

## CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

**Project Name/ Applicant:** State Fire Timber Salvage Project

**Project/Case File Number:**

**Project Lead:** Eric Ott

**CE Number:** DOI-BLM-ID-I020-2014-0009-CX

**Date of Preparation:** January 10, 2014

### **BACKGROUND:**

The State Fire was detected on August 8, 2013, at approximately 1800 in Portage Canyon in Box Elder County, Utah following a lightning event. The fire escaped initial suppression efforts spreading northward into the Samaria Mountain Range in Idaho eventually growing to approximately 29,335 acres. Land ownership within the State Fire includes private lands in Utah (9,177 acres), private lands in Idaho (2,819 acres), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Utah (497 acres), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Idaho (16,228 acres) and Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) (1332 acres). From aerial photos after the fire, it is estimated that 790 acres of commercial BLM timber was burned. Of this acreage, an estimated 300-500 BLM acres has been recommended for replanting in the State Fire Emergency Stabilization & Rehabilitation Plan (August 2013) plan since a natural seed source is outside of the natural seed dispersal distance of the remaining healthy, seed-bearing trees. No weed spraying or tree planting will not take place associated with this this CX. All weed treatments and tree planting will be done in accordance to the State fire ES&R plan.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:**

This proposal consists of the removal of standing dead and dying Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) trees to utilize and recover economic value of dead and dying trees (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The proposed treatment would salvage dead and dying trees on approximately 200 acres scattered throughout the north facing slopes. Approximately 1.2 million board feet of timber would be salvaged using ground-based and tractor yarding systems (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Burned forests serve as an attractant to several forest damaging insect species such as bark beetles (*Scolytinae*) and flat-head borers (*Buprestidae*). This attraction not only leads to the fast deterioration of the burnt wood by insect boring but also puts the remaining healthy trees at risk if epidemic insect levels are reached. Trees stressed from partial burning are at an increased risk of insects and diseases. Salvaging trees will not only focus on utilizing the burnt timber but also promote landscape level forest health by removing partially burned (>30% crown scorched) stressed trees.

The fire consumed much of the fine and coarse woody debris on the forest floor. This left a deficit of microsite environments that can enhance planting success through moisture retention. The salvage sale will require slash being left in the forest to increase microsite environments in an effort to enhance planting success. In addition, slash would be lopped and scattered throughout the sale with emphasis on skid-trails to prevent erosion and discourage vehicular use.

Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) is an integral part of the forest ecosystem in Southeastern Idaho. Aspen is important for wildlife and of increasing concern throughout the intermountain west because of a general decline in health and distribution. Sprouting, the primary form of reproduction from burned mature aspen, has been observed in the fall of 2013. Large clonal aspen pockets will be avoided during salvage operations to maintain the integrity of aspen root systems to promote vigorous sprouting.

Standing dead trees are important for migrating birds as a foraging site for insects. At least five trees per acre would be retained in the project area for wildlife purposes. These retained trees would include those showing a resistance to the tussock moth, old growth trees, suitable wildlife trees, snags and trees with <30% crown scorch.

Treatment areas would be accessed by existing roads. Stipulations in the contract will emphasize the use of existing skid trails. **No new permanent or temporary roads will be constructed.**

The proposed action is located in the Samaria Mountains area, about ten miles southwest of Malad City, Idaho. The area is legally described as: Boise Meridian, Oneida County, Idaho, T. 15 S., R. 5 W., sec 2, 3, 4, & 10.

#### **PLAN CONFORMANCE:**

The proposed action is in conformance with the Pocatello Field Office, Resource Management Plan (2012), as amended (FO-1 and VE-4).

**Goal FO-1.** States that the forestry program should use a variety of silvicultural techniques and harvest systems to provide for an ecologically healthy system while offering products and services.

**Action FO-1.1.4.** *Silvicultural prescriptions will provide for stand health through the management of insects and disease, animal damage, and vegetation competition to promote regeneration of tree growth.*

**Goal VE-4.** Manage vegetation types to provide for their continued presence as part of an ecologically healthy system.

