

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Cottonwood Field Office
1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood Idaho 83522

DECISION RECORD

Hazard Creek Fuels Project
DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2014-0008-EA

1. Background

There exists a fuel hazard and potential for stand-replacement wildfire in the wildland-urban interface in the Hazard Creek drainage. In the absence of disturbance, the encroachment of shade-tolerant Douglas-fir and grand fir will lead to overstocked conditions with increased ladder fuels.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has developed a project plan to meet forest, fire, and related resource management objectives of the Approved Cottonwood Resource Management Plan (BLM, 2009). The project will treat forest vegetation and reduce fuel loadings on 551 acres through the use of prescribed fire, with mechanical thinning and pruning on 60 acres prior to the application of prescribed fire. BLM managed project area roads would be maintained or improved to provide for adequate drainage.

The purpose of this project is to:

1. Reduce the hazard and potential for stand-replacement fire in the wildland-urban interface (WUI)
2. Maintain or return vegetative communities to historic fire regimes (Fire Regime Condition Class 1)
3. Manage for forest health and/or habitat diversity in the Little Salmon River for desired future conditions, emphasizing the retention of large tree size ponderosa pine and/or Douglas-fir in dry conifer sites.

2. Decision

It is my decision to implement the Hazard Creek Fuels Project, as shown in the attached map and as described below. In accordance with 43 CFR 5003.1(b), this decision is effective immediately upon signature.

The BLM will treat 551 acres through the use of prescribed fire (see map). Prior to burning, 60 acres of dense stands will be mechanically thinned and pruned by chainsaw. Such treatments will include primarily the removal of small trees (generally less than 8-inch diameter) and brush, as well as pruning of lower branches up to approximately 8 feet high. The slash will be hand piled along with existing fuels and the piles would be burned. Some thinning and piling will occur within Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs).

The prescribed burn area will be broken into smaller units to aid burning activities that may be conducted over a period of 3 to 5 years. Existing road and trails will be used for access and as control lines with additional handline constructed along property lines and ridges (see map). Control line preparation may require the removal of concentrations of fuel including small trees and brush to create a 50-100 foot wide clearing. Hand line construction will entail exposing mineral soils on a 1.5 to 2 foot wide strip. Additional prescribed burn treatments will be conducted periodically, as needed to maintain desired fuel conditions.

BLM-managed project area roads will be maintained to provide for adequate drainage; which will include maintaining or constructing rolling dips, cleaning culverts, blading, brushing, and cleaning ditches. Two small stream crossings (non-fish-bearing) will be improved to prevent adverse erosion and adequately handle high (100-year) flow events. Two undersized and plugged/partially plugged culverts (non-fish bearing stream) will be replaced with 30-inch diameter culverts. One small stream crossing ford (non-fish bearing stream) will be reconstructed and maintained to prevent adverse erosion and prevent the stream from running down the road.

Environmental Design Features

Implementation will use project design and mitigation measures as listed in section 6.1.1 of the EA (pages 9-11). Many of the measures are derived from application of best management practices (BMPs) and guidelines from the Cottonwood RMP and the Idaho Forest Practices Act and Stream Channel Alteration Handbook.

Forest Vegetation

- Silvicultural prescriptions will be written for each unit, in accordance with the Cottonwood RMP guidance in Appendix C, Desired Future Conditions for Forest Vegetation/Wildlife Habitat (BLM 2009). This includes slash treatment and burn guidelines to meet desired stand conditions of species composition and structure and watershed sediment guidelines. These prescriptions emphasize retention of large early seral ponderosa pine, western larch and Douglas-fir where practicable.
- Prescribed burning will be designed and implemented with the intent of limiting tree mortality to less than 10 percent of the overstory.

Air Quality (Smoke Management)

- Cooperate with other land managers, including the State of Idaho, and the IDEQ to minimize air quality impacts from smoke on local communities and individuals.
- Conduct prescribed fires in accordance with the procedures outlined in the *Montana/Idaho State Airshed Group Operating Guide* (<http://www.smokemu.org/docs/2010%20Operations%20Guide.pdf>, June 2010).
- Apply management techniques to minimize smoke production and to enhance dispersion, including burning under optimum weather conditions, expanding the burning season, using backfires where applicable, burning small blocks, etc. These techniques are described in the Prescribed Fire Smoke Management Guide,

published by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NFES No. 1279, PMS 420-1; 1985).

- Monitor weather and the burning and smoke dispersion conditions to assure air quality impacts remain within prescribed smoke management levels. A smoke monitoring system has been established that determines the need for restrictions on prescribed burning. If the monitoring unit forecasts ventilation problems, burning is either restricted by elevation or curtailed until good ventilation conditions return. The IDEQ uses the monitoring data to inform the public of high levels during burns, wildland fires, and other activities.

