SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Ninemile Timber Sale

Coeur d'Alene Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to reduce fuels and harvest timber in accordance with Coeur d'Alene Resource Management Plan. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of July 15, 2014. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will also use this public participation opportunity under the NEPA to assist the agency in satisfying the public involvement requirements under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 U.S.C. 470(f)) pursuant to 36 CFR 800.2(d)(3). The information about historic and cultural resources within the area potentially affected by the proposed action will assist the BLM in identifying and evaluating impacts to such resources in the context of both NEPA and Section 106 of the NHPA.

The BLM will consult with Indian tribes on a government-to-government basis in accordance with Executive Order 13175 and other policies. Tribal concerns, including impacts on Indian trust assets and potential impacts to cultural resources, will be given due consideration. Federal, State, and local agencies, along with tribes and other stakeholders that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action that the BLM is evaluating, are invited to participate in the scoping process and, if eligible, may request or be requested by the BLM to participate in the development of the environmental analysis as a cooperating agency.

Purpose and Need for Action

Need: The present condition of the forest is overstocked with numerous understory trees that threaten the large overstory ponderosa pine trees to fire by providing a way for a ground fire to reach the crowns of the pine trees called "ladder fuels". The combination of the overstocked overstory, and scattered dead lodgepole pine trees creates a fire hazard adjacent to a major powerline traversing the project area administered by the Bonneville Power Administration. The project area is within the wildland-urban interface (WUI) area. One of the goals identified in the Coeur d'Alene Resource Management Plan (BLM 2007), is to "Protect life and property while returning fire to its natural role in the ecosystem." The RMP further states that one of the specific objectives for achieving this goal is to "Reduce impact from wildland fire to WUI areas, municipal watersheds, and infrastructure. In addition, the Shoshone County, Idaho Community Wildfire Protection Plan identifies the proposed project area as high priority for hazardous fuels treatments.

The RMP states that "When applying treatments in the vicinity of old growth stands, ensure that these treatments will fully maintain or contribute toward the restoration of the structure and composition of old growth stands according to the pre-fire suppression old growth conditions characteristic of the forest type, taking into account:

- Contribution of the stand to landscape fire adaptation and watershed health; and
- Retaining the large trees contributing to old growth structure in accordance with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Purpose: The primary purpose of the proposed action is to comply with the above goal, objective, and implement the direction from the RMP. Specific objectives for the project are:

- Reduce the impact from wild land fire to WUI areas and infrastructure while returning fire to its natural role in the ecosystem within the Ninemile Creek area
- Lessen the risks to people who put out wild fires by providing them a "foot hold" area ie. harvest units, where firefighters can anchor the fire line during fire suppression actions.
- Reduce the risk to old growth ponderosa trees of burning during a wildfire.

Existing Condition

A Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) powerline traverses the project area, and its operation is at risk due to overstocked trees adjacent to the powerline. Private homes are located in Zanettiville, and in the historical townsites of Blackcloud, Black Bear, Bunn, Gem and Frisco that are all within one mile of the project area.

Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to harvest about one million board feet of timber by thinning understory trees on 200 acres of forested public land. Following timber harvest, the BLM will prescriptively under-burn 350 acres pine forest to reduce any harzardous fuels that threaten the old Ponderosa pine trees. To facilitate harvest operations, about ¾ mile of road would be constructed. Following harvest and fuel reduction actions the BLM will install gates and implement road closures to limit motorized vehicular disturbance to wildlife.

The project would be implemented in two phases, treating about half the area in each phase, with a two year timber sale contract anticipated to begin in August 2013. Public lands that have existing access roads, including easments across private land, would be treated in the first phase. In the second phase the remaining public lands would be treated, where road construction would be required on private land and the BLM would have to obtain access.

Preliminary Issues

- Wildlife: Increased recreational use may result from project road construction and improvements, potentially disturbing wildlife, which may include threatened or endangered species such as grizzly bear and wolverine.
- Fish: Riparian and aquatic habitats could be damaged by project work. Main streams adjacent to the project area contain threatened west-slope cutthroat trout. Disturbance to soils and vegetation could result in sedimentation run-off and erosion, increasing sediment loads in streams. Also, removal or opening up of the tree canopy could result in increase stream temperatures.
- Sensitive Plants: Sensitive plants occur in the project area which could be damaged or their habitat degraded by the project.

- Large Old Trees: While the large old trees on some portions of the project area are currently at risk from fire due to stand density, increased recreational use and access that may result from project road construction and improvments could also result in damage.
- Historic Structures: Historic mining structures, including an abandoned rail line, could be damaged by project work.
- Invasive Species and Noxious Weeds: Distrubance to soils and vegetation, and removal or opening of the tree canopy could provide opportunities for the spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds.
- Water and Soil Resources: Disturbance to soils and vegetation could result in sedimentation run-off and erosion, increasing sediment loads in streams.
- Air Quality: Prescribed burning would produce smoke, adding particulate matter to the airshed.
- Fire/Fuels: Current vegetative fuel loads would be affected by the project.

Preliminary Alternative Development

In addition to the proposed action the BLM will also analyze a no action (no treatment) alternative. Other alternatives may be developed to address specific issues.

Decision to be Made

The BLM Coeur d'Alene Field Manager will issue a decision regarding implementation of this project in accordance with Federal Regulations at 43 CFR 5000.

