

NEPA

on Fire

SEPTEMBER 2003
ISSUE NO. 1

A monthly fact sheet about fuels treatments and the NEPA process.

Welcome 1

Bringing It All Together—
Teams Synthesize
Scientific Findings 1&3

Follow the Framework—
Efficient, Consistent Ways
to Participate in NEPA
Analyses 2

Frequently Asked
Questions 3



On the Web

New Fire Management
Activity 3

Electronic Resources 3

A forum for fuels specialists; NEPA coordinators, writers, and editors; silviculturists; and others interested in accomplishing fuels hazard reduction projects.



USDA Forest Service
Fire and Aviation Management and
Ecosystem Management Coordination
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-1107
<<http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nepa/>>

Publication courtesy of CAT Publishing Arts

Welcome ...

To the inaugural issue of *NEPA on Fire*, a monthly forum for fuels specialists, NEPA coordinators, writers and editors of NEPA documents, silviculturists, and others with an interest in accomplishing fuels projects. This short fact sheet will focus on topics of science, management, and policy related to fuels projects and the NEPA process in support of the Healthy Forest

Initiative and the National Fire Plan. Each fact sheet will be published on the Web at <<http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nepa/>> and sent electronically to everyone on our mailing list.

Got questions? We've got answers! Send us your questions, and we'll answer a few each month. Send questions, comments, and add your name to our electronic mailing list by contacting [NEPA on Fire](#).

Bringing It All Together— Teams Synthesize Scientific Findings

Timely decision-making on fuels and restoration treatment often relies on the ability of interdisciplinary (ID) teams to gather, synthesize, and integrate diverse, complex scientific findings into the design and analysis of alternatives. It's time-consuming work that, to be done well, requires experts who are familiar with evolving bodies of science and who can understand and interpret research findings for the specific decisions at hand.

During the past few years, the number of experienced field specialists with science backgrounds has decreased, while the flow of scientific findings from the Joint Fire Science Program and the National Fire Program has increased. The ranks of the research scientists who could provide advice to planning teams have also dwindled.

Without thorough interpretation of the science, planning teams might omit or misapply important findings, or they might lack effective

strategies for dealing with inevitable scientific uncertainties and differences. Project-level analyses developed with complete scientific consideration support good decisions and reduce vulnerability to appeal and litigation.

It has become clear that to adequately design projects we need to accelerate efficient access to scientific information.

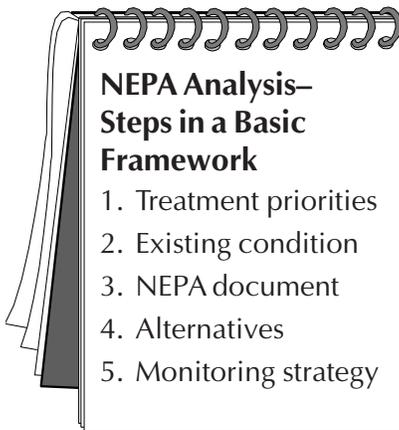


Continued on page 3

Follow the Framework— Efficient, Consistent Ways to Participate in NEPA Analyses

The contribution of a fuels specialist to any NEPA analysis is critical. Hazardous fuel treatments must help ensure a reduced risk of wildland fire to communities and the environment and help increase the safety level for firefighters. An assessment should display changes in fire behavior, describe the potential current fire behavior (in the no-action alternative), and provide information about the efficacy of proposed treatment alternatives to the interdisciplinary (ID) team and the public.

The fuels specialist's task can be simplified if a basic outline or framework is followed. Such an approach can result in an efficient baseline analysis that addresses fuels reduction objectives—to reduce hazardous fuels and achieve a desired fire behavior—while providing a consistent approach for a variety of fuels hazard analyses.



Part 1— First Things First

The fuels specialist's work—collecting and reviewing data and beginning the specialist's report—begins before the initial ID team meeting. The "pre-meeting" work will help to develop the project's purpose and need.



Establish Treatment Priorities

- Treatment of areas within the wildland-urban interface, municipal watersheds, and crucial species habitat, in that order, are priorities based on the National Fire Plan.
- In the wildland-urban interface, the priority areas are frequent and mixed severity fire regimes (condition classes 2 and 3).
- Maintenance of areas within the natural historic fire regime (condition class 1) is also essential.
- Both silviculturists and fuels specialists should work together to achieve vegetation objectives and to restore forest health, vigor, and diversity.



Describe the Existing Condition

- State why this particular area is a priority for treatment. Document the criteria used in the priorities, considering National Fire Plan, 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy,

current and historic fire regime, and condition class.

- Describe the fire environment (fuels, weather, topography). Work with the vegetation specialist to document structure and composition (trees per acre, height to crown, etc.) for further fire behavior analysis.
- Describe the current fire behavior within the area—type of fire and fire behavior expected on average and worst-case weather days, potential size, rate of spread and intensity, resistance to control, etc.
- Describe the desired future condition from a fire behavior perspective. What is the target fuel condition that will likely result in fire behavior that meets the purpose and need? What will happen if no treatment occurs (no-action alternative)?
- Provide maps of recent fires, photos of present conditions, and describe in words and pictures what the area would look like with and without treatment.
- Gather and document other scientific information pertinent to the area.

Next issue: Step 3. Build the NEPA document, Step 4. Analyze alternatives, and Step 5. Develop the monitoring strategy.





On the Web

New Fire Management Activity

In June 2003, an interim Forest Service directive (FSH 1909.15-2003-1) was issued for two new categorical exclusions for hazardous fuels reduction and fire rehabilitation. Category 31.2(10) is for hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire (4,500 acres or less) and mechanical methods (1,000 acres or less). Category 31.2(11) is for post-fire rehabilitation activities (4,200 acres or less). Found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/hfi/index>

Electronic Resources

DigiTop, the Digital Desktop Library for USDA, provides employees with electronic access to key journals, newspapers, databases, statistics, and other important resources such as *The Leadership Library*®, a contact database of institutional leaders in all levels of U.S. government, business, and professional and non-profit organizations. Found at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/digitop>

Bringing It All Together . . . continued from page 1

Science Synthesis Teams to the Rescue

Four national teams, lead by Forest Service researchers in collaboration with university and other partners, are synthesizing scientific information for NEPA analysis. There's a team for:

1. Forest structure and fire behavior;
2. Effects of fuel and restoration treatments on environmental resources and values;
3. Economic uses of material removed in treating fuels and restoring fire-adapted ecosystems; and
4. Public attitudes and beliefs about treatment methods and strategies, along with ways to incorporate the public's values into the design of fuel treatment programs.

Each team is producing at least one synthesis document in a clear, understandable style and format for ready access by planning teams. The synthesis teams are also providing fact sheets to answer specific questions relevant to their topics, and a resource guide of citations to help ID teams understand and apply the most current science. Links to Websites and other sources of information will be included in each synthesis document.

Stay tuned for more information.



Q Does NEPA require the preparation of separate detailed resource specialist reports for an EA or EIS?

A There is no NEPA requirement to complete a separate resource specialist report. Instead, a concise and complete summary of the relevant site-specific findings may be presented in the body of the EA or EIS, with citations to the source of the information. Cited material must be made part of the project record. Regardless of where the information is located, a specialist's documentation demonstrates that the Forest Service took a hard look at the site-specific resources relevant to the proposed actions addressed by the EA or EIS. Specialists' documentation can also be good archive records to review when you're working on other similar project proposals.

Send YOUR questions to

