
File Code: 1950

Date: 8/14/2017

NEPA Project Notification

Dear Partners, Stakeholders, and Interested members of the public

I am proposing to restore approximately 12 miles of instream habitat and reduce tree density on approximately 157 acres of riparian stands and within the North Fork Area in the Cispus River corridor. You are receiving this letter because you have requested to be notified of such proposals on national forest system (NFS) lands where activities are being proposed. The following information is provided to allow you an opportunity to review and comment on this proposal. The project is located on NFS lands in Lewis County, Washington south of Randle WA off Forest Road 23. The Upper Cispus subbasin contributes to the Cowlitz River located approx. 20 miles downstream. Approximately 70 percent of the Upper Cispus watershed is forested with an average precipitation of 84.3 inches annually (USFS 1995). The Cispus River and North Fork Cispus River make up the Upper Cispus watershed, with a combined area of nearly 251 square miles, spanning a vertical relief of 10,900 ft. from the confluence at river mile 20.0 (1,370 ft.) to its glacial headwaters on Mt Adams (12,281 ft.). See Figure 1 and Figure 2 for the general project location.

Proposed Action

Instream restoration areas where aquatic features would be treated include the channel bottom, flood prone area and lower bank slope ranging up to 180 feet from water's edge. There are approximately 100 sites where wood structures may be placed totaling less than 6 acres of disturbance. The proposed stream segments where channel structure is lacking are identified in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.

Large wood, boulders and other structures (e.g., engineered log jams and porous boulder weirs) would be incorporated into streams in areas where they would naturally occur, and would simulate disturbance events such as log jams, wind-throw and tree breakage. Large wood may be whole conifer and hardwood trees, logs, and root wads. Log structures would be patterned after natural log features to restore channel complexity, reconnect floodplain and side channel habitat and diffuse downstream flood peaks. Partial burial of large wood and boulders may occur for stability, and grade control structures and minimal stream re-routing may be required.

Structures would maintain natural free flow and only partially span stream channels, or be positioned along stream banks. Equipment such as excavators, dump trucks, front-end loaders and similar equipment may be used to implement such projects. These activities would help to restore channel function and process.

Approximately 157 acres of dense riparian forests would be treated selectively thinned from below to approximately 50 % canopy closure and create down wood averaging around 15-24 inches diameter-at-breast-height. The treatment would cut approximately 25 trees per acre while creating small openings (15 ft. radius) around selected dominant leave trees; this would provide enough downed wood to obtain approximately 3-5% ground coverage and promote the large tree



development of approximately six trees per acre. The remaining surplus cut trees would be used as large wood in stream improvement. Downed wood to be retained on site would consist primarily of Douglas fir and may be salvaged with root wads attached (i.e., tipped trees). Trees would be cut using chainsaws, hand tools, or ground based machinery.

Table 1. Instream Restoration Project Areas

| Stream Name | Beginning River Mile | Ending River Mile | Total River Miles* |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Cispus River | 20 | 29 | 8 |
| North Fork Cispus River | 3 | 8 | 3.5 |
| East Canyon Creek | 0 | 0.5 | 0.5 |

*All values rounded to the nearest 0.5 mile.

Table 2. Riparian Reserve Forest Improvement Areas

| Unit # | Stand ID | Sale Name | HUC 10 | Acres |
|--------|----------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 2 | 531528 | Wobbly | North Fork Cispus River | 1.4 |
| 3 | 531530 | Wobbly | | 0.7 |
| 6 | 530675 | Wobbly | | 10.0 |
| 10 | 530644 | Bishop | | 2.0 |
| 11 | 530629 | Jackpot Thin | | 4.0 |
| 17 | 530522 | Jackpot Thin | | 5.0 |
| 19 | 530520 | Jackpot Thin | | 2.0 |
| 27 | 529044 | Valley | | Cispus River |
| 28 | 529719 | Blue | 1.0 | |
| 29 | 529021 | Blue | 1.0 | |
| 30 | 529656 | Blue | 4.0 | |
| 31 | 529054 | Blue | 11.0 | |
| 32 | 529658 | Blue | 7.0 | |
| 33 | 530057 | Valley | 30.0 | |
| 34 | 530036 | Blue | 26.0 | |
| 35 | 530181 | Valley | 7.0 | |
| 42 | 529001 | Blue Thin | 9.0 | |
| 44 | 539242 | Blue Thin | 9.0 | |
| 45 | 539151 | Peak Thin | 1.0 | |

Purpose of and Need for Action

Several federally listed fish species inhabit the alluvial valley bottoms which provide high inherent habitat potential promoting the Cispus River corridor as a key watershed (USDA USDI 1994). This includes Lower Columbia River Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Lower Columbia River coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and Lower Columbia River steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), all of which have been listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, along with Proposed or Designated Critical Habitat for each species. Many streams in the area are lacking naturally occurring channel structures due to past stream cleaning (i.e., removal of large wood) and timber harvest, and wood supplies are low due to anthropogenic disruptions (USDA 2004). Limited structural diversity (e.g. deep pools, log

complexes, gravel substrate) and accelerated channel lateral movement restrict spawning and rearing potential for the threatened fish in the project area. Project work would occur in stream channels and adjacent floodplains to increase channel stability, pool formation, spawning gravel deposition, channel complexity, hiding and holding habitat, and floodplain function. Primary design criteria are to slow channel lateral migration reduce width – depth ratio, scour pools and retain spawning gravels.

