

**United States Department of Interior  
Bureau of Land Management, Four Rivers Field Office**

**Garden Mountain Fuels Management Project**

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

Finding of No Significant Impact: It has been determined that EA No. ID-096-2004-055 adequately analyzes the impacts of the Proposed Action and indicates a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on the quality of the human environment. Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA, it has been determined that impacts are not expected to be significant and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Both context and intensity, as discussed in 40 CFR 1508.27, have been considered in this FONSI. Context connotes 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. This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region wide, or statewide importance. Significance varies with the setting... 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. In the EA the intensity of effects was evaluated within a local (i.e., project area) context.

The Garden Mountain project is located within the BLM FRFO area and lies northwest of the communities of Garden Valley and Crouch. No Endangered Species Act listed plant or animal species or cultural resources are known to occur in the project area. The land within the project area is BLM-managed land surrounded by State- and privately-owned lands. The surrounding private ownership includes expanding residential sites, mainly in the form of new subdivisions, and the communities of Crouch and Garden Valley, which are National Fire Plan designated Communities-at-Risk (Federal Register Vol. 66, No. 160, August 17, 2001).

From its inception, the project was designed to preclude adverse environmental effects. While the appearance of the forest and vegetation within the project area will be changed as a result of the decision, the characteristic landscape and the overall scenic quality of the area will not be adversely affected. Because the treatment would occur over a number of years rather than all at once, the short term visual effects would be minimized while accomplishing the short and long term fuel reduction objectives. In the longer term, the forest stands will begin to appear more as they were before the adoption of the effective fire suppression efforts. The forest stands will be more vigorous, healthy, and resilient. They will be less susceptible to severe wildfire because the project will change vegetation/fuel properties (density and structure) in a manner that will reduce the potential for high intensity wildfire. Property and resource values will be more defensible when wildfire occurs. A severe wildfire of any extent would result in a loss of resource and property values in the project area.

Intensity refers to the severity of the impact. The following discussion is organized around the ten significance criteria described in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (40 CFR 1508.27). Potential adverse effects of implementing the Proposed Action were analyzed and found to be not significant in both context and intensity.

**1. *Whether impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse have been considered.***

Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered when making a determination of significance. The EA contains a complete discussion of effects on pages 26-75. The adverse effects are short-term in nature and will not impair land productivity. The long-term effects are considered to be beneficial, especially to the overall health of the forest and wildlife habitat, and will result in decreased large scale fire potential. While there will be beneficial effects, this action does not rely on those effects to balance potentially significant adverse environmental effects. The beneficial effects of the action do not bias the finding of no significant environmental effects. Potential adverse effects have been substantially or fully reduced through project design (Attachment A). For example, potential water quality effects have been reduced by including buffer zones on both sides of all perennial and intermittent streams in the project area. INFISH recommended buffer widths will be applied and pre-approved by the BLM fisheries biologist or watershed specialist and no work will occur within these zones.

**2. *The degree of effect on public health or safety.***

The project will reduce the risk of large, high severity wildland fire on approximately 1,348 acres (EA pages 5, 8, 14, and 15 and Attachment A). These efforts will improve the potential for successful suppression of a wildland fire within the project area and increase firefighter and public safety (Attachment A of the EA). The project will have a beneficial effect on public health and safety within the wildland urban interface areas by reducing current and expected risks of a large wildland fire through the reduction of existing fuels. The loss of property and resource and social/recreational values associated with wildland fire will also be reduced. During prescribed burning there will be some short-term effects to air quality that could affect health of individuals in the community. Burning will be conducted at favorable times to ensure safe burning and to minimize adverse effects in accordance with applicable air quality regulations (EA pages 56 and 57 and Attachment A).

**3. *The degree of effect on 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 project area is not in proximity to and/or will not affect any known historic sites, parklands, prime or unique farmlands, floodplains, environmental justice issues, known hazardous wastes, Native American religious concerns, wetlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or ecologically critical areas. A cultural resource survey was conducted and no resources were identified in the project area (EA pages 49-51). Protection measures will be put in place if any historic properties are discovered within the project area during

project implementation (Attachment A). Non-treatment areas for the project include riparian habitat conservation area buffers adjacent to streams in the project area. Additional protective measures are identified in Attachment A of the EA.

