

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Mineral Ridge Fuels Reduction Project Coeur d'Alene Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to implement a fuels reduction project in the Mineral Ridge Area, in accordance with the Coeur d'Alene Field Office Resource Management Plan. Mineral Ridge is located approximately 6 miles southeast of Coeur d'Alene, ID, near Lake Coeur d'Alene (see attached map). Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences. The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA). Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will also use this public participation opportunity under the NEPA to assist the agency in satisfying the public involvement requirements under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 U.S.C. 470(f)) pursuant to 36 CFR 800.2(d)(3). The information about historic and cultural resources within the area potentially affected by the proposed action will assist the BLM in identifying and evaluating impacts to such resources in the context of both NEPA and Section 106 of the NHPA.

The BLM will consult with Indian tribes on a government-to-government basis in accordance with Executive Order 13175 and other policies. Tribal concerns, including impacts on Indian trust assets and potential impacts to cultural resources, will be given due consideration. Federal, State, and local agencies, along with tribes and other stakeholders that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action that the BLM is evaluating, are invited to participate in the scoping process and, if eligible, may request or be requested by the BLM to participate in the development of the environmental analysis as a cooperating agency.

Background

The BLM has been considering how to better protect the unique resources on Mineral Ridge, as well as adjacent property from wildfire. Past proposals have included prescribed burning only in the fall, which is when historic fires would most likely have been ignited. However, the missed fire return intervals and the subsequent buildup of fuels, make controlling a fall burn more precarious. In addition, getting air quality clearance, as well as proper fuels conditions (humidity, fuel moisture, air temperature, etc.) at the same time in the fall can be difficult. The updated proposal includes flexibility in timing and methods to reduce fuels on the site. This would help the BLM to better protect legacy trees and adjacent lands from wildfire while still accomplishing the goal of reducing the build-up of fuels that makes the site more vulnerable to stand replacing fires.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to reduce fuels within the Mineral Ridge area to protect people, property, and legacy trees from wildfire, while retaining the recreational values and uses of the area. The Mineral Ridge Area has missed three or more fire return intervals (i.e., the understory hasn't burned in 45-75 years or more). The area is dominated by ponderosa pine, which typically burns every 15-25 years. As a result, a wildfire on public land, from lightning or from human carelessness, could move into the urban interface and destroy houses. This area has very limited access, which would delay initial attack fire suppression. This area is also a recreation area with a picnic site and a high volume of recreation along the trail. A wildfire could endanger the lives of recreationists and destroy the existing recreation site infrastructure. In addition, trees within the project area are currently being impacted by root rot disease and bark beetles. Insect and disease activity is expected to increase as the number of shade tolerant trees increases. The site contains numerous legacy trees that are more than 100 years old. These large diameter ponderosa pine and Douglas fir are of high value to wildlife and to people. Reducing shade tolerant trees around these legacy trees will help to protect them from future fires that may occur and increase their resistance to insects and disease.

The objectives of the proposed project are:

- Protect large diameter pine from mountain pine beetles by reducing competition with shade tolerant trees.
- Reduce the threat of wildfire to site, legacy trees, and adjacent lands by reducing fuel load.
- Restore/maintain ponderosa pine as the dominant cover-type by removing Douglas fir and grand fir seedlings.
- Maintain recreational values and opportunities.

Proposed Action

Fuels reduction activity would occur on 74 acres of BLM lands through slashing and hand piling of shade-tolerant tree species (Douglas-fir and grand fir). Removal of these species would benefit shade-intolerant seral species, specifically ponderosa pine, and reduce fuel loading. All Douglas-fir and grand fir smaller than 9" diameter would be cut and piled. Small diameter ponderosa pine may also be cut if they are interfering with dominant trees or are potential ladder fuels near large diameter, more desirable ponderosa pine or Douglas-fir.

In addition to the above action, the BLM is proposing to create a buffer of approximately 130 feet along the southern portion of the BLM property line (see map). This area lies directly adjacent to private land and dwellings, thus we are proposing removal of shade tolerant conifers less than 9 inches in diameter and all brush within this buffer strip. All trees greater than 9" diameter will be left.

Hazardous fuels would be slashed and piled throughout the project site in the late summer or fall of 2015. Piles would be left to cure and then burned in the spring or fall within one to two years, preferably within one year.

Preliminary Issues

Issues that have already been identified and may require further analysis include:

- Noxious weed introduction or expansion: removal of small diameter trees and burning of fine fuels could provide disturbance resulting in the introduction or expansion of noxious weed species.
- Disturbance to wildlife and their habitat: disturbance to wildlife resulting from human presence, equipment noise, and smoke may disrupt or deter wildlife on the site. Changes in habitat may have negative effects on some species.
- Disruption of recreation activities: this high use area may need to be temporarily closed during project implementation.
- Smoke impacts to adjacent landowners and the general public: smoke during the pile burning portion of implementation may bother adjacent land owners and the public.
- Impacts to sensitive plants and their habitat: opening the canopy and disturbing the soil (by burning or slashing) can create an environment that is favorable to weeds. Weeds can then out compete or inhibit the growth of sensitive plants that currently occupy or could occupy the site in the future.

