest Forest Plan. This action only affects a small portion of the Forest, which in turn, is a very small portion of the Region. The activities that are authorized and guided by this decision are limited in scope and duration.

Some minor adverse effects are expected. However, given the renewable nature of the resources, sandy soil conditions, and the high growth rates of coastal vegetation, these effects are expected to be short-term. No long-term adverse effects are expected.

Intensity

1. Negligible adverse environmental effects are anticipated. Impacts of this project will be hard to discern given the existing effects of the natural windthrow event. Overall effects to hydrology and soils will have little or no consequences (EA pages 11 and 13). The removal of wood will not reduce the amount of fish habitat, stream channel stability or change stream temperatures (EA pages 16 and 17). Further, I find that when considered alone, any adverse effects of this project are not significant (EA, Chapter 3, pages 9 through 22).

2. No significant adverse effects to public health or safety have been identified (EA, pages 4 and 5).
3. The characteristics of the geographic area do not make it uniquely sensitive to the effects of project actions. Past actions of similar intensity in similar areas have not indicated any significant adverse effects.
4. The Sparrow Blowdown Salvage Environmental Assessment has disclosed direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soil, water, aquatic and terrestrial species, and other components of the human environment. There are no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects anticipated from implementing project actions. The analysis of cumulative effects considered past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest lands as well as for other ownerships in the affected watershed (EA, chapter 3).
5. Based on the pre-project survey and record search of the Project area, actions associated with the Project will have “no effect” (as defined in 36 CFR 800.5 [b]) on any listed or eligible heritage (cultural) resources. If a heritage site is discovered during project implementation, work will be stopped until the site is evaluated or the project has been altered to avoid the site (EA, pages 5 and 14; Analysis File H).
6. Based on the fisheries and wildlife biological evaluations (BE) prepared for the Project, no effect is anticipated on any Federally listed terrestrial and aquatic species (Fisheries BE, Analysis File B, pages 5 and 6; Wildlife BE, Analysis File C, pages 4 and 5).
7. The Project is in compliance with relevant Federal, State and local laws, regulations and requirements designed for the protection of the environment. The Project will meet or exceed State water and air quality standards and is consistent with the Oregon Coastal Management Program as required by the Coastal Zone Management Act (EA, Design Criteria, page 4; EA, Other Disclosures, page 22).
8. The effects from the Project on the quality of the human environment are not found to be highly controversial (EA, page 2; Analysis File A).
9. The Project’s environmental effects are not uncertain or unknown. Planned actions are similar to those already accomplished on similar lands on the Forest (EA, page 9; Chapter 3).
10. Actions that will be implemented by the Project do not set a precedent for future actions, because we have implemented similar actions in the past. The non-significant amendment to the Oregon Dunes Management Plan which authorizes this action is project specific for this location and terminates upon closure of harvest activities (EA, page 1, Chapter 1)

Other Disclosures

All measures contained in the Project EA and the vegetation management analysis (Analysis File E) will be incorporated to comply with the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation published December 1988 and the subsequent Mediated Agreement of May 1989.

The Project will have no significant adverse effects on wetlands, floodplains, farm land, range land, or park land (EA, page 22); land birds (EA, page 11); minority groups, civil rights, women, or consumers (EA, page 22); Indian social, economic, subsistence rights, and sacred sites (EA, page 22).

Findings Required By Other Laws

Based on the analysis in the Sparrow Blowdown Salvage Environmental Assessment, I find the selected alternative to be consistent with the Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1990), as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (USDA, USDI 1994), and the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area Management Plan (USDA, 1994) as amended by this EA. It is designed to meet or exceed the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy as set forth in the Northwest Forest Plan (EA, pages 20 and 21).

The selected alternative is consistent with the National Forest Management Act implementing regulations, including the seven management requirements listed in 36 CFR 219.27, a through g:

- a. *Resource protection*—The Project EA includes criteria designed to protect resources and will apply practices as described in General Water Quality Best Management Practices (BMPs), Pacific Northwest Region, November 1988 (EA, Design Criteria, pages 4 and 5);
- b. *Vegetation manipulation of tree cover*—Vegetation manipulation has been proposed to remove blown down trees as well as those that would pose a safety hazard to the logging operation. Standing trees and snags that do not pose a safety hazard will be left (EA, pages 3, 4 and 5);
- c. *Silvicultural practices that apply to timber harvest and cultural treatments*—Silvicultural practices include removal of blown down trees as well as those that would pose a safety hazard to the logging operation in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish and wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic resources. Natural regeneration of adjacent trees will be the primary means for tree regeneration while seedlings native to the Oregon coast will be planted to a wide spacing (EA, pages 3 and 4; Analysis File E);
- d. *Even-aged management in the forest*—No even-aged management is proposed. Only blown down trees as well as those that would pose a safety hazard to the logging operation will be harvested. Other standing trees and snags will be retained. The primary source of tree regeneration will be naturally seeded from adjacent trees. Trees planted to a wide spacing with coastal trees species will provide natural species diversity;
- e. *Riparian area protection*—Special attention has been given to riparian areas by retaining down trees (at least five (5) trees per 100 feet of stream channel) to maintain long-term stream-channel stability (EA, page 4; Analysis File B);
- f. *Conservation of soil and water resources*—The Project is consistent with the Aquatic

