

NOTICE OF FIELD MANAGERS DECISION

CRYSTAL SPRINGS FUELS REDUCTION AND RESTORATION PROJECT

EA#DOI-BLM-ID-1020-2013-0010-EA

DECISION

After careful consideration, it is my decision to implement specific elements of Alternative B-Proposed Action Alternative analyzed in the Crystal Springs Fuels Reduction and Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (EA#DOI-BLM-ID-1020-2013-0010-EA).

Under this decision, the following elements of Alternative B would be approved:

The reduction of hazardous fuels accumulations in 28 landscape units through the use of mechanical methods including chainsaws, brushcutters, other hand tools, mechanical equipment, chemical methods, and prescribed fire. A total of approximately 3,248 acres would be treated over a 15-year period. The design criteria presented in the Proposed Actions and Alternatives section and management restrictions presented in Appendix A of the EA would apply to these elements of Alternative B.

Primary Wildland Urban Interface

- Douglas fir/junipers densities would be reduced by selectively cutting and hand-piling, create open canopy stands and decrease ladder fuels. Juniper and Douglas fir would be cut and scattered in areas with steep slopes and soil instability to decrease the opportunity for erosion due to vegetation removal.

Wildland Urban Interface Buffer

- Douglas fir/junipers densities would be reduced by cutting and hand-piling or cut and scatter.

Maintenance and Improvement

- In the Mid-Elevation Shrub vegetation type, the density of juniper would be reduced by selectively thinning stands and cut and scattering junipers which are encroaching on sagebrush steppe.
- In the Aspen/Maple/Mahogany vegetation type, encroaching Douglas-fir and juniper would be removed or girdled. In aspen dominant areas, some mature aspen trees would be cut to stimulate aspen suckering.
- In Aspen/Conifer vegetation type, approximately two-thirds of Douglas fir trees less than 10 inches dbh and approximately one-third between 10 and 18 inches dbh would be removed. The remaining trees would be limbed up to 6 feet from ground level. In addition to selective thinning, diseased and standing dead Douglas fir would be removed, maintaining a minimum of 5 snags per acre.

RATIONALE

The implementation of Alternative B would provide protection to the cities of McCammon and Lava Hot Springs, Frandsen / Indian Falls / Lava Hills subdivisions, McCammon municipal water supply, homes, ranches, and farms adjacent to the project area by reducing hazardous fuel accumulations and improving forest/shrub community health. Under this alternative, the following objectives, which have been identified for the project area, would be met:

Primary Wildland Urban Interface

- Decrease risk to public/firefighter health and safety and loss of property associated with uncontrollable wildland fire.
- Decrease fuel loading to reduce fire behavior intensity while maintaining wildlife habitat by enhancing species diversity and improving shrub community health.
- Create live fuel breaks using existing aspen, maple, and mahogany stands. Stimulate aspen suckering by increasing available sun light and soil temperatures.
- Decrease canopy closure to reduce threat of crown fire and move community towards or obtain Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) 1.
- Improve/maintain shrub steppe communities from encroaching junipers.
- Provide education and incentives for cooperative hazardous fuel management projects on private, county, state, and federal lands.

Wildland Urban Interface Buffer

- Extend fuel reduction beyond immediately adjacent lands to reduce fire behavior in advance of WUI units.
- Decrease fuel loading to reduce fire behavior intensity while maintaining wildlife habitat
- Decrease crown canopy closure to reduce threat of crown fire, reduce fuel loads, and create live fuel breaks.
- Create live fuel breaks using existing aspen, maple, and mahogany stands. Stimulate aspen suckering by increasing available light and soil temperatures.
- Reduce encroaching Juniper/Douglas fir growing within Aspen/Maple/Mahogany stands.
- Improve/maintain Aspen, Maple, and Mahogany vegetation communities.
- Stimulate Aspen suckering and where Aspen clones exist, increase aspen sucker density to 1,000 suckers/acre within 2 years following prescribed fires.

Maintenance and Improvement

- Restore and maintain shrub steppe community from encroaching juniper.
- Enhance species diversity, improve shrub community health, and move vegetation towards or obtain FRCC 1.
- Improve and maintain Aspen, Maple, and Mahogany vegetation type.
- Decrease competition and maintain or improve stand health for resiliency.

- Where aspen clones exist, increase aspen sucker density to a minimum of 1,000 suckers per acre within 2 years following prescribed burning.
- Reduce standing diseased and standing dead Douglas-fir while maintaining wildlife habitat (maintain a minimum of 5 snags per acre).
- Improve overall forest health by maintaining healthy stocking levels of varying age classes, maintain wildlife habitat, and enhance species diversity by moving vegetation towards or obtain FRCC 1.
- Where aspen clones exist, increase aspen sucker density to a minimum of 1,000 suckers per acre within 2 years following prescribed burning on unit.
- Reduce threat of crown fires, reduce fuel loads, and create live fuel breaks.
- Eliminate all age classes of Juniper growing within Douglas-fir/Aspen/Maple/Mahogany stands.
- Move towards desired future condition (DFC).

