



United States Department of Agriculture

North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact



Forest Service

**Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie
National Forest**

**Darrington and Mt.
Baker Ranger
Districts**

April 2025

Responsible Official:
Jody Weil, Forest Supervisor
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Introduction

The North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Environmental Assessment (EA, April 2025) is incorporated by reference. The EA contains a detailed discussion of the purpose and need for action, proposed action with project design criteria, no action alternative, resource conditions, and environmental effects of the alternatives.

The North Fork Stillaguamish project is located on the Darrington and Mt. Baker Ranger Districts of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (MBS), Skagit and Snohomish Counties of northwest Washington. It is located to the north and northwest of the city of Darrington. The project area boundary encompasses approximately 61,849 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands.

This decision notice (DN) is based on a review of the EA, specialist reports and related scientific literature, the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended, and comments received during the scoping period, and the opportunity to comment on the EA, as well as Tribal consultation discussions. The final EA is available for public review on the MBS website, and at the Darrington Ranger District Office located in Darrington, WA. Project documents, maps, and other associated information can be found in the project record and on the MBS website.

Decision

Based upon my review of the EA and supporting documents, and input from the Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team), local Tribes, partners, interested organizations, members of the public and other agencies, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 (EA at 10-19) with the modification of the Riparian Reserve buffers from Alternative 3 (EA at 19). My decision includes the project design criteria described in Appendix B of this DN. The riparian buffers will be based solely on stream classification (Table 1).

Table 1. Riparian Reserve Stream Buffers

Stream Classification	Retained No-Thin Buffers
Fish Bearing (Perennial and Intermittent)	150 ft
Perennial Non-fish Bearing	150 ft
Intermittent Non-fish Bearing	50 ft

Please note that in selecting this combination of alternatives, there are fewer potential impacts to the natural environment than Alternative 2. Alternative 2 includes Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) review to allow for the cutting and removal of trees between 20" – 26" dbh. This will occur in stands identified for variable density thinning. I am selecting the larger riparian reserve buffers for thinning actions while allowing for multiple uses of the road system. The proposed action includes approximately 8,842 acres of proposed variable density commercial timber thinning; 5,644 acres of non-commercial thinning, habitat improvement vegetation treatments, improvements to the transportation system and aquatic organism passage (AOP), 12.12 miles of road decommissioning, 18.71 miles of road will be placed in storage resulting in a total of 112.63 miles of road in storage post project (90.3 miles are within the project area boundary; the remaining are haul routes outside of the project boundary that will be treated post use), and a suite of other restoration and recreation projects such as stream improvements and dispersed camping site improvements (Table 2, Figure 1). In addition, I have decided to defer a decision on Texas Pond dam repair and maintenance, pending future environmental analysis to include additional alternatives for that

location. The full description of Alternative 2, modified with Alternative 3 riparian buffers and without Texas Pond dam, is provided in Appendix C of this decision.

Table 2. Decision Summary

Alternative 2 with Riparian Reserve Buffers from Alternative 3	Acres unless otherwise specified
Variable Density Thinning	Up to 8,842
Huckleberry Enhancement – Non-commercial Thinning	Up to 300¹
Stand Improvement – Non-commercial Thinning	Up to 5,644
Riparian Reserves Variable Density Thinning	Up to 1,275²
Riparian Reserve Variable Density Thinning	
Perennial Fish Bearing VDT (stream miles)	12
Perennial Non-fish Bearing VDT (stream miles)	49
Intermittent (stream miles)	91
Riparian Reserves Stand Improvement – Non-commercial Thinning	Up to 688
Riparian Reserves Stand Improvement – Non-commercial Thinning	
Perennial Fish Bearing (stream miles)	4
Perennial Non-fish Bearing (stream miles)	23
Intermittent (stream miles)	57
Temporary Road Construction	
New temporary road construction (miles) (All temporary roads would be decommissioned post project)	19
Temporary road on unclassified roads with existing road prisms (miles) (All temporary roads would be decommissioned post project)	39.64
Temporary road on previously decommissioned roads (miles) (All temporary roads would be decommissioned post project)	4.3
Rock pits (less than ½ acre at any one site)	7
Danger Tree Removal	As Needed
Maintenance Level – Road Miles Post Implementation	
Decommission	12.12
Maintenance Level 1 -- Closed/Storage	112.63
Maintenance Level 2 – High Clearance	62.13
Maintenance Level 3 – Suitable for Passenger Cars	79.41

¹ Huckleberry Enhancement – Non-commercial thinning acres overlap with Stand Improvement – Non-commercial thinning acres.

² Riparian Reserves Variable Density Thinning acres overlap with Variable Density Thinning acres.

Storm Proofing – As needed	193.93
Aquatic Restoration	
Aquatic Organism Passage (sites)	Up to 30
Instream Wood (sites, 2-4 trees >20" dg per site)	Up to 12
Beaver Habitat Enhancement (sites)	Up to 7
Recreation	
Dispersed Camping (areas)	Up to 10

Table 3. Road Management Changes.³

Road No.	Road Seg. Length	Current ML Level	Alt 2 Proposed ML Level ⁴	SRS Aquatic Risk	SRS Road Level	Rationale for Proposed Changes ⁵
1700000	6.00	4	3	H	3	CT
1700000	8.00	4	3	H	3	CT
1730000	3.20	2	1	H	1	PPC
1730000	0.21	1	1	H	1	PPC
1731000	6.65	1	1	L	1	PPC
1732000	4.18	1	1	H	1	PPC
1732014	0.18	1	1	L	1	PPC
1740000	0.25	2	1	L	1	RSA
1740111	0.14	2	1	L	1	CT & PA
1740111	1.47	2	1	L	1	PA
1750000	0.79	2	1	H	1	CT
1750011	1.42	1	1	H	1	CT
1750025	0.21	1	D	L	1	No CT or PPC
1750100	0.22	1	D	L	1	No CT or PPC
1751000	0.48	1	1	L	1	CT
1755013	0.91	1	1	H	1	CT
1765000	2.31	1	2	L	1	PPC
1765550	0.23	2	1	M	1	PPC
1766000	1.00	2	1	L	1	EOF No CT or PPC
1766000	0.41	1	D	M	1	EOF No CT or PPC
1766020	0.36	1	D	L	1	EOF No CT or PPC
1800014	1.10	1	1	M	1	CT
1800014	0.55	1	1	M		CT

³ ML 1: closed roads that have been placed in storage between intermittent uses; ML 2: roads open for use by high clearance vehicles; ML 3: roads open and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car; ML 4: roads open and maintained for travel with a moderate degree of user comfort; ML 5: roads open and maintained for travel with a high degree of user comfort. Colors in table match maps in Appendix A.

⁴ Colors in table match map in Figure 1. North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Selected Alternative.

⁵ Haul Route / CT = Commercial Timber, PPC = Planned Pre-Commercial; PA = Private Access; REC = Recreation; RSA = Rock Source Access; EOF = Easement Outside of Forest Boundary; MA = Mining Access or Special Use

Road No.	Road Seg. Length	Current ML Level	Alt 2 Proposed ML Level ⁴	SRS Aquatic Risk	SRS Road Level	Rationale for Proposed Changes ⁵
1800017	0.40	1	1	H	1	CT
1800022	0.65	1	1	H	1	CT
1800025	0.23	1	1	H	1	CT
1800025	0.07	1	1	H	1	PPC & RSA
1810000	1.50	1	2	H	1	CT
1810000	0.77	1	2	H	1	CT
1820000	3.49	2	2	H	1	CT & MA
1820000	0.33	2	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
1820011	0.46	1	D	L	1	No CT or PPC
1820013	0.29	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
1820050	0.30	1	1	L	1	CT
1822000	0.46	1	1	H	1	CT
1822000	0.48	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
1822014	0.16	1	D	L	1	No CT or PPC
1855000	1.14	2	1	H	1	PPC
1855013	1.08	1	2	H	2	Admin Access only & PPC
1870000	1.93	1	1	H	1	CT
1870000	0.12	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
1880000	0.78	2	D	M	1	No CT or PPC
1880011	0.09	1	2	M	D	CT & Pit Access
1880011	0.32	1	D	M	D	No CT or PPC
1880011	0.09	1	D	M	D	No CT or PPC
1880012	0.18	1	2	L	D	CT & Pit Access
1880013	0.48	1	1	M	1	CT
1890000	0.46	2	1	H	2	CT
1890011	1.03	1	D	M	1	No CT or PPC
1890013	0.30	1	2	H	1	CT
1890013	1.53	1	1	H	1	CT
1890013	0.05	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
1890017	0.21	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
1890130	0.60	1	1	M	1	CT
1891000	0.41	2	1	H	1	CT
1891000	1.29	2	1	H	1	No CT or PPC leads to roadless area
1891000	1.90	2	1	H	1	No CT or PPC leads to roadless area
1891000	0.59	2	1	H	1	No CT or PPC leads to roadless area
1891011	0.40	1	1	H	1	CT
2800000	10.10	3	2	H	3	CT

