

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area at Blue Creek Bay Vegetation Treatment and Trails

Coeur d'Alene Field Office
DOI-BLM-ID-C010-2015-0013-EA

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to harvest timber, reduce hazardous fuels and implement recreation improvements in accordance with Coeur d'Alene Resource Management Plan (RMP) (BLM 2007) within the Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area at Blue Creek Bay approximately six (6) miles east of the City of Coeur d'Alene, ID. 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 Bureau of Land Management acquired the Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area (WFCA) throughout the early 1990's. Following the ice storm of 1996 and a series of wind storms around the same time, the BLM through a number of timber sales treated approximately 500 acres removing wind thrown material, broken topped trees, and trees killed by insects following the storms. Since that time no further forest health treatments have occurred resulting in a departure from historic stocking levels creating an accumulation of hazardous fuels within the wildland urban interface (WUI) and increased conifer encroachment to the dominant overstory. Changes in vegetative conditions have also resulted in increased susceptibility and loss of forest vegetation due to insect and disease agents.

Fuel accumulations and fire suppression has also changed the vegetation patterns, structure, and composition of forests; therefore, the role that fire plays in the ecosystem has been altered (BLM 2007). The altered forest composition, increased recreational use and structures built adjacent to BLM lands, significantly increases the potential for future fires.

The WFCA is considered one of the top priority locations for non-motorized recreation planning by the Coeur d'Alene Field Office. Since the late 2000's, development of an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible day-use area with docks, a day-use trailhead with parking, outdoor education amphitheater, and a viewing platform have been completed. Development of a fully accessible ADA paved trail and parking area are underway on the western side of the meadow; however, no upland developments to date have occurred on the western side of the WFCA parcel. Currently access from the east side developments to the west side are through the use of county maintained roads.

Purpose and Need for Action

Need: The Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area located around Blue Creek Bay is approximately 730 acres (Map 1). The area is unique in that it is comprised of a gradient of forest types ranging from wetlands to upland forest dominated vegetation. The present forest composition is showing signs of decline in overall health and has become overstocked with Douglas-fir, grand fir, and small diameter ponderosa pine. The resulting condition is encroachment by small diameter trees into areas that were historically dominated by large diameter, lower density ponderosa pine and western white pine stands. Overstocking has increased fuel loadings and ladder fuels, in effect creating hazardous fuels conditions within the wildland urban interface. Insect and disease agents are also prevalent and continue to kill trees, many of which are located near county roads and along recreation trails.

Demands for outdoor recreation opportunities continue to increase; thus making the WFCA a desirable recreation site; in part because of its access to Lake Coeur d'Alene and its proximity to Coeur d'Alene, ID. The east side of the ownership has been developed with a non-motorized trail system and day-use areas, however to meet the growing demand of recreationalists, additional trails are needed.

Purpose: The purpose of the proposed action is to address the following goals as key components of the Coeur d'Alene Resource Management Plan (RMP) (BLM 2007):

1. *Goal VF-1*-Restore forest vegetation towards historic species composition, structure, and function across the landscape.

The objectives are to:

1. Manage for forest health throughout approximately 500 acres within the WFCA by conducting forest vegetative treatments (commercial thinning, pre-commercial thinning, slash piling, prescribed fire, etc.) to reduce stocking levels and promote a historic species composition.
2. Reduce the accumulation of hazardous fuels within the WUI.
3. Promote a historic species composition of ponderosa pine, western white pine and western larch.

2. *Goal WF-1*-Protect life and property while returning fire to its natural role in the ecosystem.

The objectives are to:

1. Reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to homes located within the WUI.
2. Protect developed recreation sites and structures on public lands.
3. Protect and reduce the threat of wildfire to cultural and natural resources.

3. *Goal RC-1*-Provide opportunities for quality outdoor recreation experiences ensuring enjoyment of natural and cultural resources on BLM-managed or partnered lands and waterways.

The objectives are to:

1. Provide an upland trail network on the western side to accommodate a variety of non-motorized day-use recreation opportunities and establish connectivity between the east side features to the west side.
2. Enhance environmental education opportunities throughout portions of WFCA.

Proposed Action and Preliminary Alternatives

Proposed Action: The BLM is proposing to reduce stocking levels and treat hazardous fuels across approximately 500 acres within the Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area through a combination of vegetative treatment methods including: the use of selective harvest (SH), pre-commercial thinning (PCT), hazardous fuels reduction work, and prescribed burning (Map 2). All vegetative treatments would favor leaving early seral species such as western larch, ponderosa pine and western white pine where they exist. To facilitate vegetative treatments, existing roads and trails would be primarily utilized; however, temporary road construction would be considered where needed. All temporary roads would be closed and re-vegetated after completion of treatments. In areas adjacent to homes and/or structures, fuel breaks of approximately 200 feet would be utilized. Treatments have the potential to begin in late 2016 and could continue for up to six years through multiple phases.

