Background

The South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared to analyze the effects of implementing forest and fuels treatments and transportation system changes in the South Summit area of the Methow Valley Ranger District of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. The Environmental Assessment was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. The project will authorize forest and fuels treatments in a manner that is consistent with the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (EA, Chap. 1, pages 6-10). The Environmental Assessment is incorporated by reference into this decision.

The South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project area is located within the Lower Beaver Creek, Frazer Creek, Summit Creek, Chiliwist Creek, Benson Creek, Alder Creek-Methow River, Texas Creek-Methow River, French Creek and Swamp Creek sub watersheds east of Twisp, Washington. The project area, approximately 50,000 acres, lies mostly within T34N, R23E; T33N, R23E; T33N, R24E; T32N, R23E; T32N, R22E; and T31N, R23E, W.M.

About 70% of the project area burned with varying levels of severity during the 2014 Carlton Complex wildfire. In parts of the project area experiencing low fire severity or no wildfire during that event, past timber harvest and fire exclusion have caused extensive changes in forest vegetation over the past century. This includes increased tree density, decreased average tree size, increased proportion of shade tolerant Douglas-fir forest cover, and increased vulnerability to forest insects and diseases when compared to historic conditions. In addition, some roads within the project area do not meet current safety and design standards or are now excess to management needs because of changes in logging system practices. Some existing roads are located in areas where they impact aquatic habitat and hydrological function.

Decision

I have decided to select Alternative 2 as described in the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project Environmental Assessment, including mitigation measures and monitoring (EA, Chap. 2, pages 12 to 27). This decision will allow activities that include approximately 2350 acres of harvest treatments, approximately 9955 acres of fuels treatments (including post-harvest treatments), and modifications to the transportation system that include decommissioning approximately 81.5 miles of road. Harvest thinning treatments include commercial harvest thinning (1625 acres), commercial harvest thinning with dwarf mistletoe treatment (560 acres), regeneration
harvest (70 acres), quaking aspen maintenance thinning (60 acres), and thinning in JR and Loup Loup Campgrounds (35 acres). Up to 1850 acres of harvest in the South Summit area would be specifically restricted to winter logging conditions in order to minimize compaction and displacement of ash cap soils. Summer logging with harvesting systems to protect soils would be used to avoid disrupting winter recreation on approximately 498 acres. The purchaser could choose to harvest in winter and/or use a cut-to-length system during the summer on up to 2 acres. Non-commercial thinning treatments would occur on 1000 acres. Tree planting includes 8285 acres of lands burned during the Carlton Complex wildfire, as well in the 70 acres of regeneration harvest units. Hazard tree thinning would occur along the Highway 20 corridor to reduce risks to motorists, in campgrounds to reduce risks to campers, and along roads used as haul routes during timber harvest activities.

A total of 9955 acres of fuels will be treated including commercial harvest activity fuels (approximately 2350 acres), noncommercial harvest activity fuels (1000 acres), and an additional 6600 acres of fuels treatment outside of harvest or non-commercial thinning units. Fuels treatments include ladder fuel reduction thinning, machine pile/burn, hand pile/burn, underburn, and mastication. Connected actions include construction and use of 1.8 miles of dozer-built fireline and 0.5 miles of hand-built fireline.

Fuels and vegetation treatment areas will include forest areas designated as Forest Plan Old Growth (500 acres) and Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (274 acres).

Transportation system changes include construction of new roads (0.5 miles), construction of temporary road (0.4 miles), closing roads (approximately 26 miles), converting roads to Nordic trails (2 miles), replacing or upsizing culverts (8 locations), decommissioning roads (81.5 miles), and designating Administrative Motorized Access Routes (23.5 miles).

A horse campground would be constructed adjacent to the North Summit SnoPark. This facility would provide campsites and a day-use area for forest visitors using horses.

Adaptive Management

Adaptive strategies have been included to allow treatments to change if conditions do not meet fuel prescriptions, market conditions do not allow for biomass utilization, or a drivable ford cannot be built (EA Chap. 2, pages 17 to 19), as follows:

- Where mastication is proposed on 300 acres, debris may be hand-piled and pile burned if mastication equipment is not readily available or uneconomical, or if soil conditions have not stabilized from recent wildfire effects.
- If machine piles are burned before ladder fuel reduction thinning occurs in harvest units, then the debris from LFR thinning would be hand-piled and burned after curing. This would affect up to 1575 acres.
- If market conditions make biomass removal uneconomical, landing piles would be burned within about two years of harvest, after adequate time for the material to be utilized as firewood where open road access is allowed.
- If 200 feet of road with a drivable ford cannot be built across Frazer Creek to provide Okanogan PUD access to the powerline, approximately 0.9 miles of
road that currently provides PUD access to this area would not be decommissioned and would continue to be used as an access road.