Soils and Water Resources

- Prescribed burning should be of low enough severity to insure adequate duff retention to limit surface erosion. Only light low severity underburning on high landslide hazard areas would occur.
- Management activities within RCAs for the Hazard Creek watershed will be conducted in accordance with the Cottonwood RMP, Action VR-1.1.4, page 24 and Appendix D, Aquatic and Riparian Management Strategy (BLM 2009). Mechanical treatments will be buffered. Prescribed fire will not be ignited within a RCA, but may back into these areas under conditions where fire severity will be low and burning will result in very low potential for mortality to overstory trees and reduction of canopy cover or exposure of bare soil in these RCA buffer areas.

Invasive, Non-Native Species

- Treat existing weed infestations along access roads prior to project implementation.
- Disturbed areas should be inventoried for new weed introductions and treatment implemented one year post project and preferably two.
- Post project monitoring of vegetation would occur to assess achievement of treatment goals/objectives and survey for invasive plants. If any invasive plants were found during survey they would be treated as described in the record of decision for the *Cottonwood Integrated Weed Treatment Program*, DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2011-0017-EA, 12/06/2012.

Aquatic and Riparian Habitat

- As described for Soil and Water Resources, apply RMP guidance to landslide prone areas; and streamside and wetland RCAs.
- No fuel storage, equipment maintenance, or fueling would be authorized within RCAs.
- Thinning would not occur within any riparian habitats or 25 feet (whichever is larger) of any intermittent or perennial non-fish-bearing stream or within 300 feet of any fish bearing stream (Hazard Creek).
- Within the mechanical treatment areas no slash piling and burning would occur within 50 feet of streams.

- Control line preparation occurring within RCAs would be limited to a width not exceeding 25 feet and would be coordinated with the Cottonwood Field Office Fisheries Biologist
- Ignition would not occur within the RCAs, but fire would be allowed to back down into the RCAs.
- BLM managed project area roads would be maintained or improved to provide for adequate drainage and to minimize potential for adverse erosion/sediment.
- The culvert replacement projects occur in an intermittent non-fish bearing stream, and culvert installation would occur during a summer or fall no-flow periods. The ford improvement project includes pulling back the ford berms and reshaping the ford crossing with an excavator to insure that high flow events stay in the stream channel. As needed, all stream crossing improvement projects would have appropriate erosion/sediment measure to prevent adverse erosion (i.e., seeding desirable species and mulching). Culvert and ford re-construction specifications include design measures to handle a 100-year flow event.

Mitigation Measures

To reduce potential for disturbance, displacement, injury, or mortality to nesting birds, no thinning would occur from April 1 to July 15 within the mechanical treatment areas (60 acres).

3. Authority

This is a Fire Management decision in accordance with 43 CFR 5000.

4. Rationale

My decision is based on consideration of the protective resource design and mitigation measures information contained in the environmental assessment for this project (DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2014-0008-EA), management requirements of applicable laws and policies, and the comments received from public involvement and agency consultations for this project. The Proposed Action and the No Action alternatives were both analyzed in the EA. The Proposed Action was selected because it best meets the need for treatments to reduce the fuel hazard and potential for stand-replacement wildfire in the wildland-urban interface in the Hazard Creek drainage. The environment in the project area can be improved and moved toward desired conditions as a result of this project.

The project is consistent with Federal, state and local laws and requirements. It conforms to 2009 Cottonwood Resource Management Plan (EA, section 4.0), specifically with direction for wildland fire management on page 34 of the RMP for Action WF-1.2.5, to “Design, develop and implement hazardous fuels reduction projects identified in or consistent with the goals of community wildfire protection plans.” The Hazard Creek Fuels Project is in the Salmon River Fire Management Unit that is ranked as a high priority for allocating prescribed fire and non-fire fuel reduction resources.

The action will not violate other Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment (FONSI, Intensity factors 9 and 10). Viable populations of species would be maintained as required by the Endangered Species Act and BLM Special Status Species policy (EA, sections 7.6, 7.8, and 7.9). The BLM has planned the project to incorporate applicable Federal, State and local requirements Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Idaho State Water Quality Standards, Idaho Forest Practices Act, and Idaho Stream Channel Protection Act. Burning activities would implement the EPA and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality permit procedures outlined in the North Idaho Smoke Management Memorandum of Agreement (EA, section 7.4).

5. Public Involvement

Scoping for preparation of this EA included publishing information on the Idaho BLM NEPA website in June 2014, and sending letters requesting comments from various groups and the public. The BLM received comments from one individual and one organization that were considered in the development of the proposed action and identification of issues for analysis.

The Cottonwood Field Office issued the EA for a 15-day public comment period the week of January 29, 2015. BLM posted the EA on the ePlanning internet site. One comment letter was received from an organization in full support of this project.

6. Coordination and Consultation

The BLM sent a letter describing the proposal to the Nez Perce Tribe on June 24, 2014 and a letter on January 29, 2015 requesting review and comments of the EA. Coordination with the Tribe did not identify any concerns for traditional cultural properties or their ability to exercise treaty rights.

