

**USDI, Bureau of Land Management, Boise District, Four Rivers Field Office**  
**DECISION RECORD**  
**GARDEN MOUNTAIN FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)**  
**DOI-BLM-ID-096-2004-055-EA**

**BACKGROUND**

The broad landscape around the project area is composed of a mixed ownership including private, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Idaho Department of Lands. The project area is a fire prone landscape and is within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), “where humans and their development meet or intermix with wildland fuel” (Fire in the West, The Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Problem, A Report for the Western States Fire Managers, September 18, 2000). The project area is within 2 miles of Crouch, Idaho, and within 1 mile of five separate subdivisions (Terrace Lakes, Castle Mountain, Valley-Hi, Shilo, and Mountain Shadows) composed of more than 500 homes. (See Map #1, Urban Interface)

Since 2009, many private home owners have already completed fire mitigations measures around their property under the Idaho Department of Lands Community Protection Program funded and sponsored by the BLM and Idaho Department of Lands working through the Boise County Resource Conservation and Development Council. These measures include brush removal and thinning/pruning of trees on their individual lots.

The landscape is composed of a forest structure that facilitates the rapid spread of fire and is located at the north end of a highway corridor which has experienced seven large fires since 1989:

- The forest structure contains high tree density, extensive ladder fuels, a high proportion of fire susceptible late seral tree species, and widespread dwarf mistletoe (a tree disease). This structure and disease create unhealthy and fire prone conditions.
- A 14 mile stretch of US Highway 55 and County Highway 17 (near Banks, ID) has experienced seven fires since 1989 which have burned more than 22,000 acres. The project area, Crouch, and the five subdivisions sit at the northeast end of this corridor and perennial winds come from the southwest. (See Map #2, Fire History)

These forest/fuels conditions, the proximity of the project area to Crouch and five subdivisions, and seven fires since 1989 leave property owners in a precarious, hazardous situation with regards to future fire events.

Recognizing the hazards associated with these conditions, the BLM is seeking to mitigate the hazard by reducing the tree density on the more gentle sloped ground near the private property and creating a fuel break along the road on the lower slope of Garden Mountain. Such actions would facilitate a reduction of flame height, fire intensity, and rate of spread as a fire approached the private property.

Additionally, the BLM is aware of the fuels reduction work completed by many local home owners and wishes to supplement this work with complementary work on adjacent BLM lands.

## **LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE AND NEPA COMPLIANCE**

I have reviewed the Land Use Plan conformance and NEPA (DOI-BLM-ID-096-2004-055) compliance record and have determined that Garden Mountain Fuels Management Project is in conformance with the Cascade Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (1988) and that no further environmental analysis is required.

## **DECISION AND RATIONALE**

Decision - It is my decision to implement the proposed activities (shaded fuel break and forest health improvement treatments in Units 2, 3 and 4) that are economically viable at this time. These units (690 acres), which are on the lower slopes of Garden Mountain and closest to the subdivisions, hold the greatest promise of mitigating the wildfire risk to the five nearby subdivisions. (See map #3, Urban Interface Risk Mitigation)

Rationale – Implementation of the shaded fuel break and forest health improvement treatments in Units 2, 3 and 4 would reduce the potential of the late summer perennial winds from the southwest pushing a running crown fire toward the housing subdivisions. These activities would reduce the potential by breaking up the vertical and horizontal continuity of the forest canopy and ground fuels on the BLM lands closest to the housing subdivisions. (See map #4, Proposed Activities)

The forest health improvement treatment proposed for Unit 1 (648 acres of helicopter yarding) would not be implemented since it is not economically viable at this time due to the present high cost of helicopter logging and mediocre lumber market. Additionally, Unit 1 is on the mid-to-upper slopes of Garden Mountain, furthest from the subdivisions and therefore, poses less wildfire risk to the subdivisions.

It is my belief that, at this time, the nearby subdivisions are best served by initiating the proposed activities on the lower slopes and foregoing the treatment of the upper slopes. To postpone lower slope activities, with scant evidence that helicopter logging will be economical within the next 10 years, would put the communities at unnecessary risk in the interim.

### **Vegetative Treatments**

Decision - Commercial harvest (harvest and sale of timber greater than 10 inches diameter at breast height) in Unit 2, 3 and 4 would occur on 280 acres. Ground less than 35 percent slope would be logged with tractors. Ground from 35 to 60 percent slope would be yarded with tracked-jammers. Harvested trees would be whole-tree-yarded with slash piled at the landings. Commercial harvest would not occur in the riparian zones.