**Action VE-4.2.2.** *Within the Aspen/Aspen Conifer Mix and Dry Conifer vegetation types, treatment and restoration areas will be:*

- *Areas with greater than 50% mature conifer composition.*
- *Areas adjacent to deer/elk summer range.*
- *Areas significant to special status species.*
- *Areas impacted by insects and disease.*

#### **COMPLIANCE WITH THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT**

The proposed action is categorically excluded under US Department of Interior manual part 516, Appendix 1, categorical exclusion 1.12, and is consistent with resource the Pocatello management plan.

516 DM 11.9, C. *Forestry* (8) applies to salvaging dead or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than 0.5 mile of temporary road construction. Such activities:

- a) *May include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.*
- b) *May include temporary roads which are defined as roads authorized by contract, permit, lease, other written authorization, or emergency operation not intended to be part of the BLM transportation system and not necessary for long-term resource management. Temporary roads shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources; and*
- c) *Shall require the treatment of temporary roads constructed or used so as to permit the reestablishment, by artificial or natural means, of vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover was disturbed by the construction or use of the road, as necessary to minimize erosion from the disturbed area. Such treatment shall be designed to reestablish vegetative cover as soon as practicable, but at least within 10 years after the termination of the contract.*
- d) *For this CX, a dying tree is defined as a standing tree that has been severely damaged by forces such as fire, wind, ice, insects, or disease, and that in the judgment of an experienced forest professional or someone technically trained for the work, is likely to die within a few years.*

The application of this categorical exclusion (CX) is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. The proposal has been reviewed to determine if any exceptions described in 516 DM 2.3A, appendix 2 apply, and there were no exceptions that applied.

The proposed action **will not** be conducted in (1) wilderness areas or where they would impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation of wilderness; (2) will not include the use of herbicides or pesticides; and (3) will not involve the construction of new permanent roads or other infrastructure.

**EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRING PREPARATION OF AN EA OR EIS (516 DM 2, APPENDIX 2)**

The action described in categorical exclusion # DOI-BLM-ID-I020-2014-0009-CX has been reviewed to determine if any of the following extraordinary circumstances listed below apply, as listed in the Departmental NEPA regulations (43 CFR 46.215).

**DM#    Extraordinary Circumstance**

- 2.1    Have significant impacts on public health or safety  
*No issues were identified.*
- 2.2    Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.

- There would be no significant impact on these issues. The removal of burned timber will not have any significant impact to migratory bird populations. The cultural resources have all been mapped and fall outside the project areas.*
- 2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102(2)(E)].  
*There are no highly controversial effects or unresolved conflicts. BLM range staff has coordinated with the Samaria Cattle Association and discussed the project. Due to the fire, cattle should not be present while salvage harvest is occurring. The BLM briefed the Oneida County Commissioners and no controversial effects or conflicts were identified.*
- 2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.  
*Salvage logging would not have highly uncertain, potentially significant, uncertain or unique environmental effects. Harvest would take place in an area that has been harvested in the past. Equipment will stay on existing roads or skids trails. All slash (tree tops and limbs) will be left on site for erosion control. Existing roads will be closed and barricaded at the end of the project.*
- 2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.  
*Salvage logging would not establish a precedent that would affect future actions. The area has been identified in the Pocatello RMP (April 2012) as commercial timber area. The BLM will replant after harvest is complete if seed sources are absent.*
- 2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.  
*Following the fire, there is considerable fire rehabilitation work to accomplish. These projects aim to restore the fire area, repair damaged fences and pipelines and to control erosion to the existing road network. These projects, along with timber salvages will not cause cumulatively significant effects on the fire area or the salvage area.*
- 2.7 Have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.  
*BLM Archeologist has completed a class I inventory of the area. No properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places exist within the project area.*
- 2.8 Have significant impacts on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species.  
*The entire Samaria mountain range is considered “general sage grouse habitat.” The salvage activities will not impact sage grouse. Most of the higher elevations around the proposed salvage sale burned intense enough to remove all vegetation. The upper part of the mountain will likely take several years before sage grouse habitat has returned. The salvage project will at most be an 18 month project and over before sage grouse concerns return. The haul road off the mountain is on open existing routes.*
- 2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.  
*This project will not violate and Federal, State, local, or tribal laws. There is no water within the project area, it has been inventoried and cleared by BLM botanist for sensitive*

