

TABLE 1: RECENT SMALL DIAMETER THINNING PROJECTS - MOVING AHEAD!

PROJECT	LOCATION	SIZE	OBJECTIVES	TIMELINE
Big Butte Springs	RR-SNF, High Cascades Ranger District.	6,134 acres. 41 mmbf of timber.	Thinning and underburning plantations and fire suppressed stands for diversity and wood volume.	Implementation. Multiple sales of several years.
Boaz Thin	MBLM, Ashland Resource Area.	40 acres, .25 mmbf., poles and biomass.	Thinning fire suppressed stands for diversity and wood volume.	Complete.
Cat Hill Thin	RR-SNF, High Cascades Ranger District.	347 acres.	Thinning plantations for diversity and wood volume.	Complete.
Coastal Healthy Forests	RR-SNF, Powers, Chetco, Gold Beach Ranger Districts.	About 40,000 acres and 250 mmbf over 10 years.	Thinning plantations for diversity and wood volume.	Implementation. Multiple sales over several years.
East Illinois Valley Managed Stands	RR-SNF, Wild Rivers Ranger District.	3,000 acres of commercial units.	Thinning plantations for diversity and wood volume.	DN signed.
East Star	MBLM, Ashland Resource Area	500 acres, 2.7 mmbf., plus additional burning and hand work.	Thinning fire suppressed forests.	Implementation.
Gooseneast LSR	KNF, Gooseneast Ranger District.	2,226 acres. Undetermined timber volume, firewood and poles.	Thinning 60-80 year old plantations for diversity.	Implementation.
Graves Creek and Galesville Thin	MBLM, Glendale Resource Area.	6,200 acres. Unknown timber volume, firewood and poles.	Thinning plantations with upper diameter limit.	Implementation.
Healthy Murph	MBLM, Glendale Resource Area.	220 acres, 1.5 mmbf. of timber plus firewood and biomass.	Thinning plantations for diversity and wood volume.	Implementation.
High Cascades Plantations	RR-SNF, High Cascades Ranger District.	17,000 acres. Undetermined timber volume and biomass.	Thinning plantations for diversity and wood volume.	EA due Spring 2008.
Penny Stew	MBLM, Grants Pass Resource Area.	100 acres. Unknown timber volume, firewood, poles and biomass.	Fuels reduction and plantation thin.	Implementation.
Rich and Rocky	MBLM, Grants Pass Resource Area.	Unknown timber volume, firewood and biomass.	Fuels reduction and plantation thin.	Near completion.
Rogue Wild and Scenic Fuels	MBLM, Grants Pass Resource Area.	9,000 acres. Undetermined timber volume, firewood, poles and biomass.	Fuels reduction thin.	Implementation.
Rum Creek	MBLM, Grants Pass Resource Area.	137 acres of commercial units, 1,533 total acres. Undetermined timber volume and biomass.	Fuels reduction and plantation thin.	Implementation. Stewardship activities planned.
Slim Jim	MBLM, Glendale Resource Area.	220 acres of commercial units, 1.4 mmbf., 1,451 total acres.	Thinning plantations for diversity and wood volume.	Implementation.
Tennis Thin	KNF, Salmon-Scott Ranger District.	175 acres of commercial units.	Fuels reduction thin and underburning.	Implementation.

MMBF = MILLION BOARD FEET (1 MMBF = APPROXIMATELY 300 LOG TRUCKS OF SMALL TREES)

KNF = KLAMATH NATIONAL FOREST

RR-SNF = ROGUE RIVER-SISKIYOU NATIONAL FOREST

MBLM = MEDFORD DISTRICT BLM

DN = DECISION NOTICE

EA = ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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FOREST RESTORATION AND SMALL DIAMETER THINNING

There is strong support throughout the Pacific Northwest for the protection of forests on federal public land for the many values they provide. Increasingly, conservationists and concerned citizens are collaborating with diverse stakeholders to support active restoration on public lands. One tool in active restoration is thinning small diameter trees, which can mitigate wildfire risk to communities, restore forests that were previously clearcut and produce wood volume.

FOREST RESTORATION

Forest restoration consists of any activity, such as road removal, culvert replacement or noxious weed control, which aids a forest in recovery from past damage. Oftentimes, conservation groups like KS Wild support “thinning” federal forests when such thinning reduces excess brush and small trees, abating the threat of fire to communities. Thinning can also remove surplus trees in dense tree plantations, helping them become better wildlife habitat while producing wood products.

SMALL DIAMETER THINNING

Despite the rancor that often surrounds mature and old growth logging on federal land, common ground and consensus is emerging around thinning small diameter trees. For example, KS Wild, local agencies and some timber interests work amiably together, in collaborative groups like the Southern Oregon Small Diameter Collaborative and the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan Working Group. Local employment, rural economic stabilization, habitat improvement and the reduction of wildfire threat to communities are some of the benefits of thinning small trees.

The following are some of the projects KS Wild, federal agencies and other stakeholders have worked on to address excess small trees and brush on federal public forests:



Small diameter thinning sales can produce volume and help improve forest habitat. Pictured here is the Healthy Murph timber sale on Medford BLM.

