CHAPTER 1

Purpose and Need

Chapter 1

Purpose and Need

INTRODUCTION

The Forest Service has prepared this Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed vegetation and fuels management project within South George project planning area.

This FEIS addresses: 1) the proposed action and three additional alternatives, including no action; 2) issues associated with the proposal; and 3) direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects that would result from implementation of the proposed action or any of the alternatives.

A vicinity area map and other maps for this document are located in Appendices A, H, and I.

CHANGES BETWEEN DEIS AND THIS FEIS

Changes for this chapter include:

- Minor editorial changes and or corrections.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This FEIS has been prepared in compliance with the National Forest Management Act (NMFA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), other relevant Federal and Washington state laws and regulations, and Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

Format for this FEIS follows the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) recommended format (40 CFR 1502.10). The format is as follows:

Cover Sheet – The cover sheet details the agencies involved in the development of the statement, contact information, a brief abstract describing the contents of the document, and name and title of the responsible official. For a FEIS it includes the deadline date by which comments must be received.

Table of Contents – A list of chapters, sections, appendices, and a listing of tables in the EIS.

Summary – It adequately and accurately summarizes the statement. It emphasizes major conclusions, areas of controversy, and issues to be resolved.

Chapter 1 – Purpose of and Need for Action: Includes a brief description of who is proposing this action, the location of the action, background information as to why there is a need for action, how the agency proposes to achieve the purpose and need, and what activities would occur. This chapter also includes a listing of what decisions are to be made concerning this project and a vicinity map.

Chapter 2 – **Alternatives**: Describes in more detail the agency's proposed action as well as alternative methods of achieving the purpose and need, and measures to mitigate environmental effects. It includes

information on how the public was informed, and a description of major (key) and other issues relevant to the proposed action that will be tracked in analysis of affected environment and environmental consequences.

Chapter 3 - Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences: Describes the affected environment, current condition of resources involved, and environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. This chapter is organized by resource.

Chapter 4 – List of Preparers and Lists of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons: Contains a list of those who helped prepare this document, and a list of tribal members, agencies, organizations, and individuals receiving a copy of this document.

Index - An alphabetical listing of topics giving the location of where they are mentioned in a text.

Appendices - Each appendix provides more detailed information and or maps used to support the analysis presented in this EIS.

LOCATION AND PROJECT AREA

South George project planning area is located on Umatilla National Forest, Pomeroy Ranger District. It is approximately 21,000 acres in size and is primarily situated in Asotin County, Washington with a small portion in Garfield County, Washington. A vicinity map of this project area can be found on the last page of this chapter and in Appendix A.

The project planning area is within portions of T.7N., R.43E., sections 1-2; T.7N., R44E., sections 1-6 and 10-11; T.8N., R.43E., sections 1-2, 10-15, 21-28, 33-36; T.8N., R.44E., sections 5-8, 17-23, 25-36; and T. 9N., R.43E., section 35; and T9N., R44E., section 31. It is located in South Fork Asotin Creek and Upper George Creek Subwatersheds of the Asotin Watershed. Elevations range from 3,200 to 6,000 feet.

South George project planning area is bounded by Umatilla National Forest boundary to the north and east, Smoothing Iron Ridge to the west, and breaks of the Grande Ronde River to the south. Asotin Creek and Wenatchee Creek inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) are near the west and south sides of the project planning area. Existing main access forest system roads (FR) 4400, 4300, and 4304 separate both IRAs from the project planning area boundary. Ecosystems in and around the project planning area are diverse, ranging from dry sage grasslands to cold sub-alpine forests. There are numerous camping areas, hiking trails, scenic vistas, along with big game hunting opportunities (elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, and black bear) and huckleberry sites. Most of the area is accessible by vehicle. A small portion of the Asotin County Rural Wildlife Urban Interface is located within the project planning area (eastern side) and Anatone Wildland Urban Interface[1] (WUI) area is located approximately three miles away from the eastern boundary of the project planning area, and is identified in the Asotin County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) (Fuels Report, map on page 3).

Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife owns approximately 550 acres (designated elk winter range) within the project planning area

[1] **Wildland urban interface (WUI)** – A WUI refers to areas where wildland vegetation meets urban developments, or where forest fuels meet urban fuels in the case of wildfires (such as houses). These areas encompass not only the interface (areas immediately adjacent to urban development), but also the continuous slopes that lead directly to a risk to urban developments be it from wildfire, landslides, or floods.

BACKGROUND - CURRENT CONDITIONS

An analysis of existing and historical vegetation (Appendix J) has indicated that active management is warranted for upland forests of the South George project planning area. High levels of insect and disease susceptibility, caused largely by overly dense forests containing low vigor trees, are symptoms of impaired forest health and deteriorating ecosystem integrity. These symptoms relate to changes in three vegetation components: species composition, forest structure (including canopy layering), and tree density (including canopy biomass).

The historical range of variability (HRV) recognizes that ecosystems are complex and they experience a range of conditions across which processes are resilient and self-sustaining. When allowed to move beyond the limits of the range of variability, ecosystems inevitably move into a state of disequilibrium or disorganization (Egan and Howell 2001, Holling and Meffe 1996, Kaufmann et al. 1994). HRV uses a range of reference conditions pertaining to the pre-settlement era – a timeframe defined as the mid 1800s for the northern Blue Mountains.

