

Decision Record - Memorandum

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

This page intentionally
left blank

Table of Contents

1. Dixie Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan	1
1.1. Description of the Proposed Action	1
1.2. Plan Conformance	2
1.3. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)	5
1.4. Persons and Agencies Consulted	5
1.5. Decision and Action on Rationale	5
1.6. Approval and Implementation Date	6
1.7. Administrative Review or Appeal	6

This page intentionally
left blank

Chapter 1. Dixie Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan

This page intentionally
left blank

1.1. Description of the Proposed Action

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Elko District would conduct Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Projects within the Dixie Fire. The Dixie Fire was a lightning caused fire that burned approximately 353 acres across BLM administered and private lands with low to moderate fire severity. The fire burned within the 1999 Saddler Fire Complex that burned approximately 200,000 acres. The Dixie fire perimeter is completely within a Priority Habitat Management Area (PHMA) and there are 6 active and/or pending sage-grouse leks within 4 miles of the fire. The fire also burned portions of Dixie Creek which contains Lahontan Cutthroat Trout. This area is also classified by Nevada Department of Wildlife as pronghorn summer range and crucial mule deer summer range.

The fire burned within vegetation that consisted of perennial bunchgrasses, rubber rabbitbrush, Utah serviceberry, Antelope bitterbrush, Mountain big sagebrush, and low sagebrush. Fire intensities were high enough to consume and kill many of the brush species which don't typically recover after fire, reducing the potential for plant regeneration and viability of the native seed stock. Many wildlife species depend on sagebrush, bitterbrush, and forbs for cover and forage and will be severely impacted if these species are not reestablished back into the ecosystem.

During the post fire assessment noxious weeds such as Scotch thistle, Bull thistle, Canada thistle, Spotted knapweed and hoary cress were documented within the fire perimeter. In addition to these resource concerns, other concerns include the invasion of annual weeds and noxious weeds, soil erosion, and watershed function.

The proposed action includes the following:

Seeding

The BLM would aerial seed approximately 92 acres of public land with a seed mix based on the ecological site descriptions and burned area assessments. Application would be conducted using a full coverage swath pattern. The aerial seed mix would include Mountain big sagebrush, western yarrow, and blue flax. Nevada Department of Wildlife, in cooperation with the private landowner, will also be aerielly seeding the private lands with the same mix throughout the fire. The only exception for their seed mix, would be where the fire burned hotter in Dixie Creek, they will be utilizing a watershed mix that will also contain perennial bunchgrasses.

The treatment also includes hand seeding bitterbrush over approximately 92 acres using dibble sticks and hoe-dads. This would take place in conjunction with the bitterbrush seedings that NDOW will be conducting on private land.

Weeds

The BLM would conduct inventories and treatments on approximately 92 acres of public land within the Dixie Fire for noxious weeds and other invasive species. Scotch thistle, Bull thistle, Canada thistle, Spotted knapweed and hoary cress are the primary weeds of concern with a high potential to increase within the burned area and surrounding rangeland. These weeds were documented during the burned area assessment and field visits prior to the fire. Treatments would consist of an integrated approach using mechanical and chemical means.

A noxious weed inventory would be conducted throughout the BLM administered lands to locate any new infestations. The methods would be a broad scale ocular observation for qualitative

and quantitative data. Infestations found would be documented using the global positioning system (GPS) for mapping and would be included in the plan for treatment at the next appropriate treatment time. The access roads through the fire would also be surveyed.

Chemical treatments would be done following all label requirements and conform to the BLM Chemical Pest Control Handbook H-9011-1. Herbicides, surfactants, and dyes used would be approved for use on BLM administered lands and applied following standard safety and operating procedures. Herbicide application to range sites would be by low pressure backpack sprayers or hand gun from an all terrain vehicle (ATV). Herbicide application to road right-of-ways would be by vehicle mounted unit or ATV.

Utilization of Imazapic or a combination of Imazapic and Glyphosate herbicide treatments for the 92 acres of public land may be necessary to suppress non-native annuals in order to introduce the shrubs, forbs, and grasses into the treatment area. Nevada Department of Wildlife would work with the landowner to discuss treatment options on private lands. The application rates and procedures would follow the 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.

Monitoring

Monitoring would be conducted on the proposed action each year following treatment (2016–2018) to determine the success of the revegetation and/or stabilization efforts. Objectives for vegetation recovery are measured in seeded areas using the following Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) methods: vegetation density and cover using photo points, line point intercept, perennial (and annual grasses) basal and canopy gap distances, and species richness as outlined in: Monitoring Manual for Grassland, Shrubland and Savanna Ecosystems, Volume 1: Quick Start, Herrick et al, 2005, p 36 and Volume II: Design, Supplementary Methods and Interpretation. Paced density quadrat count methods were developed by BLM staff and advised by Rangeland Monitoring in Western Uplands, George Ruyle et al., University of Arizona, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, 2006, p 16. 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 from the grazing deferment.

All of the planned treatments would occur outside of the biologically sensitive timeframes and would be below any noise thresholds for sage-grouse. The project would result in a net conservation gain for the sage-grouse.

1.2. Plan Conformance

LUP Name*	<u>Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP) Record of Decision</u>	Date Approved:	<u>March 1987</u>
Other Document	<u>Elko and Wells Resource Management Plans Fire Management Amendment (BLM/EK/PL-2003/026)</u>	Date Approved:	<u>September 29, 2004</u>

Other Document Nevada and Date Approved: September 21, 2015
 Northeastern
 California Greater
 Sage-Grouse Resource
 Management Plan
 Amendment

**List applicable LUPs (for example, resource management plans; activity, project, management, or program plans; or applicable amendments thereto*

The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable LUP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decisions:

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:

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:

- 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)

- Belmont Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan (BLM/EK/PL-2002/040) Approved August 2002
- East Humboldt Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan (BLM/EK/PL-2006/027) Approved December 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
- 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)
- Hastings Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan (BLM/EK/PL-2006/001) Approved November 2005
- Sneekee Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan (BLM/EK/PL-2006/020) Approved October 2006
- Tuscarora Sagebrush Habitat Restoration Initiative (BLM-NV-E020-2010-01-EA) Approved November 2009

1.4. Persons and Agencies Consulted

- Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW): Steve Foree
- Permittee for the El Jiggs Allotment
- Nevada State Office— Project in Sage-grouse Habitat Notification, approved November 5, 2015

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 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/ Richard E. Adams

11/12/15

Signature

Date

Richard E. Adams

Field Manager

Tuscarora Field Office

1.7. Administrative Review or Appeal

Field Office Manager Recommendation

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.