THINNING PROJECTS THAT ENJOY WIDESPREAD COMMUNITY SUPPORT

1) BIG BUTTE SPRINGS TIMBER SALES

The Big Butte Springs project authorized 6,184 acres of logging, producing 41 million board feet of commercial volume via thinning on the Butte Falls Ranger District of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

Big Butte Springs is in the drinking watershed for Medford, making the hazardous fuels reduction a priority. Prior to clearcut logging around the turn of the century, many of the forests in this area were groves of old growth Douglas fir and ponderosa pine. Second-growth white fir trees that currently occupy the cut-over forests would not be as prevalent if the forest had not been logged and then subjected to decades of fire exclusion. The 2005 Environmental Impact Statement is currently in the process of implementation.

Photos at right: Projects that log old-growth are bad for the forest and don't garner community support. The unit pictured on the top was withdrawn from the Big Butte Springs timber sale. Below is second growth white fir unit that is indicative of the sale units KS Wild supports.



2) COASTAL HEALTHY FORESTS PROJECT

The Coastal Healthy Forests Project involves thinning young tree plantations on the Gold Beach, Powers and Chetco Ranger Districts on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

Coastal Healthy Forests is a very large project. Over 47,000 acres, or 62 square miles, are identified for thinning. Timber managers from the Forest Service estimate that the project would generate over 250 million board feet (that's 15 log trucks a day, every day, for 15 years!). These coastal forests are very wet and productive, and prior to clearcut logging consisted of very large, old-growth Douglas fir trees. Now they are very dense and generally a monoculture of young, planted Douglas fir trees. Timber sales from the 2007 Environmental Assessment are currently being sold and awarded.



KS Wild's Conservation Director in the field with Klamath National Forest staff discussing the Round Valley project on the Goosenest Ranger District.

3) ROGUE WILD AND SCENIC RIVER HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION TREATMENT

The Rogue Wild and Scenic River, Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project reduces hazardous fuels through forest under-burning and thinning on the Medford BLM, Grants Pass Resource Area.

The project area includes 9,000 acres in and near the designated Recreation Area of the Wild and Scenic Rogue River. About half of the project is in a, "community-at-risk," defined by the National Fire Plan.

Much of the project is being implemented using Stewardship Contracting. An unknown amount of products such as firewood, post and poles and logs – the byproducts of the fuels reduction work – are being sold. Using a 12-inch diameter limit for tree felling, BLM is focusing thinning near homes and communities (they are using a 7-inch diameter cap near roads and other fire ignition areas). The 2003 Environmental Assessment is currently being implemented.

4) GOOSENEST LATE SUCCESSIONAL RESERVE SOUTHEAST HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT

The Goosenest LSR Project is located on the Klamath National Forest, 4 miles west of the town of Macdoel, California. This 2,226-acre project focuses on thinning plantations and second-growth stands that may have developed due to Forest Service fire suppression policies. The project includes prescribed burning and brushing to treat fuels on the forest floor. The results of this project include improving habitat for old-growth dependent species, reducing fuels and providing wood products.

The 2005 Environmental Assessment is currently being implemented.



This dense young stand of Douglas fir trees is being thinned out in the Goosenest LSR Project.

5) TENNIS THIN TIMBER SALE

The Tennis Thin Timber Sale on the Salmon Scott Ranger District of the Klamath National Forest is in an area where forests have accumulated high densities of small trees because fires have been suppressed.

Located west of Hilt, California, Tennis Thin commercially logged 175 acres of overcrowded forests and targeted 800 acres for underburning to address fuel-loading issues.

The 2005 Environmental Assessment is currently in the process of implementation.

6) GRAVES CREEK WATERSHED & GALESVILLE VALLEY PROJECTS

Graves Creek Watershed and Galesville Valley Projects thinned overly dense tree plantations in the Graves and Cow Creek Watersheds on the Medford BLM, Glendale Resource Area.

Galesville Thin is 500 acres with a 7-inch diameter cap. The Graves Creek project is 5,700 acres. About 1,000 acres of Graves Creek has commercial sized trees that will be yarded and transported to a timber mill.

The Graves Creek and Galesville Projects focused on thinning existing tree plantations, and included upper diameter limits on felling and manual slashing, hand piling, snag (dead trees used by wildlife) creation, and underburning. The 2003 Environmental Analysis has largely been implemented.

CONCLUSION

Thinning is not without on-the-ground impacts. Individual projects should be examined to determine how the logs are removed (tractors can be hard on soils), how they are hauled (roads are often proposed even in thinning projects) and how water quality can be maintained (thinning projects can produce sediment that can harm streams and salmon). Working out these issues early in the planning stages can produce a good thinning project.

Until there is no longer an incentive to log big trees, most of the interested public will remain skeptical of the commercial timber sale program on federal forests. But, most citizens acknowledge that small diameter thinning in previously logged stands may aid forest health in some instances. The Forest Service and BLM have ample opportunity to demonstrate responsible thinning operations in previously logged stands that can help wildlife and increase the support for timber programs while exercising restraint to leave the remaining old-growth and roadless forests intact.