Forest stand composition, density, and structure in the project planning area have been altered from historical conditions due to fire suppression and other past forest management practices. A majority of current forest stands originated as a result of fire disturbances occurring up to the 1930s, and have not experienced fire since then. Late seral tree species have become dominant after long periods without disturbance and are more susceptible to disturbance-caused mortality than early seral species. Overall forest health has generally declined due to overstocking and an increase in the amount of shade tolerant species.

Findings from the NFMA analysis (Appendix J of this document and Silviculture Specialist's Report pages 74 to 95 in project file) for upland forests in South George project are listed below.

Dry forests sites currently have the following issues, concerns, or opportunities with respect to forest vegetation conditions:

- Dry forest sites currently support too much of the grand fir and Douglas-fir cover types, and too little of the ponderosa pine cover type.
- Dry forest sites currently support too much of the understory reinitiation structural stage, and too little of the stand initiation and young forest multi strata structural stages.
- Dry forest sites currently support too much high-density forest condition, and too little of the low-density condition.
- For the dry upland forest biophysical environment, both late-old structural stages are within HRV, so scenario B from the wildlife standard in the Eastside Screens (an amendment to the Forest Plan) is to be followed for this biophysical environment (see Appendix C for Consistency with Eastside Screens).

Moist-forest sites currently have the following issues, concerns, or opportunities with respect to forest vegetation conditions.

- Moist-forest sites currently support too much of the grand fir and spruce-fir cover types, and too little of the lodgepole pine, western larch, broadleaved trees, and Douglas-fir cover types.
- Moist-forest sites currently support too much of the stem exclusion open canopy and old forest single stratum structural stages, and too little of the young forest multi strata and old forest multi strata structural stages.

- For the moist upland forest biophysical environment, one of the late-old structural stages is above HRV and the other is below HRV, so scenario A from the wildlife standard in the Eastside Screens (an amendment to the Forest Plan) is to be followed for this biophysical environment.

Findings also show that existing insect and disease susceptibility[2] based upon historical range of variability is well above normal levels for defoliators (western spruce budworm and Douglas-fir tussock moth), fir engraver beetles, and root diseases (Armillaria and laminated root disease).

Fire regime Condition Classes[3], which describe departure from historical fire regimes in terms of fire return intervals and vegetative change from historical composition and density, have been modified in the project planning area due mainly to past harvest history and fire suppression (Fuels Specialist's Report pages 6-13). In many areas fuels that would have historically been consumed during periodic wildfires have increased above historical levels. Today, fires in dry and moist forests would exhibit moderate to severe effects characterized by high fire severity and intensity on landscapes that historically had low to mixed severity. Without treatment, the project planning area would continue to transition from a low or moderately altered fire regime (Condition Classes 1 and 2), to a significantly altered fire regime (Class 3), where the risk of losing ecosystem components would be substantially higher. Surface fuel loads would continue to build and tree density and canopy layering would also increase. Abundant small trees would serve as ladder fuels that can carry fire from the forest floor to the tree canopy, increasing the likelihood of high severity, stand-replacement fires. Fire ignitions today would not function as a natural disturbance process within their historical range pertaining to fire size, frequency, intensity, severity, or landscape patterns.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Pomeroy District Ranger has determined that based upon current vegetative and fuel trends in the project planning area, and contrasting them with desired future conditions identified in Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, pp. 4-3 to 4-14), and recommendations made in the Asotin Watershed Assessment (pages VI-1 to VI-3). The Asotin Watershed Assessment recommended the use of timber harvest to thin dense stands, reduce fir, retain pine and larch to convert to early-seral species stands, and allow fire prescriptions to reduce fuels. Based on these recommendations and the difference between the current conditions of the area and the Forest Plan's desired future conditions, the purpose of and need for action for this project is to improve forest health, vigor, and resilience to fire, insects, and disease in upland forests that are outside their historical pre-fire suppression conditions for species composition, structural diversity, stocking densities, and fuel loadings. Providing sawlogs and wood fiber products for utilization by regional and local industries is also considered a need for this project, and because the majority of acres (about 18,700 acres) in the project planning area are Forest Plan management area allocations with big game and wildlife habitat goals (C3, C3A, and C4) the District Ranger determined that there is a need to continue to provide and manage wildlife habitat and its components (cover and forage) in South George project planning area.

[2] **Susceptibility** – A set of conditions that make a forest stand vulnerable to substantial injury by insects or diseases.
[3] **Condition Class** – Describes the departure from historical fire regimes in terms of fire return interval and vegetative changes from historical composition and density (Hann and Bunnell, 2001). Class 1 – within historical range; Class 2 – moderately altered from historical range; and Class 3 – significantly altered from historical range.

The response to the purpose and need for this project is identified as follows:

Vegetation – There is a need to move forest structure, species composition, and stand density toward their historical ranges of variability (HRV). By moving these forest attributes toward HRV, ecosystem processes, such as response to wildfire, insects and disease, are more resilient and self-sustaining (Egan and Howell 2001, Holling and Meffe 1996, Kaufmann et al. 1994). This would be accomplished by favoring fire tolerant species, increasing old forest structure, and reducing stocking density to levels that resist insects, diseases, and stand-replacing wildfire(s).