Road No.	Road Seg. Length	Current ML Level	Alt 2 Proposed ML Level ⁴	SRS Aquatic Risk	SRS Road Level	Rationale for Proposed Changes ⁵
2800000	0.27	3	1	H	3	CT
2800000	1.50	3	1	H	2	CT
2800017	0.95	1	1	H	1	CT
2800018	1.11	1	1	H	1	CT
2800019	0.98	1	1	H	1	CT
2800020	0.54	1	1	H	1	CT
2815000	1.00	2	1	H	1	PPC
2820000	0.31	2	1	H		CT
2830000	0.68	2	1	L	1	CT
2830000	0.32	2	1	L	1	PPC
2832000	0.37	1	1	L	1	CT
2840000	4.69	3	2	H	1	CT
2840000	0.18	3	1	H	1	PPC
2840000	2.28	3	1	H	1	PPC
2840011	0.63	1	1	H	1	CT
2840016	0.85	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
2840016	0.30	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
2840018	0.15	2	1	L	1	CT
2840018	0.12	2	1	L	1	PPC
2841000	1.98	2	1	H	1	CT
2841013	0.46	1	1	H	1	CT
2841013	0.10	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
2849000	0.38	1	1	H	1	CT
2850000	1.63	1	1	H	1	CT
2850000	0.37	1	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
2851000	0.78	1	1	H	1	CT
2860000	0.50	1	1	H	1	CT
2870000	0.78	2	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
2872000	0.27	2	1	H	1	PPC
2880000	0.06	2	2	L	1	CT
2880000	2.85	2	1	L	1	PPC
2881000	1.98	2	1	H	1	PPC
2882000	1.15	2	2	H	1	CT
2882000	0.42	2	1	H	1	PPC
2885000	1.76	2	D	H	D	No CT or PPC
2886000	0.38	2	D	H	D	No CT or PPC
2890000	0.03	2	D	H	1	CT
2890000	1.89	2	D	H	1	No CT or PPC
2900000	0.08	2	1	M	1	PA
2940000	1.33	1	1	L	1	CT

Road No.	Road Seg. Length	Current ML Level	Alt 2 Proposed ML Level ⁴	SRS Aquatic Risk	SRS Road Level	Rationale for Proposed Changes ⁵
2942000	3.26	2	1	L	1	CT
2947000	0.04	1	2	L	D	REC - Dispersed Camping
2950000	1.49	2	1	L	1	CT
2950011	0.03	1	1	L	1	CT
2950011	0.13	1	D	L	1	No CT or PPC
2950014	0.34	1	1	H	1	CT
2956000	0.50	1	1	H	1	CT

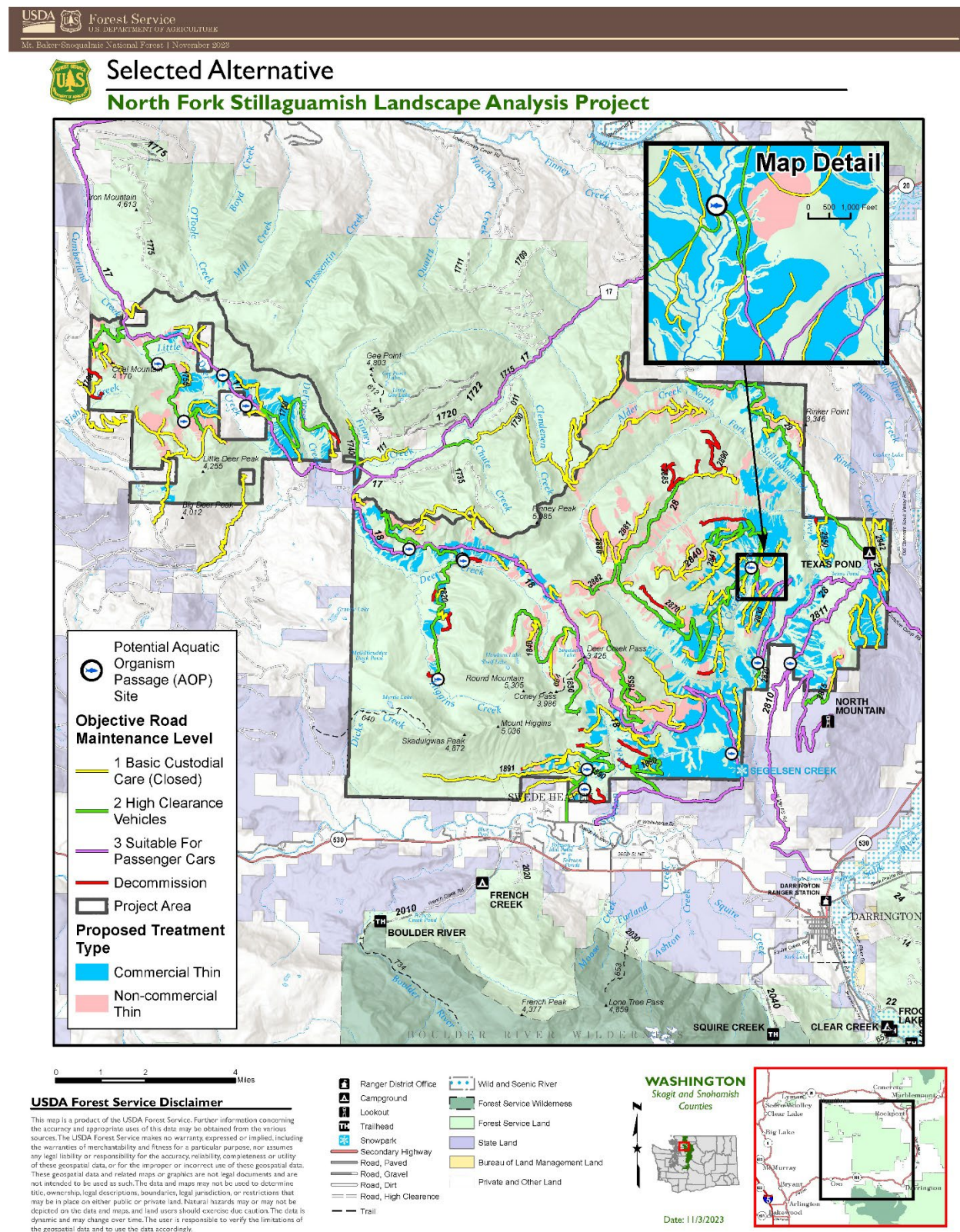


Figure 1. North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Selected Alternative

Forest Plan Amendment

The regulation at 36 CFR 219.13 allows for forest plans to be amended during project planning in order to keep plans current or respond to changing conditions. A forest plan amendment is necessary in MA-19, Mountain Hemlock Zone, to remove the condition of consistency with a Study Plan (that was never completed). This amendment modifies certain aspects of the standards and guidelines for MA-19 forest-wide. Timber management activities are limited to those needed to improve habitat diversity, particularly to restore habitat for huckleberries, a First Food resource critical to local Tribes. Broadcast burning and precommercial thinning will be permitted. Thinning treatments will benefit huckleberry production in the short term due to reduced tree density, particularly in the small gaps. In the long term the treatments will promote the development of desirable late-successional characteristics in these stands. Forest understory species contribute to biological diversity and long-term ecosystem productivity in late-successional and old-growth forest habitats. The modified standards and guidelines will provide clear management direction to enhance habitat diversity into the future. The full description of the proposed amendment, and its effects analysis are provided in the EA at pages 7-8, 25-26.

Forest Plan Amendment Findings under the 2012 Planning Rule

The programmatic⁶ Forest Plan amendment included in alternative 2 removes the condition of a Study Plan from MA-19 (Mountain Hemlock Zone management area), and allows management activities to improve habitat diversity in MA-19 across all districts on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. See Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4. The Forest Plan amendment will modify standards and guidelines for MA-19 including those relevant to fish and wildlife habitat, timber management activities, broadcast burning, precommercial thinning and temporary road construction.