- and endangered plants and cleared by BLM biologist for and wildlife concerns. Timber sales are standard practice conducted by the BLM and allowed under FLMMPA.*
- 2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).  
*This project will likely create jobs that could employ minorities.*
- 2.11 Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).  
*BLM Archeologist inventoried the project area and found no areas of concern. There are no known ceremonial sites within the project area. Salvaging timber will not restricted any valid treaty rights within the area.*
- 2.12 Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).  
*This is not anticipated due to an active weed program and stipulations in the contract. All equipment used in the salvage project will be washed and cleared by BLM representatives before being allowed on the project area. The area will have an active weed spraying presences for the next several years due to the State Fire.*

**PERSONS AND AGENCIES COORDINATED:**

Idaho Department of Fish and Game:  
Southeast Regional Office, Pocatello, ID.  
Oneida County Commissioners

Bureau of Land Management:  
David Pacioretty- Field Manager  
Michael Kuyper- Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist  
James Kumm-Wildlife Biologist  
Amy Lapp-Archeologist  
Karen Krause- Botanist  
Michele Mavor- Fire Ecologist  
Channing Swan- Zone Forester

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The proposed action is categorically excluded as outlined in 516 DM (11.9, C. Forestry (8)) and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 apply.

/s/Eric Ott, Zone Forestry Technician, CX Preparer  
Date: 2/3/2014

/s/Blaine Newman, NEPA Reviewer  
Date: 2/3/2014

## **DECISION AND RATIONALE**

I have decided to implement the Samaria Fire Salvage Project. I have reviewed the project and determined that the proposed action is categorically excluded under US Department of Interior manual 11.9, C. Forestry (8) and in conformance with the Pocatello management plan. Implementation of the proposed action would help recover economic value from dead and dying trees, enhance microsite environments for tree planting, stimulate the growth of aspen, and reduce the opportunity for the epidemic spread of insects and disease. Mechanical removal will be used to achieve project goals. These actions meet the needs for the project.

