

Forest Service Announces Decision for Jackson Timber Sale

by Jim Scarborough

Thursday, January 31, 2008

On January 30, the U.S. Forest Service released a much-anticipated decision notice for the Jackson Timber Sale, located between Quilcene and Brinnon on the Olympic National Forest. Several years of agency planning, repeated site visits by OFCO and other conservation groups, and voluminous public comment resulted in a final product that most folks can probably live with.

In its original form, the Jackson sale proposal was not without controversy. Much debate derived from plans to log in scenic forest that had regenerated naturally from a succession of settler fires in the late 19th century. This unique maritime forest, centered on the quiet slopes of Mount Walker—a major recreation draw and green backdrop to Hood Canal—is maturing towards eventual old-growth status all on its own. Other concerns stemmed from proposed logging roads that would jeopardize water quality and fish habitat. Opposition from the local community and conservationists was rapid and sincere.

In reviewing the Jackson sale's final version, it's clear that the Forest Service heard the public's input and responded accordingly. We are quite certain that the agency spent many extra hours studying each nuance of the sale, relying on both their professional expertise and the public's stated concerns. Happily, Mount Walker will not be logged as part of this sale, and neither will the equally impressive east slopes of Buck Mountain and Mount Turner across the way, rising tall above Highway 101. Moreover, certain areas in the vicinity of Rocky Brook sporting older forest attributes will also be spared the chainsaw. Temporary and reconstructed logging road mileage has been cut roughly in half from the original proposal.

To be sure, the Jackson sale will still result in the thinning of over 1,500 acres of public forest and involve over three miles of new logging roads on previously unroaded soils (though these roads will be removed to the extent possible after the sale is completed). OFCO remains generally skeptical of agency claims that thinning in western Washington forests over 50 years of age will benefit their development in any way. And we cannot condone the construction of new logging roads, temporary or otherwise, given the maintenance backlog for old roads elsewhere on the forest that threaten the health of our watersheds.

All told, however, the situation is now far brighter for the Jackson sale. Essentially all of the controversial logging proposed in older, scenic forests has been eliminated. National Forest acreage on Mount Walker will remain untouched. Logging road mileage has been much reduced, and what remains will feature improved standards such as narrower widths. OFCO wishes to congratulate all those in the community who care deeply about their home turf and made their voices heard through this long process. And we encourage everyone to commend our Forest Service personnel for taking seriously their roles as public servants and stewards of the unmatched Olympic National Forest.

Please send your comments to: comments-pacificnorthwest-olympic-hoodcanal@fs.fed.us.