

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Salmon River Corridor Forest Restoration

Salmon Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to thin forest stands and harvest merchantable material where and when feasible by mechanical and/or manual (by hand) methods in accordance with the Lemhi Resource Management Plan 1987, as amended. 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) with an estimated completion date of January 1, 2016. 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.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to improve forest resilience to insects, disease and wildfire. The need for action was established and is based on the recommendations for achieving resource management objectives as presented in the Salmon River Corridor Watershed Assessment (SRCWA) completed in September of 2011. The SRCWA documents the condition and function of public land resources within a 64,000 acre area that includes the proposed project area. The proposed action is designed to mitigate hazards inherent of current vegetative conditions within the dry Douglas-fir forest within the project area. These stands represent an elevated risk and imminent threat to valuable resources, property, and people from natural disturbances such as wildfire, and insect and disease epidemics.

Existing Condition

The predominant forest health issue within the project area is reduced stand and tree vigor due to overstocking. Overstocking is primarily the result of fire exclusion since the early 1900's. Few of the forest stands within the project area have experienced the thinning, sanitation, and fuel-reducing benefits of mixed-severity fire since Euro-American settlement.

The state of decreased forest vigor and overstocking within the project area is increasing the risk of tree mortality due to greater susceptibility to insects, disease and stand-replacing fire. Stand replacement (high-severity) fire potential is positively correlated to increases in the accumulation of dead material on the forest floor and increases in stocking density characteristic of forest stands within the project area.

Proposed Action

This project proposes commercial or pre-commercial thinning, and activity-generated slash disposal on approximately 1,219 acres total of forest stands within the Ringle, Ezra, and Cabin Creek drainages. Selected forest stands were chosen as part of this project because they occur within 500 feet of existing road infrastructure (most accessible) and/or have had prior timber harvest conducted within their boundaries. These stands represent forested acres that would be the most economical and most feasible to treat, and/or have prior silvicultural investment worthy of protection.

For all thinned areas, where existing roads permit and when market conditions permit, commercial harvest may occur and would be implemented by falling, bucking and limbing; tractor skidding (slopes <45%) or cable yarding (>45%); decking, loading and hauling; and subsequent slash disposal (pile and burn, or lop and scatter). Where removal of cut material is considered uneconomical, thinning prescriptions would be implemented using machinery to masticate material (slopes <30 %), or by hand crews (chainsaw) to cut and pile (or cut and scatter) material for subsequent disposal through burning or decay.

Preliminary Issues

Preliminary issues identified through internal scoping by the Salmon Field Office staff Interdisciplinary (ID) team relate to soil productivity and water quality (erosion and compaction from machinery); invasive plant species (soil disturbance and weed recruitment); wildlife (displacement due to human activity); and tribal treaty rights (visual impacts and wildlife movements).

Preliminary Alternative Development

One alternative identified during internal scoping considers a reduced acreage from the proposed action focusing only on those forested acres that have had a prior timber harvest entry and silvicultural investment. Acreage would be reduced from 1,219 acres in the proposed action, to 885 acres in this alternative.

Decision to be Made

The Salmon Field Manager is the authorized officer responsible for the decisions regarding management of public lands within the Salmon Field Office, including forest thinning and harvest being proposed as part of the Salmon River Corridor Forest Restoration project. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the authorized officer will make an informed decision whether, and under what terms and conditions, to approve forest thinning and harvest. If these actions are approved, design criteria including mitigation measures and monitoring requirements may be prescribed to ensure meeting land management objectives.

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 October 2, 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.

8/17/2015

Comments sent electronically should be sent to wbaer@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.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Bill Baer, Forester, 1206 S. Challis St., Salmon, Idaho 83467, 208-756-5419.

MAPS