This decision also applies the programmatic Forest Plan amendment specifically to the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis project area. There are 2,154 acres of MA-19 within the North Fork Stillaguamish project area (1,178 acres on Mt. Baker Ranger District (MBRD), and 976 acres on Darrington Ranger District (DRD)). See Figure 5. This includes 375 acres of proposed non-commercial stand improvement (211 acres on MBRD, 164 acres on DRD). With this amendment, up to 300 of those acres may be non-commercially thinned for huckleberry enhancement, benefitting wildlife and promoting sources of traditional foods for Tribal communities.

I prepared this forest plan amendment under the 2012 Planning Rule, which has different provisions than the 1982 Planning Rule under which the existing Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land Management Plan was developed. As explained below, this amendment complies with the procedural provisions of the 2012 Planning Rule and all the directly related substantive requirements in sections 219.8 through 219.11 of the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR Part 219). The procedural provisions and how this forest plan amendment complies are detailed below:

Using the best available scientific information to inform the planning process (§ 219.3) – The final North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Environmental Assessment (EA) uses the best available scientific information to inform the planning process for the forest plan amendment.

Providing opportunities for public participation (§ 219.4) – Opportunities for public participation were provided during the scoping and 30-day comment periods (EA at 85-86). Outreach included federally recognized Indian Tribes (EA at 84-85), interested individuals and entities at local, regional, and national levels; other federal agencies, states, counties, and local governments.

The plan amendment process (§ 219.13) – As the responsible official I have the discretion to determine whether and how to amend the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie Forest Plan. The purpose and need, and analysis prepared in the EA for the project serves as the documentation of the need to change the Forest Plan. The

⁶ A programmatic amendment changes the Forest Plan for the duration of the Plan whereas a site-specific amendment arises from the need to take a specific action to meet a forest plan goal or a desired condition and only applies to that project or activity.

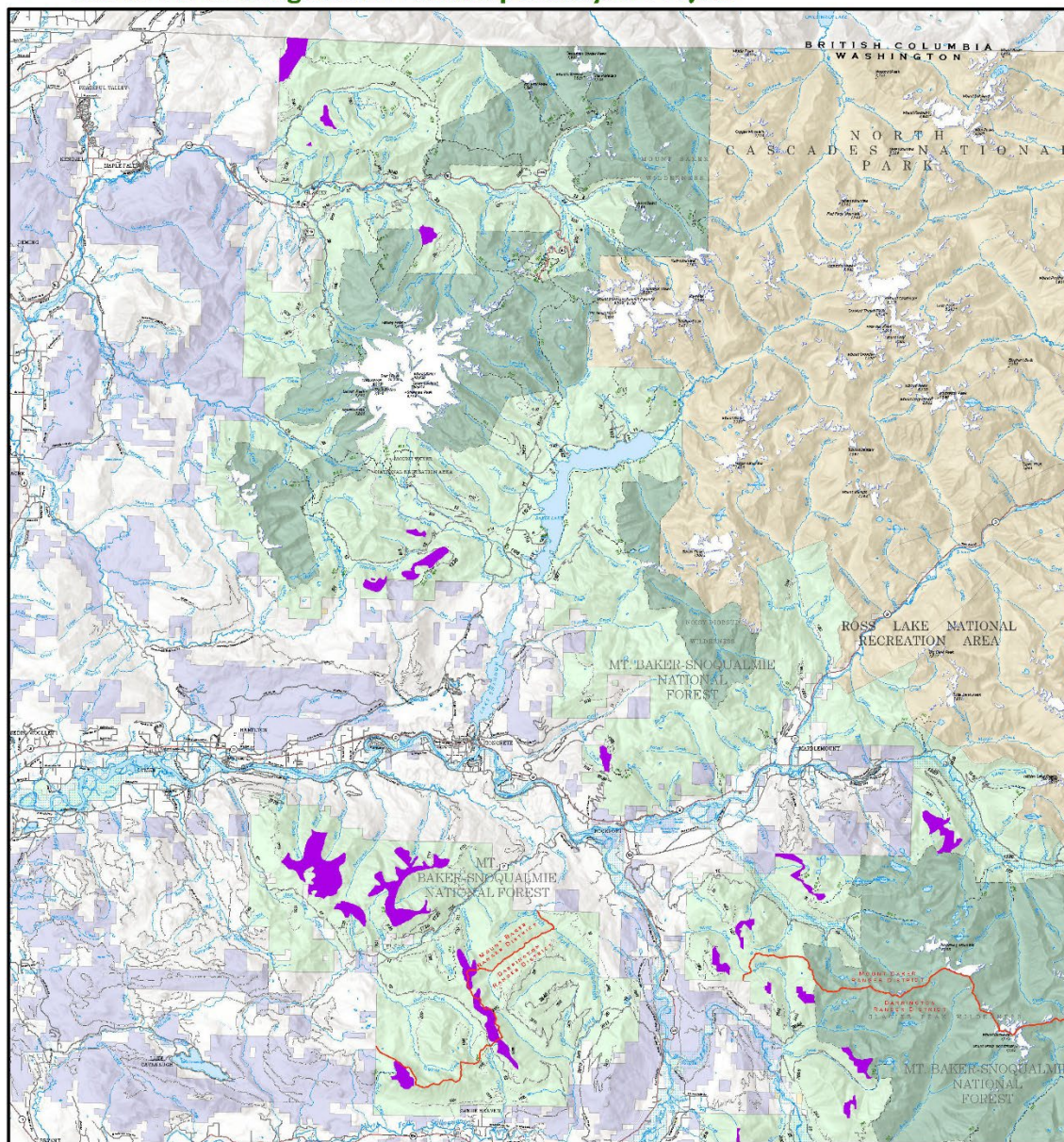
plan amendment process included opportunities for public participation (see discussion above) and included public notification (see discussion below). The plan amendment follows provisions of the 2012 planning rule (EA at 7, 25).

USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest January 2023



Management Area 19 (Mountain Hemlock Zone) - Mt. Baker Ranger District

North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Project



0 2 4 6 8 10 Miles

USDA Forest Service Disclaimer

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- MA 19 - Mountain Hemlock Zone**
- Ranger District Office
 - Campground
 - Lookout
 - Trailhead
 - Snowpark
 - Primary Highway
 - Secondary Highway
 - Road, Paved
 - Road, Gravel
 - Road, Dirt
 - Road, High Clearance
 - Trail
 - Wild and Scenic River
 - Forest Service Wilderness
 - Forest Service Land
 - State Land
 - Bureau of Land Management Land
 - National Park Service Land
 - Private and Other Land
 - Ranger District Boundary