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

Based on review of the public comments and the project analysis, we do not find any highly controversial effects to the human environment. There is no scientific controversy over the effects of the proposal. Overall, the public was in support of the Proposed Action and design criteria have been added to address the concerns that were raised by the public (see above discussion under "Rationale for Decision" and Attachment A). Fuels management actions have been occurring for a number of years and the effects of this project are similar in nature to those of other vegetation treatment and fuel hazard reduction projects that have been implemented.

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

Similar projects have exhibited the desired change in wildfire behavior by reducing fire intensity and rate of spread. The risks associated with the project are recognized, familiar and acceptable. The analysis is based on the best use of available data on fire behavior and previous experience with this type of fuel reduction project. Vegetation and fuel reduction treatments have been implemented for many years in the vegetation types typical of the project area and effects of those projects have been analyzed. Therefore, the effects are not unique nor do they pose unknown risks. Practices that the agency has successfully used before will be effective in holding environmental effects at or below expectations (see Attachment A of the EA for a discussion of best management practices (BMPs) and design criteria).

**6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts.**

A decision to implement the fuel reduction project does not establish any future precedent for other actions that may have a significant effect. These types of fuels reduction activities have been occurring for a number of years. There has been no indication that a precedent for future actions with significant effects will be established. Future actions will be evaluated through the NEPA process and will stand on their own as to environmental effects and project feasibility.

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into smaller parts.**

Cumulative effects were analyzed for each resource (EA pages 38, 39, 40, 41, 44, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 57, 58, 61, 63, 67, 71, 73, and 75). The United States Forest Service, Idaho Department of Lands, Boise Cascade Corporation, and private individuals own land near the project area. Recent or reasonably foreseeable actions include State and private

timber harvest for commercial and fuel mitigation purposes, subdivision development, road projects, and prescribed burning (EA page 38). Fuel modifications are currently occurring in a nearby subdivision on private land to lessen damage from high intensity fires. Some adjoining IDL lands have undergone recent harvesting and prescribed burning. Boise Cascade has sold two parcels near the project area (one for subdivision development and one for logging). The slopes and soil types in the adjacent private and State lands have similar properties as the project area but may be less erodible due to more moderate slopes.

Warm Springs Road has experienced severe degradation and erosion and currently it is partially passable by pickup truck or ATV only. The main sources of sediment are the running surface of the road, two cutslope failures, and two fillslope failures. Overall, under the current condition, the road, drainage ditches, cutslopes, and fillslopes do not appear to be delivering large amounts of sediment downstream. The actual amount of sediment being transported to perennial stream channels appears to be low (EA page 39).

If the southern portion of Warm Springs Road is reconstructed in the future to meet BLM Road Standards (EA pages 16-18), direct effects to soils would be expected and soil erosion could increase in the short term. Road building on this soil and landtype is potentially a major source of sediment and the disturbance could lead to an increase in noxious weeds and invasive species. Ultimately site productivity, water yield, water quality, and aquatic habitat could be affected. If the road is improved, decomposed granitic material would be exposed. Sediment yields would increase in the short term and would gradually diminish as ditch lines, cutslopes and fillslopes become revegetated. Erosion control devices would be utilized as necessary to minimize erosion and sediment movement associated with the road project.

The premise of the Proposed Action alternative is that it would significantly decrease the likelihood of high intensity wildland fire. The cumulative impact of using thinning and prescribed fire to return the historic fire regime to the project area would be positive in the long term because it would reduce fuel loads and lower the risks of large and/or severe wildland fires which could destroy resources over large areas. Significant cumulative effects are not expected due to project specific design criteria and implementation of standard BMPs.

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

The Proposed Action will not have a significant adverse effect on sites that are listed in, or are eligible to be listed in, the National Register of Historic Places because none are known in the project area. A cultural resource inventory was conducted and no sites were identified (EA pages 49-51). Design criteria are included in the Proposed Action in the event that any sites are discovered during implementation (EA Attachment A).

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

In compliance with Endangered Species Act requirements, a BA of this project's impacts on threatened and endangered species was completed. The determination in the BA is that the Proposed Action would have "no effect" on gray wolf, Canada lynx, and bald eagle and "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" bull trout.

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

The Proposed Action meets Federal, State, and local laws for the protection of the environment, including the Cascade RMP, and meets disclosure requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (EA page 5). Local governments were informed of the proposal during scoping and the public comment period (EA pages 6, 76, 77, 78, and 79).

  
Four Rivers Field Office Manager

  
Date