United States

Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

April 2008

Templeman HFRA
Healthy Forests Restoration Act Project

Decision Notice and
Finding of No Significant Impact

Bonners Ferry Ranger District
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Boundary County, Idaho

Unit 5 Templeman HFRA EA Project (2006 photo)
Fuel Model 10 (timber with heavy surface fuels)

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Decision Summary

This Decision Notice documents my choice for a course of action for the Templeman HFRA Project. I have decided to select and approve implementation of Alternative 2 as described in the project Environmental Assessment (EA) completed in January 2008, but with some changes to the connected actions that resulted from resolution of some objections received from the public concerning the project.

Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) includes a combination of mechanical treatments, hand treatments and prescribed burning to reduce forest fuels and the intensity of wildland fire occurrence on approximately 1,200 acres of the Bonners Ferry Ranger District.

Background

The Templeman HFRA Project is designed under the requirements of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) and in response to the 10 year Comprehensive Strategy and focuses primarily on reducing hazardous fuels. Bonners Ferry is listed in the Federal Register, Vol. 66, No.3, January 4, 2001, as a community in the vicinity of Federal Lands that is at high risk from wildfire.

The project proposal concurrently addresses identified hazards and vulnerabilities described in the Boundary County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP). The County Plan was developed in 2003 (amended February 2004) through a collaborative process between Boundary County citizens, federal, state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. The group formed several goals to begin mitigation of fire risk within the wildland/urban interface. These goals include fuels modification treatments within two miles of homes and associated infrastructure, including roads, in order to protect humans, their habitations and evacuation routes. The Templeman HFRA project area is surrounded by and shares common boundaries with private residences and associated infrastructures (copy of Boundary County CWPP and WUI map kept at Bonners Ferry district office).

The Templeman HFRA project is designed to accomplish fuels reduction treatments on National Forest System lands in the Meadow Creek and Kootenai River watersheds of the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. The objectives of the project are to 1) reduce hazardous fuels within the Boundary County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)-defined wildland urban interface (WUI) area and; 2) trend towards or maintain vegetative conditions that will be resilient to fire in the Meadow Creek and Kootenai River watershed.

The project will remove approximately 40 to 60 tons per acre of forest fuels through a combination of mechanical and prescribed fire treatments in order to change the fire behavior characterization from a Fuel Model 10 (timber with heavy surface fuels) to a Fuel Model 8 (timber with light timber litter). The project is designed to remove excessive forest fuels from about 1,200-acres and will utilize removed forest products, including biomass, to the fullest extent possible, through the use of a stewardship contract.

The project area is located near Templeman Lake, a small lake located entirely within private property boundaries and not open for public use, approximately 8 miles north of Bonners Ferry within Sections 12, 13 and 24, Township 63 North, Range 1 East, of the Boise Meridian, on the Bonners Ferry Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, Boundary County,

Idaho. The project area encompasses approximately 1,700 acres with treatments proposed on about 1,200 acres (see EA Chapter 2, page 13).

The Templeman HFRA project was designed through a collaborative process starting on January 31, 2007 and included two additional collaborative meetings, including a field trip to the project area. The collaborative group developed a treatment proposal for the area. The meetings culminated in the mailing of a public scoping letter on June 19, 2007 to 118 individuals, organizations and agencies to gather comments for the proposed action. The comment period ended July 31, 2007. Issues identified in this process were used to analyze the expected effects from implementing the proposed action and no action alternative, and have been disclosed in the Project EA that was completed and issued in January 2008. The EA was made available to the public for a 30 day review and objection process pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218 Subpart A.

On March 3, 2008 objections to the Proposed Action were received from the Idaho Conservation League (ICL) and jointly from The Land's Council (TLC) and the WildWest Institute (WWI). In their objection letter, the ICL requested a resolution meeting and Linda McFaddan, the Bonners Ferry District Ranger arranged for a meeting and conference call on March 20, 2008, inviting TLC and WWI objectors and members of the collaborative group to also attend and try to resolve the issues brought up in the objection letters. The ICL and joint TLC/WWI as well as members of the collaborative group responded to the District Rangers' invitation and together we negotiated changes to the proposed action that are disclosed in following pages.

In spite of the resolution of some of the objector's issues, ICL, TLC/WWI did not wish to withdraw their objections, preferring to let the Reviewing Officer conduct the administrative review. On April 2, 2008 Reviewing Officer Kathy McAllister (USDA Forest Service, Northern Region) concluded her review of the project objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.8 (7)(b) and issued her decision on the disposition of the two objections.

The Reviewing Officer determined that the project is in compliance with laws and regulations, and clearly demonstrates how the project is consistent with the HFRA, including use of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and retention of large trees.

The Reviewing Officer did provide direction to the IDT to clarify analysis issues including the question of culvert replacements, confusion on wetlands versus moist depression areas within the project area, the need to provide a table either in the DN or project file disclosing the average size of trees to be cut and left in the treatment units, and the need to provide a final RAP analysis in the project file.

I have addressed these instruction items in subsequent parts of this Decision Notice or in the EA, EA errata sheet or project file, as directed.

As stated pursuant to 36 CFR 218.10(b)(2), this project is not subject to further administrative review by the Forest Service or the Department of Agriculture.

Decision

I have decided to select Alternative 2 as described in the Templeman HFRA Environmental Assessment issued in January 2008, but with two connected actions dropped from the planned activities and one mitigation measure added to the project design criteria, as a result of agreements made with ICL, TLC, WWI and members of the collaborative group who attended the March 20, 2008 objection resolution meeting. The two connected actions that will be dropped involve the future salvage opportunities and noxious weeds treatments using herbicides (EA connected actions #2 and #3, EA page 15). The additional design criteria/mitigation measure will be to obliterate following use unclassified roads #FR940-UA, #FR940-UB and two existing main skid trails that were extended off of #FR 397C in Unit 4 during the previous entry. The purpose for the obliterations are to gain additional "net improvement" of the soil quality in Units 3 and 4 (DN and EA errata sheet), which currently exceed R1 Soil Standards.

Alternative 2 references Figure 1 and Table 1 and proposes to reduce fuels by mechanical treatments on 1,100 acres, hand thinning treatments on 100 acres and to reduce pockets of fuel using prescribed fire on 450 acres within this 1,200-acre treatment area. The fuels reduction work will be governed by a stewardship contract to remove about 40 to 60 tons per acre of dead standing and down timber, live ladder and crown fuels including sawtimber, pulplogs and other biomass (small trees, tops and limbs) that are excess to other resource needs such as for maintaining soil productivity, large down woody material for wildlife and to reduce soil disturbance and compaction during treatment activities.

Design Criteria and Mitigations

During the design phase of the project various measures were incorporated to minimize potential impacts and to avoid resource damage. My decision includes the design criteria. These measures are detailed in the descriptions below. Specialist reports in EA Appendix A, B and C detail and rate the effectiveness of these design criteria mitigation measures for the proposed action.

1) No new permanent roads will be constructed. Existing access roads, including Forest Roads #397A, #397C, #397D, #940, #940-UA, #940-UB and #941 will be used. Segments of some of these roads, totaling 9.9 miles, will require minor reconstruction prior to use. The road work includes roadside brushing, blading, ditchline cleaning and shaping, spot graveling and ditch relief pipe cleaning at locations recommended by the project IDT and removal of hazard trees along the haul routes. It is anticipated that up to one-half mile of temporary roads will be needed to be built in Units 4a and 5. The temporary roads will be obliterated by the contractor following use. The obliteration will restore the segments to their pre-roaded condition and will be revegetated and covered with slash to prevent off-road vehicle use.

   Also, as a result of the objection resolution meeting, I have decided to obliterate following use unclassified roads #FR940-UA, #FR940-UB and two existing main skid trails that were extended off of #FR 397C in Unit 4 during the previous entry. The purpose for the obliterations are to gain additional "net improvement" of the soil quality in Units 3 and 4 (DN and EA errata sheet), which currently exceed R1 Soil Standards.

2) Logging operations in all units except Unit 7 will be restricted to the winter months (approximately December through March) to help minimize the risk of further soil compaction and further encroachment of noxious weeds that exist within and surround the project area. Unit 7 will be restricted to small-scale lightweight equipment.