The BLM also completed consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for ESA-listed wildlife and fish. The BLM coordinated with NOAA Fisheries (National Marine Fisheries Service) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists in preparing a biological assessment specific to the Proposed Action (BLM 2015). Letters of concurrence were received from U.S. Fish and Wildlife on March 13, 2015 and NOAA Fisheries on March 23, 2015.

In addition, the BLM completed consultation under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office in December 2014.

7. Protest and Appeal

This decision constitutes my final decision. Any party that is adversely affected by it may appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4. A notice of appeal must be filed in this office (Cottonwood Field Office, 1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood, Idaho 83522) within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The Notice of appeal must be sent certified mail. The appellant has the

burden of showing that the decision is in error in a statement of reasons. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300-QC, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days of filing the notice of appeal with the authorized officer. Any request for stay of this decision, in accordance with 43 CFR 4.21, must be filed with your notice of appeal.

/s/

3/23/15

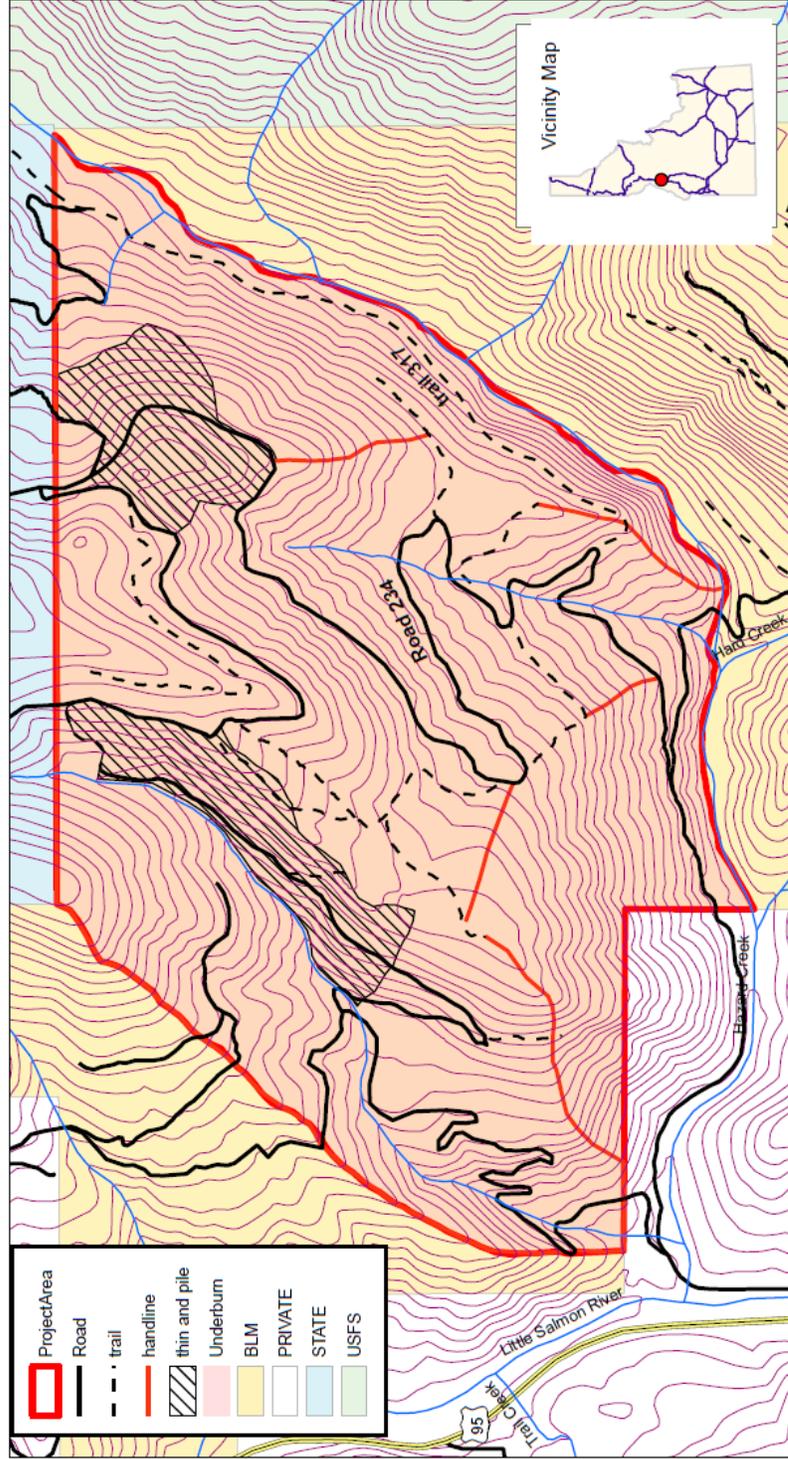
Will Runnoe
Field Manager

Date

Attachment: Project Map

Hazard Creek Fuels Project Proposed Action

Map 1



1:12,000
0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles
Map Projection: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N



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.

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management. The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed. The following cannot be made Section 508 compliant. For help with its data or information, please contact the BLM Idaho State Office Webmaster at 208-375-4000.

Map Created: 6/12/2014