Fuels – There is a need to manage forest stands in Condition Classes 2 and 3 to begin to restore vegetation characteristics and fire return intervals characteristic of historical fire regimes. This would decrease the probability of uncharacteristic high intensity wildfires by reducing fuel loads to levels expected under natural fire disturbance regimes. This would be achieved by lowering stand densities, increasing the relative abundance of fire tolerant species, reducing existing ladder, surface, and canopy fuels, while improving suppression capabilities on forest land, and reintroducing landscape prescribed fire into the ecosystem.

Timber Production – There is a need to provide sawlogs and wood fiber for utilization by regional and local economies. This would be accomplished by the commercial harvest of wood fiber.

Wildlife Habitat – There is a need to continue to provide and manage, over time, for wildlife habitat and its components (cover and forage). This would be achieved by meeting Forest Plan goals and management area standards and guidelines allocated to the project planning area for wildlife habitat.

UMATILLA FOREST PLAN

The Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (Forest Plan, 1990) includes multiple-use forest-wide goals and objectives for management of the National Forest. Forest-wide goals apply to all areas of the forest, whereas allocated management area (MA) goals are applied to specific management areas. Below is a listing of Forest Plan forest-wide goals and management area standards and guidelines that apply to this project and management area goals and desired future conditions.

Forest Plan forest-wide goals (FP pp. 4-1 to 4-3) that are most applicable to the purpose and need identified for this project are as follows:

- Forest Plan Goal 1 – Provide land and resource management that achieves a more healthy and productive forest and assists in supplying lands, resources, uses, and values which meet local, regional, and national social and economic needs.
- Forest Plan Goal 9 – Provide and manage big game (elk and deer) habitat and its components (cover, forage, and roads) to assist in meeting states wildlife agency population management objectives.
- Forest Plan Goal 13 – Provide for diversity of plant and animal communities and species consistent with overall multiple-use objectives for the Forest. Maintain or enhance ecosystem functions to provide for the long-term integrity (stability) and productivity of biological communities.
- Forest Plan Goal 15 – Provide for production and sustained yield of wood fiber and insofar as possible meet projected production levels consistent with various resource objectives, standards and guidelines, and cost efficiency.
- Forest Plan Goal 25 – Provide and execute a fire protection and fire use program that is cost efficient and responsive to land and resource management goals and objectives.

Forest Plan allocated management areas (MA), each of which emphasizes a particular desired future condition (DFC) contain standards and guidelines to provide direction for achieving DFCs. The Forest Plan designates management areas as the way to characterize the landscape for the type and intensity of management activities that may occur on Umatilla National Forest lands. Management areas within the project planning area are shown in Table 1-1. A map showing the location of management areas within the project planning area is located in Appendix A of this document.

Table 1-1 Management Areas in South George Project Planning Area

Forest Plan Management Areas	Approximate Acres
A6 – Developed Recreation	25
C1 – Dedicated Old Growth	900
C3 – Big Game Winter Range	1,200
C3A – Sensitive Big Game Winter Range	2,300
C4 - Wildlife Habitat	15,200
C5 - Riparian and Wildlife	1,050
Total	**21,000**

Following are brief descriptions of goals, and desired future conditions associated with each Forest Plan management area allocation located within South George project planning area. Detailed descriptions for each area can be found in the Forest Plan (FP pages 4-94 to 4-186).

- **A6 – Developed Recreation**

  Goal*:* Provide recreation opportunities that are dependent on the development of structural facilities for user conveniences where interaction between users and evidence of others is prevalent.

  Desired Future Condition*:* Readily accessible, appropriately designed recreation facilities shall provide for concentrated us by people seeking a variety and convenience of developed recreation opportunities and experiences. Recreationists will enjoy outdoor opportunities where social interactions are moderate to high. Controls and regulations will be noticeable to obvious.

- **C1 – Dedicated Old Growth**

  Goal*:* Provide and protect sufficient suitable habitat for wildlife species dependent upon mature and/or overmature forest stands, and promote a diversity of vegetative conditions for such species.

  Desired future condition**:** Old-growth areas will be characterized by stands of naturally appearing overmature trees. Stands of mature trees may be included in the old growth category to provide a better distribution of this habitat type throughout the forest. Trees in these stands are relatively large (with many trees greater than 21 inches dbh); past the point of rapid growth, and some have visible evidence of decay and decline including mycorrhizal fungi and other microorganisms. Stands will be dispersed in quantities and sizes which meet the needs of dependant wildlife. These stands will contribute toward the forest diversity and aesthetic values.

- **C3 – Big Game Winter Range**

  ***Goal**:* Manage big game winter range to provide high levels of potential habitat effectiveness and high quality forage for big game.

  Desired Future Condition: Big game winter ranges will appear as a mosaic of managed forests, brush patches, and large grasslands. Forested areas will contain a mix of harvested even-aged, uneven-aged, and natural stands, creating patterns of cover patches and forage areas for big game. Areas of early spring green-up and other forage changes due to prescribed fires and other means will occur in a mosaic pattern over the winter ranges; quality forage will be abundant because of management

- **C3A – Sensitive Big Game Winter Range**

  ***Goal**:* Manage sensitive areas of big game winter range to provide high levels of potential habitat effectiveness (at or above the current levels).

  ***Desired Future Condition*:** The area will appear as a mosaic of plant communities, including grassland forage area, brush, and some stands of trees. Use of prescribed fire will be apparent and carried out to maintain or increase the quality and quantity of forage and amount of cover on the area. Areas of early spring forage green-up due to prescribed fire will occur in a mosaic pattern over the winter range. Increased forage and cover will help encourage big game use on public lands and discourage high levels of winter use on the adjacent private lands. Most roads and trails will be closed to vehicle traffic during the winter, and there will be minimum human disturbance to big game during this period.