WASHINGTON



Date: 1/29/2023



Figure 2. MA-19 Mt. Baker Ranger District

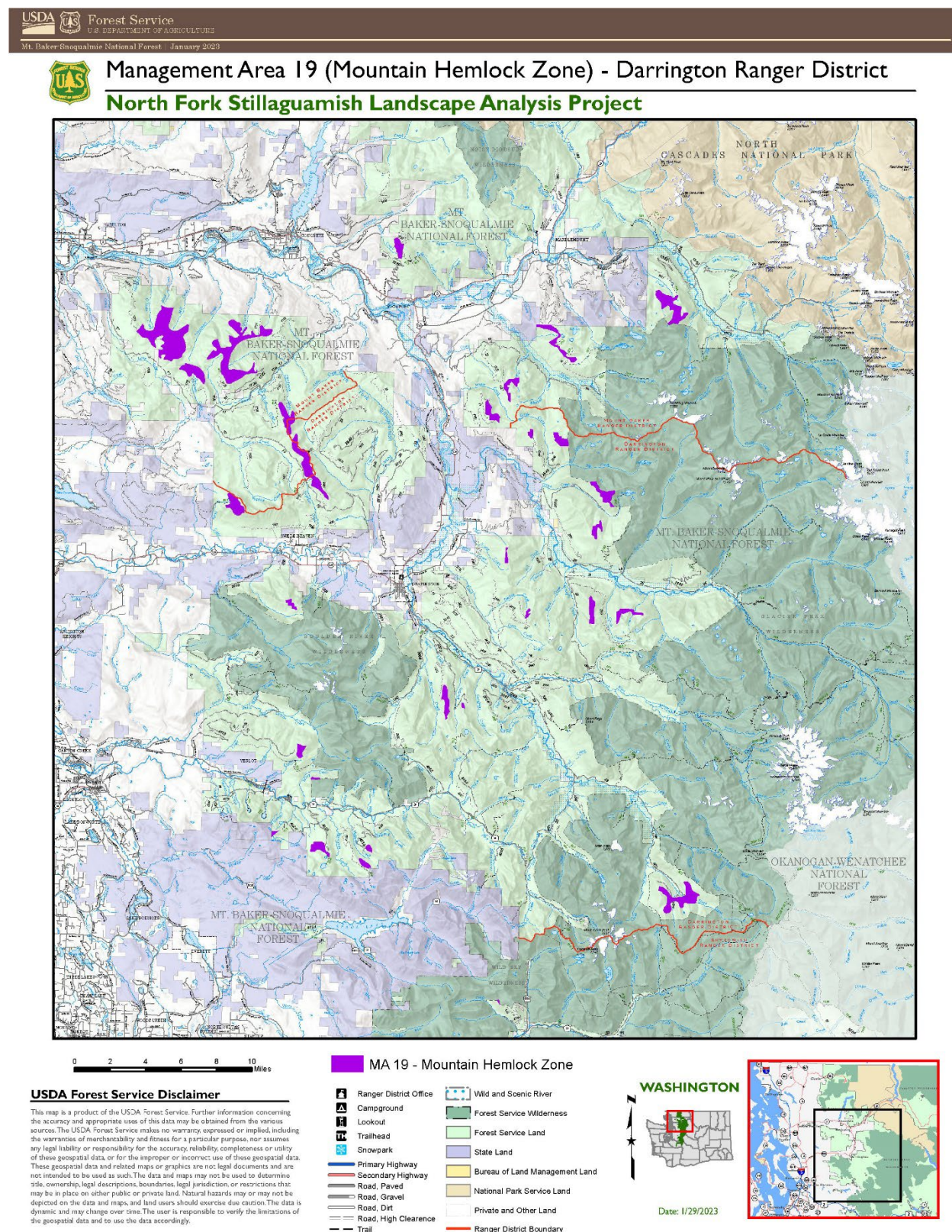


Figure 3. MA-19 Darrington Ranger District

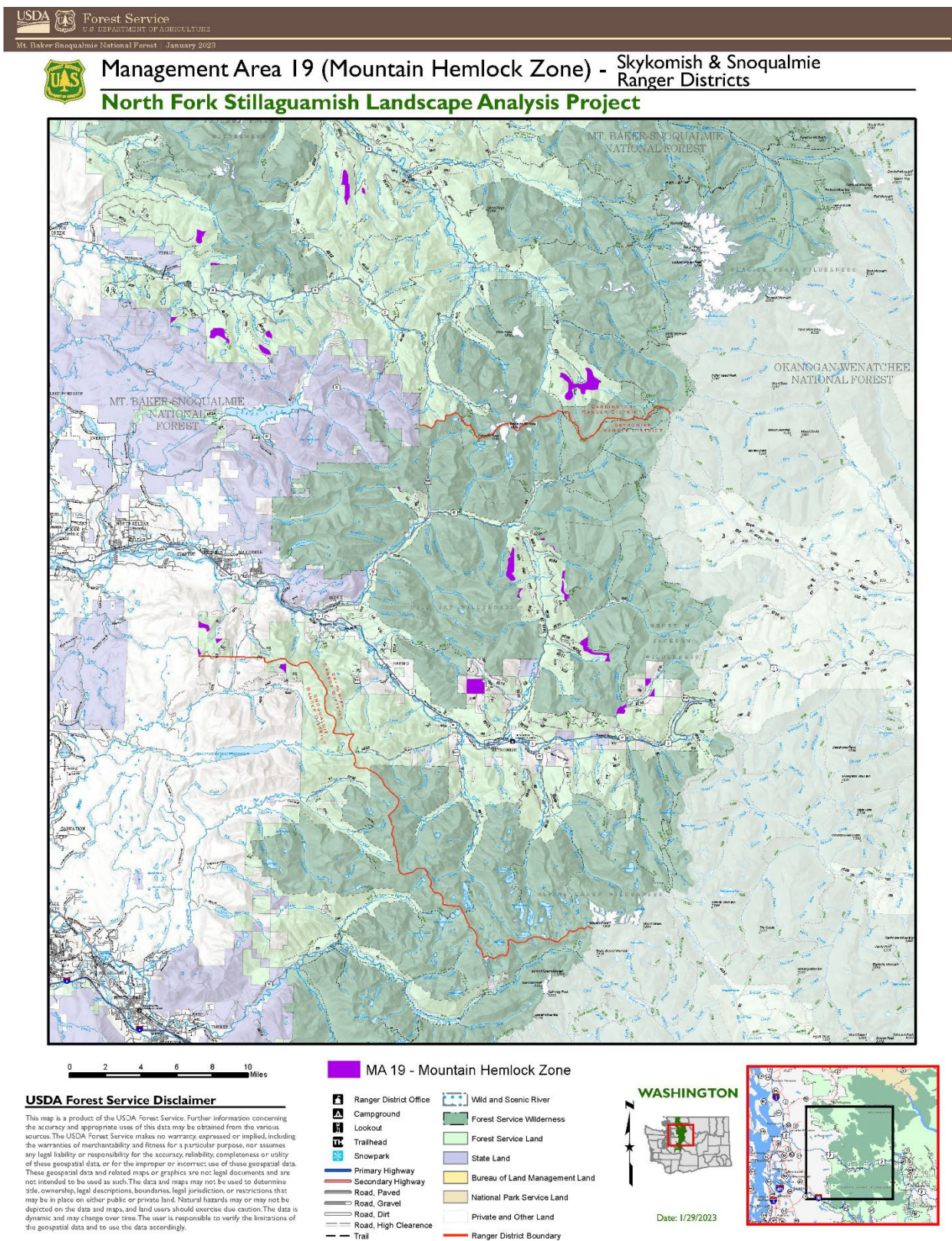


Figure 4. MA-19 Skykomish and Snoqualmie Ranger Districts

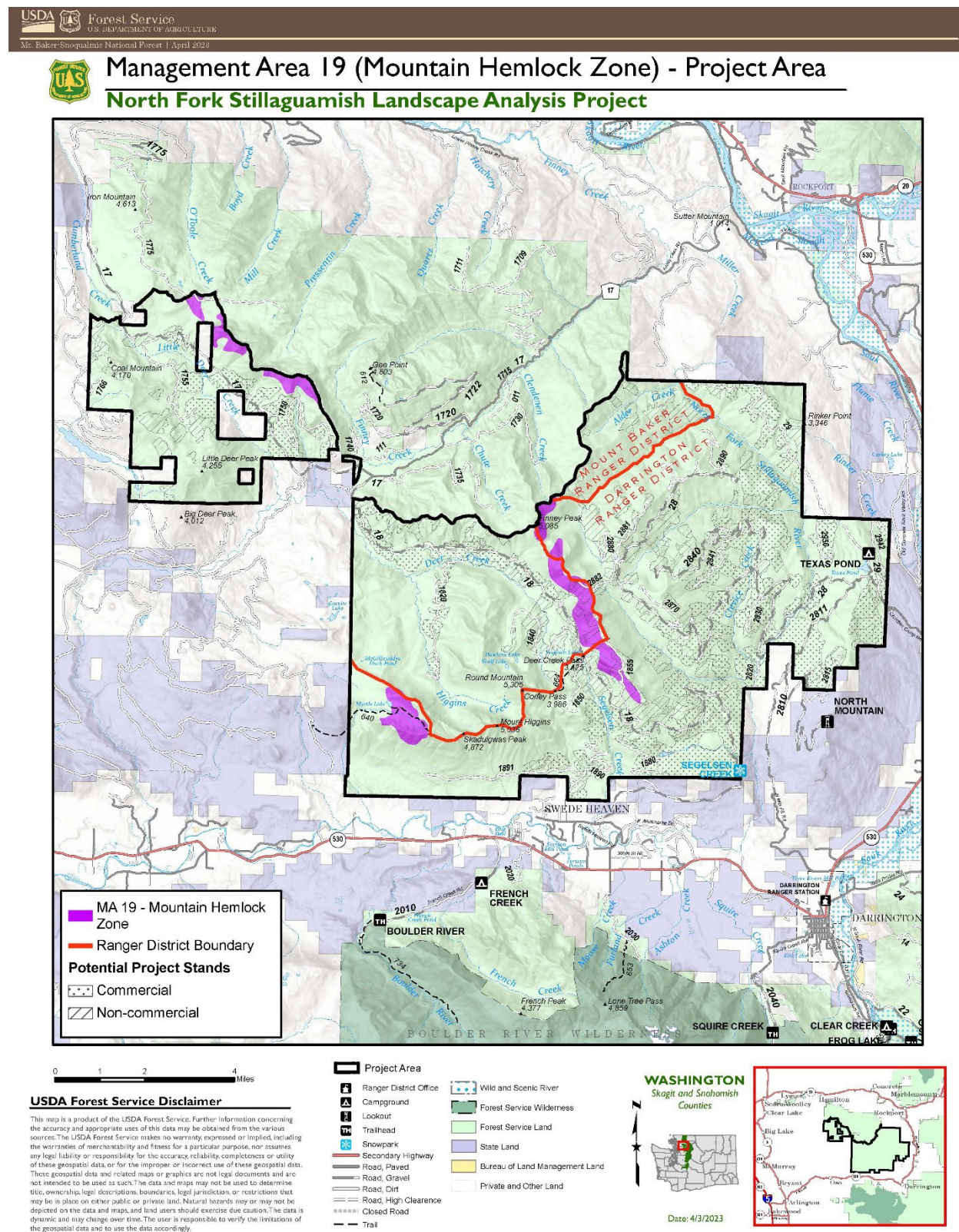


Figure 5. MA-19 North Fork Stillaguamish Project Area

Including specific information in a decision document (§ 219.14) – My rationale for approving this plan amendment is documented in the “Rationale for the Decision” section. I have provided an explanation of how the plan components meet the sustainability requirements of § 219.8 through § 219.11 in the section below, along with a statement of how the plan amendment applies to the project.

