

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Coeur d'Alene District, Cottonwood Field Office  
1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood ID  
208-962-3245**

**DECISION RECORD  
Bally Mountain Vegetation Management Project**

This documents my decision, as the Field Manager of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Cottonwood Field Office, to proceed with implementation of the Bally Mountain Vegetation Management Project ([NEPA Register](#) No. DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2011-0014). The project area encompasses 2,938 acres in Idaho County along the Highway 95 corridor south of Pinehurst, Idaho (see attached map).

**Project Summary**

Action is needed to maintain forest vegetation communities within their natural range of variability in plant composition, structure, and function, and to reduce the fuel hazard and potential for stand-replacement wildfire in the wildland-urban interface in the Little Salmon River corridor. This project has been planned to meet forest, fire, and related resource management objectives of the Approved Cottonwood Resource Management Plan (BLM, 2009). Private and BLM roads provide access to the area. The project will treat forest vegetation and reduce fuel loadings on approximately 1,428 acres through a combination of commercial harvest and prescribed fire. Approximately 800 feet of permanent road will be constructed on private property for access to the north half of the project area. Up to 1.37 miles of temporary road may be constructed during timber harvest operations, and then decommissioned after treatment. Purposes of this project are to:

1. Reduce the hazard and potential for stand-replacement fire to protect resources and property in the wildland-urban interface.
2. Maintain or return vegetative communities to historic fire regimes.
3. Manage for forest health and/or habitat diversity in the Little Salmon River drainage area for desired future conditions.
4. Manage existing old growth stands to maintain and/or contribute to the restoration of pre-fire suppression characteristics.
5. Provide and maintain access to the project area for proposed hazardous fuel reduction and forest health management activities and future unplanned wildfire suppression activities.

The combination of timber harvest and use of prescribed fire would open up timber stands and reduce fuel loading along prominent ridges and existing roads to provide opportunities for suppression actions in the event of future wildfires. This project would promote stands of fire-resistant ponderosa pine, western larch and healthy Douglas-fir and restore stands of old growth ponderosa pine. Forest stands would be made more resilient to insects and disease. Returning

fire as a disturbance agent to the landscape would maintain open conditions and return this area to a frequent low-severity fire regime.

### **Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act**

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), BLM completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the Bally Mountain Vegetation Management Project in May 2012. My review of the analysis concluded with a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for implementation of the Proposed Action alternative less unit 6b timber harvest, as it is described in the EA. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required before the project may be implemented. The documents are available on the BLM [NEPA Register](#) internet site (Project No. DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2011-0014), and copies may be requested from the Cottonwood Field Office.

### **Public Involvement, Agency and Tribal Consultation and Coordination**

The public was initially notified of the project proposal in the BLM [NEPA Register](#) internet site at <https://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/info/nepa.html> in October 2007. On November 21, 2007 the BLM sent scoping letters describing the proposal to the Nez Perce Tribe and potentially interested individuals, businesses, organizations and agencies. A public meeting held in New Meadows, Idaho on December 13, 2007 was attended by seven private citizens. Substantive issues identified by the interested parties, including seven individuals, three organizations and six agencies, were addressed in development of the alternatives for analysis in the EA, and a scoping update package was sent out July 25, 2011, to interested parties who responded during the initial scoping period.

The Cottonwood Field Office issued the EA for a 30-day public comment period the week of May 21, 2012. BLM posted the EA on the NEPA internet site, and copies were mailed to individuals who requested one. The availability of the EA and notices of a public meeting to be held in Riggins, Idaho on June 5 were advertised in local newspapers.

Issues identified during scoping that are addressed in the EA are listed in section 1.2.3. They include concerns for forest vegetation (early seral old growth stands and achieving desired future conditions and 2 issues) fuels (protecting homes), transportation (road access), soils (slope stability), water resource (erosion and sediment), fisheries (impacts to listed fish), and socio-economic concern (cost/benefit). No one attended the public meeting, but the Cottonwood Field Office did receive comment letters on the EA from Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Conservation League, and Friends of the Clearwater. None of the letters presented new information that required changes to the environmental analysis.