**Forest Plan Amendments**
The proposal includes several project-specific amendments to Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. One amendment is permanent and the remaining amendments are temporary. Amendments are related to adjusting a management area boundary, recreation, soils, old growth, and wildlife disturbance to acknowledge existing conditions that exceed standards or to allow short-term negative impacts that would make the ecosystem more resilient in the long-term (EA Chap. 2, pages 21 to 24). The following Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines would require amendments to accomplish the resource objectives:

**Resource Objective: Campground Management**
The location of the proposed 15-acre horse campground is currently divided between MA5 and MA17. The project would permanently adjust the adjacent MA17 boundary so the entire campground falls within MA17, which is the appropriate management area for a developed campground.

**Resource Objective: Soil Protection**
Winter harvest on frozen or snow-covered ground would help protect sensitive ash cap soils from compaction, rutting, displacement or other disturbance. To implement winter harvest, the following standards and guidelines would be amended:

Forest wide Standard and Guideline Access 17-6
Temporarily amend to allow temporary snow plowing on a portion of this road segment for the purpose of implementing harvest activities in winter conditions favorable to soil protection. The South Summit Sno-park and the initial 2.1 miles of this road segment between Highway 20 and Road 4100500 would remain open for snowmobile and Nordic ski grooming and use. Plowing 1.3 miles of this road segment between the junctions with Roads 4100500 and 4100450 under this amendment would facilitate winter logging of many units along this road and along spur roads leading from it. Plowing on this road would essentially preclude snowmobiling on Road 41 from this point south for up to three seasons. Groomed snowmobile and cross-country ski routes are available in adjacent areas to provide continued opportunities for these activities.

Management Area Prescription MA5-17E & MA14-17B
Amend these prescriptions prohibiting motorized vehicles on deer winter range from December 1 to March 31, to allow temporary winter operations and access for the purpose of implementing the South Summit Project. Disturbance to deer would be temporary and short-term. Adjacent undisturbed areas at lower elevations are usually favored by deer during the winter and are available for animals to use. Previous experience in the North Summit area has demonstrated that deer may not be displaced from an area by logging, but may remain in the area to forage on lichens found on logging slash. In the longer term, harvest will encourage growth of shrubs used as forage, providing more food resources. The goals of the Management Areas would be met.

**Resource Objective: Protection, Restoration, and Maintenance of Old Growth Stands**
Forest wide Standard and Guideline Old Growth 5-1
Forest wide Standard and Guideline Protection (Fire and Fuels) 19-8
Amend to allow harvest thinning and fuels treatments within old growth stands as described in the South Summit II EA.

Fire exclusion has changed the character of some mixed conifer old growth stands. Multi-story stand canopy conditions have developed with a general absence of natural fire disturbance for nearly a century. Canopy and surface fuel loading has increased from pre-settlement levels due to past fire exclusion. Existing tree stocking and fuel levels have increased the risk of insect outbreaks and crown fires which could eliminate the larger overstory tree component of mixed conifer Forest Plan old growth. Tree stocking levels are hindering the development of future large trees to maintain the old growth stand structure. There is a need to treat some Forest Plan old growth stands with harvest and fuels treatments to maintain long-term old growth characteristics and improve resiliency to natural disturbances. These proposed treatments would be consistent with the 2010 and 2012 Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Restoration Strategy guidelines.

Resource Objective: Restoration and Maintenance of Connectivity Corridors
Revised Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales (Regional Forester’s Forest Plan Amendment #2)
Scenario A, 3a) 2:
Amend standard to reduce canopy closures within connectivity corridors below the top one-third of site potential through harvesting and ladder fuel reduction thinning. The Carlton Complex wildfire caused high levels of tree mortality in a four-mile-wide swath of the central portion of the planning area, truncating pre-fire connectivity corridors established to meet Eastside Screen requirements in the initial South Summit analysis. At this time there is no potential for delineating alternate connections between the northern and southern parts of the analysis area due to the truncation in the middle portion, and this standard cannot be met. Connectivity corridors within the northern (north of Highway 20) and southern portions are fairly intact, although in many areas they are no longer connecting late/old structure stands, as approximately 40% of those features were burned with moderate/high severity.