- **C4 - Wildlife Habitat**

  ***Goal**:* Manage Forest Lands to provide high levels of potential habitat effectiveness for big game and other wildlife species with emphases on size and distribution of habitat components (forage and cover areas for elk, snags and dead and down materials for all cavity users) unique wildlife habitats and key use areas will be retained or protected.

  Desired Future Condition: The forest will be a mosaic of even-aged and uneven-aged stands dispersed in a manner to create a pattern of forage, and marginal and satisfactory cover for big game.

- **C5 – Riparian (Fish and Wildlife)**

  ***Goal**:* Maintain or enhance water quality, and produce a high level of potential habitat capability for all species of fish and wildlife within the designated riparian habitat areas while providing for a high level of habitat effectiveness for big game.

  Desired Future Condition: A near natural setting will predominate adjacent to the stream, with a wide variety of plant communities of various species, sizes, and age classes. In forested riparian zones, a continuous high tree canopy layer will be present and the forest will appear denser than in the surrounding land. Upper and mid-level conifer and hardwood canopy structure and lower shrub level will provide desired levels of stream surface shading, streambank stability, and satisfactory cover for big game.

Timber harvest is proposed to occur in management areas C3, C4, and C5. Landscape prescribe fire would occur in management areas C1, C3, C4, and C5.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Pomeroy District Ranger proposes the following action and associated activities that may occur concurrently for this project. This proposed action is in response to the purpose and need identified above. A more detailed description of the proposed action can be found in Chapter 2 of this document.

- **TIMBER HARVEST –** Commercially harvest approximately 3,900 acres. Intermediate cutting would be used to modify the growth, vigor, composition, or structure of a forest stand after its establishment and prior to its final harvest. Improvement cutting and low thinning are two types of intermediate cutting to be used for this project. Improvement cutting (free thinning[4]) would be the primary silviculture prescription (approximately 3,020 acres) with some low thinning[5] (80 acres). Regeneration harvest would include seed-tree with reserves [6](550 acres) and clearcutting with reserves[7] (250 acres). Treatments would tend to favor early seral tree species such as ponderosa pine and western larch. Harvest methods would include conventional ground based[8] logging (approximately 2,750 acres), skyline[9] logging (approximately 850 acres), and helicopter logging (approximately 300 acres). Whole tree yarding would be used for all harvested units. Some treatment units may include the removal of sawlogs, small diameter trees generally less than 7.0 inches diameter at breast height (DBH), and excess down wood for use as woody biomass [10] products. Tree planting would occur in regeneration units.

    - ***Fuel Treatments (in harvest units) –*** Activity fuels and existing natural fuels would be treated in harvest units. A combination of the following treatments (more than one treatment may occur on an acre) would occur: prescribed burning of activity fuels (approximately 2,030 acres), mechanical grapple piling of activity fuels (approximately 870 acres), and yarding with tops attached. Non-commercial hand thinning hand (about 350 acres) and mechanical thinning (about 800 acres) would be used to treat ladder fuels in both harvest activity units and natural fuels units where high density small diameter understory remain. If it is

[4] **Free thinning:** An unevenaged system intended in forests in which the remaining structure and composition is paramount. It is well suited for restoring old-growth character of forests as well as reducing the risk of wildfire. It is defined as removal of undesirable trees in order to meet objectives related to species composition or vertical stand structure (Helms 1998).

[5] **Low thinning:** Low thinning for this project it is understood to be "understory thinning" or "thinning from below." It involves cutting the smaller-diameter trees and retaining the larger-diameter trees. It is used to reduce tree density and emulate the ecological role of low-severity surface fire (Perera et al. 2004).

[6] **Seed-tree with reserves:** A seed-tree cut retains six or more well-distributed trees on each acre, with the appropriate number of residual trees varying from one stand to another depending on tree species, tree diameter, tree height, tree crown width, and the site's slope position, aspect, and other biophysical factors.

[7] **Clearcutting with reserves:** It is defined as "the harvesting in one operation of all trees with the expectation that a new, even-aged stand will be established" (Burns 1989).

[8] **Conventional ground based logging system**: This is tractor or skidder yarding on trails spaced approximately 100 feet apart. Skidding equipment would be required to remain on the trails and logs dragged to the landings with one end suspended. Mechanical felling equipment would be used to fall and bunch logs near the trail and be allowed a single pass between skid trails to reduce compaction concerns.

[9] **Skyline logging system:** In a skyline system, logs are yarded up the hill by a system of cables, and logs are either partially or fully suspended to reduce soil disturbance. Skyline yarding landings are slightly smaller than conventional ground-based systems.

[10] **Woody biomass:** Trees and woody plants, including limbs, tops, needles, leaves, and other woody parts, grown in a forest, woodland, or rangeland environment, that are the by-products of forest management.

economically feasible, material from 3 to 10 inches DBH would be removed as a woody biomass product, if it is not economically feasible, mechanical fuel treatments would be treated by mastication.

- ***Road Management –*** To accomplish implementation of proposed activities approximately 46.5 miles of seasonal open[11] system roads and about 32.5 miles of closed[12] system roads, would be used as haul routes. Closed system roads used for project activities would not be opened to the public. All system roads would remain the same after project implementation; closed roads would continue to be closed, and seasonal open roads would continue with that designation. Approximately 3.0 miles of temporary[13] road would be constructed. All temporary roads would be decommissioned after project activity use. No new Forest system road construction is proposed.