Giving public notice (§ 219.16) – Comments were invited on the plan amendment during scoping and on the draft EA (EA at 84). A 30-day public scoping period was provided starting on April 22, 2022, with publication of a legal notice in the Everett Herald, Everett, Washington (the newspaper of record). A 30-day public comment period was provided starting February 14, 2023, with publication of a legal notice in the Everett Herald, Everett, Washington. Public notifications were also posted online.

Providing an objection opportunity (subpart B) – A 45-day objection filing period – A 45-day objection filing period was provided on the final EA and draft Decision Notice and FONSI, pursuant to 36 CFR 219 Subpart B. Refer to “Administrative Review” section of the Draft Decision Notice.

Directly Related Substantive Requirements of 36 CFR 219.8 through 219.11

I have reviewed the following specific substantive rule requirements contained in sections 219.8 through 219.11 and determined which requirements directly relate to this amendment. For each substantive requirement that relates, I have examined the effects of the amendment and concluded that those effects are not contrary to these requirements.

The following substantive provisions (36 CFR 219) were found to be directly related to the proposed Forest Plan Amendment. The analysis does not directly address all substantive requirements of the current rule that differ from those in the 1982 rule.

36 CFR 219.8(b)(5) – Cultural and historic resources and uses

A cultural resource may be many things, including valuable plant resources such as huckleberry patches, or areas of rare plants. According to a study performed by the Tulalip Tribe, maintaining an adequate supply and access to plants, like mountain huckleberry, on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest is critical to Tulalip and other area tribes. Huckleberries tend to decline as the tree canopy becomes denser and to increase after canopy reduction. A history of fire suppression along with the creation of Late Successional Reserves under the Northwest Forest Plan amendment have limited the creation of openings, causing the spatial distribution of mountain huckleberry habitat to decline (Bill et al., 2015).

The high elevation areas of MA-19 can be well suited for native huckleberry species, which need moderate to full sun exposure for flowering and berry production. The proposed forest plan amendment would eliminate existing direction requiring consistency with a non-existent study plan to undertake activities designed to enhance huckleberry habitat. This would make it easier for the forest and tribal co-managers to implement huckleberry enhancement and restoration activities.

36 CFR 219.9(a)(2) – Ecosystem diversity

Contributing to ecosystem diversity, timber management activities in MA-19 would be limited to those needed to improve habitat diversity, including huckleberry enhancement. Treatments would primarily consist of non-commercial silvicultural activities to promote huckleberry habitat, enhance habitat for a variety of wildlife species, promote a more diverse mosaic of forest conditions on the landscape, and provide increased connectivity of limited habitat.

36 CFR 219.10(a)(5) – Habitat conditions, subject to the requirements of §219. 9 for wildlife, fish, and plants commonly enjoyed and used by the public; for hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, observing, subsistence, and other activities (in collaboration with federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other Federal agencies, and State and local governments);

Wildlife benefits are expected to result from the proposed plan amendment. Areas treated pursuant to this amendment direction would provide localized increases in forage for a variety of wildlife from bears to birds, as well as providing nectaring plants with a variety of pollinator species from butterflies to bumble bees. See also 36 CFR 219.8(b)(5) – Cultural and historic resources and uses addressed above.

36 CFR 219.11(c) – Timber harvest for purposes other than timber production.

These lands are normally characterized by heavy snowfall accumulations and a very short growing season. MA-19 was classified as “not suitable” for timber production in the Forest Plan because existing knowledge, research, and experience did not provide reasonable assurance of reforestation success within 5 years after final harvest (36 CFR 219(c)(3)). (Forest Plan 4-257). This forest plan amendment would not change that determination. MA-19 would remain classified as “not suited” for timber production.

I have reviewed the effects analysis of the amendment in the final EA, and I have concluded that the amendment has met, and its effects are not contrary to, the directly related substantive requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule, 36 CFR Part 219 sections 219.8 through 219.11.

Forest Service Road 2810000 (North Mountain Road)

In addition, the Forest Service will move forward with the termination of easements, removing Forest Service Jurisdiction from Forest Service Road 2810000 (North Mountain Road) from MP 0.47 to MP 6.65. This road no longer is needed for the administration of National Forest System lands. The Forest Service will no longer control public access over this portion of road. Public access will be controlled and determined by the underlying landowners and remaining easement holders. Forest Service access to the North Mountain Lookout will be by way of the 2811 and 2800 roads along with the upper portion of the 2810 road which the Forest Service will continue to manage. See Figure 6.

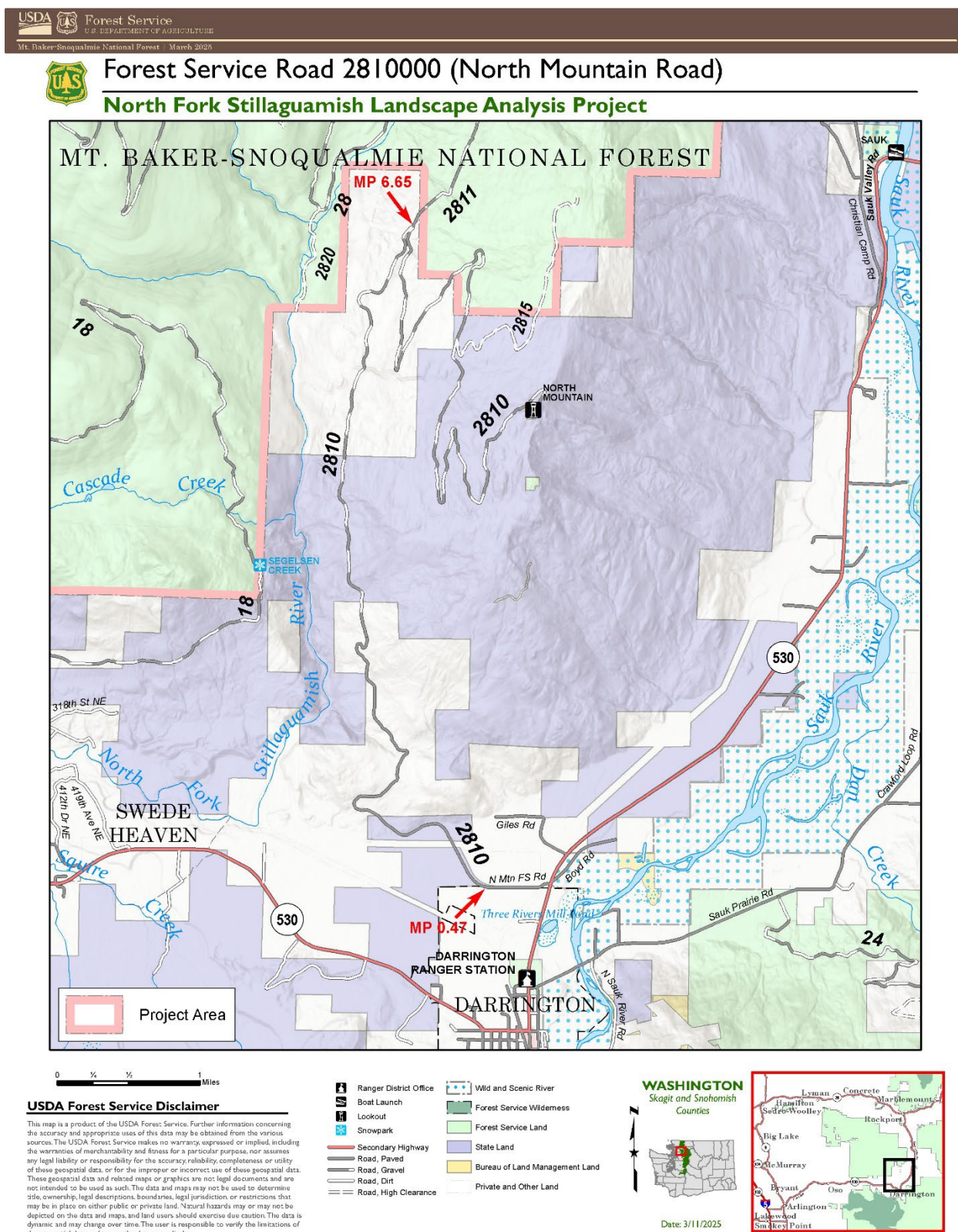


Figure 6. Forest Service Road 2810000 - North Mountain Road

Rationale for the Decision

This project is the result of our interdisciplinary process over the past year, which aims to provide for the varied, and sometimes contrasting, things we are charged with managing under the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960. This Act highlights the challenges of land management: *“It is the policy of Congress that the National Forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes.”* Our forests are productive, unique and complex.