- For tractor-yarded Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6:

  1) Where present, existing skid trails will be used. For units 1, 2, 3 and 4 no new skid trails or landings will be allowed in order to keep from exceeding Forest Plan standards for soil compaction and disturbance.
  2) All new skid trails will be agreed upon and designated on the ground by the Purchaser and Forest Service before felling begins.
  3) Where terrain is conducive, trails will be spaced at least 100 feet or more apart.
  4) Post-harvest, all utilized skid trails will be either covered with slash and randomly placed logs (on contour) to increase the microtopography needed to reduce runoff, stabilized with waterbars, or a combination thereof.
  5) Excavated skid trails, if needed in Units 5, 6 and 7 will be re-contoured and seeded after logging is completed. No excavated skid trails will be permitted in Units 1, 2, 3 and 4.
  6) Operating equipment will avoid moist or wet depression areas unless properly protected by snow or frozen conditions. This specifically applies to units 2, 4 and 5 where shallow depth to groundwater occurs.

- Also, during harvest operations, any one of the following conditions will be contractually required for tractor-yarded Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,and 6:

  1) a 24-inch snow layer or 18 inches of settled snow or;
  2) a slash mat in combination with 12 inches of settled snow or;
  3) frozen ground to a depth of 4 inches

- For Unit 4a, skyline yarding shall include contractual requirements to suspend the leading end of logs.

- Also for Unit 4a, existing corridors will be used.

- For Unit 5, designate the unit boundary at least one chain (approximately 67 feet) back from the top edge of the cut slope on FR 397D in those locations where wetlands exist below the road outside of the treatment area (UTM 11U0553767 5407648), in order to retain the stability and hydrologic function of the wetlands.

- For Unit 7, small-scale harvesting, forwarding and slash piling equipment (i.e. equipment less than 10 feet wide, measured from outside edge of tracks or wheels) will be required and will operate on slash mats in order to minimize damage to small diameter residual trees expected to be left on about a 12 to 15 foot spacing. The smaller and lighter machinery should result in much less compaction compared to equipment typically used for sawtimber-size trees since equipment width is lessened (Johnson et al. 2007), especially if passes are limited. For comparison, "standard-sized" harvesting equipment vary in width between 10-12 feet and weigh between 50-60,000 lbs, whereas the small-scale machines vary in width between 7-10

feet and weigh less than 26,000 lbs. A special contract provision will be developed for restricting the size and type of equipment to be used in this unit.

3) For Units 5, 6 and 7, existing skid trails and landings will be utilized where appropriate in order to maintain current soil compaction levels. Any new skid trails will be agreed upon by the Forest Service and Purchaser. All skid trails utilized will be covered with residual slash, waterbarred and seeded as needed upon completion of the sale.

4) Units 1 and 2 currently exceed soil quality standards by one and two percent, respectively. Given the soil characteristics in these two units, mitigation measures are possible. Therefore, once proposed harvest and slash treatment activities are completed, utilized skid trails will be decompacted, thereby moving these two units towards a net improvement in soil quality. Improvement efforts also include addition and incorporation of organic matter, seeding, and weed control. Decompaction will provide for enhanced hydrologic function and will initiate a recovery process that otherwise may be prolonged as soil compaction from past and proposed harvest activities persist.

5) Equipment used for logging, slash piling, biomass removal and road reconstruction will be required to be pressure-washed in all units prior to being allowed on the project area. Currently suitable contract provisions for washing equipment for noxious weed control purposes will be used.

6) Based on average results obtained from three separate field surveys conducted for soils, fuels and silvicutural analysis, Forest Plan Standards for maintaining an adequate supply of large down-woody material for soil productivity and nutrient recycling are currently being met in the project area and will be maintained (EA Appendix A and B soils and fuels analysis, and project file recon notes).

   a) The latest soil nutrient management recommendations from the Intermountain Forest Tree Nutrient Cooperative (IFTNC) and Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) will be applied as appropriate to each activity area where organic material is removed. Slash will be left to recycle nutrients back into the soil until site-prep occurs. Grapple piling equipment will operate on slopes under 35 percent.

   b) As this is a hazardous fuels reduction project, determination of fire risk where slash is left untreated for prolonged periods of time will be made by the district fire management officer. Where fire risk is considered high, flexibility will be given to treat slash prior to it being left for several months.

   c) Downed woody retention levels will be maintained at the lowest recommended levels due to concern for fire risk in the interface area. For the moist forest habitat types where harvest is proposed in Units 1, 2, 5 and 6, Graham et al (1994) recommend retaining 17-33 tons of downed woody material greater than three inches in diameter. For the drier habitat types associated with Units 3, 4, 4a and 7 the recommended retention level is 5-15 tons.

   d) For Units 1, 2, 5 and 6 grapple piling or biomass removal machinery will stay on existing trails, operate on slash mats where available and stay off slopes that exceed 35%.

e) An alternative slash disposal method for Units 1, 2, 4a, and 5 will be to remove slash, excess to the desired Graham guideline levels and following at least one wetting season, at the option of the timber sale purchaser to utilize this material for biomass energy, biofuels, or other uses. The need for post-harvest slash piling and burning would be eliminated in these units.

f) Prescribed underburning and burning of numerous small rather than few large slash piles will take place when the upper surface inch of mineral soil has a soil moisture content of 25 percent by weight or 100 percent duff moisture.

7) The District will manage for the snag resource by following the "Regional Snag Management Protocol" (January 2000), which calls for retention of 6 to12 snags per acre with 2 to 4 snags/acre greater than 20 inches in habitat types associated with Units 1, 2, 5 and 6 and 4 snags per acre over 20 inches in diameter in habitat types associated with Units 3, 4, 4a and 7. Based on a recent reconnaissance cruise conducted for the project, Units 1, 2, 5 and 6 contain about 8 snags per acre over 10 inches in diameter, including about 1 snag per acre over 20 inches. Units 3, 4 and 4a currently contain about 9 snags per acre over 10 inches in diameter, but only 2 per acre that are over 20 inches (Project File, Recon Documents). Unit 7, the proposed biomass thinning unit, currently has less than 1 10-inch or greater diameter snag per acre due to this being a 30-year old plantation with average tree diameters in the 6 to 7-inch range. The Forest Plan standard for snags is 3 per acre that are 10 inches or larger in diameter for Management Area 1 lands and 4 per acre (same size classes) for Management Area 4 lands. The current snag composition is well within the level recommended by the Northern Region protocol, except for snags over 20" dbh. This is due to the past sanitation salvage and firewood cutting treatments conducted in the area over the past several decades that removed the largest dead and dying trees. The proposed treatment is designed to retain large-diameter live trees and also dead trees over 16 inches in diameter, especially ponderosa pine, western larch, white pine and Douglas-fir. These live residual trees can be managed for snag recruitment trees to increase the number of 20-inch-plus diameter snags in the future.

   The wildlife biological evaluation for this project (EA Appendix C) included the following conservation requirements, recommendations and design criteria, which will be incorporated into project implementation:

- Goshawk Nest Site Protection – Additional nest searches will be conducted during project layout and implementation. If any goshawk nests are discovered, mitigation measures will be implemented to help ensure that nest sites and post-fledgling areas are receiving minimal disturbance. A no-activity buffer (greater than 150 foot radius) will be placed around each known active nest tree. In addition, a 30-acre no activity buffer will be placed around each nest area to provide long-term nesting habitat (Reynolds et al. 1992).

  Purchasers operations and related Forest Service activities will be suspended within 0.5 mile distance of active nest areas from March 15 to August 15 to (1) promote nesting success and (2) provide foraging opportunities for adults and fledgling goshawks during fledgling-dependency period. Activity restrictions will be removed after June 30 if the Forest Service wildlife biologist determines the nest site is inactive or unsuccessful.