► **DANGER TREE REMOVAL** – Danger trees[14] would be felled and removed along all previously described haul routes used for timber sale activity. If considered economically feasible they would be sold as part of a timber sale. Danger trees within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) would not be removed; they would be cut and left to provide potential additional coarse woody debris. Asotin Creek and Wenatchee Creek inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) are separated from the project planning area by three existing main access Forest Service system seasonally open system roads (Forest Roads (FRs) 4400, 4300, and 4304). Danger tree removal, for public safety, is part of the Forest Service's general road maintenance for these roads. Danger tree removal is currently occurring where needed on these roads and will continue as long as they remain open for public use. Danger trees will continue to be removed from 300 feet on each side of FRs 4400, 4300, and 4304.

► **LANDSCAPE PRESCRIBED FIRE –** Landscape prescribed fire would occur across approximately 3,000 acres within the project planning area. In the majority of the project planning area, fire intensities would be kept low by keeping fire out of the overstory and burning mainly surface fuels. Individual tree and group torching would likely occur in areas where there is sufficient ladder fuels and in timber stands with high occurrences of mistletoe.

► **RIPARIAN HABITAT CONSERVATION AREA (RHCA) FUELS TREATMENT** – Approximately 25 acres are proposed for non-commercial mechanical thinning with an improvement cut silvicultural prescription. To reduce the chance of crown fire, thinning would be used to disrupt canopy continuity in dry forest RHCAs, and prescribed fire would be used to reduce existing and created ground fuel. Trees would be removed in the 4 to 18 inches DBH range. Yarding would be accomplished by utilizing full suspension methods. No trees would be skidded through RHCAs. Material would be decked, but not included in South George commercial timber sales.

---

[11] **Seasonal Open road:** Closed to use during certain seasons.

[12] **Closed road:** These roads are not available for motorized vehicle travel for everyday access and are gated or closed by barricades. These roads can be opened for access for resource management activities or fire suppression. Snowmobile use is allowed except where specifically prohibited.

[13] **Temporary road:** A road or trail that is not a forest road or trail, or a temporary road or trail that is not included in a forest transportation atlas (36 CFR 212.1).

[14] **Danger trees:** A danger tree is defined as any standing tree that presents a hazard to people due to conditions such as, but not limited to, deterioration or physical damage to the root system, trunk, stem, or limbs and the direction and lean of the tree (FSH 6709.11, Glossary). Trees will be felled that have an imminent or likely potential to fail. Trees that have an imminent potential to fail are so defective or rotten that it will take little effort to make them fail. Trees considered likely to fail include all dead trees and some live trees with specific diseases and/or damage.

Depending on when a decision is made on this project vegetation and fuels treatments could take place beginning in calendar year 2012 and could continue over a period of approximately five to ten years. Fuel treatment areas would likely be treated over a period of approximately ten years after the decision.

The number of approximate acres proposed for commercial harvest and fuels treatments have changed since the project was originally scoped in March of 2009. They have been adjusted to reflect updated on-the-ground information.

PROJECT RECORD

Relying on specialists reports and the project file helps implement the CEQ's regulation provision that agencies should reduce NEPA paperwork (40 CFR 1500.4), that environmental documents shall be analytic rather than encyclopedic, and that EISs/EAs shall be kept concise and no longer than absolutely necessary (40 CFR 1502.2). The objective is to furnish enough site-specific information to demonstrate a reasoned consideration of the environmental effects of the alternatives and how these effects can be mitigated, without repeating detailed analysis and background information available elsewhere.

This EIS hereby incorporates by reference the project file (40 CFR 1502.21). The project file contains resource specialist reports and other technical documentation used to support the analysis and conclusions in this EIS. Specific information on methodologies, assumptions, and limitations of analysis and other details are contained in specialist reports. The following specialist reports are included in the project file: soil, hydrology, fisheries, silvicultural, historical range of variability (HRV), insects and disease, invasive plants/noxious weeds, visuals/scenery, fuels, air quality, recreation, transportation system (roads), heritage, economics, terrestrial wildlife species and habitats, management indicator species, climate change, migratory birds, biological evaluations and assessments for threatened, endangered, and sensitive (TES) aquatic, terrestrial, and plant species, inventoried roadless areas, potential wilderness areas, other undeveloped lands, and deadwood habitat (DecAID analysis). Other sources of information, documents, published studies, and books referred to in this document are also included in the project file which is located at Pomeroy Ranger District office.

TIERING AND INCORPORATING BY REFERENCE

In order to eliminate repetition and focus on site-specific analysis, this FEIS is tiered to the following documents as permitted by 40 CFR 1502.20:

- ***Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan*** **FEIS** and **Record of Decision** (ROD) dated June 11, 1990 and all subsequent NEPA analysis for amendments. The FEIS contains analyses of resource management practices, levels of resource production and management, and the availability and suitability of lands for resource management.

This FEIS also incorporates by reference the following documents:

- ***Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)*** dated June 11, 1990, and all subsequent Forest Plan amendments. The Forest plan provides programmatic direction for the Forest, including South George project planning area. Relevant Forest Plan amendments for this project are summarized below:

  Forest Plan Amendment #10, The Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-Producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH)

dated February 24, 1995. PACFISH provided further protection for fish habitat, particularly regarding activities within riparian areas.

