

Decision Record - Memorandum

Prepared by
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Elko District, Tuscarora Field Office

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Chapter 1. Squaw Valley Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan

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1.1. Description of the Proposed Action

The Squaw Valley Fire burned approximately 591 acres within an Other Habitat Management Area for sage-grouse, of which 524 acres occur on lands administered by the BLM. There are no known leks within the burned area or within 4 miles of the fire perimeter. The Squaw Valley Fire also burned within summer range for pronghorn, and approximately 90 acres of the fire is also considered crucial mule deer habitat. Other resource concerns for the fire include the invasion of annual weeds and noxious weeds, soil erosion, and watershed function.

The proposed action includes the following:

Herbicide Treatment

Utilization of Imazapic or a combination of Imazapic and Glyphosate herbicide treatments for the entire 524 acres of public land within the fire perimeter to suppress non-native annuals in order to introduce shrubs, forbs, and grasses into the treatment area. Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) would work with the landowner to discuss treatment options on private lands. Application rates and procedures would follow directions as listed on the herbicide label. BLM representatives would be present on the project site during treatment application to inform the public of what is occurring. This treatment would be completed the fall after the fire and would lay fallow for one year before we reseed the fire.

Drill Seeding

In the fall/winter following the herbicide treatment (2016) we would drill seed all 524 acres of public land within the fire perimeter with a mixture of desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The drill seed mixture would contain a mix of Siberian wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, Russian wildrye, Sainfoin, small burnett, Western yarrow, forage kochia, and Wyoming big sagebrush. NDOW would work with the landowner to discuss treatment options on the private lands within the fire perimeter.

Cultural

Cultural resource inventories would be conducted for the proposed new temporary fence construction and drill seeding. Inventories would be conducted prior to the implementation of the proposed fence and drill seeding to identify any cultural resources that need to be protected and avoided.

All cultural resources located or relocated would be recorded on the Nevada IMACS site forms and plotted on maps. Resources determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places will be avoided through preplanning efforts.

Monitoring

Monitoring would be conducted on the proposed action each year following treatment (2017-2019) to determine the success of revegetation and/or stabilization efforts. Specific monitoring method(s) used would depend on the establishment objectives developed. For example, if the establishment objective is three seeded plants firmly rooted per square meter, AIM and density monitoring techniques or similar BLM established methods would be utilized for the seeded areas. A resource specialist from the BLM Elko District Office would provide program oversight for this specification.

Post-treatment monitoring studies would be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed treatments or to determine if additional treatments are needed, and to determine the time frame for re-opening lands for grazing. The monitoring results would be documented in the project file at the BLM, Elko District Office.

All of the planned treatments would occur outside of the biologically sensitive timeframes for sage-grouse.

1.2. Plan Conformance

The proposed action conforms to the 1987 Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP), as it was amended for fire management on September 29, 2004. The decision for fire rehabilitation from the Approved Fire Management Amendment, page 20, is to “Conduct fire rehabilitation activities to emulate historic or pre-fire ecosystem structure, functioning, diversity and/or to restore a healthy stable ecosystem.” The proposed action is consistent with resource objectives of the plan:

Emergency Fire Rehabilitation

1. Evaluate all wildfires as soon as possible to determine if reseedling is necessary to recover ecological processes and achieve habitat objectives appropriate for the biological needs of sage-grouse and prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species.
2. Assure that long-term wildfire rehabilitation objectives are consistent with the potential natural vegetation community.
3. Align long-term objectives for seedlings with the habitat needs of sage-grouse. Seedlings should include an appropriate mix of grasses, forbs, and shrubs, including sagebrush, that will recover the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation. Emphasize native plant species when these species are adapted to the site, are available in sufficient quantities, and are economically and biologically feasible.
4. Reseed all burned lands occurring in sage-grouse habitat within 1 year unless natural recovery of the native plant community is expected.

The proposed action also conforms to the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-grouse Resource Management Plan Amendment. The proposed action is consistent with the Sagebrush-steppe, invasive species, and livestock grazing objectives and Management Decisions within the Amendment. It is also consistent with the Post-Fire Management Objective to retain, protect, and improve intact unburned sagebrush communities in burned areas incorporating the FIAT assessment. It is also consistent with the Amendment’s Post Fire Management Decisions:

MD FIRE 34: Review Objective SSS 4 and apply MDs SSS 1 through SSS 4 when reviewing and analyzing projects and activities proposed in GRSG habitat.

MD FIRE 35: Prioritize post-fire treatments in PHMAs and GHMAs to maximize benefits to GRSG and its habitat. Focus post-fire treatments on replacing or reestablishing burned sagebrush habitat with the appropriate cover and structure to support GRSG habitat objectives (Table 2-2).

