

activities would not include temporary road construction.

*Comment:* Some respondents suggested that any road construction should be carried out only following a thorough environmental analysis. Others indicated that culverts should not be replaced or upgraded without a watershed analysis.

*Response:* These categorical exclusions provide only for construction of temporary roads and do not propose adding additional road miles to the National Forest System. Where use of these proposed categorical exclusions involving no more than 1/2 mile of temporary road construction, with or without culverts, is being proposed, the responsible official must review the proposed action to ensure that the temporary road construction is consistent with environmental quality standards (36 CFR 223.30) which include minimizing increases in soil erosion and providing favorable conditions of water flow and quality. The responsible official must also determine that no extraordinary circumstances exist, and document those findings in a decision memo (FSH 1909.15, ch. 30, secs. 30.3 and 32.3).

*Comment:* Some respondents suggested that the categorical exclusions should specify that temporary roads will be constructed only where the roads will be reclaimed/obliterated upon activity completion.

*Response:* As defined in 36 CFR 212.1, temporary roads are roads that are authorized by contract, permit, lease, other written authorization, or emergency operation, are not intended to be part of the Forest Service transportation system, and are not necessary for long-term resource management. In accordance with 36 CFR 223.37, upon completion of the timber sale contract, the purchaser is required to treat temporary roads constructed or used during the authorized activity. This involves the reestablishment of vegetative cover on the roadway and other areas in order to minimize erosion from the disturbed area. Once the authorized timber sale contract is completed, the temporary road becomes unneeded as described in 36 CFR 212.5(b)(2) and should be decommissioned or considered for other uses such as trails.

Decommissioning roads involves restoring roads to a more natural state. Activities used to decommission a road include, but are not limited to, the following: reestablishing former drainage patterns, stabilizing slopes, restoring vegetation, blocking the entrance to a road, installing water bars, removing culverts, reestablishing

drainage-ways, removing unstable fills, pulling back road shoulders and scattering slash on the roadbed, completely eliminating the roadbed by restoring natural contours and slopes, or other methods designed to meet the specific conditions associated with the unneeded road. How temporary roads are decommissioned is a project-specific decision and therefore appropriately decided at the project level (36 CFR 212 and FSM 7703.2). The decision to convert a temporary road to another use would entail a new decision that requires additional NEPA review.

*Comment:* Some respondents stated that the Forest Service should comply with Executive Order 12866, Regulatory Planning and Review, by assessing the economic costs and benefits of the initiative. Respondents say that this assessment should include the non-market costs of the initiative to landowners, businesses, communities, water quality, recreation, scenery, non-traditional forest products, and game.

*Response:* In compliance with Executive Order 12866, the Forest Service has prepared a cost-benefit analysis and has determined that these categorical exclusions will not have an annual effect of \$100 million or more on the economy or adversely affect productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, Tribal, or local governments. The economic effect expected to result from this action is a reduction in the administrative burden of preparing unnecessary environmental assessments and findings of no significant impact, and benefits to the environment and nearby communities as a result of limited timber harvesting to improve forest health and salvage merchantable forest products. The agency estimated an annual savings of \$6.4 million that would otherwise be spent on environmental assessments.

*Comment:* Several respondents requested clarification of the harvest treatments which could be implemented under Category 12. Some of these respondents indicated too much flexibility was provided to the local manager under uneven-aged techniques. Others believed the limitation on even-aged management treatments should be removed.

*Response:* The Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2470.5 contains the definitions of silvicultural practices on National Forest System lands. An uneven-aged system is defined at FSM 2470.5 as: "A silvicultural system involving manipulation of a forest to simultaneously maintain: a. Continuous high-forest cover; b. Recurring regeneration of desirable species; c.

Orderly growth and development of trees through a range of diameter or age classes to provide a sustained yield of forest products." Individual tree selection and group selection are the two recognized uneven-aged cutting systems. FSM 2470.5 defines group selection cutting with the groups (openings to regenerate shade-intolerant species) as usually no more than 2 acres in size. Additional instructions may also exist in the forest plans developed for each unit. Timber harvesting activities must be consistent with the objectives of site-specific prescriptions approved by certified silviculturists (FSM 2478.03 (5)). Professional forestry standards and agency oversight ensure uneven-aged techniques are properly prescribed and implemented, including acreage limitations on opening sizes.

Uneven-aged systems (individual tree selection and group selection) maintain the canopy of a forest stand and therefore have relatively little effect on the structural and aesthetic properties of stands. Even-aged regeneration harvests, such as clearcutting, seed tree, and shelterwoods, were excluded from use in Category 12. Because the cutting operations involved in Category 12 retain the canopy of the forest, adequate regeneration of tree species is not a concern. However, because projects using this category will use the timber sale contract, they are subject to 36 CFR 223.30 (c). This requires the approving officer to ensure that each timber sale contract, permit, or other authorized form of National Forest timber disposal includes, as appropriate, requirements for regeneration of timber as may be made necessary by harvesting operations.

*Comment:* Some respondents disputed the need for Category 13 because of the importance of dead and dying trees to the forest ecosystem.

*Response:* Dead and dying material is an important component of a healthy forest ecosystem. Forest plan standards for snag density (standing dead trees) and cavity habitat will be met when salvage activities take place.

*Comment:* Some respondents indicated that regeneration harvesting using both even-aged and uneven-aged silvicultural systems should be allowed under Category 13.

*Response:* Category 13 addresses salvage harvesting. The Society of American Foresters Dictionary of Forestry defines salvage cutting as "the removal of dead trees or trees damaged or dying because of injurious agents other than competition to recover economic value that would otherwise be lost." As such, salvage harvesting is not