



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Prineville Field Office
3050 N.E. 3rd Street
Prineville, Oregon 97754

IN REPLY REFER TO:

5800.2

August 28, 2002

Dear Interested Public:

The Central Oregon Resource Area of the Prineville District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is currently examining management options for the public lands surrounding Little Canyon Mountain to create and maintain a healthy forest ecosystem while decreasing the potential wildland fire hazard to human life and property.

The BLM manages approximately 2000 acres of forest land in this area located between the city limits of Canyon City to the north, Little Pine Creek to the east, Canyon Creek to the west and the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness Area managed by the Malheur National Forest to the south. (Township 14 South, Range 31 East, Sections 1, 12 & 13, and Township 14 South, Range 32 East, Sections 6, 7, & 8.)

The Little Canyon Mountain (LCM) area offers relatively easy and extensive public access to the public lands. A number of private residences are located immediately adjacent to the area and numerous mining claims and several patented mines are located on the slopes of Little Canyon Mountain. In addition a vacated mining area, "the pit", acts as an illegal dumping grounds as well as a jump off point for many off-road and 4x4 vehicle trails. Existing roads through the area also provide access to the Wilderness Area and other recreational pursuits.

Management actions in this block of public land have led to a dense forest of Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir, which poses a fire threat to local homes and the town of Canyon City. The trees in this area are also suffering from an outbreak of western pine beetle, several patches of dead trees have developed in the last two years and numerous other trees are under attack currently.

Initial public feedback and BLM review have described several key issues including: forest stand conditions and susceptibility to fire, road access and off-road vehicle usage; and illegal garbage dumping.

The Prineville BLM, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, will be preparing the appropriate NEPA documents to assess current conditions, propose management alternatives and implement the resulting decisions. The primary goal of this project is to address the potential fire hazard in the area and implement desired management direction aimed at addressing the fire hazard risk. Also included in

this process will be management associated with forest health in regard to the insect infestation, road access and off-road vehicle use, and illegal garbage dumping.

While this project will assess long term solutions and management direction with regard to these issues the BLM recognizes the need to act more quickly to the concerns and hazards present. A small piece of the project targeting fire fuels reduction near existing homes and structures is already underway, and when fire precaution levels are lifted a pre-commercial thinning of small diameter trees on approximately 70 acres will be implemented adjacent to private property and associated developments. The BLM is also in the process of preparing a more thorough analysis of management options to address conditions on the entire mountain in a more comprehensive manner. The initial phases of this process are already underway. The BLM is collecting the relevant data required from the site in order to propose alternatives for management and assess impacts with regard to those alternatives. Should you visit the area during this data collection period you may encounter BLM employees or their representatives as they complete their work.

In mid-September the BLM team will launch into writing the appropriate NEPA document and expects to have a final document released by the end of November. The team will consist of BLM professionals representing various disciplines including: fire/fuels; forestry; soils; hydrology; fisheries; geology/minerals; recreation; wildlife; botany and archeology. Upon release of the final document there will be a 30-day public comment period. At the end of the comment period the BLM will consider all comments and likely release a decision shortly thereafter. Upon release of a Decision Record the appropriate protest and/or appeal timeframes will apply. The BLM expects to be able to implement this project prior to the 2003 fire season.

The BLM realizes that public involvement throughout the process can expedite implementation. In an effort to foster public involvement the Prineville District has designed an internet web-site dedicated to this project:

<http://www.or.blm.gov/Prineville/LCM/home.htm>.

On this site will be weekly or bi-weekly updates and progress reports, issues, and concerns. We encourage you to take advantage of this site by reviewing the progress and products of the team as well as commenting and participating in the process. A dedicated e-mail address (LCM@or.blm.gov) is set up to facilitate timely response from anyone interested in contributing to the process or you may submit written comments or concerns to Dan Tippy at the above address. In addition a specific Public Comment period will occur upon release of the document. If you would like to express your ideas or concerns for project design or resource impacts please remit these as early in the process as possible. If you have specific questions related to this project you may direct them to Brent Ralston at (541)416-6713. The BLM will take comments and input throughout the process as well as during the designated Public Comment Period.

Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Prineville BLM office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays, located at the above address.

Comments may be published as part of the EA or other related documents. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address or both from public review, or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

The BLM appreciates your interest and feedback concerning this project.

Sincerely,

/s/ Danny L. Tippy

Danny L. Tippy
Acting Field Manager
Central Oregon Resource Area