Public Input Needed

The BLM is asking for comments on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by May 30, 2014 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Comments may be mailed or had deliverd to:

BLM Coeur d'Alene Field Office
ATTN: Nine Mile Timber Sale
3815 Schreiber Way
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815

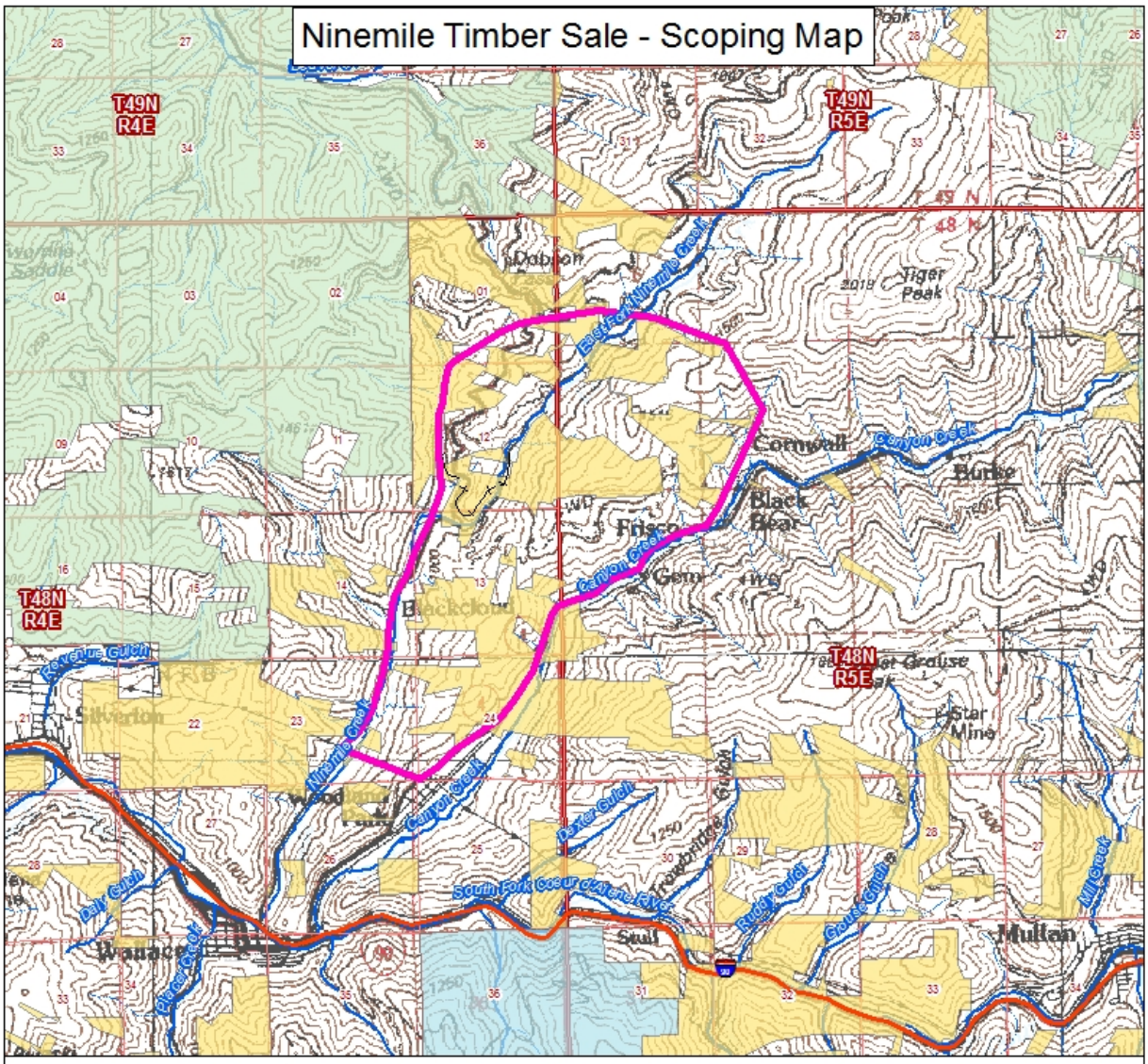
or sent electronically to BLM_NinemileTimberSale@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

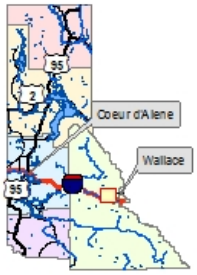
The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Larry Kaiser, Supervisory Forester, 3815 Schreiber Way, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815, phone number 208-769-5023.

Attachment:

Ninemile Timber Sale – Scoping Map



Northern Idaho Vicinity Map



Legend

- Project Area
- BLM
- STATE
- USFS

0 1 2 Miles

Map Scale 1:60,000

N W E S

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management. The accuracy, reliability, or c9ompleteness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed. The Scoping Map cannot be made Section 508 compliant.
For help with its data or information, please contact the BLM Idaho State Office Webmaster at 208-373-4000.

The surface management status ("land ownership") should be used as a general guide only, Official land records, located at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and other offices, should be checked for up-to-date information concerning any specific tract of land.

This map was created by Larry Kaiser on 11/04/2013