Rationale - Commercial harvest would focus on retaining the largest, healthiest, fire resistant tree species. These are generally the larger, early seral species (i.e. ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir)

which are generally best adapted to surviving fires due to their thicker bark and higher distance to their lower crown branches. Tree harvest would focus on the understory which is composed mostly of late seral species (grand fir and sub-alpine fir) and dwarf mistletoe infected Douglas-fir. Dwarf mistletoe is a parasitic disease which saps the health and vigor of its host tree. Harvest of late seral understory and disease infected trees would reduce amount of total fuel loading and ladder fuels, which would reduce the potential of a high intensity/severity, rapid expansion wildfire behavior.

Decision - Within two years of the completion of logging, the remainder of Units 3 and 4 (410 acres) would be treated to create the desired shaded fuel break. This treatment would include tree felling, brush cutting, pruning, lopping, hand piling of slash, brush, and debris, and burning slash piles covered the previous year. Commercial harvest is not part of this treatment. This work, except for the burning of the piles, would be completed under a separate service contract, not as part of the timber sale contract. The pile burning would be done by BLM fuels personnel in the late fall or winter when control of the burning is at its maximum.

Rationale - Without treatment of the understory sub-merchantable trees (less than 12 inches diameter at 4.5 feet in height) the ladder fuels would remain, permitting a fire to easily become a high intensity, rapidly moving crown fire. Treatment of these understory trees would facilitate a fire flame front dropping to the ground and allowing fire suppression personnel a better opportunity to protect the nearby subdivisions.

### **Log Haul and Transportation Management**

Decision - Log haul would occur to both the north and south on the Garden Mountain Road. The Warm Springs Road would be improved by the installation of drainage culverts, relief culverts, rolling dips, and outsloping of the road surface. Both the north and south half of the Warm Spring road would undergo maintenance before, during and after log haul.

Rationale - Log haul to both the north and south on the Garden Mountain road would eliminate the need to construct a very steep 0.1 mile road segment to join the Garden Mountain Road to the McBride Road. The Garden Mountain Road has been closed to full size vehicles for approximately 10 years. ATV traffic on the road has steadily increased. As a consequence of being closed to full size vehicles and a limited district-wide road maintenance budget, the road has not been maintained as well as planned. Future maintenance is anticipated as a continuing problem. The present road is in-sloped, which requires more frequent maintenance than the proposed outsloping with rolling dips. During logging activities, the Garden Mountain Road would be closed to the public between the junctions with the Banks-Lowman Road and the McBride Road.

Decision - Log haul would also occur on the McBride Road. Easements have been acquired with seven property owners along the McBride Road route. Existing drainage problems on short segments of the road would be improved through the use of maintenance before, during and after log haul. Required maintenance would include (but not necessarily be limited to): placement gravel in key locations, re-shaping of the road surface/prism to facilitate correct drainage, installation of rolling

dips, installation of ditch relief culverts, placement of a road base stabilization product (i.e. magnesium chloride) on the lower road segment leading to the Shilo subdivision.

Rationale - The seven easements acquired along the McBride Road and the two existing easement on the Garden Mountain Road require that the BLM bring the roads up to specified safety and physical standards before use and leave the roads at those standards at project completion. The engineering design and specification standards will be included in the timber sale contract.

Decision - Approximately 0.5 mile of temporary road construction would occur within Unit 2 to access the log landing locations. This would be an extension of an Idaho Department of Lands road coming off the McBride Road. The road would be permanently closed and rehabilitated after completion of logging activities.

Rationale - The 0.5 mile temporary road to Unit 2 is necessary to access the log landings identified in the EA. Without such road access, excessively long skid trail would create greater soil resource damage.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMENTS RECEIVED**

The initial scoping notice was sent to other agencies, organizations, and the interested public on February 27, 2004. Two public meetings were held: one in Crouch on March 15 and the other in Boise on March 16, 2004.

The Environmental Assessment was completed in August of 2005 and Finding of No Significant Impact and EA Decision Record were signed on February 1, 2006.

Since 2007, the project was stalled for several years due to the inability to acquire the necessary road easements. However, BLM representatives have frequently attended spring or early summer homeowner association meetings for Terrace Lakes and Shilo subdivisions to provide updates on the status of the project.