I must also keep in mind that the implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act, 40 CFR 1500, under which this analysis and decision are issued, direct us to “use all practicable means, consistent with the requirements of the Act and other essential considerations of national policy, to restore and enhance the quality of the *human environment* and avoid or minimize any possible adverse effects of their actions upon the quality of the *human environment*”⁷. I emphasize the human environment because therein lies the management challenge. From talking with the ID Team and other agencies, local Tribes, local communities, other partners, and interested members of the public, I know cultural areas and outdoor recreation are valued, and there are concerns about traditional uses of forest products. Forest roads are appreciated for both recreation and for industry benefit. Large old-growth trees are also valued, for protecting listed species and providing high quality fish and wildlife habitat, as well as complex early seral habitat for forage, nectar, and other associated species. Water quality, soil stability and how National Forest road systems interact with these natural resources remains a public concern. More action is desired by the Forest Service to improve watershed health and aquatic organism habitat. Because every acre can’t support every one of these qualities, I rely on your input and on our interdisciplinary discussions to help me weigh those values, and to work with my team to make an informed decision about what actions will best address these values and meet the purpose and need for the project.

Tribal and public comments were carefully considered during project development, including mitigation measures and project design criteria to reduce or eliminate environmental impacts. My decision is responsive to these as it is important to me to show the public how I considered their comments and how those comments made a difference in my decision.

Regional Ecosystem Office Review: Removal of Large Trees (>20” DBH) and Finney AMA

As required by the NWFP S&Gs (per page C-11), an LSRA was prepared for all LSRs on the Forest (Forest-wide LSR Assessment) in 2001. The silvicultural activities described within the LSRAs were evaluated by the ID silviculturist and were identified as consistent with criteria. On May 5, 2023, the North Fork Stillaguamish Project (Project) review by the Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) Interagency Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) Workgroup concurred with the Forest’s findings that the proposed Project’s actions meet the objectives of the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Standards and Guidelines (S&G’s) for LSRs. With this determination, subsequent project level REO reviews are not needed for implementation of this project. The Project is located within the 85,677-acre LSR 802, which is the only LSR on the Forest that is not contiguous with other Federal Land; it lies entirely within the Finney Adaptive management Area (AMA).

In addition, the Forest prepared the Finney Adaptive Management Area Plan and requested REO review of that plan in 2010. Adaptive Management Areas are landscape units that are designed to encourage forest managers to develop and test technical and social approaches to achieving desired ecological, economic and other social objectives. The emphasis for the 98,400-acre Finney AMA is restoration of late-successional and riparian habitat components (page D-13). The REO’s comments back to the Forest

⁷ 40 CFR 1500.2(f), <https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/ECFR?page=browse>

on January 28, 2011, found that generally, “the emphasis of the Finney AMA plan is consistent with that outlined in the NWFP Standards and Guidelines (page D-13) for maintenance and restoration of pacific silver fir late-successional old growth forest and riparian habitat components.” The Finney AMA Plan included some innovative treatment approaches, which are proposed as a part of this Project. One such innovation is that Variable Density Thinning (VDT) gaps, or areas of non-uniform openings, would be 0.5 to 2 acres in size as outlined in the Finney AMA Plan. Gaps, or openings, in LSR would normally be restricted to 0.25 acres in size.

Riparian Reserve Thinning and Water Quality

Many commenters were concerned about thinning actions in riparian areas, particularly when combined with higher slope gradients. Concerns were expressed regarding the potential impacts to water quality, including increased sedimentation and stream temperature. As a result, I have selected the greater riparian reserve buffers from Alternative 3, to further reduce any potential impacts to the watershed and aquatic habitat.

Roads

Roads are a common point of contention in planning efforts on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. I have carefully weighed interest in maintaining access, and resource concerns such as sedimentation, fish habitat, and elk or other wildlife species security. The proposed action includes decommissioning 12.12 miles of road that will improve resource conditions with limited impacts on Forest user access. My decision also includes a suite of transportation and road related watershed restoration actions, including storm proofing, that will improve the hydrologic function of the road network related to resource conditions. EA at 10-16. The Forest has an obligation to reduce its overall road system in order to reduce the amount of resources required for maintenance. However, roads serve multiple user groups, allowing visitors to access recreation areas, providing access for Tribal members to reserved hunting, fishing and gathering areas and supporting access to timber harvest. Roads also provide access for emergency and wildland firefighting activity. While both Alternatives 2 and 3 account for these needs and uses, I have selected the proposed road actions from Alternative 2 with less road decommissioning.

Soil Stability & Landslide Risk

I deeply respect the community’s concerns regarding soil landslide risk in our area. I also strongly support the project design criteria brought forward by the project’s ID team to reduce this risk. The ID team used GIS analysis and slope stability models to assess soil stability throughout the project area and known areas of highly unstable soils have already been dropped. Landforms with slope stability concerns will be identified by qualified resource specialist with appropriate knowledge and training. Review and identification of known or potential unstable landforms in the project area will occur prior to implementation. No-cut buffers will be identified by a qualified resource specialist prior to implementation. Only thinning silvicultural prescriptions will be implemented as part of this project. I am comfortable with the assessments of our specialists and confirm their expertise and experience in this field. There will be no treatment stands in areas of unstable soils.

I recognize that some members of the public are very passionate about what they felt was best for the land, but in considering all the comments received, I find that there is no single management strategy that could totally satisfy all concerns that were expressed. I believe my decision addresses the major concerns, but I recognize that it is not likely to resolve conflicting points of view. My decision to implement Alternative 2 modified with Alternative 3 Riparian Reserve buffers will be implemented in a series of entries. These actions will serve to provide protection for resources, accelerate the development of late successional and old-growth forest characteristics, improve the aquatic and terrestrial environment and address impacts to water quality, enhance huckleberry productivity, improve recreation opportunities, provide a steady supply of renewable forest products, and maintain or improve Forest health and vigor.

In making the decision, I evaluated the environmental consequences of the alternatives considered along with the science referenced in the analysis. I considered how each alternative addresses the purpose and need for the project, and complies with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. I reviewed and considered the range of public comments submitted throughout the project planning process. The project, including application of the design criteria and mitigation measures, will not substantially affect wildlife, fisheries, vegetation, heritage, or mineral resources. My decision meets requirements under the Forest Plan, the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and all other applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

Alternatives Considered

In addition to the action alternatives (Alternatives 2 and 3), I considered one other alternative, the no action alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA at page 8-9 in Table 6. The no action alternative is described in the EA at page 10.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

In addition to the alternatives fully analyzed in the EA, I considered ten alternatives with the ID team, but for various reasons, these were eliminated from detailed study. These alternatives are described in Appendix D of the EA.

Tribal, Public, and Agency Involvement

Tribal Consultation

The Forest Service has a duty to consult and coordinate with Tribes on a government-to-government basis (Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments). Government-to-Government Consultation is a process that enables Tribes to provide meaningful, timely input and, as appropriate, exchange views, information, and recommendations on Forest Service proposed policies or actions that may affect tribal rights or interests prior to a decision. FSM 1563.05. As part of Government-to-Government Consultation the Forest Service fully considers information from and recommendations of tribes and addresses tribal concerns on proposed decisions. FSM 1563.11(5). The Forest Service also informs Tribes how their information and recommendations were considered in Forest Service decisions, including explanations in the event that tribal recommendations are not adopted or incorporated. FSM 1563.11(6).