Forest Plan Amendment #11, Continuation of Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem, and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales (Regional Forester's Amendment No. 2, Screens) dated June 12, 1995. The Screens (Eastside Screens) established additional management direction regarding area buffers, structural diversity, and connectivity of late/old structure, retention of snags and downed wood, and goshawk nest-sites.

Forest Plan Amendment #30, Pacific Northwest Region Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Invasive Plant Program, 2005, hereby referred to as the R6 2005 FEIS. The R6 2005 FEIS culminated in a Record of Decision (R6 2005 ROD) that amended the Umatilla National Forest Plan by adding management direction relative to invasive plants.

- The **Biological Opinion for the *Implementation of Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH***) from National Marine Fisheries Service dated January 23, 1995. PACFISH itself does not propose any ground-disturbing actions, but sets in place certain riparian management goals and management direction with the intent of arresting the degradation and beginning the restoration of riparian and stream habitats. Habitat for anadromous fish is present in the watersheds analyzed for this project.

- The **Biological Opinion for the *Effects to Bull Trout from Continued Implementation of Land and Resource Management Plans and Resource Management Plans as Amended by the Interim Strategy for Managing Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, Western Montana, and Portions of Nevada (INFISH), and the Interim Strategy for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH*)** from National Marine Fisheries Service, dated August 14, 1998. This BO addresses the effects of continued implementation of LRMPs as amended by PACFISH standards and guidelines where listed distinct population segments of bull trout occur in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Habitat for bull trout is present in the watersheds analyzed for this project.

- The **Biological Opinion on the *Land and Resource Management Plans for the Boise, Challis, Nez Perce, Payette, Sawtooth, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests*** from National Marine Fisheries Service, dated March 1, 1995. National Marine Fisheries has identified a set of goals, objectives, and guidelines that will apply to watershed and site-specific consultations until Land and Resource Management Plans are amended. Conformance with the provisions of this Opinion, in combination with implementation of PACFISH, should provide reasonable certainty that site-specific actions will not result in jeopardy to listed salmon or adverse modification of critical habitat. This applies to the Land and Resource Management Plan for Umatilla National Forest and PACFISH amendment used for this project.

- The **Biological Opinion - *Land and Resource Management Plans for National Forests and Bureau of Land and Management Resource Areas in the Upper Columbia River Basin and Snake River Basin Evolutionarily Significant Units*** by National Marine Fisheries Service dated June 22, 1998. This BO addresses the effects of continued implementation of the 18 LRMPs as amended by PACFISH standards and guidelines on Snake River salmon and steelhead. This applies to the Land and Resource Management Plan for Umatilla National Forest incorporated by reference in this project.

- ***Blue Mountain Expedited Section 7 Consultation Process –***Letter dated September 29, 2009 from Level 1 Team Agreement (U.S. Forest Service, NOAA Fisheries, and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service) tiering to Letters of Concurrence for the Blue Mountain Expedited Section 7 Consultation Process (Blue Mountain Project Design Criteria (PDC)) received from Fish and Wildlife Service, June 4, 2007 and NOAA Fisheries dated May 31, 2007. Level 1 Team letter also fulfills requirements for ***Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation.*** This expedited process was used for South George project (see Appendix F).

- ***Bull Trout Critical Habitat Designated in 2010:*** Letter dated November 16, 2010 from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, confirmation of ***Conference Reports and Conference Opinion as Letters of Concurrence and a Biological Opinion for Multiple Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Actions Involving Proposed Bull Trout Critical Habitat.*** This letter transmits confirmation of previously completed conference documents for actions described in the letter. Date of informal conference (13420-2010-1C-0150) for Umatilla National Forest is July 30, 2010. The purpose of this letter is to adopt the conference report as a Letter of Concurrence for designated bull trout critical habitat for the Blue Mt. Expedited Section 7 Consultation Process. Habitat for bull trout is present in the watershed analyzed for this project.

- National Forests in Oregon and Washington received the biological opinions "**Fish Habitat Restoration Activities in Oregon and Washington CY2007-2012 Biological Assessment and associated Biological Opinions, reissued by NMFS on June 27, 2008**: NMFS BO (FS 2008/03505), FWS BO (13420-2007-F-0055)" (referenced as ARBO). To address the 2010 designation of bull trout critical habitat, the ARBO for FWS was reinitiated by the Forest Service, and a resulting Biological Opinion and Letter of Concurrence dated April 26, 2011 on the Programmatic Aquatic Habitat Restoration Activities in Oregon and Washington that Affect ESA-Listed Fish, Wildlife, and Plant Species and Their Critical Habitats (TAILS #13420-2011-F-0129) was released. This process was used for South George project (see Appendix F).

- ***Asotin Watershed Assessment,*** Umatilla National Forest, Pomeroy Ranger District, January 18, 1996. A watershed-level ecosystem analysis of current and reference conditions along with recommendations for restoration. South George project is located in the Asotin Watershed and recommendations from this assessment were considered for this project.

- ***Invasive Plants Treatment Project (EIS)***, Umatilla National Forest, decision dated July 2010. Authorizes treatment of invasive plant species over a 5-15 year period using manual, mechanical, biological, herbicide, and cultural treatments. Up to 4,000 acres may be treated annually, including known sites and those detected in the future. Invasive plants in the project planning area will be treated as identified in this EIS (Chapter 3, Table 3-72).