MD FIRE 36: In post-fire rehabilitation plans in PHMAs and GHMAs design revegetation projects to accomplish the following:

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Plan Conformance*

- Maintain and enhance unburned intact sagebrush communities when at risk from adjacent threats
- Stabilize soils
- Reestablish hydrologic function
- Maintain and enhance biological integrity
- Promote plant resiliency
- Limit expansion or dominance of invasive species
- Reestablish native species

MD FIRE 37: Implement post-fire treatments in PHMAs and GHMAs that emphasize stabilizing, rehabilitating, and restoring sagebrush ecosystems damaged by wildfires, including controlling invasive species.

MD FIRE 38: Increase post-fire treatment activities in PHMAs and GHMAs through the use of integrated funding opportunities with other resource programs and partners.

MD FIRE 39: Following post-fire treatments, monitor and implement management actions in PHMAs and GHMAs that promote healthy perennial grass, shrub and forb communities, and lentic (slow-moving freshwater) and lotic (rapid freshwater) riparian habitats so as to further restoration and ensure longterm persistence of seeded or pre-burn native plants, in accordance with GRSG habitat objectives (Table 2-2).

MD FIRE 40: Evaluate the potential for sagebrush island plantings based on ESDs in large burn areas that may lack sufficient sagebrush seed sources in order to ensure the reestablishment of sagebrush in GRSG habitat.

MD FIRE 41: Monitor post-fire rehabilitation treatments on a multiple-year basis to ensure that project objectives are achieved.

MD FIRE 42: Use GRSG habitat objectives (Table 2-2) and emphasize the use of native plant species in post-fire rehabilitation (e.g. reseeding), recognizing that nonnative species may be necessary, depending on the availability of native seed and prevailing site conditions. Selected species shall maintain site ecological function based on pre-burn conditions and anticipated threat of invasive and noxious weed establishment. Use ESDs and state and transition models if available.

The proposed action is further consistent with other Federal, state, and local and tribal laws, regulations, policies, and plans to the maximum extent possible. The closure of the burned area to livestock grazing is in conformance with 43 CFR subparts 4110.3–2(a) and 4110.3–3(a). Noxious weed treatments were not identified as an issue in the development of the Elko RMP and were not specifically addressed in the document. However, weed management is clearly consistent with the terms, conditions, and decisions of the RMP as previously documented in the FY2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment. The Elko Field Office Noxious Weed Strategy Plan (September 2004) outlines the priority factors for weed treatments. Only herbicides on the list of approved herbicides for use on BLM lands would be used.

1.3. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

- Basco Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan (BLM/EK/PL-2006/025) Date Approved, August 2006
- Elko and Wells Resources Management Plans (RMP) Fire Management Amendment (BLM/EK/PL-2003/026) Date Approved, September 29, 2004
- Elko District Vegetation Maintenance Treatment Project (DOI-BLM-NV-2010-0005-EA) Date Approved, August 2010
- Esmeralda Fire Complex Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan (BLM/EK/PL-2005/015) Date Approved, August 2005
- FY2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NFRPEA), (BLM/EK/PL-2000-037), which was completed to update and replace the FY93 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (EA-NV-010-92-060)
- Susie Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan (BLM/EK/PL-2006/021) Date Approved, August 2006
- Tuscarora Sagebrush Habitat Restoration Initiative (BLM-NV-E020-2010-01-EA) Date Approved, November 2009

1.4. Persons and Agencies Consulted

- Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW): Steve Foree
- Permittee for the Little Humboldt Allotment

1.5. Decision and Action on Rationale

I have decided to implement the proposed action, as described, because:

1. The project will meet the need for restoring lands damaged by wildfire to a management-approved condition, consistent with agency and Departmental policies and procedures.
2. The action conforms to the applicable RMP and is consistent with current BLM and Departmental policies and procedures.
3. The project has been planned to incorporate environmental design features and monitoring requirements. There are no extraordinary circumstances having significant effects that would require an environmental analysis.

1.6. Approval and Implementation Date

This project is approved for implementation beginning immediately, subject to the conditions as specified in the attached project description. This decision is placed in full force and effect

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Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*

under the authority of 43 CFR 4190.1(a) based on the vegetation and soil within the burned area being at immediate risk to erosion and other long term damage.

/s/ Deborah N. McFarlane (acting for)

Signature

Richard E. Adams

Field Manager

Tuscarora Field Office

10/29/2015

Date

1.7. Administrative Review or Appeal

This decision is subject to administrative appeal. Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, parties who are adversely affected and believe it is incorrect have the right to appeal to the Department of the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 4.4. Appellants must follow procedures outlined in the form, "Information on Taking Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals" (See Attached). An appeal should be in writing and specify the reasons, clearly and concisely, as to why the decision is in error. Appellants are requested to supply this office with a copy of the Statement of Reasons.

Also within 30 days of receipt of this decision, appellants have a right to file a petition for stay (suspension) of the decision together with an appeal, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.21. The petition must be served upon the same parties identified in items 2, 3, and 4 of the attached form. The appellant has the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

Note

For additional information, please contact Tom W. Warren, Assistant District Manager, Operations at the BLM Elko District Office, 3900 E. Idaho Street, Elko, NV 89801; or call 775-753-0355.