In the remaining connectivity corridors and late/old structure stands, management activities in the last century caused extensive changes in forest vegetation, including increased tree density, decreased average tree size, increased proportion of shade tolerant Douglas-fir forest cover, increased proportion of multiple canopy layer stands, and increased vulnerability to forest insects and diseases and wildfire compared to historic pre-settlement conditions. Stands of large trees with a high proportion of ponderosa pine and western larch stocking currently are less common in the project area than historically. Treatments would release or maintain larger and medium sized trees. Allowing harvest treatments on approximately 19 acres in connectivity corridors spread over 14 proposed harvest units (approximately two percent of the remaining connectivity corridors) would reduce canopy closure below the top one-third of the site potential. Beneficial effects include reducing fuel ladders from surface through understory to overstory, which lowers the risk of crown fire initiation and spread and improves resiliency to natural disturbances. Increasing resilience helps provide sustainable forested landscape connections between late and old structure, old growth, and management requirement habitats.
These proposed treatments would be consistent with management direction applicable under Scenario A of the Regional Forester’s Forest Plan Amendment #2 direction (Goodman 2003) to utilize site-specific Forest Plan amendments to provide flexibility implementing eastside screens direction in order to better meet late and old structure (LOS) and other screens objectives and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Restoration Strategy guidelines. No trees greater than or equal to 21 inches DBH would be prescribed for removal with this project.

**Resource Objective: Forest Health**

Management Area Prescription Wildlife MA5-6A, MA 14-6A, and MA26-6A
Amend to allow for thermal cover percentage levels below prescription for deer winter range. Currently, this standard and guideline is not being met and there is no potential for meeting it for several decades due to the fire in MAs 5 and 26. In MA 14, around half of the thermal cover was destroyed in the wildfire. Proposed treatments would reduce the total winter thermal cover by 1% in one management area. Recent science suggests that providing for thermal cover was over-emphasized in the current plans. Thermal cover is not as critical as other factors such as forage quality and quantity, and human disturbance (Cook et al. 1996, 1998). Treatments proposed in these stands would increase forage and create a more sustainable cover component and would be consistent with the 2010 and 2012 Forest Restoration Strategy. To reduce the impact of proposed treatments, thinning in fuels and NCT units would leave 20% of the area untreated in patches from 0.1 acre to several acres in size. Fuels treatments in proximity to the moderate to high severity burned areas would be deferred until 2017, and then reviewed to assess cover needs.

**Resource Objective: Limit Wildlife Disturbance**

Management Area Prescription Roads MA5-17C, MA14-17A, and MA25-17C
Amend standards to temporarily allow for increased open road density during project implementation. Current open road density and proposed post-project open road density in discrete Management Areas 5-08, 14-07, and 25-10 are expected to remain within the Forest Plan standards. During project activities, it is possible that open road density may exceed the standards if all closed roads were opened at the same time.

**Mitigation and Monitoring**

Mitigation measures will be incorporated to further minimize resource impacts. There are 144 design criteria and mitigation measures listed in Appendix A (EA, pages 333-375).

Monitoring will be conducted to ensure that activities are implemented as designed and to determine the effectiveness of Alternative 2 at minimizing resource impacts (EA, Chap. 2, pages 25 to 27). There are monitoring actions for forest vegetation and reforestation, sensitive plant sites, fuel loadings, prescribed burning, activities in riparian habitat conservation areas, goshawk and western gray squirrel nesting, invasive plant infestations, and soil disturbance.