- Wildlife Tree Retention – Snags and live tree replacements will be retained where opportunities exist in treatment units at levels recommended by the USFS Region 1 Snag

Protocol (see previous discussion). While retention objectives are accounted for on a treatment level scale, some snags will be represented on every 10 acres of treatment, in clusters or clumps where feasible, to promote good distribution of snags. Large diameter snags (greater than 16 inches diameter) that are felled for safety reasons will remain on site to provide for large woody debris recruitment and long-term site productivity. Selection of snags and live tree replacements will emphasize practices that assure the highest probability for long-term retention (Bull et al. 1997). The high hazard snags and snags in the advanced stages of decay will not be used to meet retention objectives. Retention practices will focus on ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir and western red cedar trees, especially veteran or relic ponderosa pine and western larch trees. Trees killed by root disease should be avoided, where possible, to meet retention objectives because of their rapid deterioration and resulting fall-down rate.

- Grapple Piling – Where grapple piling is prescribed for fuel reduction, leave an average of one to three slash piles per acre unburned to provide habitat for small forest animals (e.g. snowshoe hares), while still meeting fuels reduction objectives.

- Road Design: To retain habitat for snag-dependent species and species dependent on large-diameter trees, the location of the proposed temporary road will ensure, whenever practical, that veteran and relic survivor trees and snags will not be removed during construction.

- Skid Trail and Cable Corridor Location: To maintain habitat for snag-dependent species, the timber sale or contract administrator will ensure, whenever practical, that the design of skid trails and cable corridors will avoid veteran and relic fire survivor trees and snags.

- Road Management: The temporary roads in Units 4a and 5 will be fully decommissioned following use in accordance with the Area Road Management Plans and the IPNF Forest Plan. Existing roads, which are currently restricted and utilized for this project, will be returned to their pre-project road status with the exception of unclassified roads #FR940-UA and #FR 940-UB, which will be obliterated after use.

- Maintaining Veteran and Relic Structure: No allocated old-growth stands exist within the project area. However, to maintain habitat for snag-dependent species, areas within treatment units that contain small pockets of older, large diameter structure will be thinned from below or not treated. These unique areas will be managed on a case-by-case basis. Vegetation type, moisture regime, logging system, wildlife species suitability and surrounding treatments will all be considered.

- Protection of Cedar Swales: Microsites of western red cedar having diameters greater than 12 inches dbh will be retained.

- Retention of Hardwood Trees: To maintain forest species diversity and wildlife habitat, aspen and birch trees will not be harvested for pulp. If trees of these species need to be cut for safety reasons, they will remain on site for coarse woody debris and long-term site productivity. Conifers in and around aspen and birch patches will be harvested or slashed to reduce competition for water, sunlight, nutrients as well as to help provide fuel for underburning. Where appropriate, individual trees may be cut or pushed over to encourage sprouting. Whenever possible, these areas will be underburned to stimulate sprouting. This strategy will provide vegetative diversity, which benefits various wildlife species.

- Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife Species Protection: If any threatened, endangered, or sensitive species are located during project layout or implementation, management activities will be altered to include proper protection measures. Stewardship contract provision K-G.2.4# (Protection of Plants, Animals, Cultural Resources, etc.) will be included.

8) No-harvest buffer zones for lakes, streams, wetlands and other riparian habitat have been included in and adjacent to harvest units as designed by the project fish biologist, hydrologist, botanist and soil scientist utilizing INFISH standards and other site-specific recommendations (including BMPs). Approximately 10 acres of the precommercial (hand-chainsawing) thinning treatments will encroach in a RHCA. The fisheries analysis determined that the thinning activities will not directly affect temperature, sediment delivery, habitat cover/complexity, pool frequency, habitat connectivity, or width/depth ratios because there are no ground-disturbing activities scheduled to occur within these RHCAs (see Chapter 3 and fisheries BA/BE report in Appendix C).

Connected Action

In addition to the activities listed in Table 1 above, the following activity will also take place:

1) Some of the excess trees cut during the precommerical thinning treatments in Units 29 and 35 could possibly be utilized (salvaged) for special forest products (i.e. Christmas trees, boughs used for wreaths, decorative arrangements, etc). None of these types of forest product removals will involve the use of heavy equipment.

Table 1 - Fuels Reduction Treatments by Unit

Unit	Acres	Harvest Type and Logging System	Slash Disposal Method	Residual Stand General Characteristics
1	50	Commercial Thin/Sanitation Salvage - Tractor/winter	Grapple pile and burn or optional biomass removal. Machines stay on existing trails, operate on slash mats where available and stay off slopes that exceed 35%.	12 to 30+ inch diameter larch, Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine and cedar
2	42	Commercial Thin/Sanitation Salvage - Tractor/winter	Grapple pile and burn or optional biomass removal. Machines stay on existing trails, operate on slash mats where available and stay off slopes that exceed 35%.	10 to 18+ inch diameter larch, Douglas-fir and cedar
3	140	Commercial Thin/Group Selection Tractor/winter	Underburn	15 to 30+ inch ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch with pockets of advanced regeneration of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch
4	263	Commercial Thin/Group Selection Tractor/winter	Underburn	15 to 30+ inch ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch with pockets of advanced regeneration of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch
4a	48	Commercial Thin/Sanitation Salvage Skyline/winter	Underburn, optional removal of excess biomass prior to burning.	15 to 30+ inch ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch with pockets of advanced regeneration of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch
5	201	Commercial Thin/Sanitation Salvage Tractor/winter	Grapple pile and burn or optional biomass removal. Machines stay on existing trails, operate on slash mats where available and stay off slopes that exceed 35%.	10 to 18+ inch larch, Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, cedar and hemlock
6	26	Shelterwood Tractor/winter	Grapple pile and burn site prep for planting. Machines stay on existing trails, operate on slash mats where available and stay off slopes that exceed 35%. Plant whitepine and larch.	12 to 18+ inch Douglas-fir, larch and also grand-fir and hemlock for snag recruitment
7	300	Commercial "Biomass" Thin Small-scale harvester/forwarder	Mandatory removal of excess biomass, incidental piling using small-scale excavator, where concentrations of tree branches exist. Burn piles. Estimate 1% of unit (approx 3 acres).	6 to 8 inch ponderosa pine, larch, Douglas-fir, white pine and other species
Plantation Units 29 and 35	100	Precommercial Thin - chainsaw - incidental salvage of forest products such as X-mas trees, boughs, etc.	None	6 to 8 inch Larch, Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, white pine and other species
Incidental hazard tree removal along haul route on FS lands	Estimate total of 10 acres	Individual tree removal from roadsides at widely scattered locations in groups of 1-2 trees in any single spot and within striking distance of road. No off-road equipment necessary. Cable yard to roadside or remove from road surface if they have fallen on road from wind or other weather event.	Lop and scatter	No detectable change from existing condition.
Total Acres	1,180			

Monitoring

Information gathered before, during and after implementation of activities is used to determine the effectiveness of the project's design and associated mitigation measures. This establishes a feedback mechanism so management can develop and employ an adaptive learning curve. Monitoring is done at recurring intervals as a basis for Forest Plan implementation. Project effectiveness monitoring is done by sampling specific projects at specified time intervals. The activities associated with this proposed action will include monitoring of the following:

Temporary Road, Unclassified Road and skid trail Obliteration: The effectiveness of road and skid trail obliteration and erosion control will be periodically checked by hydrology, soils, road management, or timber personnel.

Soil Compaction: The effectiveness of prescribed Best Management Practices (BMPs) of winter logging, decompacting skid trails utilized in Units 1 and 2 and redistributing residual slash over skid trails to help prevent erosion will be checked by soils, hydrology, timber, or fisheries personnel.

Down Woody Debris: During project contract administration the amount of debris left in the mechanical treatment units needs to meet recommended minimum levels. Accomplishment of this activity will be monitored by timber, fuels, or soils personnel.

Northern Goshawk: Goshawk surveys for occupied nesting and/or post-fledging habitats were completed in the project area during 2006 and 2007. No currently suitable nesting habitat will be impacted by this proposal and no goshawks were found or are known to be using the project area or immediate vicinity for reproduction. Timber Sale Administration and wildlife personnel will continue to monitor the project area for goshawk presence during project implementation.

Noxious Weeds: The effectiveness of design criteria for minimizing the spread of existing noxious weeds in the project area will be monitored by district personnel (noxious weed program manager, botanist and others) during and after project implementation. Noxious weeds within this project are expected to be treated at a future date following completion of a new noxious weeds program analysis and decision document.

