

REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM OFFICE

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 6, 2016

TO: Tina Lanier, District Ranger, Gold Beach RD, Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest

FROM: Jessica Rubado, Regional Ecosystem Office Representative to the Regional Interagency Executive Committee

SUBJECT: Regional Ecosystem Office Review of the Kimball Thin Project, Gold Beach Ranger District, Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest

Summary: The Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) interagency Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) Work Group has concluded its review of the documents provided by the Forest regarding proposed activities in LSRs within the anticipated action of Kimball Thin Project within the Southwest Coast LSR, Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest. The REO, based upon review by the LSR Work Group, concurs with the Forest in its finding that the Kimball Thin Project is consistent with the Ecological Principles for Management of Late-Successional Forests under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP).

Basis for the Review: Silviculture treatments in LSRs are subject to REO review under the NWFP S&G (C-12) if they do not meet existing criteria in the LSR Assessment or the exemption criteria for commercial thinning in the REO Memorandum #694 "Criteria to Exempt Specific Silvicultural Activities in Late-Successional Reserves and Managed Late-Successional Areas from Regional Ecosystem Office Review" dated July 9, 1996. As required by the NWFP S&G (C-11), the Forest prepared a Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (LSR assessment). The 2004 Southwest Oregon LSR Assessment, which encompasses the Kimball Thin Project, was reviewed and found to be consistent under the NWFP standards and guidelines (C-11). Although the LSR Assessment supports the thinning, the projects came before the LSR Workgroup for review because certain recommendations in the LSR Assessment and Exemption Criteria are not consistent with activities needed to expedite development of late-successional stand characteristics associated with the Kimball Thin Project.

Background and Project Description: The Kimball Thin Project planning area is located in the Klamath Province on the Gold Beach Ranger District of the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest and within the Quosatana Creek-Rogue River 6th field watershed and the Northwest Coast LSR.

Silvicultural treatments proposed for the Kimball Thin Project are consistent with pertinent S&Gs in the ROD (C-12), and with LSRA treatment criteria for density management in stands less than 80 years of age but vary from existing review exemption criteria (REO Memorandum #694 dated July 9, 1996 and REO Memorandum #801 dated September 30), by:

- 1) Gaps - Creating gaps larger than ¼-acre in extent. Specifically, gaps up to ¾ acre are proposed to create structural and age diversity and provide habitat for rare, endemic plant species.

- 2) Increase allowable cut tree diameter from 20 to 30 inches – removal of trees >20” dbh that are <80 years of age during variable density thinning on 268 acres.

The District proposes variable density thinning within dense natural and previously thinned stands in the project area to reduce inter-tree competition. The objective of the proposed action is to address closed homogenized forest stand conditions in the lower Rogue River 5th field watershed. A combination of open grown tree regeneration created by a 1930s disturbance event combined with high productivity site characteristics, stocking-level control treatments in the early 1990s and maritime influenced environmental conditions have resulted in dense stands of 65-75 year old trees with quadratic mean diameters (QMD) over 20 inches. Thinning practices in LSRs (under 20 inches and thin from below) would not be sufficient in lowering tree density to meet desired stand and landscape objectives. Variable density thinning would thin trees across diameter classes up to 30 inches (aged 80 or younger) would subsequently improve stand structure and diversity.

The gaps are designed to provide sufficient openings to provide habitat for rare Siskiyou Mountain endemic species. One goal of the Northwest Coast LSR is to provide habitat for *Illiamna latibracteata* and *Arctostaphylos hispidula* to “maintain biological diversity associated with native species” (B-1, USDA, 1994b), compliant with habitat improvement projects provided that “their effects on late-successional associated species is negligible” (C-17, USDA, 1994b).

Some of the gaps would be reforested with disease resistant Port-Orford Cedar (POC) to increase/create stand structural and species heterogeneity. POC will be planted opportunistically in site appropriate areas. There may be some created gaps that are along the northern slope of the project area more suited for POC but for the most part, the gaps are intended to serve as habitat for rare, endemic plants commonly associated with open sites. Up to 20% of the total project area may have up to ¾ gap creation.

Snags and large down wood will be created using a variety of methods: girdling, topping and de-limbing, and inoculation. Inoculation of residual trees with *Phellinus pini* (or another appropriate native heart rot fungi) may be conducted with or without mid-crown topping.

The snags will be distributed as individuals or clumps across all treatment types (thinned, skips, gaps). Overall, an average of 8 snags/down wood will be created per acre.

Up to 10 trees per ¾ acre gap will be targeted to address snag and downed wood deficits as shown in the DecAID analysis (Emerson 2015). Of the 10 trees, 8 will be created as standing snags (2 snags in the 30-36” dbh range, the 6 remaining snags in the 20-30” dbh range) and 2 live trees (20-30” dbh) will be felled to provide downed wood on the forest floor. Gaps will be strategically placed in order to meet the snag creation criteria.

Outside of the gaps, 4-5 snags per acre will be created in a scattered pattern across the project area.

Review of the Project: The Rogue-Siskiyou Forest staff discussed the Kimball Thin Project with the LSR Work Group on May 28, 2014 and September 28, 2015 via conference call. Follow-up discussions and email correspondence occurred between the project and workgroup members and Kimball Thin team members. The Work Group’s review was based on all the information from REO Variance Request documents, specialist reports and other correspondence and discussions.

Conclusion: Based on the interagency REO LSR Work Group's review and conclusions, the REO concurs with the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forests conclusion that the Kimball Thin project, if implemented as described above, is consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan.

If you have questions regarding this review, please contact Kim Mellen-McLean at 503-808-2677.



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Regional Ecosystem Office Representative to the Regional Interagency Executive Committee

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