**Decision Rationale**

I am selecting Alternative 2 because it best meets the purpose and need (EA, Chap. 1, pages 7-10 and Chap. 2, pages 13-21) to improve, maintain, and restore forest and fuels conditions, reduce fire hazard, manage the project area’s road network, and construct a horse campground in a manner that is consistent with the Okanogan.
Alternative 2 will provide for forest vegetation management consistent with the amended Forest Plan and meet the purpose and need as follows:

*Improve or maintain the resiliency of mixed conifer forests to disturbances including insects, diseases, and wildfire. Maintain and restore mixed conifer forest conditions that more closely reflect historical tree density, spatial patterning, species composition, and size classes, including large fire-resistant trees. Maintain and develop sustainable vegetation and fuels conditions in Forest Plan Old Growth stands that limit the likelihood of losing mature forest stands during wildfires and other natural disturbances, including insect and disease outbreaks. Reduce fire hazard on National Forest lands within the wildland-urban interface.*

The selected alternative will implement approximately 9955 acres of vegetation management treatments to reduce susceptibility of forest stands to uncharacteristic disturbances. These actions will maintain and improve the resiliency of mixed conifer forests to disturbances such as insects, diseases and wildfire by reducing stand densities to more closely reflect historical tree density, spatial patterning, species composition and size classes, including large fire-resistant trees (EA, Chap. 3, pages 44-57 and 67-70). Tree stocking levels would be reduced to decrease competitive stress, prevent bark beetles from killing large ponderosa pine and maintain vigorous, large diameter Douglas-firs (EA, Chap. 3, pages 46-49). Harvest thinning will decrease susceptibility to insect defoliators and dwarf mistletoe in treated stands by reducing the proportion of Douglas-fir stocking in the upper canopy and removing Douglas-fir understory tree canopy layers (EA, Chap. 3, pages 48-52). Treatments will maintain existing large trees, increase the resilience of Forest Plan Old Growth stands to disturbance, provide for the sustained recruitment of dead and down trees while reducing fuel loads and the risk of wildfire (EA, Chap. 3, pages 50-51, 69). Treatments will reduce the fire hazard in the wildland-urban interface on National Forest lands by thinning understory trees, increasing canopy spacing, and treating surface fuels (EA, Chapter 3, pages 67-70).

*Maintain and restore the species composition (including large-diameter broadleaf trees such as aspen), structural diversity, and natural disturbance patterns of plant communities found within RHCAs to provide large conifers and maintain and attain riparian management objectives.*

Under Alternative 2, vegetation management treatments would be implemented on approximately 274 acres to maintain and restore the species composition (including broadleaf trees such as aspen), structural diversity, and natural disturbance patterns of plant communities found within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) to maintain large trees and attain riparian management objectives. Of this amount, harvest thinning, noncommercial thinning, and subsequent fuels management treatments would be applied on approximately two percent of the total RHCA acres in the project planning area, and tree planting would occur on another 7% of the total RHCA acres (EA, Chap. 3, pages 51-52). Proposed fuel treatments would affect up to
about 7% (about 190 acres) of the RHCA in the project area, increasing the proportion of RHCA with high fire resilience over the next 15 years. Ladder fuel reduction and prescribed fire treatments would re-introduce disturbance in the RHCA and increase fire resiliency by reducing surface fuel loading and small-diameter conifer stocking (EA, Chap. 3, pages 68-69).

Modify the current transportation system to provide for long-term sustainable resource management, safe recreation use, reduced maintenance costs, and reduced impacts on aquatic habitat, wildlife habitat and hydrological function. Alternative 2 would result in a long-term decrease in the number of open roads and overall existing roads, reduction of overall maintenance costs, the elimination of unauthorized roads, and continued stabilization of existing roads through road maintenance activities, thereby minimizing sedimentation levels (EA, Chap. 3, pages 201-209). This would have reduced impacts from the road network on sediment (EA, Chap. 3, page 205), aquatic habitat (EA, Chap. 3, pages 120-121, 125-127) wildlife habitat (EA, Chap. 3, page 159), and hydrological function (EA, Chap. 3, pages 97-101), while maintaining a safe and efficient transportation network for land management activities and public access.

Maintain or improve the overall health of trees within and adjacent to Loup Loup and JR Campgrounds by reducing tree competition and susceptibility to attack by insects and diseases. Reduce ladder fuels between ski runs at the Loup Loup Ski Area to improve forest health and reduce the threat of wildfire. Reduce the risk of hazard trees that pose a threat to public safety along Highway 20 and in the campgrounds. Reduce mortality of large Douglas-fir trees caused by beetles.

Under Alternative 2, vegetation management treatments would be implemented to maintain and improve overall health of trees within and adjacent to Loup Loup and JR Campgrounds by reducing (inter-) tree competition and susceptibility to attack by insects and diseases. The campground thinning harvest treatment would be applied on approximately 35 acres total within the (fenced) administrative boundaries of both campgrounds (EA, Chap. 3, pages 52 and 262-263). Ladder fuel reduction thinning would reduce the risk of crown fire initiation and help improve forest health (EA, Chap. 3, pages 55, 67). Hazard-tree thinning along Highway 20 would reduce the risk to public safety (EA, Chap. 3, pages 258, 266).