Conservation Strategy objectives and includes best management practices (BMPs) and other measures designed to protect, enhance, or minimize effects to soil and water resources. Actions are expected to enhance water quality in the long term. (EA, pages 4, 5 and 20; and

- g. *Preserve and enhance the diversity of plant and animal communities*— Management prescriptions for the area have been designed to mimic natural stand characteristics for this coastal site. Plant and animal diversity will be maintained (EA, page 4; Analysis Files B, C and E).

Implementation Date

Implementation of this project may proceed immediately upon publication of this decision in the Corvallis Gazette-Times.

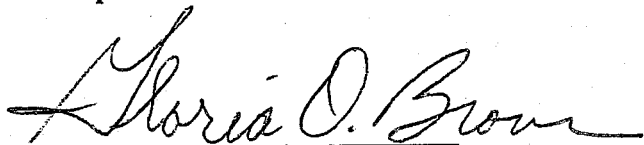
Administrative Review and Appeal

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215.8 (a). No substantive comments that recommended any changes or expressed concern with the proposed project or planning process were received during the public comment period.

Contact Person

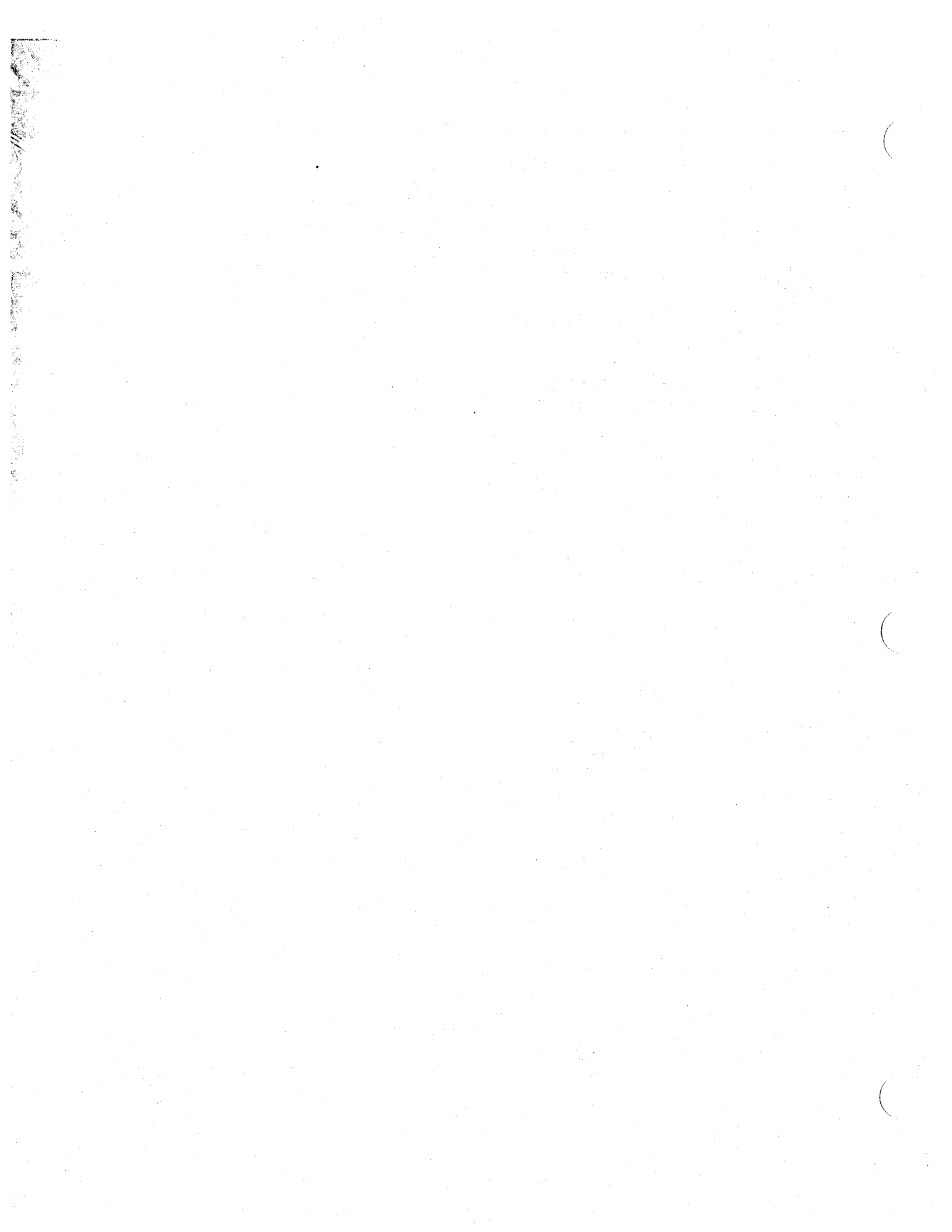
For further information regarding this project, contact Paul Thomas or Don Large, Mapleton Ranger District, 4480 Highway 101 Building G, Florence, Oregon, 97439, or phone at (541) 902-8526, or e-mail at pgthomas@fs.fed.us or dlarge@fs.fed.us.