Decision to be Made

In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the BLM Coeur d'Alene Resource Management Plan, and Federal Regulations (43 CFR 5003), the BLM Coeur d'Alene Field Manager will decide whether or not to implement proposed vegetation treatments in the Mineral Ridge Area.

Public Input Needed

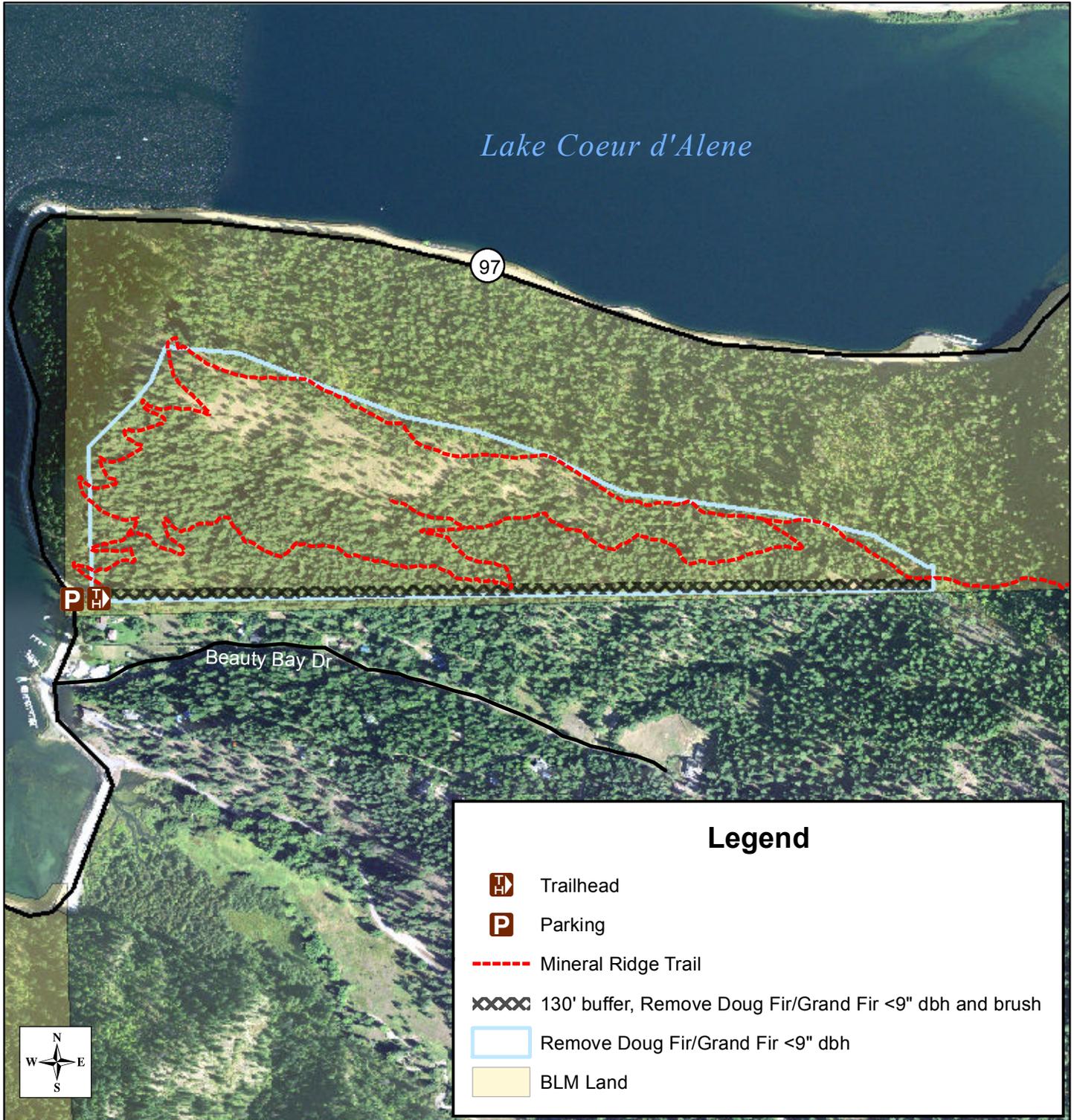
Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by April 1, 2015, and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Comments sent electronically should be sent to **BLM_ID_MineralRidgeFuelsReduction@blm.gov** . Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Carrie Hugo, Project Lead, at: (208) 769-5048.

Attachments: Project area map

Mineral Ridge Fuels Reduction Project



Legend

-  Trailhead
-  Parking
-  Mineral Ridge Trail
-  130' buffer, Remove Doug Fir/Grand Fir <9" dbh and brush
-  Remove Doug Fir/Grand Fir <9" dbh
-  BLM Land

1:8,700



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 208-373-4000.

Map Created: 1/20/2015