Rationale for the Decision

Now that I have identified my decision and described the activities that will occur, let me explain my rationale for selecting Alternative 2 (with changes described herein).

I based my decision on how effective Alternative 2 would be compared to the alternative of doing nothing (No-Action Alternative 1, for baseline comparison) in meeting the purpose and need for this project.

The proposed Templeman HFRA EA Project is designed under the requirements of HFRA and for the purpose of responding to the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy (December 2006), focusing primarily on reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface (WUI).

Based upon findings from field reconnaissance and information gathering completed by Templeman Project Team members who specialize in fire and fuels management, the existing condition within the proposed project area includes fuel loading and arrangement of fuels on the ground and in the tree crowns that make the area susceptible to severe wildfire behavior that can potentially impact this "at-risk" community (Fuels analysis, EA Appendix B). There exists a need to change the current fire Fuel Model 10 to a Fuel Model 8 in order to reduce the intensity of future fires that may occur in this wildland urban interface area. Reducing fire intensity will make it safer and easier for fire fighters to suppress future fires when they occur, thus improving the safety of humans, their homes, associated access roads and utilities in this affected area.

The project proposal concurrently addresses identified hazards and vulnerabilities described in the Boundary County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP). The County Plan was developed in 2003 (amended February 2004) through a collaborative process between Boundary County citizens, federal, state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. The group formed several goals to begin mitigation of fire risk within the wildland/urban interface. These goals include fuels modification treatments within two miles of homes and associated infrastructure, including roads, in order to protect humans, their habitations and evacuation routes. The Templeman HFRA project area is surrounded by and shares common boundaries with private residences and associated infrastructures (copy of Boundary County CWPP and WUI map kept at Bonners Ferry district office).

Given the fuels condition and location of the Templeman HFRA project area, my main concern was focused on implementing fuels reduction treatments that would be effective at reducing the potential intensity of future fires that may occur so close to this developed interface area.

Based on the analysis provided in the EA and supporting documents, implementation of the action alternative will effectively reduce the fire intensity levels within the treatment areas should a wildfire occur in the future.

Future fire intensity will be reduced by removing approximately 40 to 60 tons of live and dead (standing and down) fuels from this wildland urban interface area that are currently arranged in a combination of surface, ladder and crown fuels that is conducive to intense fires that would be difficult to suppress.

Here's an example to put the fuels reduction effectiveness in perspective: There are approximately 4,000 btu's of heat per pound of wood having 50% moisture content[1]. So an average of 50 tons of wood per acre contains about 400 **million** btu's per acre of heat that will be removed from the project area, or around 440 **billion** btu's total from the 1,100 acres in the project area that will remove wood products. In terms of "turning down the heat" by removing this amount of wood from the project area, if all the wood were used to fuel an average-sized pellet stove having the capacity of 50,000 btu's per hour, which is capable of heating a 2,000 square foot home, there would be enough fuel to heat either 913 homes for one year or one house for about 913 years!

[1] GTR FPL 29, 1979 - How to Estimate Recoverable Heat Energy in Wood or Bark Fuels, Ince, P.

The treatments will also change the remaining arrangement of fuels to a condition that includes very little ladder fuels and more open crown spacing in the overstory, which will make it much more difficult for crown fires to occur. For example, the fuels analysis disclosed on pages 44 through 45 of the EA the following determinations on the effectiveness of reducing the potential for future intense ground and crown fires within the project area following the proposed treatments:

"Table 12 (EA pg 44) on the following page summarizes the probability of torching and crowning indexes by alternative and forest type within the treatment units. Fuels treatments will remove the majority of the ladder fuels, thus raising the canopy base heights to approximately 40 feet – a level where surface flame lengths would not be able to move into the tree crowns except for under rare scenarios of extremely high winds. In addition, harvest of the overstory trees will effectively space tree crowns, reducing the likelihood of fire spread from one tree to the next as shown in the increased crowning index (wind necessary to sustain crowning) in the proposed action as compared to the current condition (no action)"

"Project related activities would be effective at keeping the expected surface flame lengths under the direct attack threshold for at least 35 years into the future. Without treatment the expected surface flame lengths increases almost linearly from approximately 5.5 feet to 7.5 feet for the next 35 years. This is likely due to the fact that the dead and dying timber currently standing will begin to fall over and increase the amount of woody surface fuels (EA pg 44)."

"The initial entry will have an immediate effect on the probability of torching – reducing it to zero in the treatment year for approximately 10 years. It then increases to approximately 65% - this being a result of regeneration contributing to the ladder fuels under the residual overstory. Within this timeframe an additional entry would be necessary to once again reduce the likelihood of torching the tree crowns (EA pg 45)."

"The proposed action would increase the crowning index to a level where crown fire would be nearly impossible. This graph shows a windspeed ceiling of 100 miles/hour – FVS actually predicts the crowning index in the treatment units to be greater than this at initial entry time – meaning a wind event of over 100 miles/hour would be necessary for crown fire to occur in these stands. It would remain at this level for approximately 15 years where it would then decrease to roughly 40 miles/hour – still relatively high. Over the next 35 years the crowning index would still remain approximately 20 miles/hour greater than if the project area were left untreated (EA pg 45)."

Project design features and mitigation measures have been incorporated to address issues for soil productivity, Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive and MIS species and their habitat, fisheries and water resources, invasive weeds, allocated old growth, cultural resources, promoting community assistance, scenery management, recreation, transportation system, air quality and other issues that were considered but found not to be affected by the project proposal because the issues didn't pertain to the project area (such as roadless areas for instance).

I believe the selected course of action (Alternative 2, with changes described herein) provides a balanced response to the purpose and need for fuels reduction treatments in the Templeman HFRA project area, whereas the option of doing nothing at this time (the No-Action Alternative 1) will continue to jeopardize neighboring homes and associated utilities and evacuation routes in event of wildfire in this area.

Public Involvement and Collaboration

This project has transitioned from the analysis and decision process of a categorically excluded project under 36 CFR 215 NEPA procedures to an Environmental Assessment under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act NEPA procedures described in 36 CFR 218.

On January 31, 2007, Boundary County Commissioner Dan Dinning facilitated an initial

collaborative meeting for the Templeman and one other possible HFRA project area (Twin Skin). Invited attendees included the presidents of the Bee Line and Skin Creek Water Associations, a representative from the Kootenai Tribe, the mayors of Moyie Springs and Bonners Ferry, the Bonners Ferry City Engineer, the Bonners Ferry USFS District Ranger and two other district personnel.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the merits of conducting fuels reduction projects within areas that could affect the Skin Creek and Bee Line Water Associations water supply as well as the cities of Moyie Springs and Bonners Ferry (i.e. power from Moyie Dam). All attendees agreed that there was a need to reduce hazardous fuels within the areas that could adversely affect the community water supplies as well as destroy homes and block evacuation routes if the fuels were ignited. At the close of this meeting, District Ranger Mike Herrin decided to schedule a public open house in order to form collaborative groups that would help develop proposed actions for the two projects.

On March 8, 2007 a public open house was held at the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. Over 100 invitations to attend the meeting were mailed out to adjacent landowners, other individuals, government entities, agencies and organizations. The purpose of this meeting was to build on the previous collaborative meeting and open it up to any and all stakeholders who wanted to be informed about the Templeman and Twin Skin HFRA projects and also to form collaborative groups in order to help develop the proposed actions for the two projects.

Eighteen people attended the meeting. Participants represented the Idaho Department of Lands, the Idaho Conservation League, Riley Creek Lumber Co., Vaagen Brothers Lumber Co., Fodge Pulp, Inc., Northern Lights Utility CoOp., one adjacent landowner, Congressman Bill Sali's representative and several Bonners Ferry RD personnel, including Acting District Ranger Don Gunter, the project leaders and other interdisciplinary members from the district.