Provide commercially valuable timber and other forest products that are economically viable and sustainable.

Alternative 2 would provide about 7000 MBF or 14,000 CCF of sawtimber and an un-estimated amount of biomass from 2350 acres of harvest treatment. It would have an expected stumpage value of $296,500 and a delivered mill value of $1,094,000 (EA, Chap. 3, page 79).

Ensure reforestation occurs in areas where stand-replacement wildfire eliminated reliable seed sources for natural conifer regeneration. Alternative 2 would reforest 8285 acres where wildfire killed all or most of the trees. Stands would be re-planted to provide timely regrowth of desirable species, accelerating reforestation of 59% of the dry forest areas deforested by wildfire (EA, Chap. 3, page 53).

Provide camping opportunities specific to horseback riders in the North Summit area.
Alternative 2 provides for the creation of a 14-site horse campground on 15 acres in the North Summit area (EA, Chap. 3, page 263-264). The campsite would provide both day-use and overnight facilities for horseback riders.

**Other Alternatives Fully Analyzed**

Because this project is being prepared under the July 24, 2008 Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act regulations, and there are no unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources, no alternatives to the proposed action are required [36 CFR Part 220, Section 220.7 (b) (2) (i)]. The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) considered comments made during public scoping and where the purpose and need for the project could still be met, adjusted the original proposed action to resolve the concerns that were within the scope of the project, or addressed the concern by developing project design criteria (PDFs), including Best Management Practices (BMPs); or by disclosing effects in the analyses of Chapter 3. The proposed action revisions included adding additional tree-planting units, increasing this activity from 6550 acres to 8285 acres (EA, Chap. 2, page 14).

**Alternatives Considered, but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

Comments were received suggesting that the project include salvage logging. An alternative was considered in response, but eliminated from detailed study because fire-killed ponderosa pine would have little commercial value by the time harvest occurred, and areas with sufficient Douglas-fir salvage opportunities where timber value may last longer were scarce. (EA, Chap. 2, pages 12-13; Appendix I, page 458).

Comments were received requesting additional analysis and restoration of wetland and aspen communities within the project area in the proposal. An alternative was considered in response, but eliminated from detailed study because aspen regeneration (a suggested component of wetland restoration) is anticipated to be rapid and abundant in many areas of the project area due to recent fire activity. In addition, further wetland restoration could not be evaluated with current staffing for this project. (EA, Chap. 2, pages 12-13; Appendix I, page 452).

Internal staff discussions considered the development of alternatives to include post-fire repair and rehabilitation work at the Pole Pick Seed Orchard (i.e. fence rebuilding, pollen buffer and fuel break establishment, and storage shed reconstruction) in the project proposal. This alternative was considered but dropped from further analysis because proposed activities were not fully developed at the time of this analysis, and because maintenance and repair of administrative sites such as the orchard is generally considered to be part of a category of actions (“Categorical Exclusion”) not requiring documentation in an EA, EIS, or Decision Memo (EA, Chap. 2, page 12).

Another internal consideration included developing an alternative that provided for hazard tree felling adjacent to system roads for public, personnel, and contractor safety in the proposed action. This alternative was considered but dropped from further analysis because Forest Service Manual direction allows for hazard tree removal along roads used for timber hauling described below as “Hazard Tree Removal along Haul Routes.” Hazard tree felling along the Highway 20 corridor is included and analyzed in this document. Public firewood gathering is anticipated to remove hazard trees along open system roads where consistent with the current firewood policy. Remaining
hazard trees would be felled at up to 2 trees per mile of road. These actions are expected to be sufficient to remove hazard trees where firewood gathering is not allowed along open roads (EA, Chap. 2, page12).

The analysis team also discussed the anticipated long-term increase in large-diameter fuels created by eventual collapse of fire-killed trees in the burned portion of the project area. An alternative that would create strategic fuel breaks in moderate- to high-burn severity areas. This alternative was considered but dropped from further analysis because it is beyond the temporal scope of the identified purpose and need for this project. The interdisciplinary analysis team agreed that the need for soil stabilization and vegetation recovery more immediate and tractable given current conditions and available funding than long-term fuel reduction.

