



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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February 13, 2015

In Reply Refer To:
9214 (G010)

Rockhouse Prescribed Fire
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2014-0020-EA

Decision Record

Background

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Gila District Fire Management Program is proposing to apply prescribed fire as a resource management tool to improve wildlife habitat by promoting an increase in native grass and forb cover and species diversity, improve native species diversity and watershed function by reducing undesirable woody and succulent species (DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2014-0020-EA). The proposed action identifies a management area for consideration for the application of prescribed fire as a resource management tool. The goals of implementing the Rockhouse prescribed fire treatment include:

- Use prescribed fire in a safe, carefully planned, and cost-efficient manner.
- Reduce wildfire risk to watersheds and other values and to benefit, protect, maintain, sustain, and enhance natural and cultural resources.
- Utilize prescribed fire to restore natural ecological processes and functions, and to achieve land management objectives.

Two alternative actions include:

Alternative A: Managing Wildland Fire for Resource Benefit:

In contrast to planning and implementing a prescribed fire within predetermined boundaries and prescriptive parameters a wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives and these objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape. Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives. This management alternative does not have predetermined boundaries or prescriptive parameters that govern when fire can be applied to the landscape in a controlled fashion.

No Action Alternative: Full Suppression

Continue with full suppression as outlined in the Gila District 2010 Fire Management Plan. BLM will suppress natural or human-caused wildland fires by first addressing the safety concerns of firefighters and the public and then addressing resource concerns. Private lands and structures located near this management area require protection from wildfire. The priority appropriate management action is to prevent wildfires from spreading to private land.

Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action is in conformance with the Safford District Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement, approved in 1991, as amended. This proposed action has been reviewed to determine if it conforms to the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5, BLM MS 1617.3.

The proposed action is also in conformance with the Arizona Statewide Land Use Plan Amendment for Fire, Fuels, and Air Quality Management and Record of Decision (LUPA), approved in 2004. This proposed action has been reviewed to determine if it conforms to the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5, BLM MS 1617.3.

The proposed action is consistent with the LUPA Land Use Allocation 1-Wildland Fire Use: Areas suitable for wildland fire use for resource management benefit:

- “Areas where wildland fire is desired, and there are few or no constraints for its use. Where conditions are suitable, unplanned and planned wildfire may be used to achieve desired objectives, such as improve vegetation, wildlife habitat or watershed conditions, maintain non-hazardous levels of fuels, reduce the hazardous effects of unplanned wildland fires and meet resource objectives. Where fuel loading is high but conditions are not initially suitable for wildland fire, fuel loads are reduced by mechanical, chemical or biological means to reduce hazardous fuels levels and meet resource objectives (includes WUI areas).” (LUPA, pp. 4-5)

The proposed action is consistent with the LUPA Desired Future Conditions:

- “Each vegetation community is maintained within its natural range of variation in plant composition, structure, and function, and fuels loads are maintained below levels that are considered to be hazardous.” (LUPA, pg. 4)
- “Semi-desert Grassland-The Desired Future Conditions are for perennial grasses to cover its historic range of variability, annual grass cover is reduced, and fire naturally inhibits the invasion of woody plants such as juniper, tarbush, whitethorn, and creosote.” (LUPA , pg. 6)

The proposed action is consistent with the LUPA Management Actions:

- “In areas suitable for fire where conditions allow, BLM will allow naturally ignited wildland fire, use prescribed fire and a combination of biological, mechanical and chemical treatments to maintain non-hazardous levels of fuels, reduce hazardous effects of unplanned wildland fires and meet resource objectives.” (LUPA, pg. 9)
- “For all fire management activities (wildfire suppression, appropriately managed wildfire use, prescribed fire, and mechanical, chemical, and biological vegetation treatments), Conservation

Measures will be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to provide statewide consistency in reducing the effects of fire management actions on federally threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate (“Federally protected”) species.” (LUPA, pg.9)

Compliance with Relevant Laws

Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2014-0020-EA) was prepared in accordance with the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and any additional Federal, State, and local statutes that may be relevant to the proposed action, to assess the potential environmental impacts anticipated to result from the application of prescribed fire on approximately 9,581 acres of BLM (6,332 acres), State Trust (1,990 acres) and private (1,259 acres) lands in Cochise and Graham Counties.

Regarding Threatened and Endangered species (T&E), the Conservation Measures as outlined in Appendix B in the Biological and Conference Opinion for the BLM Arizona Statewide Land Use Plan Amendment for Fire, Fuels and Air Quality Management (September 2004) will be adhered to. Conservation Recommendations as stated in the Biological Opinion issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on August 27, 2014 (AESO/SE 02EAAZ00-2013-F-0093) will also be adhered to.

Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2014-0020-EA) was also prepared in accordance with other applicable laws and authorities, including:

- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 USC Chapter 35)
- National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 USC 470)
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978
- Clean Air Act, as amended (42 USC 7401 et seq.)
- Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1251 et seq., 1972
- Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-148)
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended (16 USC 703 et seq.)
- Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (16 U.S.C. 668-668c)
- Endangered Species Act of 1983, as amended (16 USC 1531)
- Executive Order 12898, “Environmental Justice,” February 11, 1994
- Executive Order 11988, as amended, Floodplain Management, May 24, 1977
- Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, May 24, 1977

Scoping and Public Participation

Internal scoping was completed by a BLM Interdisciplinary Team consisting of specialists in Range Management, Fuels Management, Wildlife Management, Cultural Resource Management, and NEPA Planning. The public was also invited to review and comment on the draft EA and draft Finding of No Significant Impact from November 25, 2014 through December 29, 2014. No comment letters were received.

Decision and Rationale on Action

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2014-0020-EA), and have signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Rockhouse prescribed fire treatment project. Based on that review and the record as a whole, I approve implementation of the proposed action alternative (selected alternative) as described in the Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2014-0020-EA. In accordance with 43 CFR §2931.8(b)), this Decision is in full force and effective immediately.

Appeals

This decision is subject to appeal per the procedures at 43 CFR 4.410-4.415. An appeal may be accompanied by a petition for stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.21, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted below, within 30 days following receipt of this decision:

Bureau of Land Management
Safford Field Office
ATTN: Scott C. Cooke, Field Office Manager
711 14th Avenue
Safford, Arizona 85546

The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant feels that the decision here is in error.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4.21(b)(1) a petition for stay, if filed, must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
- (3) The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted.
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.



Scott C. Cooke
Bureau of Land Management
Field Manager



Date