- ***Environmental Assessment for Pomeroy Ranger District Motorized Access and Travel Management Plan,*** Pomeroy Ranger District, July 1993. A comprehensive program resulting in a transportation system which provides for a broad mix of both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities while moving toward Forest Plan desired future conditions. The transportation system for this project is consistent with this EA.

- ***Analysis of Umatilla National Forest Road System,*** completed January 2004. Forest-scale analysis in determining the minimum road system needed to meet resource and other management objectives. Transportation actions for this project are consistent with this Forest scale analysis.

- The ***Integrated Scientific Assessment for Ecosystem Management in the Interior Columbia Basin*** released 1996. Links landscape, aquatic, terrestrial, social, and economic characterizations to described biophysical and social systems. Biological and social systems for this project are described in Chapter 3 of this EIS.

- ***Umatilla National Forest Interim Snag Guidance Letter*** dated April, 1993, which provides direction on the number and distribution of snags to retain in harvest units. Direction from this letter was used for this project.

- ***National Fire Plan*** (August 2000) developed with the intent of responding to severe wildland fires and their impacts to communities while addressing five key points: Firefighting, Rehabilitation, Hazardous Fuels Reduction, Community Assistance, and Accountability. Activity and natural fuels are proposed for treatment in this project.

- ***Region 6 Protocol for Assessment and Management of Soil Quality Conditions*** dated January 2002. Established consistency in soil assessment methods on the Umatilla National Forest and other Blue Mountain forests, and ensures compliance with Forest Plan and NEPA condition assessment needs. This protocol was used for the soils analysis in this project (Appendix E).

Analysis and documentation for this project has been done according to direction contained in the ***National Forest Management Act*** (NFMA), ***National Environmental Policy Act*** (NEPA), ***Council on Environmental Quality Regulations*** (CEQ), ***Clean Water Act*** (CWA), ***Clean Air Act*** (CAA), ***National Historic Preservation Act*** (NHPA), and ***Endangered Species Act*** (ESA).

TREATY RIGHTS

The Forest Service, through the Secretary of Agriculture, is vested with statutory authority and responsibility for managing resources of the National Forests. Commensurate with the authority and responsibility to manage is the obligation to consult, cooperate, and coordinate with Indian Tribes in developing and planning management decisions regarding resources on National Forest system land that may affect tribal rights.

Locally, South George project planning area lies within the area ceded to the United States government by the Nez Perce Indians, as a result of the Treaties of 1855.

Elements of respective Indian cultures, such as tribal welfare, land, and resources were entrusted to the United States government as a result of the treaties. Trust responsibilities resulting from the treaties dictate, in part, that the United States government facilitate the execution of treaty rights and traditional cultural practices of Nez Perce Indians by working with them on a government to government basis in a manner that attempts a reasonable accommodation of their needs, without compromising the legal positions of the respective tribes or the federal government. Specific treaty rights applicable to that land base managed by the Umatilla National Forest area generally articulated in Article III of the 1855 Nez Perce Treaty, include:

"The exclusive right of taking fish in all the streams where running through or bordering said reservation is further secured to said Indians; as also the right of taking fish at all usual and accustomed places in common with citizens of the Territory; and of erecting temporary buildings for curing, together with the privilege of hunting, gathering roots and berries, and pasturing their horses and cattle upon open and unclaimed land."

Although the 1855 Treaties do not specifically mandate the federal government to manage habitats, there is an implied assumption that an adequate reserve of water be available for executing treaty related hunting and fishing activities.

For this project, a government to government scoping letter was sent to tribal staff members of the Nez Perce Tribe on March 2, 2009, informing them of the South George proposed project and requesting any comments or concerns regarding this proposed project. Pomeroy's District Ranger presented the District's Program of Work to Nez Perce tribal staff members on May 23, 2011, and November 7, 2011. At these meetings, projects are presented and an offer is made by the District Ranger to respond to any questions or present any additional information requested on a project. No specific comments or concerns for South George project were presented by tribal staff members after the government to government consultation scoping letter or Program of Work meetings.

General concerns received from tribal staff members on previous projects reflect the following:

- Potential effects to archeological and traditional properties and first foods resources.
- Potential effects to water quality.
- Potential effects to fish habitat, including salmonid species federally listed as threatened or endangered under ESA.
- Potential effects to economic recovery.
- Potential effects to treaty rights.

Because tribal trust activities often occur in common with the public, Umatilla National Forest will strive to manage tribal ceded land to enable the execution of tribal rights, as far as practicable, while still providing goods and services to all people.