Public Involvement and Consultation

Public involvement for the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project began with the publishing of the December 2014 Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). A scoping notice describing the project components and querying comments was sent to approximately 150 members of the public on December 29, 2014, which initiated the scoping period. The Forest Service received a total of five comments by letter and email.

The Tribal governments (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Yakama Nation) were sent a letter describing the project and soliciting issues on December 18, 2014. No concerns about the project were raised by either government.

The South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project Record contains a detailed scoping summary that describes Forest Service outreach efforts, the scoping comments received for the project, and how the Forest Service addressed scoping comments in the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project EA. Comments that raised concerns, but did not provide a cause and effect statement to become an issue that would drive an alternative, were identified and resolved by clarifying the Purpose and Need or the Proposed Action in Chapter 1, addressing the concern by developing project design criteria (PDFs), including Best Management Practices (BMPs), or by disclosing effects in the analyses of Chapter 3. As these concerns were resolved they did not drive the development of an alternative to the Proposed Action (EA, Chap. 1, pages 10-11).

The Preliminary South Summit II Forest and Fuels Environmental Assessment (EA) was mailed on March 6, 2014 to groups and individuals who provided comments in response to the scoping letter or who requested a copy. A notice of EA availability for a 30-day comment period was published in the Wenatchee World newspaper on March 6, 2015. We received comments from five parties. Comments were considered in the development of the final EA, with specific consideration of comments available in Appendix I.

Consultation on effects to Federally threatened and endangered fish and wildlife species with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – Fisheries has been initiated and is ongoing.
Finding Of No Significant Impact

I have determined through the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Environmental Assessment that this is not a major federal action individually or cumulatively that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This determination is based on analysis of the context and intensity of the environmental effects, including the following factors:

1. Significant effects may exist even if the Federal agency believes on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making this determination of non-significance. No significant adverse effects were found when beneficial effects are not considered (EA, Chap. 3, pages 30-302). This project is consistent with January 14, 2011 Council on Environmental Quality Memo. Beneficial impacts have not been used to compensate for significant adverse impacts.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety:
There are limited health and safety hazards to Forest Service Employees, permittees, and the general public from the project. None are unusual or unique to this project. Recreationists could be exposed to smoke during burning (EA, Chap. 3, page 75, 262). All burning will be done under WA State Smoke Management Requirements, and will maintain air quality within State standards (EA, Chap. 3, pages 76-77). Recreationists could encounter logging traffic. Some roads will not have log haul on weekends (EA, Appendix A, page 339). Hazard trees will be removed at JR Campground, Loup Loup Campground and along roads to meet safety concerns (EA, Chap. 3, pages 263, 266). The safety of area will be greatly improved for recreationists, and Forest Service firefighters by reduction of fuels creating safe escape routes, safer fire suppression conditions, and an increased ability to protect homes and structures in the area. The proportion of WUI with high fire resilience will increase (EA, Chap. 3, pages 57-70).

3. The unique characteristics of the geographic area:
No prime farm lands or park lands are found within the project area (EA, Chap. 3, page 298-299). Although prime forest lands may be harvested or burned, all actions are designed to maintain and improve their health (EA, Chap. 3, pages 44-52, 67-70). Within the analysis area there is no critical habitat for Upper Columbia River (UCR) spring Chinook, UCR steelhead and bull trout and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for spring Chinook and coho (EA, Chap. 3, page 112). There would be no effect to critical habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl nor to critical habitat for the lynx (EA, Chap. 3, page 147, 165). See also #9 below.

There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers within or near the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Planning area. There are no new recreational off road use, overhead powerlines, development of common variety mineral sources or any new impoundments or water diversions proposed in this project. The Visual Quality Objectives will be met (EA, Chap. 3, pages 272-284). No effects are expected to cultural resources or historic properties (EA, Chap. 3, pages 297).

