

United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Coeur d'Alene Field Office  
3815 N Schreiber Way  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815

## **DECISION RECORD**

Mineral Ridge Fuels Reduction  
NEPA Register Number: DOI-BLM-ID-C010-2015-0003-EA

### **1. Background**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has been considering how to better manage the unique resources on Mineral Ridge by improving forest health and protecting adjacent property and unique natural resources 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 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 has proven difficult. The updated proposal includes flexibility in timing and methods to reduce fuels and improve forest health 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 and insects and disease.

### **2. Decision**

It is my decision to implement Alternative A. Fuels reduction activity will occur on 74 acres of BLM lands through slashing and hand piling of small diameter understory tree species. In addition, a shaded fuel break would be completed along the southern boundary of the property where brush and small diameter conifers would be removed to provide even greater protection for adjacent private properties.

Fuels reduction activity would be implemented through slashing and hand piling of shade-tolerant tree species (largely Douglas-fir and grand fir). Removal would benefit shade-intolerant seral species, specifically ponderosa pine, and reduce ladder fuels. All material smaller than 9" diameter (both activity related and natural fuels) 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.

BLM is also proposing to create a buffer approximately 130 feet wide that would be treated along the southern portion of the BLM property line. This area lies directly adjacent to private land and dwellings, thus we are proposing removal of conifers less than 9' inches in diameter and all brush within this buffer strip. All material up to 9" diameter would be cut and piled. All trees greater than 9" diameter will be left.

All fuels would be slashed by hand crews and piled throughout the project site. Piles would be left to cure and burned within one to two years.

In addition to the above forest health treatment and fuels reduction, old fire hand-lines that were constructed for implementation of the first proposed prescribed burn would be rehabilitated. This hand-line has become a "Trail" that is used by the public. The current use of the hand-line as a trail has resulted in compacted soil and may be furthering the spread of noxious weeds. Without rehabilitation, erosion of soils in steep areas will increase. Because prescribed burning will not be implemented as part of this final proposal, the hand-line would be rehabilitated to discontinue its use as a recreational trail.

### Design Features

In order to reduce the impact to the aesthetics of the site, there would be no slash piles created within 50 feet of the parking and picnic areas. Within this buffer, slash would be hauled off or chipped on site.

The BLM's botany and fuels programs would work closely to minimize impacts to BLM Special Status Plant Species.

Burn piles areas adjacent to two rare plant populations that do not recolonize with native species within one to two years should be reseeded or replanted using native vegetation, to inhibit post-burn weed invasion or expansion. Species chosen for the re-vegetation effort should be appropriate for the project area plant community and should not out-compete the two BLM Special Status Plant Species.

To reduce impacts to Migratory Birds, vegetation cutting and piling will not occur between April 15 and July 15.

Reduce sources of weed seed and/or plant parts and minimize risk of spreading existing infestations by treating pre-existing weed populations prior to project activities.

Reduce impacts of weed populations following project completion. Post-project activities would employ an integrated weed control strategy of: monitoring and treatment of weed infestations in treatment areas. Weed treatments may use biological controls, mechanical removal, and/or herbicides after considering the effectiveness of all potential methods and combination of methods.

Monitoring- After fuels reduction activities would employ the Coeur d'Alene Field Office's weed and vegetation management strategy to monitor and treat weed infestations on trails, roads, landings, skid trails, and treatment areas. Future weed treatments may use biological controls, mechanical removal, and/or herbicides after considering the effectiveness of the methods, as described for the Integrated Weed and Vegetation Management program in environmental assessment #ID-410-2008-EA-224 and the

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and environmental design measures in Appendix B and Appendix C of the EA (BLM 2010).

The vegetation on the inside portions of the switch backs would not be slashed or removed to help prevent social trailing. A BLM representative would be on site during project implementation to flag the areas near the switchbacks that need less treatment.

When practical, hand piles would be located thirty feet from the trail. This would help limit the amount of disturbance to the piles until burned. The thirty foot buffer would also limit the amount of burnt ground next to the trail. Limiting the amount of burnt area near the trail would help prevent the spread of noxious weeds by hikers.

### **3. Authority**

The field office manager has the authority to conduct fuels reduction activities on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management in accordance with 43 CFR 5000.

### **4. Rationale**

The proposed action would improve forest health by reducing fuels within the Mineral Ridge area. This would protect people, property, and legacy trees from wildfire, while retaining the recreational values and uses of the area. The decision is in conformance with the Coeur d'Alene Resource Management Plan and was analyzed in detail in EA number DOI-BLM\_ID\_C010-2015-0003-EA. The proposed action would cause no significant impacts to the environment, as documented in the Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI). The proposed Action would 1) Protect large diameter pine from mountain pine beetles by reducing competition with shade tolerant trees; 2) Reduce the threat of wildfire to site, legacy trees, and adjacent lands by reducing fuel load; 3) Restore/maintain ponderosa pine as the dominant cover-type by removing Douglas fir and grand fir seedlings; and 4) Maintain recreational values and opportunities.

### **5. Public Involvement**

Initially the project was proposed solely as a prescribed burn in the Fall season. The BLM conducted public scoping for this original proposal in January of 2009. On December 9, 2008 several members of the BLM Coeur d'Alene Field Office visited homeowners adjacent to the proposed burn site to identify concerns and issues from the public. On December 18, 2008 and January 15, 2009 public meetings were held at the Coeur d'Alene Field Office to discuss the project proposal and to solicit issues on the proposed project from the public. A field tour was held on May 2, 2009 at the proposed prescribed burn site.

However, because of the difficulty in getting air clearance at optimal burn times, and because of significant concerns about the welfare of large diameter trees, exacerbation of weed problems, and sensitive plants, the BLM decided to modify the proposed action in 2014. The BLM then reinitiated public scoping and asked for comments on the new

proposal from March 2 to April 1, 2015. Only one comment was received during the scoping period and the comment was in support of the Proposed Action, with the suggestion that weeds should be treated and property lines be marked during implementation.

## **6. Coordination and Consultation**

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho was consulted during the scoping process for this project.

## **7. Protest and Appeal**

The decision described in this document is a forest management decision and is subject to protest by the public. In accordance with the Forest Management Regulations, 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subpart 5003 – Administrative Remedies, protests may be filed with the authorized officer, Kurt Pavlat, within 15-days of publication of the Notice of Decision in a local newspaper. The publication date of the Notice of Decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file a protest. Protestants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

43 CFR 5003.3 (b) states that: “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 or facsimile protests. Only written and signed hard copies of protests that are delivered to the following address will be accepted:

Field Manager  
Coeur d'Alene Field Office  
3815 Schreiber Way  
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815

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. Protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the notice of decision 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. 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.

If no protest is received by close of business within 15 days after publication of the notice of decision, this decision will become final.

/s/

8/4/15

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Kurt Pavlat  
Field Manager

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Date