The BLM completed an intensive cultural resource inventory of the project area and no properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register were found. Coordination with the Nez Perce Tribe did not identify issues affecting Nez Perce Treaty Rights or their ability to exercise those rights.

Consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act was completed with the Cottonwood Field Office submission a biological assessment on April 19, 2012, and concluded with a receipt of a biological opinion from the US Fish and Wildlife Service on August 20, 2012, and the

National Marine Fisheries Service on August 29, 2012. Implementation of the project includes protection of listed fish and their critical habitat, including bull trout, sockeye salmon, fall Chinook salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon and steelhead trout.

This Bally Mountain Vegetation Management Decision Record will be available with the EA and FONSI from the Idaho BLM internet site, and the interested public will receive notices of this decision in accordance with BLM regulations for forest management decisions.

## **DECISION**

It is my decision to implement the Bally Mountain Vegetation Management Project, as shown on the attached map and described and analyzed in the May 2012 EA for the Proposed Action alternative with the exception of unit 6b timber harvest and summarized below. My decision is based on consideration of the protective resource design and mitigation measures information contained in EA, management requirements of applicable laws and policies, and the comments received from public involvement and agency consultations for this project.

### **Management Activities**

Mechanically treat approximately 599 acres followed by prescribed burning to reduce the slash. Mechanical treatments include 429 acres of thinning from below, 122 acres by irregular shelter wood, 5 acres of uneven-aged management, and 43 acres of seed tree cut with reserves. These treatments would be accomplished by commercial logging using tractor (291 acres), 238 acres of cable, and helicopter (70 acres) yarding methods. In lieu of timber harvest in unit 6b, preparation for prescribed burning would consist of hand thinning/slashing small diameter, non-merchantable trees (<12" DBH) in order to reduce ladder fuels.

Apply prescribed fire on an additional 829 acres, including private property within the project area to help address fuel reduction closer to homes. Enhance the feasibility of safer and more effective control of prescribed burn treatments by utilizing existing roads, ridges, and drainages. The methods that would be used to accomplish fuel load reduction include underburning of natural fuel accumulations and slash fuels from logging activity and machine pile burning for activity created fuels. Prescribed burn treatments would be revisited every 5-15 years as needed to maintain desired fuel loadings.

Existing roads in the project area to be used includes approximately 5.1 miles that are open yearlong to public motorized use, 3.2 miles closed, and 15.3 miles that are not designated. Completion of the project would require construction of about 800 feet of permanent road (on private property) and 1.37 miles of temporary road, and approximately 580 feet of existing road would need major reconstruction. Upon completion of the treatments, retain 5.1 miles of existing roads open yearlong, close 10.8 miles, and decommission about 7.7 miles. Temporary roads would be fully obliterated and re-contoured to near natural slope.

Restore a 4-acre forest type wetland, including weed control, seeding, obliteration of roads adjacent to pond/wetland, and planting riparian vegetation.

## **Environmental Design Features**

Implementation will use project design and mitigation measures as listed in section 2.1.5 of the EA (pages 9-12). Many of the measures are derived from application of best management practices (BMPs) and guidelines from the Cottonwood RMP and the Idaho Forest Practices Act and Stream Channel Alteration Handbook.

1. Forest Vegetation - Cottonwood RMP, Appendix C, Desired Future Conditions
2. Air Quality/Smoke Management - Montana/Idaho State Airshed Group Operating Guide and Prescribed Fire Smoke Management Guide
3. Soil and Water Resources – BMPs and RMP guidance for harvesting timber and maintaining road and trails in landslide prone and riparian conservation areas.
4. Invasive, Non-Native Species - Weed control and revegetation
5. Wildlife/Habitat – RMP guidelines for snag retention and disturbance buffers
6. Aquatic and Riparian Habitat - RMP guidance in landslide prone and riparian areas
7. Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species – Measures to protect ESA-listed fish and their habitat, as required in the Biological Opinions for this project.

Additionally, to protect ESA-listed fish, prescribed burning in sub-watersheds 4 and 6 will be limited to low intensity; and no more than 40 percent of the burn only treatment will be conducted in any given year, in order to limit the disturbance on landslide hazard areas.