Instream placement of large wood would help to restore channel function and process. Instream and riparian area treatments would restore channel diversity, adjust geometry, increase channel stability and promote fish habitat features. Structural enhancement would be designed to reduce channel width to depth, increase channel complexity, stabilize bars (e.g., add surface roughness) and promote stream shade through long term retention of bars and their vegetation.

Another component of the project will strategically engineered log jams to stabilize lower banks and protect forest roads where bank erosion threatens to wash out roads. Engineered log jams are preferred over other hard structural enhancements (e.g. rock rip rap) because it maintains the natural character and provides valuable fish habitat for TES species.

Riparian stands would be treated to promote structural development and diversity by non-commercial harvest of surplus small trees and reducing competition around select large leaf trees. Non-commercial thinning within riparian reserves will help manage density to promote stand development and species diversity. Down wood will promote habitat complexity and provide a source of large wood for instream restoration projects along nearby waterways.

This project is being proposed to make progress toward the Forest's goals for management, as described in the *Land and Resource Management Plan for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest* (Forest Plan) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan ("NWFP," USDA and USDI 1994¹); Forest Plan goals relevant to the project are listed below:

- Provide special management for fish and wildlife habitat in riparian areas (Wildlife Forest Management Goal #17, Forest Plan p. IV-3);
- Maintain or enhance habitat for populations of Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species (Wildlife Forest Management Goal #18, Forest Plan p. IV-3);
- Provide, over time, at least the minimum management level of snag and down log habitat (Wildlife Forest Management Goal #20, Forest Plan p. IV-3);
- Maintain and/or enhance fish habitat. Increase the capability of this habitat over time with improvement projects (Fish Forest Management Goal #23, Forest Plan p. IV-3);
- Maintain all riparian areas in a condition which enhances riparian dependent resource values (Vegetation Forest Management Goal #30, Forest Plan p. IV-4);
- Maintain or enhance existing soil productivity and water quality, quantity, and timing of runoff (Forest Management Goal #34, Forest Plan p. 04-4);
- Address Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives (NWFP, p. B-11)

