

Appendix S

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bob Vidourek, BLM
FROM: Russ Lane, Forest Practices/Service Forester, ODF
DATE: June 12, 2002
RE: Little Canyon Mountain

This memo is in response to your request for documentation of my recommendations for treating the forest health/fuels problems on the BLM property on Little Canyon Mountain. I will address vegetation treatment needs, some resource/operational considerations and a few thoughts on opportunities for a broader, landscape approach to managing forest health across ownership boundaries.

Vegetation treatment:

Ips pini is active throughout the pine stands on Little Canyon Mountain. Mortality from these insects is moderate to heavy. Many “green” trees show visible indicators of ongoing attack or severe stress that makes attack in the near future nearly certain. The standing dead fuels with retained needles will promote sustained crown fire runs with extreme rates of spread in the near term. Absent treatment, these fuels will convert to heavy down fuels that create different, but equally difficult, control problems. Either condition is likely to lead to stand-replacement fires. The close proximity to populated areas also introduces high risk that such events will be community-replacement fires. The following recommendations will help alleviate this situation:

1. Prioritize activities. Put immediate emphasis (next six months) on reducing threats to Communities-at-Risk. Actively pursue a broader strategy that addresses concerns over the entire area.
2. Reduce tree stocking consistent with site capability. Basal areas in the pine dominated stands currently range from 100-200 square feet per acre. Post-treatment basal areas of 40-50 square feet will provide for healthy, fire resistant stands. Basal areas at these levels will allow for fuels reduction in the short term while allowing for stand growth and development for the long term.
3. Remove other woody fuels. Western juniper and various shrub species are present and contribute to the potential fire spread. Hand cutting, piling and burning of these fuels will further mitigate fire danger.
4. Manage fine fuels. Grasses and herbs are primary carriers of fire spread. These will be enhanced by removing woody vegetation. Managed grazing (timing and duration) can reduce the fine fuel load while protecting other resource values.

Resource/Operational Considerations:

The comprehensive vegetation treatment required for this project to be successful will generate “commercial” sized material. Removal of these fuels can be expected to create minor ground disturbance. With the very long distances to live water, minor disturbance should have no cumulative effect in the watershed. Disturbance can be minimized by specifying equipment that is appropriate for the terrain and placing limitations on the operation of that equipment.

1. Restrict ground based equipment. Utilize ground-based equipment only in areas that average less than 35% slope. Forwarding machines that do not drag logs may be preferable. Designate skid corridors. Prohibit excavated skid trails.
2. Consider temporary roads. Utilizing temporary roads could shorten skidding distances and reduce overall ground disturbance. Rip and re-vegetate following use.
3. Evaluate consequences of no action. The resource impacts of catastrophic fire are well-understood. In the last five years, this area has had at least one ignition per year that required suppression action. With the current fuel conditions, the risk of a high severity fire is imminent. It is also important to consider the suppression effort required in the urban interface. In many cases, the impacts of suppression can far outweigh those of appropriate preventive treatment projects.

I am eager to see a community-driven approach on Little Canyon Mountain that addresses both the acute, short-term needs and the comprehensive long-term concerns. Such an approach would complement and leverage our efforts on private lands through the National Fire Plan. I am also hopeful that this can be a springboard towards an interagency strategy to address forest health and fuels issues on a landscape level. Thanks for the opportunity to comment. I would be happy to assist wherever I can as you move forward with project design and implementation.

RL

Cc: LCM “Core” group