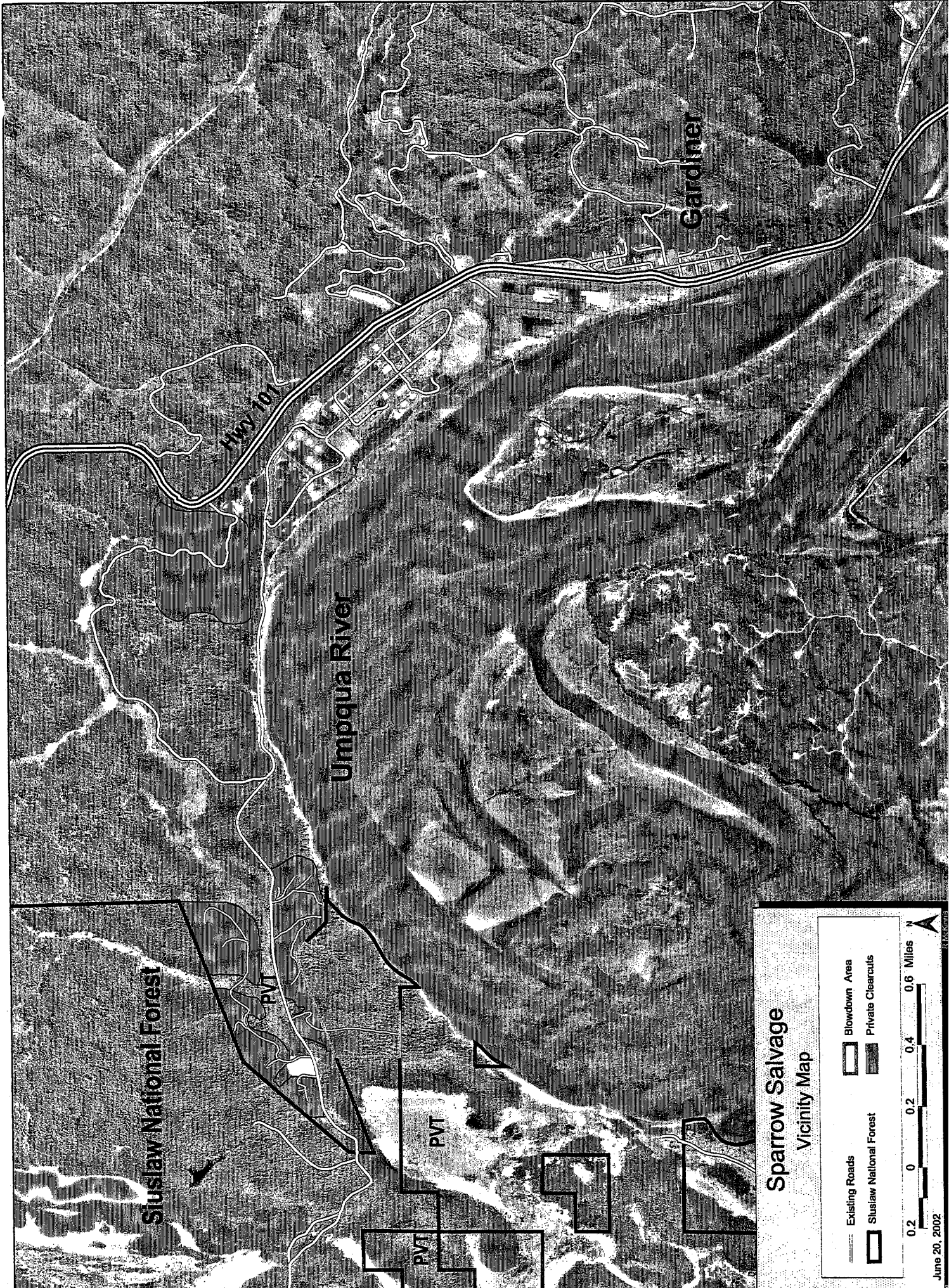
Responsible Official:



GLORIA D. BROWN
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Siuslaw National Forest
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August 22, 2002
Date





Siuslaw National Forest

Hwy 101

Umpqua River

Gardner

PVT

PVT

PVT

Sparrow Salvage
Vicinity Map

	Existing Roads		Blowdown Area
	Siuslaw National Forest		Private Clearcuts