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and Tribal representatives meet periodically to discuss new and ongoing concerns, partnership opportunities, and issues that may Tribes, the exercise of treaty rights, and the protection of sacred and spiritual sites. The Forest Service recognizes the long history of Tribes harvesting and managing for sustainability, fish, animals, plants and other resources, and their integral role in the stewardship of these lands, now managed by the Forest Service to meet their subsistence, spiritual, cultural, and medicinal needs, and for the purposes of trade and commerce.

Project-specific consultation with the following Tribes was invited during the development of this EA: Samish Indian Nation, Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, Upper Skagit Tribe, Stillaguamish Tribe, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, and Tulalip Tribes. In a letter addressed to each of the Tribal chairpersons, the Darrington District Ranger requested information on Tribal interests or knowledge of cultural uses or properties, concerns about possible effects on historic properties of religious or cultural significance, or information on reserved treaty rights within the project area.

The Darrington District Ranger and Staff met with Tribes to discuss their questions and concerns for the North Fork Stillaguamish project area. Concerns raised by Tribes included the following:

- Restoration of traditional food, medicinal or technical resources, and access for elders to these locations
- Protection of archaeological, sacred and traditional properties, and maintaining the suitability of these areas for cultural and spiritual uses in perpetuity
- Continued access to treaty-reserved resources, and access for elders to these locations
- Shared stewardship opportunities on the national forest with tribes
- Water quality, and fish habitat, including habitat for all salmonid species in addition to those listed as threatened or endangered under ESA and access to those resources
- Wildlife habitat, including elk security and forage, beaver and mountain goat reintroductions
- Climate change and USFS appropriate adaptive response
- Need for careful management of recreation use to address potential environmental impacts to forest lands and to reserved treaty rights/cultural uses given increasing numbers of visitors on the MBS

The effects of the proposed action and alternatives were evaluated with consideration for both written and verbal responses received from Tribes regarding Tribal interest and Treaty reserved rights that could be affected by the project.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in April 2022 and has been listed on subsequent SOPAs on a quarterly schedule. The initial proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for a 30-day scoping comment period on April 22, 2022. Legal notice was published in the Everett Herald, and 2,346 scoping notifications were sent. A public meeting regarding the project was hosted on May 18, 2022. 45 scoping letters were received. The Draft Environmental Analysis was made available to the public on the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest website on February 14, 2023, the beginning of the 30-day comment period. 28 public comments were received. Complete mailing lists and all letters and emails received are in the project record.

In addition, as part of the public involvement process, public meetings, and field trips for interested parties, tribal governments, and other organizations were held on several dates. Between 20-30 members of the public attended or participated in these events. More detailed information is available in the project record.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

I have evaluated the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), taking into consideration both the context and intensity of the effects. After considering the environmental effects described in the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Restoration Project Environmental Assessment, specialist reports, and background information contained in the Project Record, I have determined that the Selected Alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. As a result, no environmental impact statement will be prepared. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

Context

For the proposed action and alternatives the context of the environmental effects is based on the environmental analysis in this EA and specialist reports incorporated by reference herein. The disclosure of effects in the EA may differ by the resource being analyzed and by the scale of analysis. Multiple scales and levels of analysis were used to determine the significance of the actions' effects on the human environment.

This project is limited in scope and duration. The project was designed to minimize environmental effects through use of project design criteria and mitigation measures. I assessed the anticipated environmental effects of the action alternatives, as detailed in the EA section Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives (EA at 26-85), in terms of context and intensity, and I found them to be localized, minor, and short-term. The EA implements direction set forth in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, USDA 1990) as amended by the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (Northwest Forest Plan/NWFP, USDA and USDI 1994). The MBS totals around 1.76 million acres of NFS lands (1,762,383 acres). The Darrington and Mt. Baker Ranger Districts encompass about 1,094,048 acres of those NFS lands. The North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis project encompasses less than 6% of these districts with 61,849 NFS acres. Alternative 2 would allow up to 16,061 acres of commercial, non-commercial, and habitat improvement vegetation treatments, and approximately 194 miles of road maintenance. Many of these miles and/or acres of treatment overlap in space and time (i.e. multiple treatment on a single acre/mile). Even when considered as such, this represents approximately 1.2% of the MBS acreage, and represents approximately 2% of the districts NFS lands acreage.

Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of this EA and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. We have taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project, as described above, and intensity of effects, as described above, using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse are discussed in Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives of the EA (EA at 26-85). These impacts are within the range of those identified in the Forest Plan. The actions will not have significant impacts on other resources identified and described

in Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives. Adverse effects from the action alternatives will be minimized or eliminated through application of project design criteria and mitigation measures (EA Appendix B).

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

No significant effects to public health or safety are anticipated. Some comments received regarding the draft EA requested forest roads remain open and accessible for emergency use and firefighting. Road maintenance and decommissioning analysis considered these uses. Selecting Alternative 2 allows for greater use of Forest Service roads for these purposes.

Short-term safety hazards such as log truck traffic and falling trees near roads or trails will be mitigated through removal of hazard trees and contract safety provisions. The project also contains a variety of project design criteria to protect public health and safety during project implementation (EA Appendix B).

There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because this project proposal does not affect any unique geographical characteristics such as parklands, prime farmlands, or rangeland (EA at 83). There are no designated wild and scenic rivers within the project area, however, limited portions of the project area are within the viewshed of the Skagit, Sauk and Suiattle rivers (EA at 57). This project incorporates design criteria to reduce impacts to the viewshed of these scenic and recreational rivers and retain natural features of the landscape (EA Appendix B).

Implementing this decision will improve the connectivity of floodplains, help create refugia from high flow events, and increase instream and off-channel fish habitats by replacing failing structures and adding instream wood to increase habitat connectivity and complexity (EA at 47-51). Project design criteria will minimize erosion and sediment delivery to wetlands and floodplains (EA at 40-51, Appendix B).

The areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities will be surveyed and evaluated for the presence of heritage resources. Areas with historic or cultural resources will be avoided, buffered, or otherwise protected. Known cultural resource sites in the project area will be protected through implementation of project design criteria, as well as any potential new sites that may be uncovered (EA at 33-37, Appendix B).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. However, I recognize that there are differing opinions held by some members of the public on the management actions in this project. The level of interest in what course of action to take regarding forest management (social controversy) is not the focus of this criterion; rather the focus is on the degree of scientific controversy over the effects of the proposed project.

Some commenters provided lists of what they deemed scientific papers which disputed or provided alternative information to the scientific reports that were used to analyze the effects of the NF Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis project. Submitted scientific papers were reviewed but were not found to provide information that would alter my considerations for this project. I have found the scientific literature used by Forest Service specialists to be the best available and most applicable science. No significant disagreements have been identified with the disclosure of effects in the EA. While some comments differed with the conclusion that the proposed action would affirmatively respond to the purpose and need, the reasons for this difference appear to be based on opinions, not scientific evidence related to effects. I am not aware of any credible, peer-reviewed scientific questioning of the methods

used in this analysis, nor its results. During scoping, 30-day public review of the draft EA, and effects analysis, no scientific controversy over unacceptable effects was identified.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The Forest Service, and the MBS specifically, has considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented by this project. Similar types of terrestrial and watershed restoration actions, transportation system treatments, recreation activities, and other connected or similar actions have occurred on this district, this forest, and other National Forests. Commercial (variable density) and non-commercial thinning, road work, and recreation management are common practices, and the effects are well known. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (EA at 26-85). The best available scientific information provided the foundation for designing this project, including associated project design criteria and mitigation measures. I am satisfied that the alternatives, as designed, and the effects disclosed in the EA present no highly uncertain or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because it does not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented to meet the goals and objectives of the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended. The amendment proposed for this project is programmatic, with only a potential 300 acres proposed for implementation in this project. Future decisions for any other project would be based on consideration of relevant scientific and site-specific information available at that time.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The cumulative impacts of this project and past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, within or adjacent to the project area, will not result in significant impacts. This determination is based on the results of cumulative effects analyses discussed in the EA. Each resource effects analysis contained in the EA discusses cumulative effects; none was found to be significant (EA at 26-85).

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Project activities will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because any physical impact proposed prior to implementation, not previously reviewed, will be evaluated for potential adverse effects (EA at 33-37). Implementation of project design criteria will ensure that if any sites are uncovered during project implementation, effects, if any, to cultural resources will be minimal (EA Appendix B).

Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be accomplished over the life of the project in accordance with 36 CFR 800.1(c): The agency official must complete the section 106 process prior to the approval of the expenditure of any Federal funds on the undertaking or prior to the issuance of any license. This does not prohibit agency official from conducting or authorizing nondestructive project planning activities before completing compliance with section 106, provided that such actions do not restrict the subsequent consideration of alternatives to avoid, minimize or mitigate the undertaking's adverse effects on historic properties (EA at 37).