## **PROTEST PROCEDURES**

The decision described in this document is a forest management decision and is subject to protest by the public. In accordance with Forest Management Regulations at 43 CFR Subpart 5003 Administrative Remedies, protests of this decision may be filed with the authorized officer, Tate Fischer, within 15 days of the publication date of the notice of decision/timber sale advertisement in the Idaho Statesman, Boise, Idaho. The notice of decision will be published in the Idaho Statesman newspaper on August 28, 2014.

43 CFR § 5003.3 subsection (b) states: "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 (email) or facsimile (fax) protests. Only written and signed hard copies of protests

that are delivered to the Four Rivers Field Office will be accepted. 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.

43 CFR § 5003.3 subsection (c) states: “Protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the notice of decision or the notice of sale 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 to her. The authorized officer shall, at the conclusion of the review, serve the protest decision in writing to the protesting party(ies). Upon denial of a protest, the authorized officer may proceed with the implementation of the decision as permitted by regulations at 5003.3(f).

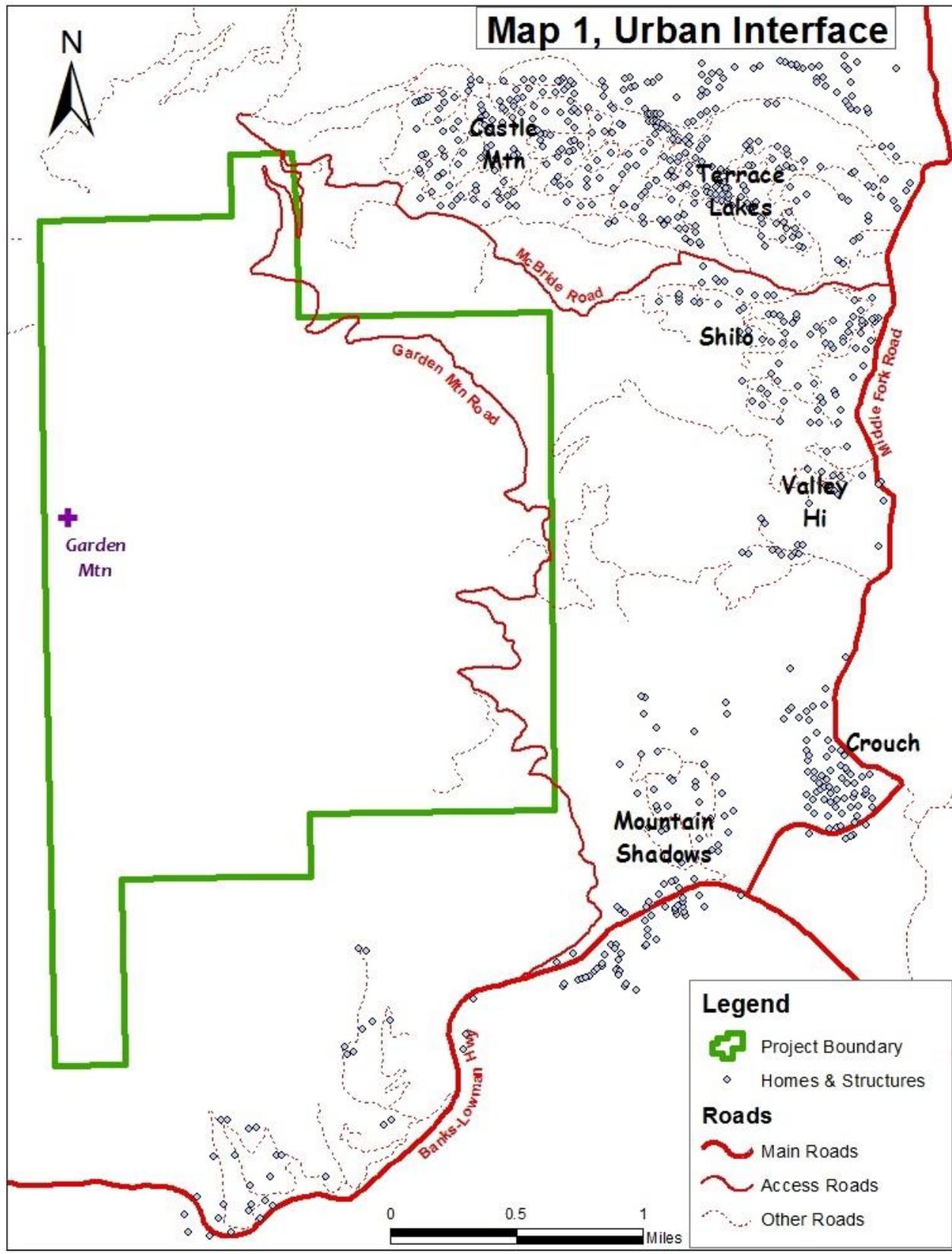
If no protest is received by the close of business (4:30 p.m.) within 15 days after publication of the decision notice, this decision will become final. If a timely protest is received, the project decision will be reconsidered in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available, and the Four Rivers Field Office will issue a protest decision.