The general purpose of this group meeting was to start the process of transitioning the Templeman Hazardous Fuels Categorical Exclusion to a "new" Templeman HFRA EA project and proceed with further development of a proposed action for the new project. The group decided at this time to form two separate collaborative groups for the two projects (Templeman and Twin Skin) due to the distance between the two projects and the feeling that different adjacent landowners would be involved and interested only in the project nearest their residences. The group agreed that the next meeting should involve a field trip to get a better idea on the project needs and to further discuss and develop proposed actions for the two projects. The group agreed on the dates of May 8th and 9th, 2007 for field trips, May 8th would be the date to visit the Templeman project area.

Invitations announcing the May 8th field trip were mailed out to the collaborative group that was formed at the March 8th open house. The group included 26 people representing adjacent land owners, government entities, agencies, utilities, forest products businesses and organizations. A news release was also published in the local Bonners Ferry Herald that invited all interested people to attend. On May 8, 2007, thirteen people attended the field trip. Participants represented Boundary County FireSafe, Boundary County Commissioners, the Idaho Department of Lands, the Idaho Conservation League, Vaagen Brothers Lumber Co., Forest Interface Solutions/Envio Energi (a FireSafe contractor and biomass industry company), a small-scale mechanized logging contractor specializing in small diameter timber stand fuels reduction treatments, and Forest Service personnel, including Acting Ranger Don

Gunter, in-coming Ranger Linda McFaddan, the IPNF soil scientist, the project leader and other interdisciplinary team members.

This field trip focused on the possibility and feasibility of adding to the project area a 300-acre "biomass thinning" treatment in the 1979 Templeman Fire plantation, which would remove and utilize small trees cut during what would normally be considered a "precommercial thinning" treatment that typically leave the cut trees unutilized and sometimes piled and burned. Also discussed was the possible need for using a stewardship contract to help finance and accomplish this biomass removal work, as well as to provide a funding source for noxious weed treatments. The group also visited other previously proposed areas under the Templeman CE to discuss the needs and methods for treating those areas.

The group was in general agreement to proceed with a proposed action that included the biomass thinning treatment as well as all the previously proposed treatments, possibly with some minor changes. The group also decided to look into the possibility of increasing the acres of prescribed fire treatment if there were appropriate areas that had been overlooked previously and also consider any possible watershed improvement work that could be done in Templeman Creek or Meadow Creek.

A scoping letter was then mailed out on June 19, 2007 to 118 individuals, organizations and agencies to gather comments for the proposed action. The comment period ended July 31, 2007, although comments could still be received and considered up to the date of issuing this EA for 30-day comments. A legal announcement for this scoping notice was also published in the Coeur d'Alene Press on June 28, 2007.

The Templeman HFRA EA was also posted on the IPNF Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) initially in the April 13, 2007 and all subsequent SOPAs.

Eight comments were received during the scoping period.

The EA was finalized and released for a 30-day objection period on Feburary 3, 2008. Two objections were received on March 3, 2008, one by the Idaho Conservation League and the other was filed jointly by The Land's Council and WildWest Institute. A objection resolution meeting and conference call was held on March 20, 2008. Objectors from the ICL and TLC/WWI and the Idaho Dept of Lands participated via phone and 14 people representing the Forest Service, collaborative group members and county residents participated in person at the Bonners Ferry Ranger District office. Some resolutions were agreed upon and incorporated into my decision described in this Decision Notice while others remained unresolved and the objections were reviewed by Kathleen A. McAllister, Reviewing Officer, USDA Northern Region.

In her March 28, 2008 disposition letter to the objectors, Reviewing Officer Kathleen A. McAllister found that the project clearly demonstrates compliance with the HFRA. Other findings and instructions to the Responsible Official disclosed in the review letter included:

1) Objection Issue 1 - future salvage was resolved by dropping this connected action.
2) Objection Issue 2 - soils improvement mitigation of including the obliteration of unclassified roads #FR940-UA and #FR 940-UB in Units 3 and 4 were agreed upon as a resolution of ICLs, but not TLC-WWI concerns, and that the Reviewing Officer found

this mitigation and the project as a whole is in compliance with the Regional Soil Standards. Note: following the issuance of the Reviewing Officers' response letter, the project leader found that the "unclassified roads" referred to in Unit 4 were actually two existing main skid trails that were extended off the end of classified road #FR 397C during the previous harvest. These trails will be obliterated following use as intended. An updated project map that shows the location of these two skid trails, labeled "397C - skid trail A and skid trail B", has been included in the EA errata sheet.

3) Objection Issue 3 - concerns about adequate hydrology analysis and inconsistencies in existence of unmapped "wetlands" between resource specialists was found to be resolved by requiring the IDT to clarify the effects analysis and eliminate inconsistencies between resource specialist reports concerning this issue.
4) Objection Issue 4 - noxious weeds treatments were resolved by dropping the use of herbicides in the project area until a new weed treatment EIS is completed for the District, including the Templeman HFRA project area.
5) Objection Issue 5 - roads analysis issue will be resolved by having the District complete a final RAP analysis for the project prior to signing the DN.
6) Objection Issue 6 - the old growth and large tree issue was found to be in compliance with the HFRA requirements under Section 102(e and f).
7) The Reviewing Officer also addressed other issues brought up in the ICL and TLC/WWI objections. The Reviewing Officer instructed the Responsible Official to finalize the public comment content analysis table by adding information on where and how the DN, EA and project file addressed public comments. The Reviewing Officer also found that the project cumulative effects analysis was complete and closed the letter by disclosing that the review was not subject to further administrative review and that the Responsible Official may proceed with issuing a Decision Notice.

Findings and Consistency with Laws, Regulations and Policies

National Forest Management Act: Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is also consistent with NFMA consistency requirements:

- *Maintaining diversity:* Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is designed to be implemented in a manner that will protect wildlife and fisheries resources in the Templeman HFRA project area (EA, Appendix C). There will be no significant impact to any species, and no loss of viability to populations or species. The long-term benefits will outweigh the short-term disturbance to species during project activities.

- *Suitability for timber production (16 USC 1605[k]):* Harvest will not occur on sites identified as not suitable for timber production.

- *Stands of trees are harvested according to requirements for culmination of mean annual increment of growth (16 USC 1604(m)):* Prescriptions written for this project will implement sound silvicultural practices including a combination of thinning, sanitation salvage, group selection and shelterwood treatments that have been approved by a certified silviculturist.

- *Soil, slope or other watershed conditions (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][i] and protection for streams and other bodies of water (16 USC 1604[g][3][E][iii]):* The design of fuels

reduction treatments and road work include features designed specifically to protect water, soils, and fisheries, including criteria for road reconstruction and maintenance. There will be no irreversible damage to soil, slope, or other watershed conditions. Implementation will be based on use of Best Management Practices and design features to protect wetlands, seeps, bogs, wallows and springs. Fuels reduction treatments are not likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat.

- *Restocking (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][ii]):* Technology and knowledge exists to ensure that lands are adequately restocked within five years after final harvest. Effects on residual trees and adjacent stands have been considered.

- *Economic factors (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][iv]):* Economic factors were considered, and Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) does have economic value associated with timber volume. However, Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) was chosen primarily for the reasons documented in this decision (reducing fuels…) and not because of economic value.

- *Clearcutting and even-aged management (16 USC 1605[g][3][F]):* Even-aged management would occur on 26 acres (Unit 6, shelterwood harvest) under Alternative 2 (with changes described herein). All treatments are silviculturally appropriate and are within the timber and vegetation practices outlined in the Forest Plan. Under Alternative 2 (with changes described herein), no units will exceed the 40-acre opening size. Design of treatments included features to protect water, soils, and fisheries.

- *Temporary roadways (16 USC 1608[b]) and standards of roadway construction (16 USC 1608[c]):* NFMA requires that the necessity of roads be documented and that road construction be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources (16 USC 1608). NFMA also requires that roads are planned and designed to re-establish vegetation cover on the disturbed areas within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed 10 years unless the road is determined necessary as a permanent addition to the National Forest Transportation System (16 USC 1604, Sec. 8).