In addition to vegetative treatments, the BLM is proposing to enhance recreational trail and education opportunities within the WFCA parcel. This would include: development of the west side trail system depicted on Map 3; establishing a single track connection from the existing east side trail system through the meadow (Map 3) to the western side of the BLM ownership; and to pursue opportunities for environmental education. The BLM anticipates that recreation activities would occur in conjunction with vegetative treatments and have the potential to continue for up to six years.

No Action Alternative: To provide a baseline for the effects, the BLM will also analyze a no action alternative. Under this alternative, the BLM would not implement forest vegetation treatments or recreational trail developments.

Preliminary Issues

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

- Noxious weed introduction or expansion: disturbance to soils and vegetation through broadcast burning and utilization of logging equipment could result in the expansion of noxious weed species.
- Impacts to rare plants and their habitat: opening the canopy and disturbing the soil (by timber harvest, burning and/or slashing) can create an environment that is favorable to weeds. Weeds can then outcompete or inhibit the growth of sensitive plants that currently occupy or could occupy the site in the future.
- Disturbance to wildlife and their habitat: harvest activities may have negative effects on some species if snags and brush are removed. Changes in habitat may have negative effects on some species. Additional disturbance to wildlife resulting from human presence, equipment noise, and smoke may disrupt or deter wildlife on the site.
- Disruption of recreation activities: portions of the area may be temporarily closed during project implementation. Skid trails have the potential to establish undesired social trails if not dealt with properly.
- Smoke impacts to adjacent landowners and the general public: smoke during the pile and broadcast burning portion of implementation may bother adjacent land owners and the public.

- Impacts to cultural sites: implementing management actions could impact cultural sites either directly or indirectly and areas left untreated could have a negative impact to cultural sites in the event of a fire.

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 and recreational objectives in the Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area.

Public Input Needed

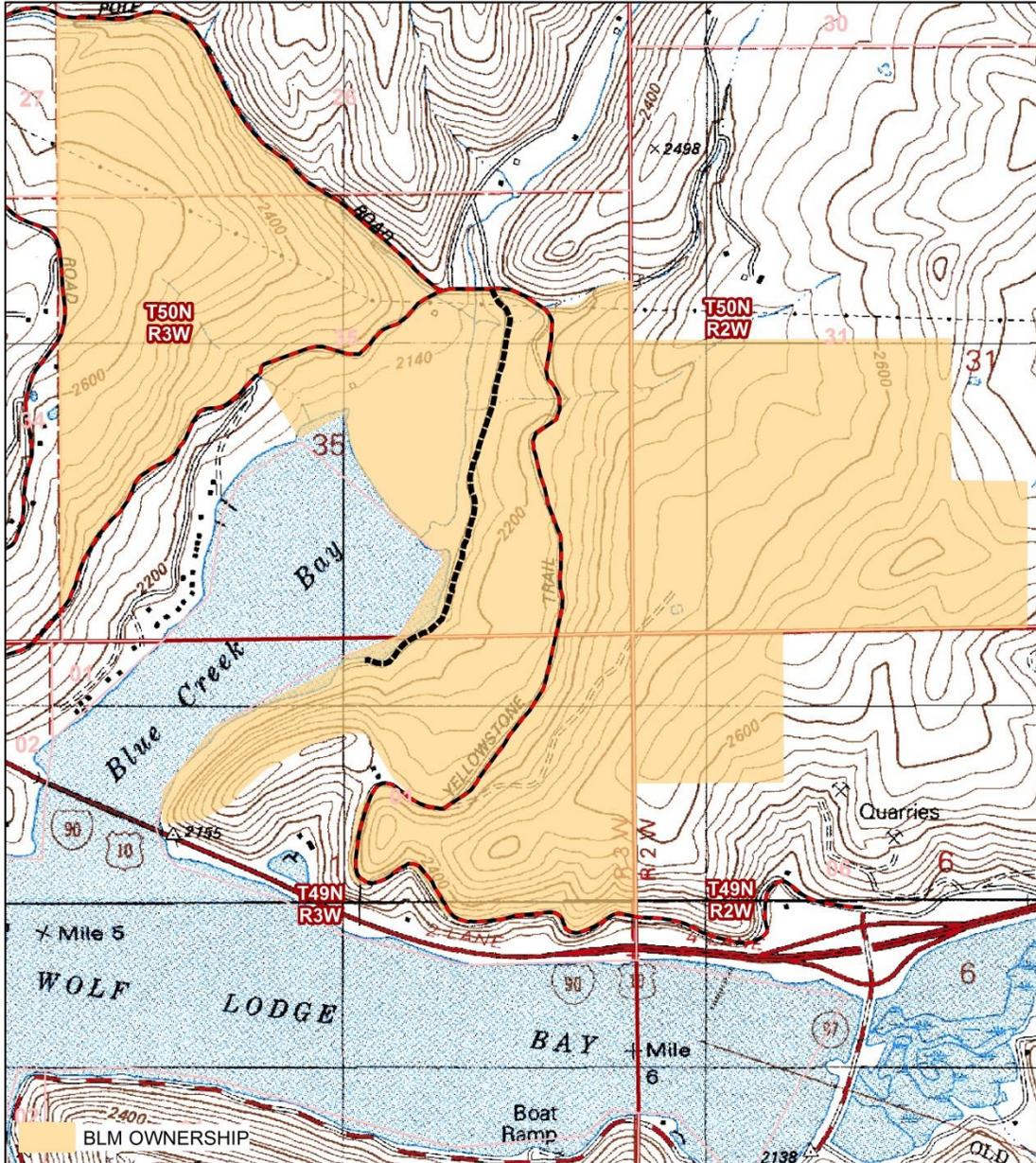
Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by **August 29, 2015** and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside 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_bluecreekbay@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