For further information, contact Frank Marsh (208) 384-3389; or Four Rivers Field Office, 3948 Development Avenue, Boise, Idaho 83705.

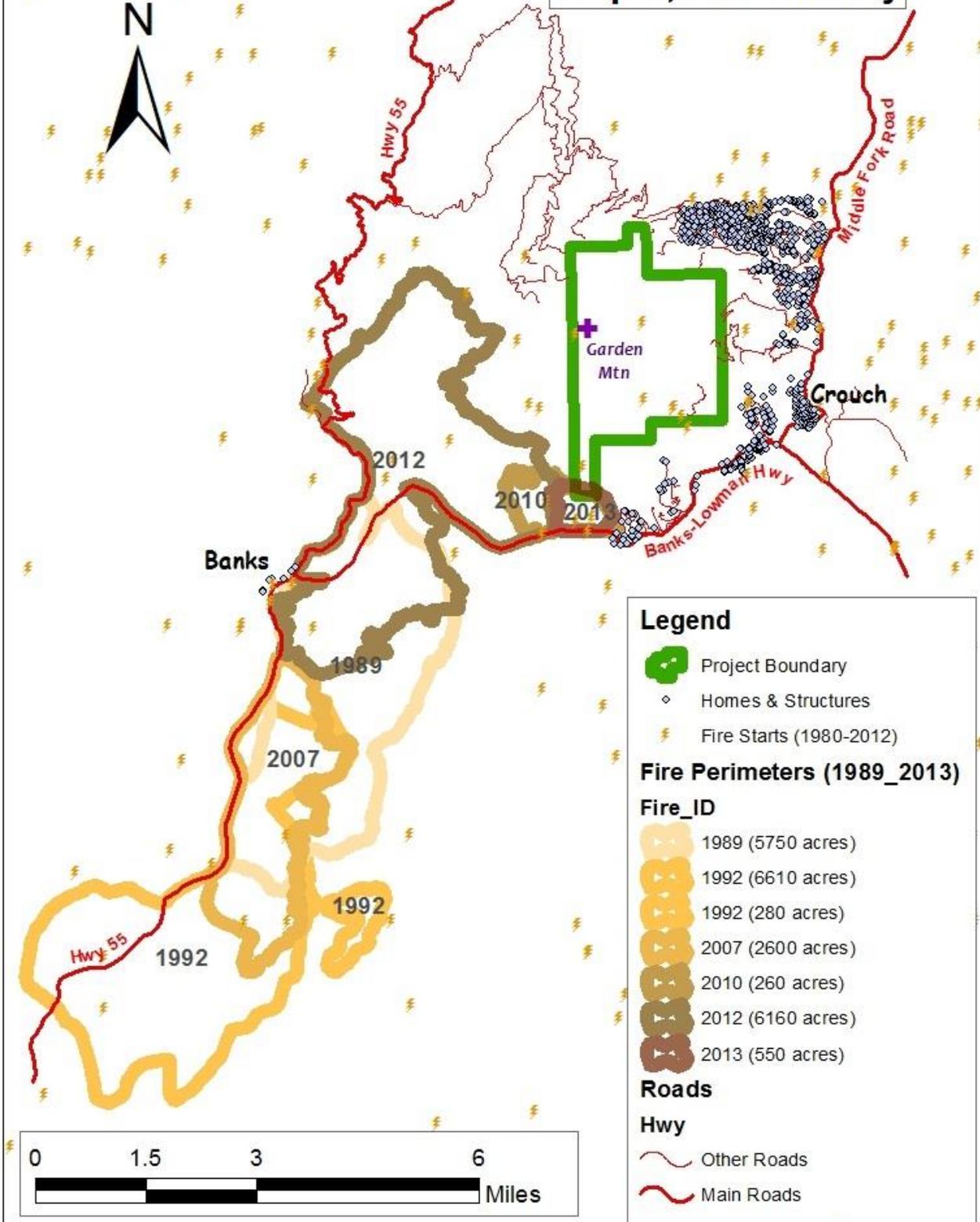
/s/ Tate Fischer  
Signature

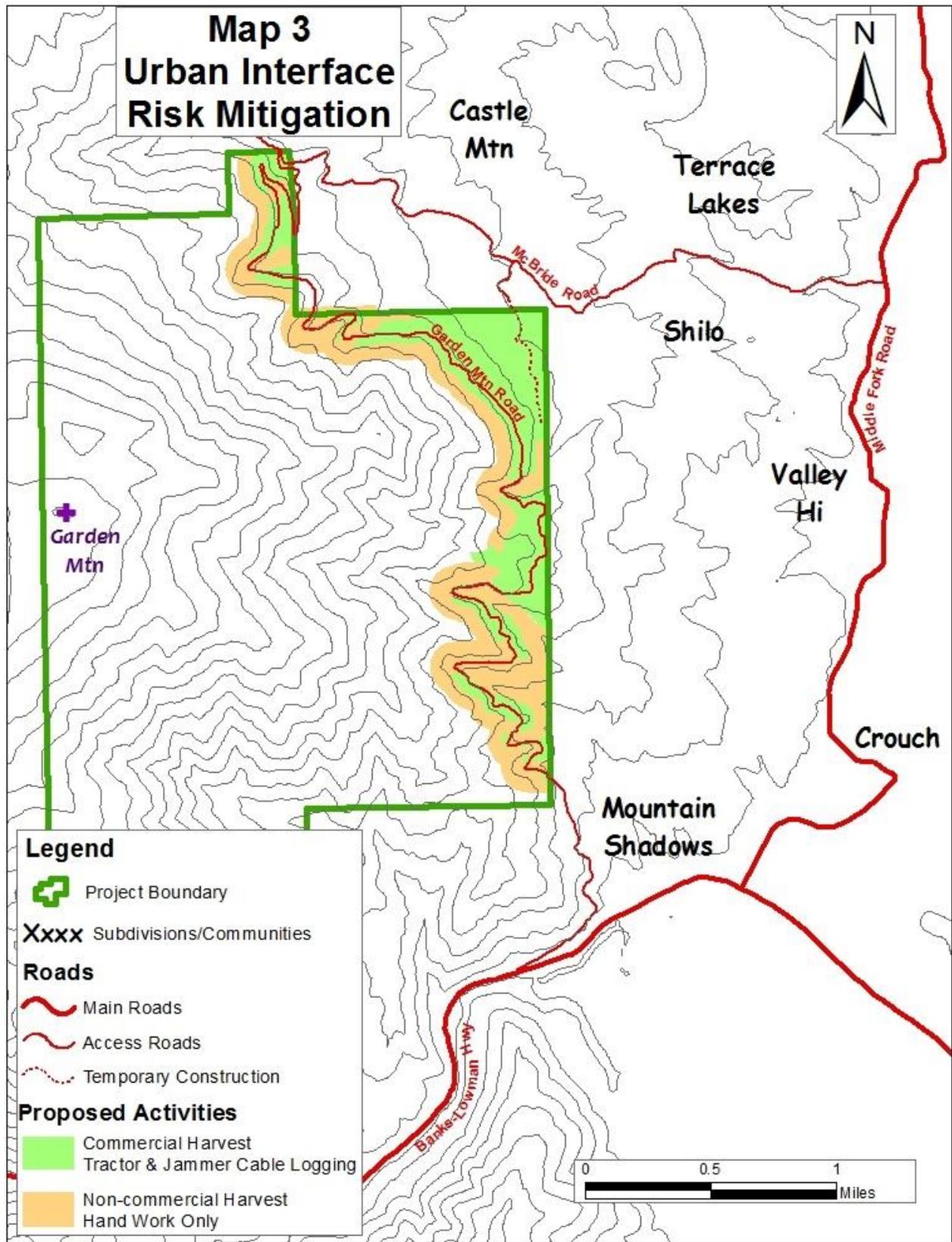
8-25-2014  
Date

Tate Fischer  
Field Manager  
Four Rivers Field Office



# Map 2, Fire History





# Map 4 Proposed Activities



+  
Garden  
Mtn

### Legend

 Project Boundary

### Roads

 Main Roads

 Access Roads

 Temporary Construction

### Proposed Activities

 Commercial Harvest  
Tractor & Jammer Cable Logging

 Non-commercial Harvest  
Hand Work Only

### EA Unit Number

 Units 1 & 2 - Improvement Harvest Treatment  
(Unit 1 is helicopter logging and is  
NOT proposed for treatment at this time)

 Units 3 & 4 - Fuel Break Treatment

