

October 24, 2003

Decision Record

Title: Little Canyon Mountain Fuels Reduction
Number: EA #OR 054-02-083
Office: Prineville District Bureau of Land Management
Central Oregon Resource Area
3050 NE 3rd St.
Prineville, OR 97754

The primary objectives of this project are to:

1. Reduce Hazardous Fuels on Little Canyon Mountain and manage for surface fire types in order to protect resources on the mountain and adjacent urban areas from catastrophic loss.
2. Improve Fire Prevention and Suppression Opportunities on BLM managed lands within the project area.
3. Improve Forest Health by reducing stand densities and competition and stress among trees to promote healthier, more vigorous and robust tree stands which are more capable of resisting parasitic insect infestations.

The action described in this Decision will result in a reduction of hazardous fuels and improvement in long term forest health and fire prevention and suppression opportunities without creating any significant impacts (consistent with the Finding of No Significant Impact – March 2003). This Decision Record addresses the yarding requirements on all units of this project. The previously released Decision Record for this project addressed all other aspects, which remain the same.

DECISION:

It is my decision to remove the requirement to whole tree yard on all units. This decision supercedes the whole tree yarding criterion described in the selected alternative (Alternative F). Whole tree yarding will still be utilized in some areas of the project but will not be a requirement. Slash will be lopped and scattered up to a 15 ton per acre limit, slash in excess of this level will be piled and subsequently burned in conjunction with slash created from subsequent thinning efforts related to this project. The effects of this implementation action have already been disclosed within the analysis of the EA and therefore the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is still appropriate.

RATIONALE:

On September 9, 2003, the Prineville District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) published a Timber Sale Notice which advertised a commercial timber sale based on the Little Canyon Mountain Fuels Reduction Environmental Analysis (EA).

This Timber Sale Notice addressed 586 acres removing 2,772 thousand board feet (MBF) of commercial timber volume within the project boundary – 50 acres were designated as tractor yarding and 536 acres as aerial yarding.

Special Provisions of the prospectus contained within Section 41, subsection B. Logging, parts e. & f. required whole tree yarding of trees less than 24 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) and trees greater than 24 inches DBH to be limbed and tops removed before yarding. Additional restrictions described in subsection - D. Fire Protection and Slash Disposal, part 4. - e. & f. require the yarding and removal of non-commercial juniper and stable ground slash.

The BLM did not receive any bids on the advertised Timber Sale as described in the original prospectus. Subsequent investigation revealed a market change in aerial yarding costs had transpired between the release of the EA in April of 2003 and the Timber Sale Notice publication in September 2003. These economic fluctuations in the marketplace coupled with the Special Restrictions on aerial yarding of whole trees, junipers and existing stable ground slash eliminated the economic viability of the project. However, the need for fuels reductions is still of paramount importance in the area. The 586 acres described in the Timber Sale Notice are within the area of the project boundary which most urgently requires active management based on fuel levels, proximity to private homes and structures and insect infestation levels. By dividing this work into a commercial sale plus a service contract which removes excess fuels, the BLM can implement the initial phase of the project and move closer to meeting the purpose and need of the project as described in the EA in a timely fashion.

This decision changes how slash is removed from the project area; but it does not change the amount, nature, or effects of slash removal. The Decision Record for this project accepted several Design Criteria Common to All Action Alternatives (see Decision Record and EA page 31-34). Design Criteria viii. on page 33 describes two methods of disposition for slash to reduce impacts to soils:

viii. Reduce the amount of pile burning of slash to protect soils from intense burn exposure.

Lop and scatter pole slash on the ground from thinning operation to reduce the number of hand piles and the area burn effects on the soil from hand pile burning. A slash rate of about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ pound per square foot was recommended for forest health in ponderosa pine stands (Debano et al. 1998), and to help limit ATV and vehicle traffic in non-roaded areas.

Whole tree yarding of trees and logs less than 24 inches diameter on the large end would be required in order to minimize ground slash and concentrate impacts of slash disposal in limited areas. These trees and logs would be yarded, with limbs and tops attached, to a landing area where the resulting slash would be piled and later disposed of by chipping or pile burning. Because of yarding equipment weight limitations, trees or logs larger than 24 inches diameter on the large end would be limbed and topped within the unit. This slash would be piled and burned within the project area or disposed of by broadcast burning.

As a result of this decision, whole tree yarding will still be completed within the ground based yarding unit. Slash will be lopped and scattered or hand piled and burned on-site within the aerial yarding units. Existing slash and the additional slash created from juniper cutting will also be hand piled in steeper slope areas (greater than 35 percent) or machined piled in areas with slopes less than or equal to 35 percent and then burned. This decision changes the proportions of the project area in which slash will be lopped and scattered, piled and burned, or whole tree yarded; but does not change the fact that all three methods will be used to minimize impacts to soil while reducing fuel levels, ladders and loading.

Since this change in the contract requirements will not increase the effects of slash management already analyzed in the EA, that analysis is still applicable and this alteration in the project will not require a revision in the EA.

Protest/Appeals:

The action included in this Decision Record is subject to administrative remedies. Protests of this Decision must be filed with the Prineville District BLM within 15-days of first publication of the Decision Record or Timber Sale Notice (October 28, 2003). See the Timber Sale notice in the October 28, 2003, edition of The Central Oregonian for further details.

The Decision Notice and Timber Sale Notice, first published on October 28, 2003, in The Central Oregonian, constitutes the decision document for purposes of protests for the action described in this Decision Record, under 43 CFR subpart 5003 – Administrative remedies. The doctrine of administrative finality precludes review of issues on which a final decision was made at the time of the first Decision Notice and Timber Sale Notice and issues which could have been reviewed at that time but were not. The only decision made between the first Decision Notice and Timber Sale Notice and this Decision Record concerns the disposition of slash, existing and created, as a result of implementation. The disposition of slash is the only issue subject to protest under this Decision Record.

Protests of the slash disposition associated with this Decision Record must be received within 15 days after first publication of that notice, to the Prineville District BLM at the above address.

/s/ Christina M. Welch
Christina M. Welch,
Field Manager
Central Oregon Resource Area