¹ Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl

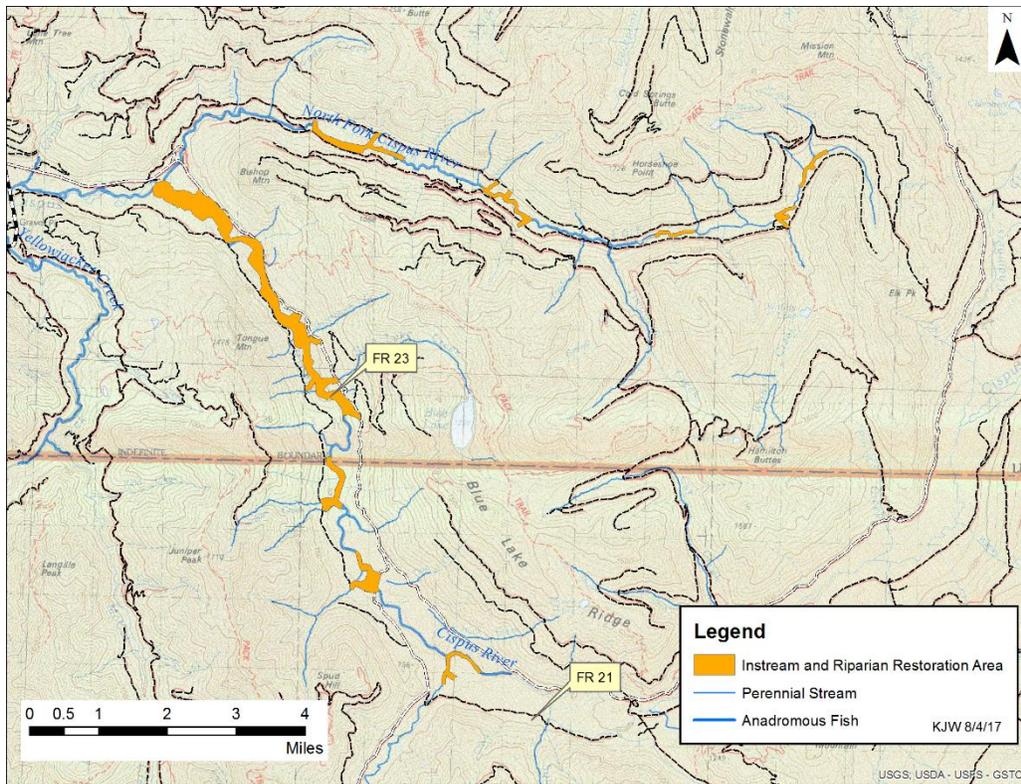


Figure 1. Vicinity Map, North Fork Instream Restoration

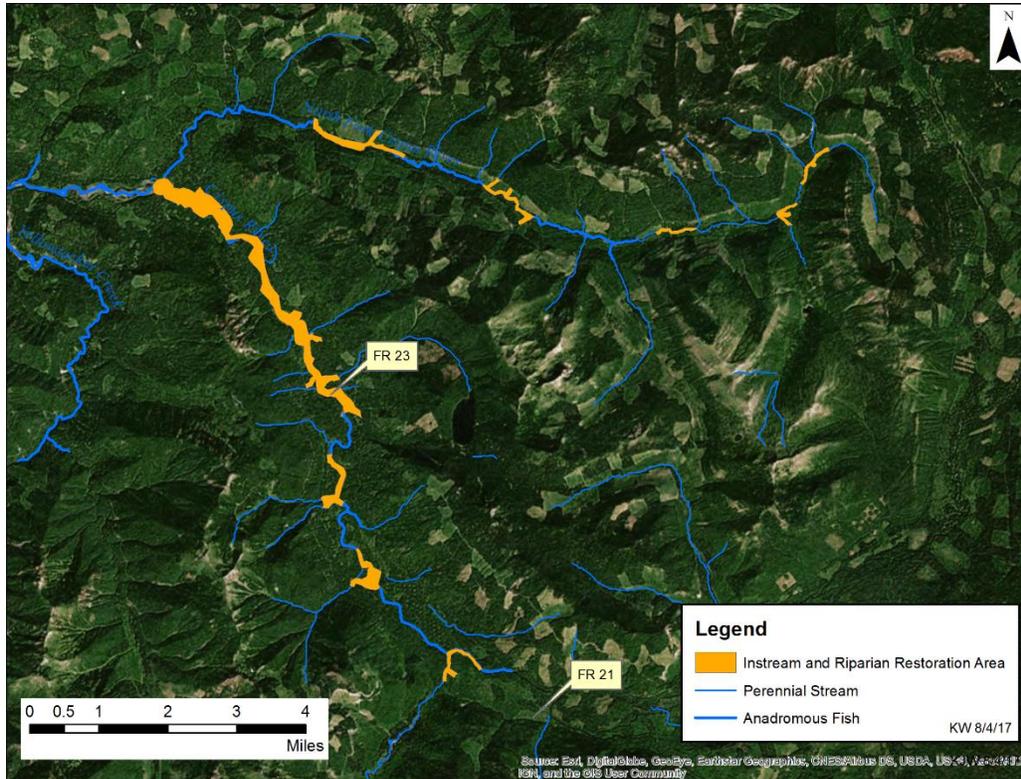


Figure 2. Vicinity Map with Imagery, North Fork Instream Restoration

Decision to be Made and Responsible Official

As Cowlitz Valley District Ranger of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, I am the Responsible Official. I will decide whether to implement the proposed action restoring instream and riparian habitat.

Scoping and Public Involvement

Scoping for this project includes public notification of the proposal and a review of the management direction for the area in the Forest Plan and NWFP, review of the National Forest Management Act, and consultations with Forest Service and other agency resource specialists. This letter is also being distributed to individuals and groups who have requested to be notified of new project proposals. Planning documents can be found on the Forest Service web site at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/giffordpinchot/landmanagement/projects>

You can help in the planning process by sharing any concerns or information you may have about these proposals. The Forest Service will use your comments to help determine the appropriate scope of environmental analysis to conduct. Comments submitted will become part of the public record.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request that a submission be withheld from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that confidentiality is granted in only very limited circumstances. The Forest Service will inform the requester of its decision regarding a request for confidentiality. Where the request is denied, the submission will be returned, and the requester notified that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

How to Submit Comments

Individuals or organizations wishing to comment are requested to do so between the date of this letter and September 15, 2017.

Please provide the following information as part of your comments:

- i. Name and address;
- ii. Title of the proposed action. (*North Fork Instream Restoration*);
- iii. Specific comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
- iv. Signature or other verification of identity upon request.

Comments can be mailed to:

District Ranger Gar Abbas
Cowlitz Valley Ranger District
PO Box 670
Randle, WA 98377

Written comments can be sent by facsimile to: 360-497-1102.

Electronic comments should be in a common digital format and sent to: comments-pacificnorthwest-giffordpinchot-cowlitzvalley@fs.fed.us. To ensure that they are considered, hand-delivered comments must be received at the Cowlitz Valley Ranger Station during normal business hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Additional information

For additional information on the project, please contact Project Team Leader Ken Wieman at kwieman@fs.fed.us or by calling (360) 497-1141.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gar Abbas".

GAR ABBAS
District Ranger