/s/David A. Pacioretty, Pocatello Field Manager

Date: 2/3/2014

# State Fire Proposed Salvage Units

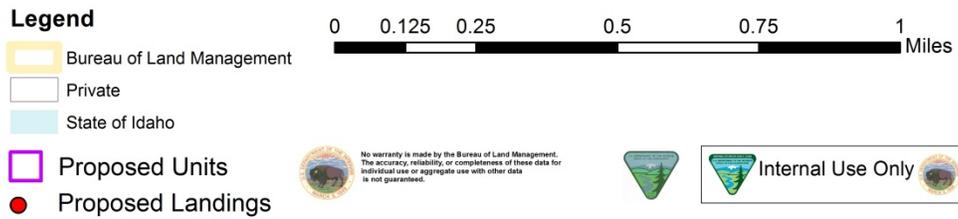
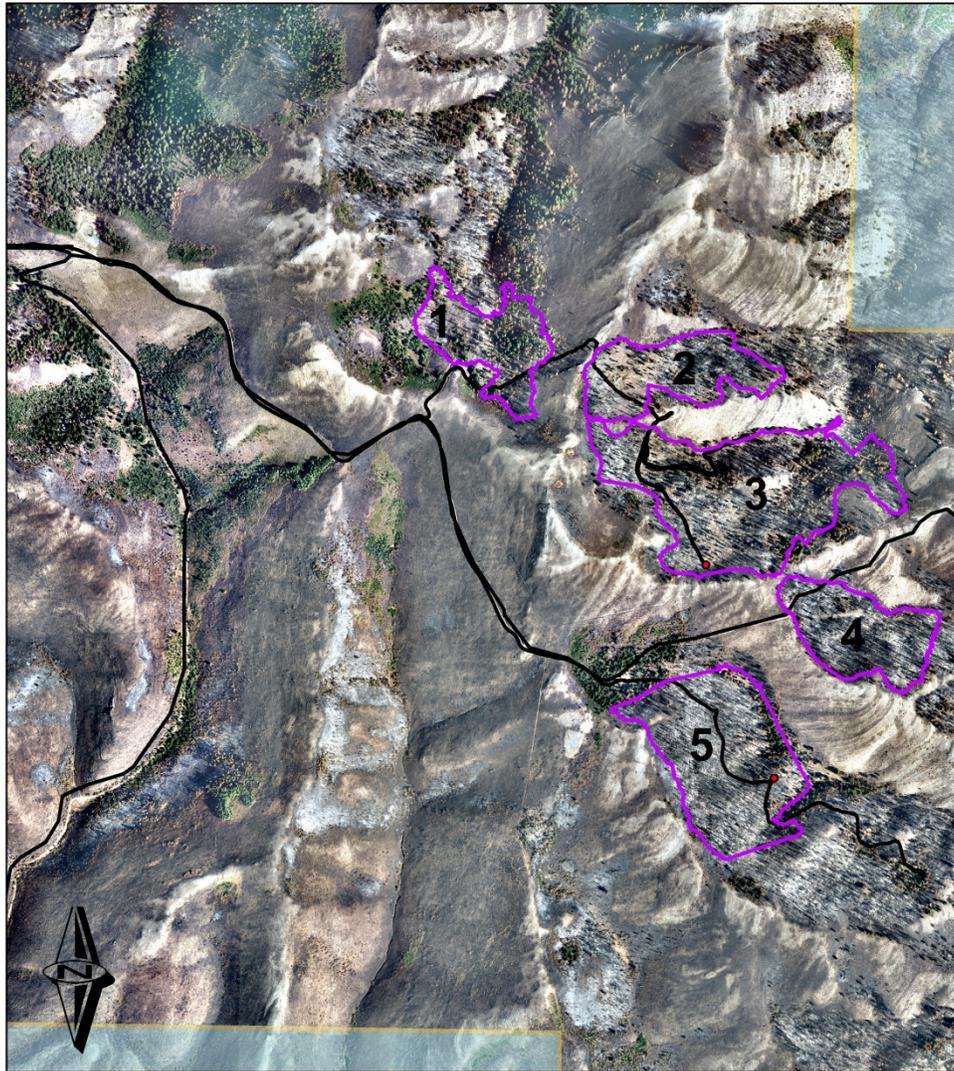


Figure 1. A map of identified timber salvage units within the State Fire Salvage Project.

Figure 2. A table of unit acreage, trees per acre, volume per acre, volume per unit, average diameter at breast height (DBH), and totaled board foot volume.

<b>Unit #</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Tree/Acre</b>	<b>Vol/Acre</b>	<b>Total Volume</b>	<b>Avg DBH</b>
<b>Unit 1</b>	19.22	58.0	5426	104296	16.8
<b>Unit 2</b>	21.7	64.7	7952	172560	16.8
<b>Unit 3</b>	56.69	44.5	5909	334976	16.0
<b>Unit 4</b>	21.87	81.0	11120	243196	18.2
<b>Unit 5</b>	41.85	75.3	8956	374794	16.3
total board feet			<b>1229822</b>		

**Protest and Appeals Information**

A person who wishes to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals must file in the office of the officer who made the decision (not the Interior Board of Land Appeals) a notice that he wishes to appeal. Information on taking appeals to the Interior Board of Land Appeals is available in General guidance for appeals in 43 CFR Part 4. See attached Form 1842-1 for appealing procedures. A protest period for the sale of the timber will be available at the time the sale notice is published in the local paper, which constitutes the decision document for purposes of protests, under 43 CFR subpart 5003 - Administrative Remedies. Protests of any sale listed below must be filed within fifteen (15) days after publication of this notice.