Land Use Plan Conformance

The activities proposed under Alternative B are consistent with the objectives, goals, and intent of the Approved Pocatello Resource Management Plan (ARMP) (BLM 2012a). The ARMP provides the overall fire and fuels management direction for BLM-administered lands within the project area.

The ARMP identifies mechanical, chemical, and prescribed fire as options for treatment states that landscape-level projects and treatments should be developed in conjunction with community participation and the development of stakeholder partnerships where practical and appropriate. The ARMP recognizes that fuel accumulations in vegetation types with historically frequent fire regimes (e.g., aspen/conifer) are at risk of losing key ecological components due to lack of fire.

Direction in the ARMP emphasizes the conservation and restoration of sagebrush steppe while replicating historical disturbance and succession patterns in vegetation types with historically frequent fire regimes. These goals include: improving fire prevention and suppression; reducing hazardous fuels; restoring fire-adapted ecosystems; and promoting community assistance.

Specific goals identified in the ARMP that are applicable to this alternative include:

- Goal (WF-2) /Objective (WF-2.1) Protect life, property, and resources. Manage public land in and around WUI areas to reduce fire hazards. Appropriate treatment methods (e.g. mechanical, chemical, seeding, and prescribed fire) to reduce/remove hazardous fuels will be used. (BLM 2012a)
- Goal (WF-3) /Objective (WF-3.1) Manage the low-elevation shrub and perennial grass vegetation types in order to move towards FRCC 1 (LHC-A), so wildland fire occurs less frequently and at a smaller scale on the landscape. (BLM 2012a)
- Goal (WF-3 / Objective (WF-3.2) Manage the mid-elevation shrub, juniper, dry conifer, Aspen/conifer and mountain shrub vegetation types in order to move towards FRCC 1 (LHC-A) so wildland fire mimics historical conditions. Vegetation treatments will be designed to simulate the effects of historic fire on vegetation structure and composition.

Encroaching juniper in the mid-elevation shrub type will be removed using chemical, mechanical, and prescribed fire treatments (BLM 2012a).

In addition to meeting the objectives for the project area and conformance with the Pocatello Resource Management Plan dated April 2012, this alternative meets the purpose and need for action as presented in the Purpose of and Need for Action portion of the EA. Moreover, the analysis presented in the EA and the accompanying Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) make clear that the implementation of this alternative with associated design criteria and management restrictions identified in Appendix A would not result in significant impacts to the human environment and therefore an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Protest and Appeals Information:

43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 4 for appeals information

Any person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in writing in accordance with 43 CFR 4.470 and 4160.3 and 4160.4. The appeal must be filed within 30 days following receipt of the final decision. The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for a stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471 and 4.479, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for a stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above. The appellant must also serve a copy of the appeal by certified mail on the U.S. Department of the Interior, Boise Field Solicitor's Office, University Plaza, 960 Broadway Avenue, Suite 400, Boise, Idaho 83706 and person(s) named [43 CFR 4.421 (h)] in the *Copies sent to:* section of this decision.

The appeal shall clearly and concisely state the reasons why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error, and otherwise complies with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470.

Should you wish to file a petition for a stay, see 43 CFR 4.471 (a) and (b). In accordance with 43 CFR 4.471(c), a petition for a stay must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
- The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
- The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
- Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer and served in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471. Any person named in the decision from which an appeal is taken (other than the appellant) who wishes to file a response to the petition for a stay may file with the Hearings division a motion to intervene in the appeal, together with the response, within 10 days after receiving the petition. Within 15 days after filing the motion to intervene and response, the person must serve copies on the appellant, the office of the Solicitor and any other person named in the decision (43 CFR 4.472(b)).

Approved by:

/s/ David A. Pacioretty, Field Manager Pocatello Field Office

Date: 01/22/2014

Copies Sent to:

Ken Andrus

Blaine Burkman

Kenneth Capell

David Carpenter

Darrell and Leanne Christensen

Deputy Chief Ken Fagnant

Burke Frandsen

Richard and Raida Jensen

Ken Knowles

Edward Simmons

Joyce & Brent Terry

Richard and Chris Vaughan

Idaho Conservation League

Idaho Fish & Game, Southeast Region

Finding of No Significant Impact
For the
Crystal Springs Fuel Reduction and Restoration Project Environmental
Assessment

DOI- BLM-ID-I020-2013-0010-EA

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment, EA#DOI-BLM-ID-1020-2013-0010-EA, including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that Alternative B: Proposed Action will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Implementing regulations for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. ‘Significant’, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity. The bold and italicized text are repeated from 40CFR 1508.27 for completeness and an explanation follows for relevance to the decision.

(a) Context. This requirement means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide, or statewide importance. The analysis has shown that the project significance is local in nature and that the vegetative treatments will have no significant impact on existing resource values.