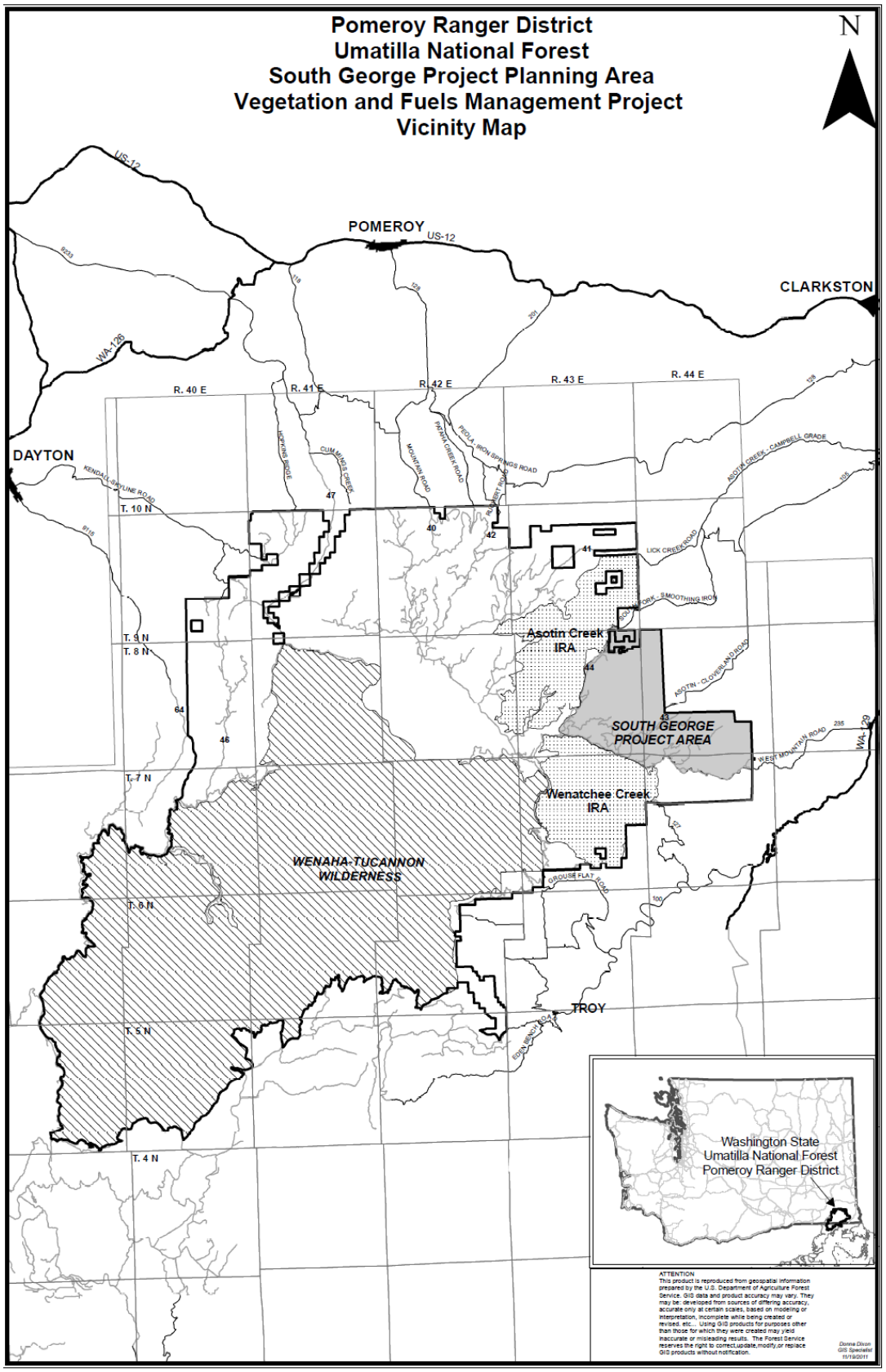
DECISIONS TO BE MADE

The scope of the project and decision to be made are limited to: commercial timber harvest, fuels treatments (landscape prescribed fire, non-commercial thinning, and non-commercial mechanical treatment of approximately 25 acres in RHCAs), danger tree removal along haul routes, and mitigation and monitoring within the project planning area. Connected actions include reforestation of harvest units and temporary road development and decommissioning of temporary roads. Chapter 2 details the designs of these actions. Proposed project activities would occur on National Forest System lands (NFS) and the decision to implement them would be limited to NFS lands.

If a Forest Plan amendment is documented in a decision for this project the Forest Supervisor of Umatilla National Forest will be the responsible deciding official. If an amendment is not documented in a decision for this project the Pomeroy District Ranger will be the responsible deciding official.

The responsible deciding official will decide whether to implement the proposed action, another alternative action, or take no action at this time. If an action alternative is selected, the responsible deciding official will also determine:

1. How much and where timber harvest and fuel treatments, along with their associated activities, should occur.
2. Whether other management activities (landscape prescribed fire, danger tree removal, and fuel treatments in RHCAs) and their associated activities should occur.
3. What monitoring requirements are needed to assure the selected alternative and mitigation are implemented as designed.


Pomeroy Ranger District
Umatilla National Forest
South George Project Planning Area
Vegetation and Fuels Management Project
Vicinity Map
N
POMEROY
US-12
CLARKSTON
DAYTON
WA-129
R. 40 E
R. 41 E
R. 42 E
R. 43 E
R. 44 E
T. 10 N
T. 9 N
T. 8 N
T. 7 N
T. 6 N
T. 5 N
T. 4 N
Asotin Creek IRA
SOUTH GEORGE PROJECT AREA
Wenatchee Creek IRA
WENAHA-TUCANNON WILDERNESS
TROY
Washington State
Umatilla National Forest
Pomeroy Ranger District
ATTENTION
This product is reproduced from geospatial information prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. GIS data and product accuracy may vary. They may be: developed from sources of differing accuracy, accurate only at certain scales, based on modeling or interpretation, incomplete while being created or revised, etc... Using GIS products for purposes other than those for which they were created may yield inaccurate or misleading results. The Forest Service reserves the right to correct,update,modify,or replace GIS products without notification.
Donna Dixon
GIS Specialist
11/19/2011