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 Debbie Paul, BLM Forester, 3815 Schreiber Way, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, 83815; phone: 208-769-5028.

MAP 1

Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area (Blue Creek)



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.

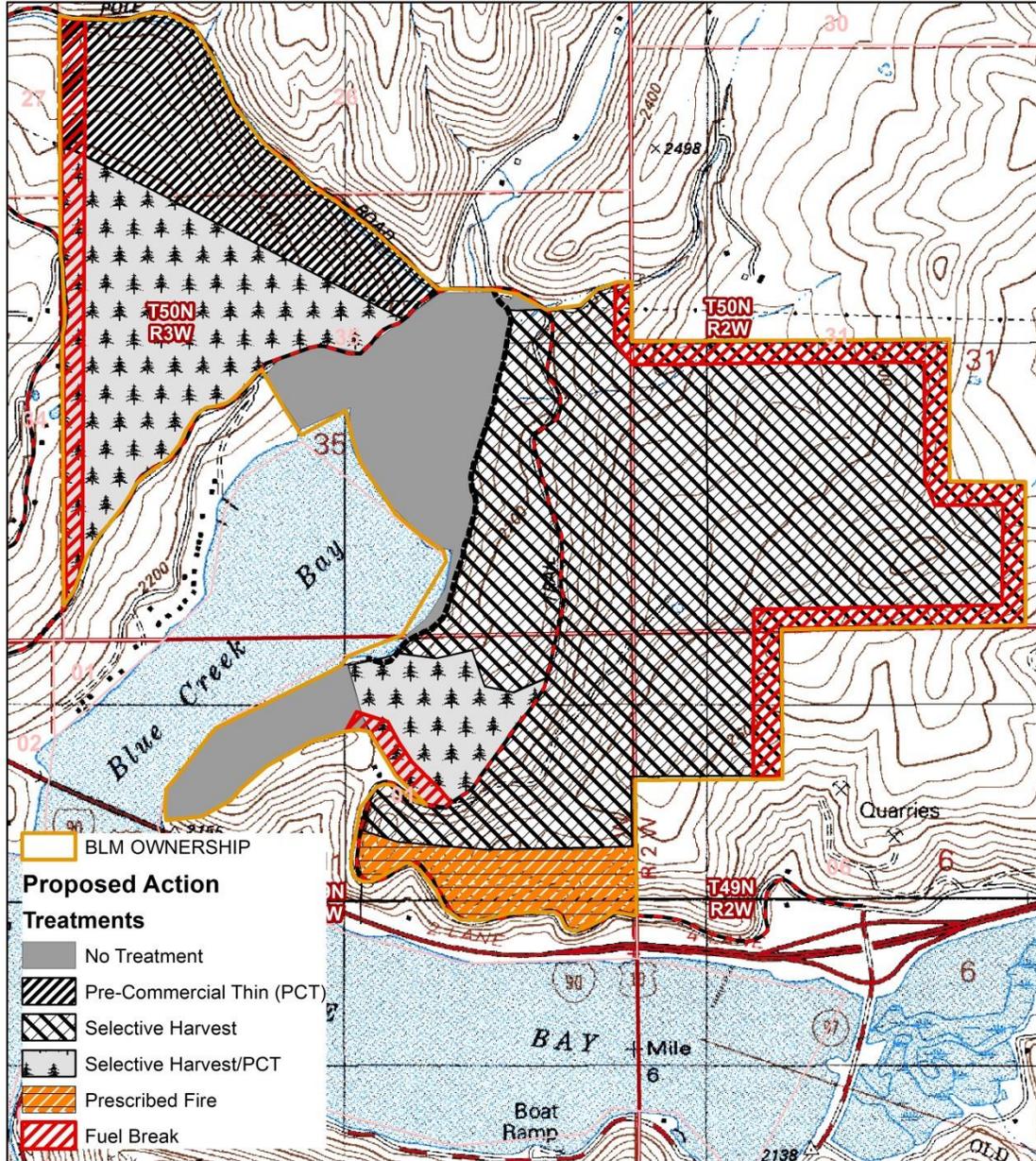
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Map Created: 2/6/2014

Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area Forestry and Fuels Treatments



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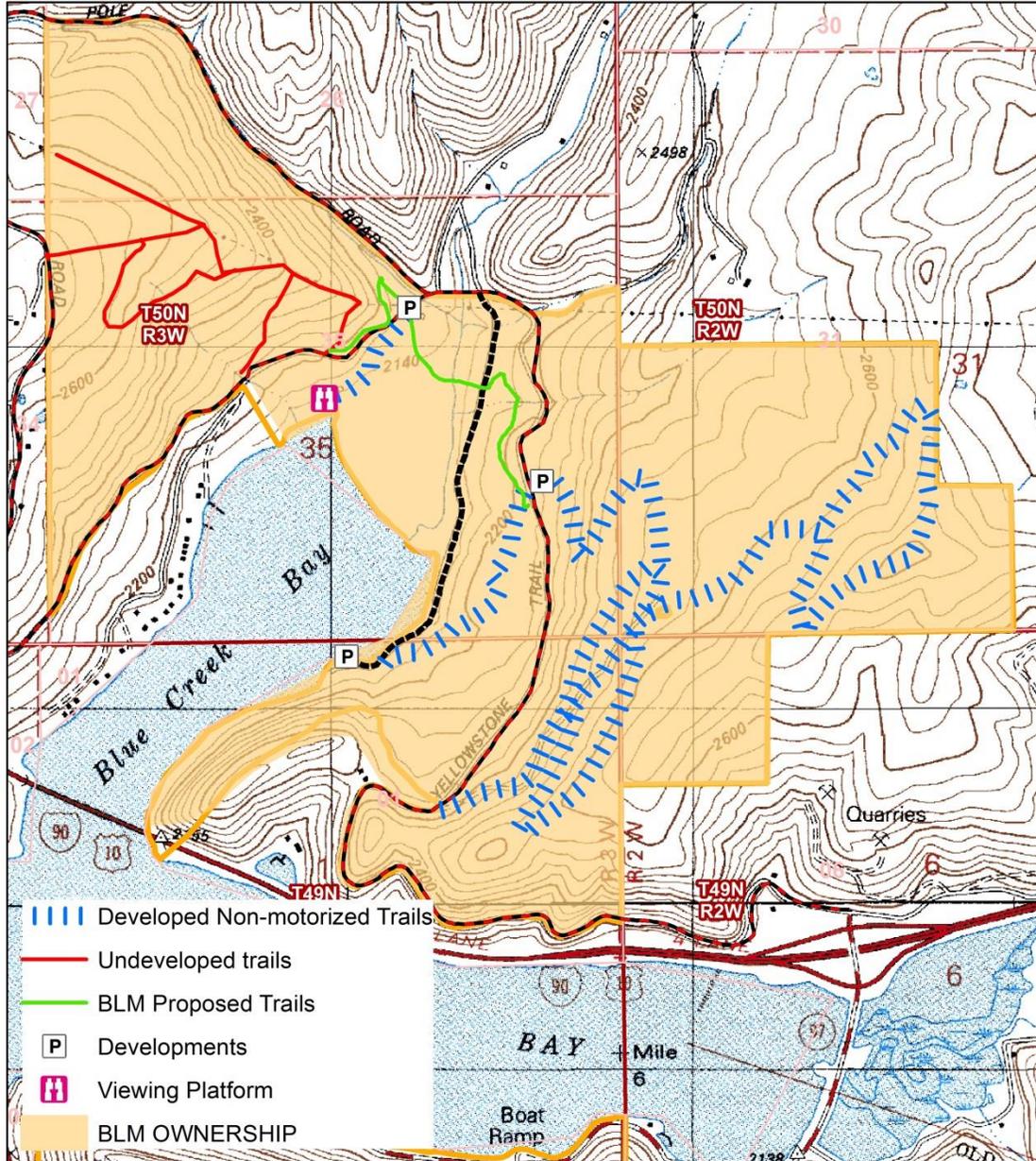
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Wallace L. Forest Conservation Area Recreation



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