No impacts to designated floodplains or wetlands are projected (EA, Chap. 3, page 298). Project activities would occur in some RHCAs although not in areas with riparian vegetation; effects are described in the forest vegetation, water resources, aquatic
resources, sensitive plants and fuels sections of this chapter (EA, Chap. 3, pages 51-52, 95-104, 118-126, 227-231, 67-70). Floodplains and wetlands would be protected through project design details and mitigation measures, which conform to Executive Orders 11988 and 11990.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:
There has been no scientifically backed information presented that indicates substantial controversy about the effects disclosed in the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project Final EA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:
There were no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified for the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project. Activities approved in this decision notice are routine projects similar to those that have been implemented under the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 20 years. None are unique or involve unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects:
Activities approved in this decision notice are routine projects similar to those that have been implemented under the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 20 years. None are new or precedent setting.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts:
Each resource effects analysis contained in the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project EA discusses cumulative effects; none were found to be significant (EA, Chap. 3, Resource Cumulative Effects sections).

The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is comprised of over 4 million acres; the Methow Valley Ranger District is approximately 1.3 million acres. Alternative 2 will implement activities on approximately 18,255 acres, or 1.0 percent of the District, 0.04 percent of the Forest.

8. The degree to which the action may affect scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
There are no scientific resources in the South Summit II Forest and Fuels Project Area. No districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places will be affected. No effects are expected to cultural or historical resources (EA, Chap. 3, pages 294-297). If any undiscovered sites are located during project activities, work will stop until the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act were met (EA, Chap. 3, pages 297). The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation and the Yakama Nation were consulted on this project; no concerns were raised by either Tribal government. All sites and resources found during cultural resource surveys were determined to be ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places (EA, Chap. 3, pages 294-297).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect endangered or threatened species or habitats:
The effects on endangered or threatened species and their habitats are discussed in the Biological Assessments with results summarized in the EA on pages 157-194 for wildlife, page 121-126 for aquatic species, and page 227-231 for plant species.

Endangered or threatened wildlife species that may inhabit the area will not be significantly affected. No critical wildlife habitat will be adversely affected. The project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect gray wolf and grizzly bear. The project would have no effect on lynx, and lynx critical habitat (EA, pages 164-165). The project is outside the range of the northern spotted owl and the marbled murrelet.

No endangered or threatened fish species inhabit the project area. No critical fish habitat will be affected. The project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect Columbia River bull trout and steelhead. The project would have no effect on chinook salmon, bull trout critical habitat nor on essential fish habitat (EFH) for chinook or coho salmon (EA, page 112-113).

Consultation on effects to Federally threatened and endangered fish and wildlife species with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – Fisheries has been initiated and is ongoing.

No threatened or endangered plant species are known to occur within the analysis area (EA, page 228).

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.
Discussion of compliance with environmental laws or requirements is identified in the following section on compliance with other laws and regulations. This project will meet requirements of environmental laws and regulations. None of the project effects were found to be significant.

Findings Required By Other Laws And Regulations

As noted above, the project is consistent with the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended by standards and guidelines described in The Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales Regional Forester’s Forest Plan Amendment #2 (Eastside Screens)(USDA Forest Service 1995) and the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Pacific Northwest Region Invasive Plant Program Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants. This project was planned consistent with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, its implementing regulations, and Forest Service NEPA regulations. This decision is consistent with the National Forest Management Act because it is consistent with the Okanogan Forest Plan, as amended, and fisheries, wildlife and plant species viability is maintained (EA, pages 118-127, 157-194, 227-231). The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan Forest-wide and Management Area standards and guidelines, with the exception of the project specific Forest Plan amendment identified previously in this document, management area specific direction, and the Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales Regional Forester’s Forest Plan Amendment #2 (Eastside Screens). All areas planned for harvest are suitable for timber production.
The project incorporates direction from the *Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Pacific Northwest Region Invasive Plant Program Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants* (EA, pages 7, 231, and 247). It is in compliance with the pertinent Prevention Standards listed in the R6 2005 FEIS, includes the prevention measures listed as Design Details, and the prevention standards listed in the Prevention and Management Strategy (EA, Appendix A, pages 331-333, 335-337).

This project is consistent with the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The proposed action alternative would maintain High Landscape Character and Scenic Integrity (Condition) and would meet the established Visual Quality Objectives of Retention in Management Area 5 and Management Area 17 with High Visual Significance (ONFP 4-65-69). Foreground landscapes (up to ½ mile distance zone or seen area) would have the visitor perception of a natural appearing environment and would have high scenic integrity. The proposed treatments would be consistent with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for Visual Quality (EA, page 293).

