

LOGGING: Project is part of broad program on Sisters forests

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the area.

Sisters Ranger District Timber Sale Manager Steve Orange explained that the current effort is “removing large amounts of dead fuel adjacent to one of the busiest recreation roads on the District.”

Forest Road 16 leads from Sisters to Three Creek Lake.

Orange also notes that “providing quality firewood — and forest products generally — is something that is an asset to the community.”

A side-effect of the project is that it opens up some impressive mountain vistas west of the roadway.

The project, which allows cutting of lodgepole up to 21 inches in circumference, is part of an overall effort to improve ecological health and reduce wildfire risk along that corridor. Lodgepole pine in the

area was hit hard by mountain pine beetle infestation and the 2012 Pole Creek Fire, leaving dense areas of standing dead trees.

“This is where the fire was stopped or held for Pole Creek,” Orange noted.

A commercial firewood sale is bid out exactly like any other timber sale, Orange and Elpi explained. Prior to the Pole Creek Fire, the area was a popular site for public firewood cutting. Orange explained why the Forest Service decided to bid the project out as a commercial sale rather than opening up the area for public cutting.

“We can regulate slash cleanup; we can regulate stump heights; we can regulate safety of cutting near one of our busiest roads,” he said.

The project is designed to minimize impact on the landscape. The sale requirements allow for only 20 percent of the sale area to be disturbed by logging operations. The project area runs to a depth of 1,000 feet from Road 16.



PHOTO BY CEILI CORNELIUS

The Melvin Butte Project on the Sisters Ranger District has opened up vistas along Forest Road 16, removing lodgepole timber and providing for better conditions to fight potential wildfire.

There is a detailed plan lining out how far apart skidding trails have to be and there are only three landings along the 2.5-mile stretch where logs are stacked to be limbed and bucked for hauling.

“I’m skidding a long, long ways,” Elpi said.

Elpi is operating a two-man crew “when it’s not me, myself and I,” hauling the logs to the two-acre Sisters Forest Products woodlot along Highway 126 where they will be processed into firewood.

While the current work is a straight commercial sale, Elpi said he particularly enjoys working on stewardship projects, where the focus can include restorative efforts as well as timber cutting.

“If you go back in history, he said, stewardship forestry dates back to Europe in the Middle Ages,” he said.

The object was to maintain forests as a sustainable resource for wood and for hunting and recreation (then, of course, restricted to the nobility).

“We as a people benefit more from stewardship than

from timber sales,” Elpi said.

Orange said that the Deschutes National Forest produced about 44 million board feet of timber last year, about evenly divided between timber sales and stewardship projects.

“That being said,” he

noted, “Sisters has favored stewardship over the past decades.”

A variety of stewardship projects based on improving ecological health and reducing fire risk have been conducted in a sweeping arc from the west to the south of Sisters.



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Logging contractor Dave Elpi, right, works with Steve Orange of the USFS to make sure that his work is within parameters of the project.

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