  The Roads Analysis Process (RAP) was used to identify the condition of (and recommendations for) each road system in the project area (project file). Under Alternative 2 (with changes described herein), no new system roads will be constructed in the Templeman HFRA project area. Approximately one-half mile of temporary roads will be constructed to allow access to harvest units numbered 4, 4a and 5. The construction will be completed using Best Management Practices to protect aquatic and soil resources (EA Appendix C and project file). At the completion of its intended use, the temporary roads will be decommissioned and revegetated with native plants. The final RAP completed as a result of the March 20, 2008 objection resolution agreements previously discussed in this DN also include the recommendation, and my decision to obliterate following use during this project unclassified roads #FR 940-UA and #FR 940-UB and two existing main skid trails that were extended off of #FR 397C in Unit 4 during the previous entry. Potential impacts of Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) from the temporary roads, two unclassified roads and two existing skid trails have been assessed and are disclosed in the Environmental Assessment, EA errata sheet and Appendices, with supporting information in the Project Files.

- *Consideration of best available science* (*36 CFR 219.35(a)*)*:* The need to employ the best science is not new, since agency decisions have always required a sound technical basis. What constitutes best available science might vary over time and across scientific disciplines. The Templeman HFRA project file demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty and risk, as appropriate.

IPNF (1987) Forest Plan: The activities planned in the Templeman HFRA project area are consistent with the Forest Plan because they will help to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically intense fire and associated risks to life, property, and natural resources; and reduce the danger to fire suppression crews. All management activities will be in compliance with Management Area direction (EA page 7), including all goals and objectives, as described in the Specialists' Reports. All treatments are silviculturally appropriate and are within the timber and vegetation practices outlined in the Forest Plan.

Forest Plan old-growth standards will be met or exceeded. Proposed activities would also meet the Forest Plan and objectives for managing snag habitat because treatments will increase the future availability of large diameter snags, while maintaining a diversity of snag structural classes on treated sites (see design features). Standards for old-growth habitat management are to maintain at least 10 percent of the forested portion of the IPNF as old growth, maintain at least 5 percent of the forested portion of those old-growth management units (OGMUs) that have 5 percent or more existing old growth, and one or more old-growth stands per OGMU should be 300 acres or larger.

The project includes portions of OGMUs 28, 30 and 31; which contain 4.2 percent, 8.7 percent and 3.3 percent old growth, respectively. Only OGMU 30 has a contiguous old-growth stand of more than 300 acres. Currently, an estimated 11.8 percent of forested lands on the IPNF (FIA data: 90 percent confidence interval of 9.5 to 14.0 percent) and 15.9 percent of forested areas in the Bonners Ferry/Kootenai Geographic Area (90 percent confidence interval of 10.2 to 21.9 percent) meet old growth criteria. The proposed action would not affect allocated old growth, and all allocated stands would continue to be managed for old-growth characteristics. Because this proposal would not trend any sensitive wildlife species toward Federal listing, Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is consistent with National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements to provide a diversity of plant and animal communities in the Plan area (16 USC, 1604, 6(g)(2)(B))(EA Appendix C, Wildlife BE).

Healthy Forests Restoration Act: Activities meet the requirements for authorization under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, including:

Section 102 (a) *describes locations on Federal land where hazardous fuel reduction projects are appropriate (for example, wildland-urban interface areas; condition class 2 and 3, lands where wildfire would have adverse effects on a municipal water supply or the maintenance of the system; where there is windthrow or blowdown, ice storm damage, epidemic disease or insects on or adjacent to federal land; or on federal land with threatened and endangered species habitat that is at risk to catastrophic wildfire).*

The Templeman HFRA project is entirely within the Wildland Urban Interface Area as defined by the Boundary County Fire Mitigation Plan. The project proposal concurrently addresses identified hazards and vulnerabilities described in the Boundary County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP). The County Plan was developed in 2003 (amended February 2004) through a collaborative process between Boundary County citizens, federal, state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. The group formed several goals to begin mitigation of fire risk within the wildland/urban interface. These goals include fuels modification treatments within two miles of homes and associated infrastructure, including roads, in order to protect humans, their habitations and evacuation routes.

Section 102 (b) *requires that proposed HFRA actions be consistent with applicable resource management plans and must be on lands managed by the USDA Forest Service or DOI BLM.*

All lands within the project area boundary are National Forest System lands managed by the Bonners Ferry Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF).

Section 102 (d) specifies that hazardous-fuel treatment projects cannot take place in wilderness or wilderness study areas, or in areas where removal of vegetation is prohibited by an act of Congress or Presidential proclamation.

There are no lands in or adjacent to the Templeman HFRA project area designated as wilderness or wilderness study areas. Proposed activities are not in any area where removal of vegetation is prohibited.

Section 102 (e) *requires that an authorized project fully maintain or contribute toward the restoration of the structure and composition of old growth stands.*

The project area does not contain any allocated, unallocated or any timber stands that meet the Green and others (corrected 2005) criteria for old growth (EA project file).

Section 102 (f) *requires that an authorized project focus largely on small-diameter trees, thinning, strategic fuel breaks, and prescribed fire; maximizing the retention of large trees.*

The analysis supports compliance with requirements for large tree retention outside of old-growth stands as appropriate for the forest types addressed and the promotion of fire-resilient stands. The intent of the treatments is to leave the largest and best trees on site, while meeting the purpose of the project to reduce fuels and increase seral species such as larch and ponderosa pine, as well as western white pine. This project is also promoting the utilization of biomass.

The project meets the intent of HFRA to “maximize the retention of large trees, as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote fire-resilient stands.”

Table DN-1 displays the average diameter of trees initially, to be cut, and to be retained following treatment, by Unit number. The table clearly discloses that the largest trees will be retained and about 95% of all trees expected to be cut are less than 14 inches dbh. Table DN-2 displays the percentage of size classes of trees to be cut by Unit number.

Table DN-1. Average Diameter of Trees (inches): Current(i); to be Cut(c) and; Retained after treatment (r), by Unit.

Unit	DBH (i)	DBH (c)	DBH (r)
1	**12.7**	**9.7**	**16.6**
2	**11.4**	**8.7**	**13.5**
3	**13.8**	**11.1**	**18.7**
4	**15.8**	**11.4**	**19.1**
4A	**16.8**	**12.7**	**18.9**
5	**11.3**	**9.1**	**13.5**
6	**10.6**	**9.4**	**16.0**
7	**5.3**	**5.0**	**6.0**

Table DN-2. **Trees per acre by size class and Percentage of size classes of trees to be cut by Unit number.**

DBH Class (inches)	Unit 1 TPA	Unit 2 TPA	Unit 3 TPA	Unit 4 TPA	Unit 4A TPA	Unit 5 TPA	Unit 6 TPA	Unit 7 TPA	TOTALS TPA
2								30.6	30.6
3								133.8	133.8
4								55.6	55.6
5						2.3	38.7	101.6	142.7
6	1.4	5.5	2.0			6.0	29.1	75.7	119.7
7	36.5	38.1	13.8	2.0		38.4	18.1	43.5	190.3
8	14.0	29.3	5.1	6.5		31.4	58.6	10.1	155.0
9	5.6	36.8	12.4	5.9		22.5	11.4		94.5
10	19.4		16.4	4.3		6.5	9.0		55.5
11	11.7		5.5	4.3		4.4	8.5		34.4
12		4.6	9.4	1.4	14.1	8.9	6.9		45.2
13	3.0		6.2	6.3	11.9	0.9	5.4		33.8
14		3.1	5.6	4.5		1.6			14.8
15			8.1	3.0			9.0		20.1
16									0.0
17	1.7					0.6			2.2
18	4.8					0.5	3.2		8.4
19	1.3					0.4	5.8		7.5
20									0.0
Size Class %	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 4a	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	All Units Total
<7.0(%)	1.4%	4.7%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	33.3%	88.1%	**42.2%**
7.0-13.9(%)	90.7%	92.7%	81.4%	80.4%	100.0%	90.8%	57.9%	11.9%	**53.2%**

14.0-15.9(%)	0.0%	2.6%	16.3%	19.6%	0.0%	1.3%	4.4%	0.0%	3.0%
16.0-19.9(%)	7.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	4.4%	0.0%	1.6%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Section 104 (c) and (d) *address consideration of alternatives, particularly for projects in the wildland-urban interface.*

The Templeman HFRA project is entirely within the Wildland Urban Interface Area as defined by the Boundary County Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP). Bonners Ferry is also listed in the Federal Register, Vol. 66, No.3, January 4, 2001, as a community in the vicinity of Federal Lands that is at high risk from wildfire. The project area is located entirely within 1.5 miles of this at-risk community.

