

USDI, Bureau of Land Management  
Burns District  
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West  
Hines, Oregon 97738

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
and  
DECISION RECORD

BIG STICK/DOUBLE O EMERGENCY FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
OR-025-01-042

INTRODUCTION:

On July 9, 2001, the Big Stick Fire (M-332) and on July 11, 2001, the Double O Fire (M-352) were started by lightning strikes as numerous storm cells moved through the Burns District. The Big Stick Fire burned approximately 9,224 acres of public land and 376 acres of private land approximately 15 miles northeast of Wagonfire, Oregon, in the Burns District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Double O Fire burned approximately 1,534 acres of public land, 226 acres of private land and 124 acres of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge 1-mile south of Harney Lake located approximately 35 miles east of Wagonfire, Oregon, in the Burns District.

Fires which have previously burned in these areas quickly become dominated by cheatgrass, an invasive nonnative species, which necessitates rehabilitating the area to ensure long-term ecosystem integrity and productivity. Additionally, noxious weeds are increasing in this area and opportunities for weed establishment will be much greater without competitive vegetation.

If not treated, cheatgrass will dominate the plant community. The likelihood of the area burning again is greater with increased levels of cheatgrass. Adjacent areas of sagebrush are also at a greater risk of fire. Increased fire size also puts at risk privately owned structures that are within a quarter of a mile from the perimeter of the Double O Fire.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION:

Big Stick Fire

The proposed action is to seed approximately 3,640 acres with a rangeland drill with a mixture of native and nonnative grasses and forbs. After drilling, these acres would be seeded aurally with Wyoming big sagebrush. An additional 3,690 acres would only be aurally seeded with big sagebrush. Areas seeded with the rangeland drill would be rolled with a wheeled seedbed packer to enhance seed contact with the soil and improve germination. The seeded areas would be protected from grazing for

5 years.

Snow fences would be installed in several locations across the aerially seeded areas to enhance moisture retention to improve sagebrush establishment by trapping snow.

To protect the rehabilitation area, 18.75 miles of 3-wire fence would be constructed to prevent livestock and wild horses from entering the seeded area. Two cattleguards would be installed on heavily used roads to prevent gates from being left open which would allow livestock and wild horses into the rehabilitation area. An additional 4.5 miles of fence which were damaged by the fire would be repaired.

If the seeding areas become invaded by introduced annuals, weeds would be treated following the second growing season after seeding.

Cost of the rehabilitation project would be \$967,748.

#### Double O Fire

The proposed action is to seed approximately 1,090 acres with a rangeland drill. A mixture of native and introduced grass and forb species would be used. After drill seeding, approximately 1,535 acres would be aerially seeded with Wyoming big sagebrush. Areas seeded with the rangeland drill would be rolled with a wheeled seedbed packer to enhance seed contact with the soil and improve germination. The seeded areas would be protected from grazing for 5 years.

Snow trap fences would be installed in several locations across the aerially seeded areas to enhance moisture retention thereby improving sagebrush establishment by trapping snow.

To protect the rehabilitation area, 7.25 miles of 3-wire fence would be constructed to prevent livestock and wild horses from entering the seeded area.

If the seeding areas become invaded by introduced annuals, weeds would be treated following the second growing season after seeding.

Cost of the rehabilitation project would be \$296,110.

#### DECISION:

After consideration of the analysis of impacts and mitigation measures of the proposed action and alternatives as detailed in the Environmental Assessment (EA), my decision is to implement the proposed action. The proposed action is consistent with the objectives outlined in the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (1992). This decision is in full force and effect as of this date based on the necessity for beginning the rehabilitation project as quickly as possible to prevent further resource damage.

All resource values have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. It has been determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible. The proposed action would result in short-term incremental impacts to soils, vegetation, and wildlife resources.

#### FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts detailed in the attached EA, I have determined that the impacts of the modifications described in the proposed action, when coupled with mitigation measures presented and detailed in the EA are not significant. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

#### Rationale:

The proposed action will provide a perennial vegetation cover of native and nonnative grasses, forbs, and shrubs. These species will compete with cheatgrass and other exotic annuals and occupy the site which will discourage noxious weed invasion. The result would be a more diverse vegetation community. The establishment of these vegetation communities will inhibit reoccurring wildfires and lessen the potential for a catastrophic wildfire in these Wyoming big sagebrush communities. The establishment of perennial vegetation communities will lessen the potential for accelerated erosion.

The protection fence will protect the seeded area until objectives are met.

Resources determined to be potentially impacted were analyzed in the EA for the proposed action and two alternatives. Among the latter resources are soils, range resources, noxious weeds, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural. Impacts to these resources are considered nonsignificant (based on the definition of significance in 40 CFR 1508.27) for the following reasons:

**Soils:** Reseeding the burned area would generate cover which would render soil loss minimal. The revegetated area would be able to hold the soil in place and protect it from raindrop impact, and would also reduce overland flows and other potential erosion hazards.

**Range Resources:** The temporary loss of 601 AUMs during seeding establishment represents a minimal amount of the active permitted use in the allotments impacted by the proposed action. Revegetation would increase plant cover and grazing could be restored to the area.

**Noxious Weeds:** Reseeding of desirable plant species, coupled with weed monitoring and control would prevent the introduction and spread of undesirable species.

**Vegetation:** The proposed action lies within the northern extension of the Great Basin. The species selected for seeding are adapted to the area and are representative of the natural vegetation present prior to the fires.

Wildlife: Impacts to wildlife could consist of temporary loss of habitat for some species and temporary gain of habitat to others. Potentially impacted wildlife species are common in the region as a whole. The proposed action would not disrupt deer and antelope migration routes. No sage grouse strutting grounds are known to occur in the project area.

Cultural Resources: The project area would be surveyed for cultural resources and historic (significant) properties prior to ground disturbance. Avoidance or other mitigation measures would be required if significant cultural sites were located. There would be no impact to areas connected with American Indian traditional values without coordination and consultation between tribal governments and the BLM.

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and the enclosed Form 1842-1. If an appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed in this office (at the above address) within 30 days from the receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to the regulation 43 CFR 4.21 (58 FR 4939, January 19, 1993) of 43 CFR 2804.1 for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and the appropriate Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

#### Standards for Obtaining a Stay

Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- 1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
- 2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
- 3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
- 4) Whether or not the public interest favors granting the stay.

Signature on file

September 4, 2001

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Rudolph J. Hefter  
Acting Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

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Date