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

The project will result in the following effects to fish and wildlife listed under the ESA:

- *Likely to Adversely Affect* the northern spotted owl and designated critical habitat due to noise disturbance that may occur during the breeding season. Removal of primary constituent elements would not substantially change the suitability of the critical habitat.
- *Likely to Adversely Affect* the marbled murrelet and designated critical habitat due to noise disturbance that may occur during the breeding season. Removal of primary constituent elements would not substantially change the suitability of the critical habitat.
- *May Affect, Not likely to Adversely Affect* the grizzly bear and gray wolf.
- *May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect* Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout; and their critical habitats.
- *May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect* Chinook, coho, and pink salmon essential fish habitats (EFH) (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act).
- *No Effect* to *Pinus albicaulus*.

Consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), as required under section 7 of the ESA has been completed. For this project, the consultation process is covered through a combination of standalone and programmatic documents. See Endangered Species Act Compliance (ESA) for additional information.

The activities proposed under the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis project will not remove or degrade suitable nesting, roosting or foraging habitat for the spotted owl or marbled murrelet. This will greatly limit the extent of potential adverse effects on these two species as well as their critical habitat. While there will be short term adverse disturbance impacts during the nesting season and minor effects, this would not lead to a negative population trend. In the long term, these treatments will be beneficial in terms of habitat development and resilience to climate change (EA at 74-77).

Activities would impact less than 0.6 percent of the federal acres' contribution to the Finney Bear Management Unit and would not substantially reduce security habitat provided in the Finney Bear Management Unit for grizzly bear. This project would decrease open road density and contribute to additional core or security habitat acres for both grizzly bear and gray wolf. While there may be short term, minor disturbance impacts from the proposed activities, longer term effects would be beneficial in terms of increased food resources and habitat security (EA at 71-83).

Overall, project activities are expected to have a long-term benefit from reduced potential for road failures and road-related sedimentation of spawning and rearing habitats, increased habitat complexity, and stability, improved riparian area function, and increased accessibility of habitats past barriers (EA at 51).

Pinus albicaulis, (whitebark pine) typically grows near timberline, within and above the subalpine zone. There are no proposed actions within the subalpine zone. In addition, the project area is outside the indicated US Fish and Wildlife Service's range for the species, and no occurrences have been documented in the project area. In addition, vegetation management is not a threat to the species (EA at 31-32).

The project is not likely to result in a loss of population viability, nor cause a trend toward federal listing for Forest Service Sensitive Species, would not contribute to a negative trend in the viability of management indicator species on the Forest, and would not contribute toward the need for additional conservation action for neotropical migratory bird species (EA at 51-52, 77-82).

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (EA at 83-85). The action is consistent with the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie Land and Resource Management Plan (EA at 83).

Findings Required By Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land Management Plan, as amended. The project was designed in accordance with the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act, as amended by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and its implementing regulations codified at Title 36, Part 219 of the Code of Federal Regulations. It also was developed in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 40, Part 1508.27). These regulations require specific findings to support decisions subject to NEPA. These findings include (1) Finding of No Significant Impact (see page 20-25 of this decision) and (2) Finding of Consistency with Management Direction for the Forest Plan (EA at 83).

Finding of Consistency with Management Direction for the Forest Plan

From the results of site-specific analysis documented in the EA, I conclude that this action is consistent with the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (EA, Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives section). The project was designed in conformance with the long-term goals and objectives of the land and resource management plan and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan standards and guidelines for soils, wildlife habitat, riparian and fisheries habitat, vegetation, water, air quality, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, and land management allocations.

After reviewing the EA and actions associated with Alternative 2, modified with Alternative 3 Riparian Reserve buffers, I find this decision is consistent with applicable statutory laws, policies, and regulations (EA, Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives section) including:

National Forest Management Act Compliance (NFMA)

Requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-588), including its amendments to the Forest and Range Renewable Resource Planning Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-378) would be met. This decision is tiered to the 1990 Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Management direction comes from the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1990) as amended by the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (USDA USDI 1994) and is designed to meet or exceed the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy as set forth in the Northwest Forest Plan.

As required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) Section 1604(i), I find this project to be consistent with the Forest Plan (the EA Proposed Action and Alternatives section discloses information on the activities proposed in each alternative along with design criteria in Appendix B, Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives section of the EA discloses information on the environmental effects of implementing each alternative and the findings of consistency with the Forest Plan and applicable laws, regulations, and policies).

Endangered Species Act Compliance (ESA)

Consultation with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) for North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis has been completed. This final decision includes project level requirements identified in NMFS Biological Opinion (BO). These requirements are related to minimizing and/or monitoring the effects of pertinent project elements on Federally listed species, and have been incorporated into the project design criteria and mitigation measures included in Appendix B of this DN.

Consultation with NMFS was initiated on January 23, 2024, and was completed on January 15, 2025 when NMFS issued a BO (WCRO-2024-00078) on the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Project, concluding that the proposed action would adversely affect but is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Puget Sound (PS) Chinook salmon and PS Sound steelhead, nor is it likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for either of these species. NMFS also provided an Incidental Take Statement which includes reasonable and prudent measures (RPMs) and their nondiscretionary terms and conditions, which will be implemented as part of this decision. NMFS also concluded the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect southern resident killer whales and their designated critical habitat.

Consultation with FWS formally began on May 13, 2024. On March 19, 2025, USFWS issued a BO (FWS/R1/2023-0096058) on the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Olympic National Forest's, Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest's, and Gifford Pinchot National Forest's Western Washington Collaboration Zone for Timber and Routine Activities on the Western Washington restoration and collaboration zone (WWRCZ). A consistency determination found that actions proposed in the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis project fit within the actions considered and addressed in the programmatic consultation, including effects to marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, Mount Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan, and bull trout and their designated critical habitats and potential effects to grizzly bear, gray wolf, North American wolverine, and Canada lynx.

The programmatic Forest Plan amendment applies to all areas of MA-19 across the forest, however there are no ground disturbing actions on any MA-19 areas outside of the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis project boundary, therefore there would be no direct or indirect effects on these areas. There is no requirement under the ESA for consultation on project activities with "no effect" determinations; therefore, only the acres that will be non-commercially thinned for huckleberry enhancement were addressed in ESA consultation. Additional consultation may be required to implement future project actions in MA-19. When a plan is amended programmatically all future projects and activities must be consistent with the amended plan.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation

NMFS determined the actions would adversely affect designated freshwater Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for Pacific Coast Salmon, which include Chinook, coho, and pink salmon. NMFS has provided conservation recommendations to avoid, minimize, or otherwise offset potential adverse effects on EFH. NMFS also concluded the actions would not adversely affect EFH for Pacific Coast groundfish, and coastal pelagic species.

Biological Opinions

This final decision includes project level requirements identified in NMFS Biological Opinion and included in Appendix B of this DN. Additionally, PDCs included FWS BO that are applicable to project

activities will be followed. These requirements are related to minimizing and/or monitoring the effects of pertinent project elements on Federally listed species.

Implementation Date

I reviewed the EA and believe there is adequate information to provide a reasoned choice of action. Implementing the selected alternative will cause no unacceptable cumulative impact to any resource. Implementation may occur immediately following the issuance of a final decision. The amendment to the Forest Plan will also be effective upon the signing of the final decision.

Minor changes may be needed during implementation to better meet on-site resource management and protection objectives. In determining whether and what kind of further NEPA action is required, we will consider the criteria at FSH 1090.15, sec. 18. Connected or interrelated proposed changes regarding particular areas or specific activities will be considered together in making this determination. The cumulative impacts of these changes will also be considered.

Administrative Review and Objection

As provided by the Pre-decisional Administrative Review process under 36 CFR 218 Subpart A for Forest Service proposed actions implementing land and resource management plan activities documented with a Record of Decision or Decision Notice, legal notice of the objection was published in The Everett Daily Herald on April 14, 2023. The 45-day objection period ended on May 29, 2023, with 11 objections received. A legal notice of interested parties was published in the Everett Daily Herald on June 2, 2023. No responses were received.

The Objecting Reviewing Officer, Deputy Regional Forester Laura Schweitzer, reviewed the objections. The reviewing official met with nine of the objectors in a formal resolution meeting on July 12, 2023, and statements were read on behalf of the two objectors who could not attend. She issued written responses to objectors on August 10, 2023, supporting the final decision based on her review. The objection responses are included in the project record.

Contact Person

For further information, contact Melissa Shelley, Forest Environmental Coordinator at melissa.shelley@usda.gov

Responsible Official


JODY WEIL
Forest Supervisor
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest


Date