(b) Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The analysis documented in EA DOI-BLM-ID-I020-2013-0010-EA did not identify any individually significant short- or long-term impacts. The Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences section of the EA (pages 22-53) describes the direct and indirect impacts of each alternative. Alternative B will aid in protection of the cities of McCammon and Lava Hot Springs, Frandsen / Indian Falls / Lava Hills subdivisions, McCammon municipal water supply, homes, ranches, and farms adjacent to the project area, along with important wildlife habitat from large, high intensity wildland fire, as well as improve and maintain forest and rangeland health. High fuel loads within and surrounding the project area have created conditions that would support the development of high-intensity wildland fires which could have severe resource and human health and safety impacts.

The implementation of this alternative would also be associated with short-term adverse impacts including the production of smoke, exhaust emissions and fugitive dust, the displacement of migratory birds and other wildlife species due to equipment noise and general human presence. These changes are also expected to maintain or improve sagebrush habitat conditions for sagebrush obligate species, and enhance habitat for big game and many other wildlife species. Impacts would be minimized through the use of design criteria, Best Management Practices (BMPs) as described and analyzed in the EA and management restrictions presented in Appendix A. The Cumulative Impacts of Alternatives section (pages 54-65) describes the impacts associated with past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions that have occurred, or are likely to occur, in the area.

(2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The environmental analysis documented no major effects on public health and safety from any of the actions described in either of the alternatives. The EA described potential impacts to air quality as including emissions from vehicles/equipment during project implementation and from burning of natural and activity fuels following completion of vegetation treatments. The EA concluded that impacts are anticipated to be very localized (roughly project boundaries), of short duration (hours to couple days) and low intensity (regulatory air quality standards met), and therefore are being considered negligible.

Alternative B would benefit public safety by reducing the likelihood of a high intensity wildfire that could threaten the Frandsen, Indian Falls, and Lava Hills subdivisions, adjacent to the project area, and isolated homes and ranches in the vicinity.

The implementation of this alternative could also protect public health by reducing the risk of adverse effects to the municipal water supply of the City of McCammon. A high intensity wildfire in the project area has the potential to input sediments and nutrients into the water supply, possibly rendering it nonpotable for an extended period of time.

(3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The environmental analysis documented no major effects on unique geographic characteristics of the area. In FY 2012, Section 106 inventory and mitigation procedures were conducted in response to all proposed actions set forth in the EA. The EA concluded that Cultural and Historic Resources are present but would not be impacted. FEMA identified floodplains would not be impacted by the proposed action or alternatives because they are not present. There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers within the area, and no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The EA also concluded that the proposed action would not impact the scenic quality or recreation opportunity of the USFS Boundary Trail. Alternative B would provide protection to the resources.

(4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

During the external scoping process, concerns were expressed with regard to the potential environmental effects of implementing Alternative B. In response to those concerns,

BLM worked closely with IDFG, volunteer fire organizations, and the public to develop a proposed decision as reflected above. On this basis, BLM does not consider the effects on the quality of the human environment to be highly controversial.

(5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Alternative B is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar fuels reduction projects in similar areas and understands the environmental consequences of these actions. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA with a high degree of certainty.

(6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The implementation of this proposed decision would not trigger other actions, nor is it a part of a larger action envisioned for the project area or elsewhere. The PFO has conducted numerous fuels reduction projects and nothing in the analysis indicates that this proposal is appreciably different and is therefore not precedent setting. Any future fuels reduction proposals would be subject to a separate and independent environmental analysis as mandated under NEPA.

(7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The cumulative analysis presented in the EA disclosed that the environmental impacts associated with the implementation of Alternative B would not result in significant cumulative impacts when considered in light of impacts associated with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

(8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The standard BLM stipulation covering cultural resources would be included and would provide protection for any cultural resources identified in the project area. The BLM archaeologist would consult with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the HRHP (National Register of Historic Places) status of any cultural resources identified, including findings of effect. The BLM would avoid NRHP-eligible historic properties during project implementation, mitigating any potential adverse impacts.

(9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat that has been determined under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.*

The implementation of the Alternative B would not affect any endangered or threatened species because it has been determined that no such species or their habitat exist within the project area.

Although the lower elevations of the project area were likely within the historical range of sage-grouse habitat, there is no mapped sage-grouse habitat or leks identified in the project area and no sage-grouse have been observed.

(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The analysis in the EA shows that the alternatives are consistent with Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for protection of the environment.

I find that implementing Alternative B does not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment in either context or intensity. I have made this determination after considering both positive and negative effects, as well as the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of this action and reasonably foreseeable future actions. I have found that the context of the environmental impacts of this decision is limited to the local area and I have also determined that the severity of these impacts is not significant.

Approved by:

/s/ David A. Pacioretty, Field Manager Pocatello Field Office

Date: 01/22/2014