## **Monitoring**

Bull trout and spring/summer Chinook spawning surveys will be conducted within the project area in Hard and Hazard Creek during the first spawning season prior to any treatment adjacent to these drainages. Monitor units with disturbed soils for any evidence of gullies or rills which have delivered sediment to stream channels and number of landslides (if any) resulting from project activities. Monitoring of fire severity and post-burn overstory mortality will be conducted following any prescribed burn activity. Reports will be submitted annually to the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service by December 31.

## **RATIONALE**

1. In addition to the Proposed Action, two action and a no action alternatives were analyzed in the EA. The Proposed Action less unit 6b timber harvest was selected because it best meets the need for treatments to manage forest communities and reduce the fuel hazard and potential for stand-replacement wildfire in the wildland-urban interface in the Little Salmon River corridor. The environment in the project area can be improved and moved toward desired conditions as a result of this project.
2. The project is consistent with Federal, state and local laws and requirements. It conforms to 2009 Cottonwood Resource Management Plan (EA, section 1.2), specifically with direction for wildland fire management on page 34 of the RMP for Action WF-1.2.5, to “Design, develop and implement hazardous fuels reduction projects identified in or consistent with the goals of community wildfire protection plans.” The Bally Mountain Project is in the Salmon River Fire Management Unit that is ranked as a high priority for allocating prescribed fire and non-fire fuel reduction resources.

3. The action will not violate other Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment (FONSI, Intensity factors 9 and 10). Viable populations of species would be maintained as required by the Endangered Species Act and BLM Special Status Species policy (EA, sections 3.2.8, 3.2.11 and 3.2.12). The BLM has planned the project to incorporate applicable Federal, State and local requirements Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Idaho State Water Quality Standards, Idaho Forest Practices Act, and Idaho Stream Channel Protection Act. Burning activities would implement the EPA and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality permit procedures outlined in the North Idaho Smoke Management Memorandum of Agreement (EA, sections 2.1.2 and 3.2.4). The project is in the Little Salmon River, Hard Creek, and Hazard Creek watersheds and has been planned to include Section 303(d) guidelines for Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and water temperature (EA, sections 2.1.5 and 3.2.6).

### **Approval and Implementation Date**

The Bally Mountain Vegetation Management Project is approved for implementation beginning in 2012, subject to completion of administrative review procedures of the BLM, as described below. If appeal(s) are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

/S/ Will Runnoe  
William Runnoe, Field Manager

8-31-2012  
Date

### **BLM Administrative Review Procedures**

The decision to implement this forest management project to complete timber harvest and prescribed burn treatments may be protested under 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subpart 5003 – Administrative Remedies. As outlined in 43 CFR 5003 (a) and (b), protests may be made within 15-days of publication date of the notice of the decision in the Lewiston Tribune, Lewiston, Idaho. Protests must be filed by close of business (4:30 p.m.) with the authorized officer at the Cottonwood Field Office. As interpreted by the BLM, the regulations do not authorize acceptance of protests in any form other than a signed, paper document that is delivered to the physical address of the BLM office within the 15-day period.

43 CFR 5003.3 (b) states that: “Protests shall be filed with the Authorized Officer and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision.” This precludes the acceptance of electronic mail or facsimile protests. Only written and signed hard copies of protests that are delivered to the authorized officer at the following address will be accepted:

William Runnoe, Field Manager  
BLM Cottonwood Field Office  
1 Butte Drive  
Cottonwood ID 83522-5200

The protest must clearly and concisely state which portion or element of the decision is being protested and the reasons why the decision is believed to be in error. Regulations at 43 CFR 5003.3 (c) state that, ‘Protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the notice of decision are not timely filed and shall not be considered.’ Upon timely filing of a protest, the

authorized officer shall reconsider the project decision to be implemented in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available. The authorized officer shall, at the conclusion of the review, serve the protest decision in writing to the protesting party. Upon denial of a protest, the authorized officer may proceed with the implementation of the decision as permitted by regulations at 5003.3(f). If no protest is received by close of business within 15 days after publication of the notice of decision, this decision will become final.

## **Contact**

For additional information concerning this BLM decision and administrative review process, contact Kristen Sanders, Cottonwood Field Office, 1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood, Idaho 83522, telephone 208-962-3245.