



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Prineville District Office
3050 N.E. 3rd Street
Prineville, Oregon 97754

IN REPLY REFER TO:

5800.2

EA # OR-054-02-083

Little Canyon Mountain Fuels Reduction Environmental Analysis

AUG 19 2003

Dear Interested Public:

This Decision Rationale Documentation describes the proposed decisions to be made as a result of analysis and public comment on the Little Canyon Mountain (LCM) Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment (EA) released in April of 2003. The EA described and analyzed six distinct alternatives including the required No Action alternative. Public feedback during the entire process from scoping to receipt of comment letters on the EA agree that the LCM area is in need of fuels reduction treatment. After review of the analysis and comments from interested citizens, the proposed decision was reached which selects elements from several different alternatives. All of the proposed decisions set forth in this document were included in at least one of the alternatives described and analyzed within the EA. The combination of actions selected for implementation do not create any cumulative or synergistic impacts that have not already been disclosed within the analysis of the EA and therefore the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is still appropriate.

Summary of Decisions:

The following proposed decisions are grouped by resource and include reference to the EA as well as the rationale for implementation.

Forest Vegetation Treatments: The forest vegetation will be treated as described in Alternative F (see pages 64-69, Section 2.2.8 Alternative F – Stand Condition Stratified Treatment).

Rationale: This treatment is based on recognition of individual stand potential and capability. It takes into consideration accepted basal area ranges for healthy stands within each dominant vegetation type and, because of this, is expected to be sustainable over time. By reducing the competition within each stand, the ladder fuels and the proximity of crowns to each other, the treatment will reduce catastrophic fire risk, improve firefighter safety and improve forest health conditions while maintaining forest stand and wildlife habitat diversity in the area. This alternative has relatively minimal ground disturbance and provides for a beneficial economic return.

Wildlife Habitat Treatments: Approximately 185 acres will be treated to a higher basal area range (100-150) to provide for wildlife hiding cover thickets. Mountain mahogany will be thinned in Whiskey Gulch and on the west side of the project area as described in both Alternatives C and F.

Rationale: These treatments will provide thicket and hiding cover for various species of wildlife. Treatments on mahogany will provide more vigorous forage for big game, while leaving those mahogany stand on the east side in their current condition to continue to provide wildlife food until the treated stands become more robust.

Road and Riparian Area Treatments: As described in Alternative D: approximately 10 acres of riparian overstory removal will be implemented; the culvert will be replaced; the main access road from the county road to the Forest Service boundary will be reconstructed; a portion of the main road will be re-routed, several miles of road closures and obliteration will occur on the Little Pine Creek claim (any decisions for road closures on roads within the Crystal Gulch #2 claim will be deferred until the mining claimants have been consulted); one mile of fence will be constructed near Little Pine Creek.

Rationale: Little Pine Creek contains habitat for mid-Columbia steelhead, a species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The overstory removal will alleviate competition with the hardwood species and allow the hardwoods to have more expression in the riparian zone, thereby promoting fish habitat and riparian function. Reconstructing the road will decrease its impacts on the riparian and stream areas; however, surfacing will be with a rock that will not change the riding characteristics of the road. The construction of the fence will allow better distribution of cattle on a grazing allotment and eliminate grazing impacts to the stream area.

Recreation Treatments: Close the pit area to vehicles greater than 50 inches in width and leave a forest buffer around the pit as described in Alternatives D and F.

Rationale: The pit area has become a dumping ground for garbage. The closure to vehicles greater than 50 inches will preclude truck and other vehicles that could transport garbage from entering the pit area and thereby eliminate dumping concerns. Retaining the forested buffer will retain further management options for recreational use such as Off Highway Vehicle trails management, and will also provide a sound and sight barrier between the pit and the surrounding areas.

On pages 41-43 (Section 2.2.4 Design Criteria Common to Alternatives C Through F) all of these criteria will be implemented as design features of the project. These design criteria are all consistent with the FONSI.

On pages 31-34 (Section 2.2.2 Design Criteria Common to All Action Alternatives) all of these criteria will be implemented as design features of the project with the following exceptions:

v. Follow Northern Goshawk Management Guidelines for goshawks in the area.

Rationale: Fields surveys in both 2002 and 2003 found no goshawk nests in the proposed project area. If, however; a goshawk nest is found during implementation of the Decision the Guidelines will be immediately implemented. Lack of need for this design criteria is based on field surveys following accepted protocols and will therefore not affect the determination in the FONSI.

vii. Schedule thinning operations and the creation of slash piles outside of the January to June window.

Rationale: The BLM recognizes the concern over insect populations in the area and wishes to minimize the extent to which insect damage continues. However, the primary concern of this project focuses on fire risk to the local communities and to forest health. Because of seasonal closures due to fire danger, and restrictions against yarding over wet ground, this additional restriction would leave virtually no time in which to accomplish work before the next fire season in 2004 and would result in not meeting out objectives. For this reason this design criteria will not be followed and efforts to chip and remove as much slash as possible from the area to prevent insect spread will be employed. Removal of this design criteria will not affect the determination in the FONSI.

Additional Proposed Decisions made based on Comments Received:

Consideration of mining needs: Mining claimants will be consulted on the timber needed to support their mining operations when trees are marked for removal. Site specific options could include cutting trees and decking them for future use by the claimants, or providing needed timber from other Public Lands.

Placement of wildlife thickets: Area to be left with higher basal areas for wildlife needs will be of a shape and location that best provides wildlife habitat needs, and will include consideration of any needs for corridors.

Removal of excess, down fuels and materials: The John Day Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (1985) call for disposal of slash concentrations in excess of 15 tons per acre. Because public concerns were expressed about the potential to carry fire through the area via the downed material already on the ground, thinning operations will also ensure that remaining material will not exceed the threshold specified in the EIS.

Short lived nature of snags that have been created from bug-kill: Because trees that have died from insect infestation remain standing for a relatively short amount of time, they will not as adequately provide snag habitat as trees that have died due to other factors. Every attempt will be made to leave as snags those trees that have died of something other than bug kill.

Minimize Noxious Weed Infestation: Because land that is disturbed can be particularly susceptible to noxious weed seed, all equipment mobilized to the site that will be used off of roads will be first washed to remove any seed that might be transported to the area.

Administrative Relief Procedures:

Because the final decisions will include actions falling under differing regulations, two distinct and different processes must be followed for administrative remedies (e.g. protests and/or appeals). A protest and an appeal period are allowed for decisions on range improvements (fence construction) and on forest management (commercial removal of trees). A Notice of Decision and Decision Record for the project will be prepared by mid-September, 2003, that includes decisions on the non-commercial aspects of vegetative treatments, non-commercial aspects of road maintenance and reconstruction, and fence construction. That Record will explain protest and/or appeal processes for those decisions. A Timber Sale Notice will be prepared by mid-September, 2003, which will include the commercial aspects of vegetative treatments and that road maintenance and reconstruction needed to support the haul of timber. The Notice will explain protest and appeal processes for those decisions. The administrative relief processes are premature at this time, but will be appropriate when the Notice of Decision or the Timber Sale Advertisement appear in the Central Oregonian.

For further information, please contact Dan Tippy at (541) 416-6729.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Danny L. Tippy".

Danny Tippy
Assistant Field Manager, Central Oregon Resource Area