The project will meet or exceed all Forest Plan standards and guidelines that apply to riparian habitat conservation areas (EA, pages 56, 68-70, and 127). Proposed vegetation management activities in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) and adjacent uplands would be consistent with PACFISH Riparian Goals, Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs), and RHCA Standards and Guidelines (EA, page 56). Fuels treatments would be consistent with PACFISH and Forest Plan Guidelines (EA, page 70). Design Criteria numbers 4-16 and 50-85 are for riparian area management (EA, Appendix A, pages 328-381). All activities in the Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas will be monitored to determine if the project is implemented correctly and if the design details and mitigation measures were effective in achieving the goals for resource protection (EA, Chap. 2, page 26).

Deer cover (EA, Chap. 2, pages 185-189), snags (EA, Chap. 2, pages 158-194) and coarse wood (EA, Chap. 2, pages 157-158) will be retained in accordance with Forest Plan standards.

Forest Plan old growth treatments will contribute to sustaining stands over time through prescribed fire (EA, Chap. 2, pages 50-51, 69).

The planned actions adhere to the R6 soil quality guidelines for maintaining soil productivity. The South Summit II Forest and Fuels project actions would not create detrimental soil condition in excess of 20 percent in units that are currently below 20 percent detrimental soil disturbance and would move all units about 20 percent towards net improvement in soil quality. Therefore the project is consistent with Forest-wide standards for site productivity (USDA 1986). The project would also comply with R6 erosion standards following activities. This project includes appropriate design criteria to ensure these standards are met following project implementation (EA, Chap. 3, page 146, Appendix A, pages 345-358).

Management Indicator Species viability for mule deer, pine marten, pileated woodpecker, three-toed woodpecker, barred owl, northern spotted owl, ten species of primary cavity nesters, ruffed grouse, and Canada lynx in the project area will be maintained (Project File, Wildlife MIS Notes, EA, Chap. 3, pages 157-194).
Summit II Forest and Fuels project may impact individuals or habitat, but would not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species of aquatic Management Indicator Species (EA, Chap. 3, page 122-123). Fine sediment delivery in the project area will be decreased as soon as project activities begin and reduced sediment delivery will be maintained after the project is completed through decommissioning some roads, and further reduction of the risk of severe wildfire. Therefore, the project will not contribute to a negative trend in viability on the Okanogan National Forest for these species.

The project is designed to meet Clean Air Act standards and meet goals of the Washington State Smoke Management Program (EA, Chap. 3, page 77, Appendix A, page 328). Effects to air quality in the Pasayten Wilderness, the nearest Class I Airshed, are expected to be minimal (EA, Chap. 3, page 77).

Clean Water Act standards will be met. Decreases in sedimentation and no increase in temperature are expected (EA, Chap. 3, pages 93-104). No impacts to wetlands or floodplains, or prime range, farm or forest lands are expected (EA, page 298).

Findings for ESA and NHPA are discussed in the FONSI above.

The project is not expected to have any disproportional effects on minorities or low-income people (EA, page 298).

My conclusions are based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

Administrative Review or Objection Opportunities

This project is now subject to the pre-decisional review process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 subparts A and B. During the objection period, only those individuals or organizations that submitted specific written comments during the designated opportunities for public participation may object (36 CFR 218.5). Objections must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 218.8(d); incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided for at 36 CFR 218.8(b).

How to File an Objection

The publication date of the legal notice in the Wenatchee World, the newspaper of record, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection and those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The objection, including attachments, must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the reviewing officer within 45 days of this legal notice at:

Regional Forester, Attention: 1570 OBJECTIONS; P. O. Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208 (or for physical delivery: 1220 SW 3rd Avenue, Portland, OR 97204); FAX: (503) 808-2339, or sent electronically to objections-pnw-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Hand deliveries may occur between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday except legal holidays.
Those submitting electronic copies must do so only to the e-mail address listed above; must put the project name in the subject line; and must either submit objections as part of the e-mail message or as an attachment only in one of the following formats: Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), rich text format (.rtf) or Adobe Portable Document Format (.pdf) only. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above or in other formats than those listed or containing viruses will be rejected.

It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their objections are received in a timely manner as described in 36 CFR 218.9. For electronically mailed objections, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of the objection, it is the sender’s responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

**Contact Person**

For more information, please contact Meg Trebon, Project Lead; Methow Valley Ranger District, 24 West Chewuch Road, Winthrop, WA 98862; (509) 996-4032.

____________________________________  ____________________________
Chris Frisbee                           DATE
Forest Supervisor
Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest
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