The treatments proposed in the Templeman HFRA project implement an acceptable version of the Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan recommendations. Under HFRA authorities, in order to expedite analyses, proposed projects inside a wildland-urban interface and within 1.5 miles of the boundary of an at-risk community do not require an alternative to the proposed action as long as it meets objectives in a CWPP. However, a no action alternative was included in order to display the effects associated with not implementing the project. Alternative 1 is the No-Action Alternative (to demonstrate the effects of failing to implement the project), Alternative 2 is the Proposed Action Alternative (the agency's proposed alternative). Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is based on changes to Alternative 2, as described previously in this Decision Notice.

Section 104 (e), (f) and (g) *encourage meaningful public participation, including collaboration and public comment. Agencies must provide notice of the project and conduct a public meeting when preparing authorized hazardous fuel-reduction projects.*

A collaborative process was used and has been fully disclosed on pages 14 through 17 of this Decision Notice.

Clean Water Act: Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is consistent with the requirements of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1251).

Sediment and water temperature, the pollutants of concern, will not permanently increase in the waters of the Templeman Project. These pollutants to water quality will be prevented through implementation of BMPS and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. The riparian protection components of the project (INFS RMOs, Forest Service BMPs) are designed to improve condition. Risks to beneficial uses will not be changed by this project. There will be no detrimental increase in sediment or stream temperature through management activities in the Templeman Project Area.

By following site specific BMPs, INFS guidelines, and RHCA buffers, there will be no detrimental cumulative effects to the streams, or net increase in siltation, suspended solids, or thermal changes, thus no violation to the TMDL regulations or Clean Water Act (EA Appendix C, hydrologist report).

Clean Air Act: The Idaho Panhandle National Forests is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group, which is composed of members who conduct a "major" amount of prescribed burning and the regulatory and health agencies that regulate this burning. The intent of the Airshed Group is to minimize or prevent smoke impacts while using fire to accomplish land management objectives and/or fuel hazard reduction (EA Appendix B, Fuels report). The monitoring unit of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group coordinates burning and smoke emissions to minimize smoke accumulation and provides smoke dispersion forecasts and air quality monitoring support for burners in the Airshed Group. Daily during the burning season, burners post proposed burns before 11:00 am; the monitoring unit considers proposed burns together with expected ventilation or smoke dispersion conditions and existing air quality to determine burn recommendations for the following day (with concurrence from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality). These procedures limit smoke accumulations to legal, acceptable limits. The District strictly complies with these procedures, and has had no air quality violations. Although prescribed burning creates smoke that contains particulate matter, activities proposed under Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) would substantially reduce the particulate matter emissions of potential wildfires (EA Appendix B, Fuels report).

National Historic Preservation Act: Surveys to locate heritage resources within the Templeman HFRA project area have been completed (EA Appendix C, Cultural Resources report). All known heritage resource sites would be protected under either alternative. Any future discovery of heritage resource sites would be inventoried and protected in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act if found to be of cultural significance.

Endangered Species Act: Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act directs that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by federal agencies do not jeopardize the continued existence of any Threatened or Endangered species, or result in adverse modification of habitat critical to these species. Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) will be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act as amended (EA Appendix C, Wildlife, Fisheries and Botany reports and EA errata sheet).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act: The wildlife report for this project determined that Alternative 2 (with changes described herein), "May impact individuals and habitat, but would not indicate a local or regional change in habitat quality or population status" (EA Appendix C, wildlife Biological Evaluation).

Safe Drinking Water Act and Amendments of 1996 (Including State of Idaho Implementation): Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is consistent with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and Amendments of 1996. BMP's were developed from protection measures recommended from this assessment along with site specific BMP's outlined in EA Appendix C, hydrology report.

Idaho Forest Practices Act: No municipal watersheds are within the effects area of the Templeman HFRA project area. Adjacent landowners draw their domestic water from either the Bee Line Water Association system located in Meadow Creek and from private water wells. Proposed activities are away from water sources used for domestic purposes. BMPs or Soil and Water Conservation Practices (EA Appendix C, hydrology report) will be applied under Alternative 2 (with changes described herein), and all activities are in compliance with the guidelines in the Soil and Water Conservation Handbook.

Executive Order 12962 – Recreational Fishing: Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is consistent with this executive order regarding aquatic systems and recreational fisheries (EA Appendix C, fisheries report).

State of Idaho Governor's Bull Trout Plan: Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is consistent with the direction in the Governor's Bull Trout Plan (EA Appendix C, fisheries report).

Roadless Area Conservation Rule, Interim Directives No. 7710-2001-2 and No. 2400-2001-3, and Wilderness Act of 1964: Activities under Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) are consistent with these mandates. There are no roadless or wilderness areas within or adjacent to the Templeman HFRA project area.

Environmental Justice Act: Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) was assessed to determine whether it would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations, in accordance with Executive Order 12898. No impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or any other portion of public involvement during the course of this analysis. Based on this, Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) complies with Executive Order 12898.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The Forest Service has two types of decisions: programmatic (such as the Forest Plan) and project level (which implements the Forest Plan). The Templeman HFRA Environmental Assessment is a project-level analysis; its scope is confined to addressing the significant issues and environmental effects of the project. Two alternatives were considered in detail - the No-Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative. The No-Action Alternative represents the current (i.e. baseline) and expected future condition given the past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities (EA, page 20 summary and Appendices). Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) represents the expected future condition based on the effects of fuels reduction, and associated activities under the Forest Service's Proposed Action as well as past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities (EA, page 20 summary and Appendices).

After considering the environmental effects described in the Templeman HFRA Environmental Assessment (EA), I have determined that Altenative 2 (with changes described herein) will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment based on the context and intensity of its impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following disclosures:

A. Context

The significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts, such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27).

The project area is set in a forested Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) environment in the Meadow Creek and Kootenai River watersheds of the Bonners Ferry Ranger District surrounded by year-round residences and with limited dispersed recreation (i.e. hunting, ATV riding and firewood cutting) and timber harvest activities (past and on-going) on both federal and private lands.

Expectations are the project will be implemented over a six to ten-year period with harvesting operations only occurring during winter months (November through April) of each year with the exception of biomass thinning Unit 7, in which summer operations will be permitted but restricted to using specialized small-scale-light-weight equipment due to the expected less-than-normal ground disturbance impacts compared to traditional logging equipment. Adjacent landowners, other local and Idaho residents and some nonresidents who choose to hunt or otherwise recreate in the area will be most affected. The context of this proposal is minimal, with direct implications only for an area of approximately 1,200 acres, although some analyses (such as aquatics and wildlife) considered the extent of effects beyond the project boundaries. While reducing hazardous fuels, the proposed action will not pose any significant short- or long-term effects. Design features included in this proposal will limit adverse effects to such an extent that any adverse impacts are almost undetectable and immeasurable, even at the local level (discussed in EA Chapter 3 and Specialists' Reports located in EA Appendices A, B and C and EA errata sheets).

The Templeman HFRA project will achieve planned activities within the project area for the foreseeable future.

B. Intensity

This refers to the severity of the impact. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27):

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if, on balance, effects are believed to be beneficial.

Beneficial and adverse impacts of this decision are addressed in Chapter 3, of the EA and EA Appendices A, B and C and EA errata sheets. No significant impacts were identified.

2. The degree of effects on public health or safety.

Safety measures have been incorporated into the project design to provide for public safety during treatment operations. In the event of a wildfire, the treatments will reduce fire intensities to help allow safe travel along the ingress/egress travel corridors. The risk of smoke intrusion into this Class II airshed from prescribed burning in the Templeman HFRA project area will be minimal due to prevailing winds (EA Appendix B). All burning complies with federal, state and local regulations (EA Appendix B). Management practices include but are not limited to burning under spring-like conditions (high fuel, soil, and duff moistures) to reduce emissions and provide for retention of large woody debris. Prescribed burning during spring or fall will generate less smoke than will occur during a much hotter stand-replacing summertime wildfire. Also, this project includes a focus for improving utilization of biomass that is a by-product of fuels reduction treatments and that have traditionally been piled and burned. Biomass removed from the project area and used for energy (electricity, ethanol or biodiesel for instance) will have the added benefit of reducing smoke emissions in the project area that will otherwise result from burning the excess slash.

Logging operation restrictions and road maintenance work as described in the project's design features on Section 2.4, pages 15-20 of the EA will be employed as additional safety features. The selected action is expected to maintain watershed conditions and water quality such that downstream beneficial uses are protected and compliance with state water quality standards is achieved.

Reduction of fuels and lower risk conditions for stand-replacing wildfire will help ensure public and firefighter safety.

For these reasons, there will be no significant effects on public health and safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas.

No parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas will be affected by any of the proposed treatments. The resource area has been surveyed and analyzed for historic and cultural resources; results indicate that the Proposed Action will not have any effect on any historical or cultural resources (EA Appendix C, Cultural Resource report). With regard to wetlands, the proposed action will exclude all Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) from proposed treatment areas, with the exception of conducting juvenile tree thinning with handsaws on approximately 10 acres within a RHCA, consistent with Forest Plan guidelines (EA Appendix C, Hydrologist and Fisheries reports) as amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy, and state and federal law. These design features will reduce riparian impacts to the extent that the Proposed Action will not pose any significant impacts to wetlands or riparian areas within the Templeman HFRA project area.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environmental are likely to be highly controversial.

CEQ guidelines suggest that an EIS should be prepared where the impacts are controversial, referring not to the amount of public opposition, but to where there is a substantial dispute as to the size, nature, or effect of the major federal action
(http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/caselaw/Major_NEPA_Cases.pdf pp 7, IIIA(2)).

Review of public input, of the potential issues raised during scoping and during development of the proposed action through collaborative meetings and field trips, and the standards, guidelines and design features related to the proposed action have resulted in a limited and focused proposed action. The expected effects of the activities in the Templeman HFRA project area on the quality of the human environment have not resulted in any substantial disputes as to the size, nature or effects of this proposed action.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Due to past similar activities on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, the effects on the human environment are well understood. Chapter 3 of the EA discloses the existing condition of the area as well as the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of Alternative 2 (with changes described herein). Those effects do not indicate uncertain, unique or unknown risks, nor do resource technical reports, Biological Assessments/Evaluations contained in EA Appendices A, B and C and EA errata sheets. Monitoring of past activities and projects has confirmed the predicted effects analysis. Documentation of past monitoring with similar projects can be found in the IPNFs' annual monitoring reports at:

(http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/forestplan/index.html#fpmon)

Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is consistent with management direction provided by the Forest Plan. Design features will minimize the potential impacts. There are no impacts that might be uncertain, unique or unknown.

6. The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) is within general and specific management area guidelines and direction in the Forest Plan and does not set any unusual or binding precedent for future actions, nor is it directly part of a larger connected action.

7. The degree of cumulative effects on resources.

The Affected Environment in Chapter 3 and EA Appendices A, B and C discloses the existing condition including past actions. Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of implementation of alternatives on the affected environment as well as planned and reasonably foreseeable actions are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA and Appendices and EA errata sheets. No cumulatively significant effects were noted. Additionally, the Biological Assessments and Evaluations for fish, wildlife and plants conclude that Alternative 2 (with changes described herein) will have no adverse cumulative effects or impacts upon threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species, nor do resource technical reports in the project record indicate that implementation of the selected alternative will result in significant effects to natural resources or the quality of the human environment.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

A record search, field survey, and resource inventory Heritage Resource Report have been completed for this project in compliance with Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act (EA Appendix C, Cultural Resource report). Assessment of historic and cultural resources in the Templeman HFRA indicates implementation of this project will not affect any heritage resource eligible for listing in the National Register of historic places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of any significant cultural or historical resources. If any new heritage resources are discovered during project implementation, operations will cease in the area of discovery until adequate protection measures had been agreed upon with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973.

The selected alternative (Alternative 2, with changes described herein) is designed to be implemented in a manner that will protect wildlife, fish, and rare plant resources in the Templeman HFRA project area (EA Chapter 2 and EA Appendix C). No activities are proposed in allocated old growth. There will be no significant impact to any species, and there will be no loss of viability to populations or species.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

National Forest Management Act and IPNF (1987) Forest Plan: The proposed action is consistent with the NFMA and other applicable federal, state and local laws that protect the environment, including the IPNF (1987) Forest Plan, as amended. The activities proposed in the Templeman HFRA project area are consistent with the Forest Plan because they will reduce fuels and therefore future fire intensities from within the county-defined WUI contained within lands designated for such purpose. The proposed action will also help promote long-lived, fire-resilient, seral species within the project area. All proposed management activities will be in compliance with Management Area direction, including goals and objectives, as described in the Specialists' Reports.

Forest Plan old-growth standards will be met. Standards for old-growth habitat management are to maintain at least 10 percent of the forested portion of the IPNF as old growth, maintain at least 5 percent of the forested portion of those old-growth management units (OGMUs) that have 5 percent or more existing old growth, and one or more old-growth stands per OGMU should be 300 acres or larger. The Templeman HFRA project area includes portions of OGMUs 28, 30 and 31; which contain 4.2 percent, 8.7 percent and 3.3 percent old growth, respectively. Only OGMU 30 has a contiguous old-growth stand of more than 300 acres. Currently, an estimated 11.8 percent of forested lands on the IPNF (FIA data: 90 percent confidence interval of 9.5 to 14.0 percent) and 15.9 percent of forested areas in the Bonners Ferry/Kootenai Geographic Area (90 percent confidence interval of 10.2 to 21.9 percent) meet old growth criteria. The Proposed Action does not include any harvest, prescribed burning, or road construction in any allocated old growth, therefore the proposed action will not affect allocated old growth, and all allocated stands will continue to be managed for old-growth characteristics (wildlife BE, EA Appendix C).

NFMA consistency requirements include the need to protect species viability and habitat for Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive Species as well as habitat for Management Indicator Species and

forest species of concern. The Proposed Action was designed to be implemented in a manner that will protect wildlife and fisheries resources in the Templeman HFRA project area (EA Appendix C, Wildlife BA/BE and EA errata sheet). There will be no significant impact to any species, and there will be no loss of viability to populations or species.

Technology and knowledge exists to ensure that lands are adequately restocked within five years after final harvest. Effects on residual trees and adjacent stands have been considered. Harvest will not occur on sites identified as not suitable for timber production. All treatments that will occur under the Proposed Action are silviculturally appropriate and are within the timber and vegetation practices outlined in the Forest Plan. Potential physical, biological, aesthetic, cultural, engineering and economic impacts of the action alternatives have been assessed and are disclosed in the Environmental Assessment with supporting information in the Appendices and project file.

Clean Water Act: The Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources (EA Appendix C) evaluated potential adverse impacts to water resource and project compliance with the Clean Water Act, and determined that the Proposed Action will be consistent with the Clean Water Act . There will be no change in risks to beneficial uses in any stream in the Templeman HFRA cumulative effects area.

Endangered Species Act: Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act directs that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by federal agencies do not jeopardize the continued existence of any Threatened or Endangered species, or result in adverse modification of habitat critical to these species. The Proposed Action will be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act as amended (EA Appendix C, Wildlife BA and EA errata sheet).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act: The habitat needs of neotropical migrants were addressed through the analyses for other species which depend upon old forest structure and snags (goshawk, pileated woodpecker, marten, and black-backed woodpecker). Although some current habitat may be lost over the short term as a result of proposed activities, taking no action could result in similar effects (EA Appendix C, Wildlife BE). Efforts to trend stands in the resource area toward historic species composition and diversity in age structure and to maintain the ecological processes that created these conditions will eventually benefit nongame and land bird species.

Environmental Justice: In accordance with Executive Order 12898, the action alternatives were assessed to determine whether they will disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. No impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or any other portion of public involvement during the course of this analysis. Based on this, either alternative will comply with Executive Order 12898.

/s/ Ranotta K. McNair April 24, 2008

RANOTTA K. McNAIR Date

Forest Supervisor

Idaho Panhandle National Forests