United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Northern Region

Idaho Panhandle
National Forests

October 2007

Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District

Prichard-Murray Resource Area Decision Notice

Under Authority of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act

Prichard-Murray Decision Notice

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ATTACHMENT A – Finding of No Significant Impact
ENCLOSURE - Map of Activities under the Selected Alternative

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PRICHARD-MURRAY RESOURCE AREA
Decision Notice

Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District

Responsible Official:
Ranotta K. McNair, Forest Supervisor

1. Introduction to the Project

1.1. Overview of the Resource Area

Fuel reduction and stand improvement activities have been proposed on National Forest System lands in a 25,000-acre area of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, identified for the purposes of this analysis as the **Prichard-Murray Resource Area** (Figure 1). The resource area is located north of Interstate 90, near the communities of Prichard and Murray, Idaho (Figure 2).

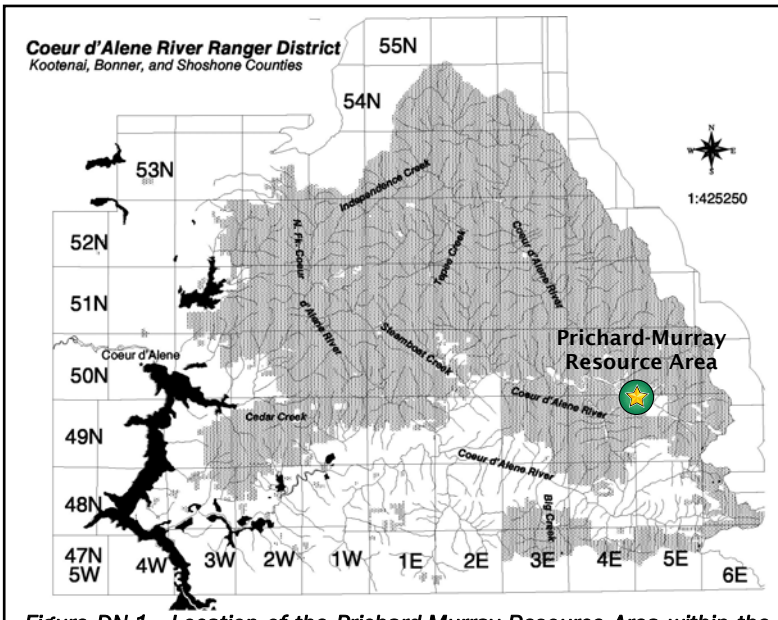


Figure DN-1. Location of the Prichard-Murray Resource Area within the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District.

The proximity of the resource area to communities results in a higher incidence of human-caused fires than in remote areas. The Murray-Prichard Volunteer Fire Department provides rural fire protection, while wildfire protection is provided by the Forest Service.

An estimated 74 percent of lands (approximately 18,500 acres) within the project boundary are managed by the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 6 percent of lands (approximately 1,600 acres) within the boundary, and the remaining 20 percent (approximately 5,000 acres) are privately-owned lands.

Forest Highway 9 is a paved route that connects the communities in the area, following the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River, up the Prichard Creek drainage through Murray, and ascending to the state line at Thompson Pass. Highway 9 would be the primary route for fire suppression crews and equipment, as well as for evacuation of these communities.

<u>Legal Description</u>

The Prichard-Murray Resource Area includes all or portions of the following sections (Boise Meridian):

T49N, R4E, sections 1, 2;
T49N, R5E, sections 4-9;
T50N, R4E, sections 2, 3, 10-36;
T50N, R5E, sections 19-21, 28-34; and
T50N, R3E, sections 12-14, 23-25

There are no developed campgrounds, picnic areas or other structural recreation developments in the area or in the near vicinity. The only recreation trail in the resource area is Trail 151, which begins on National Forest land at Kings Pass and ends on private land at Sunset Peak. The 8-mile trail follows old roads and is maintained for ATV use. Bicycle, motorcycle and foot travel also occur.

The Prichard-Murray Resource Area also includes portions of three roadless areas, including 477 acres of the Lost Creek Roadless Area, 4,854 acres of the Trouble Creek Roadless Area and 267 acres of the Maple Peak Roadless Area (Figure 2). Further discussion of these roadless areas is provided in Section 3.2 (Comparison of Effects to Other Resources – Effects to Recreation) and the Specialist's Report on Recreation.

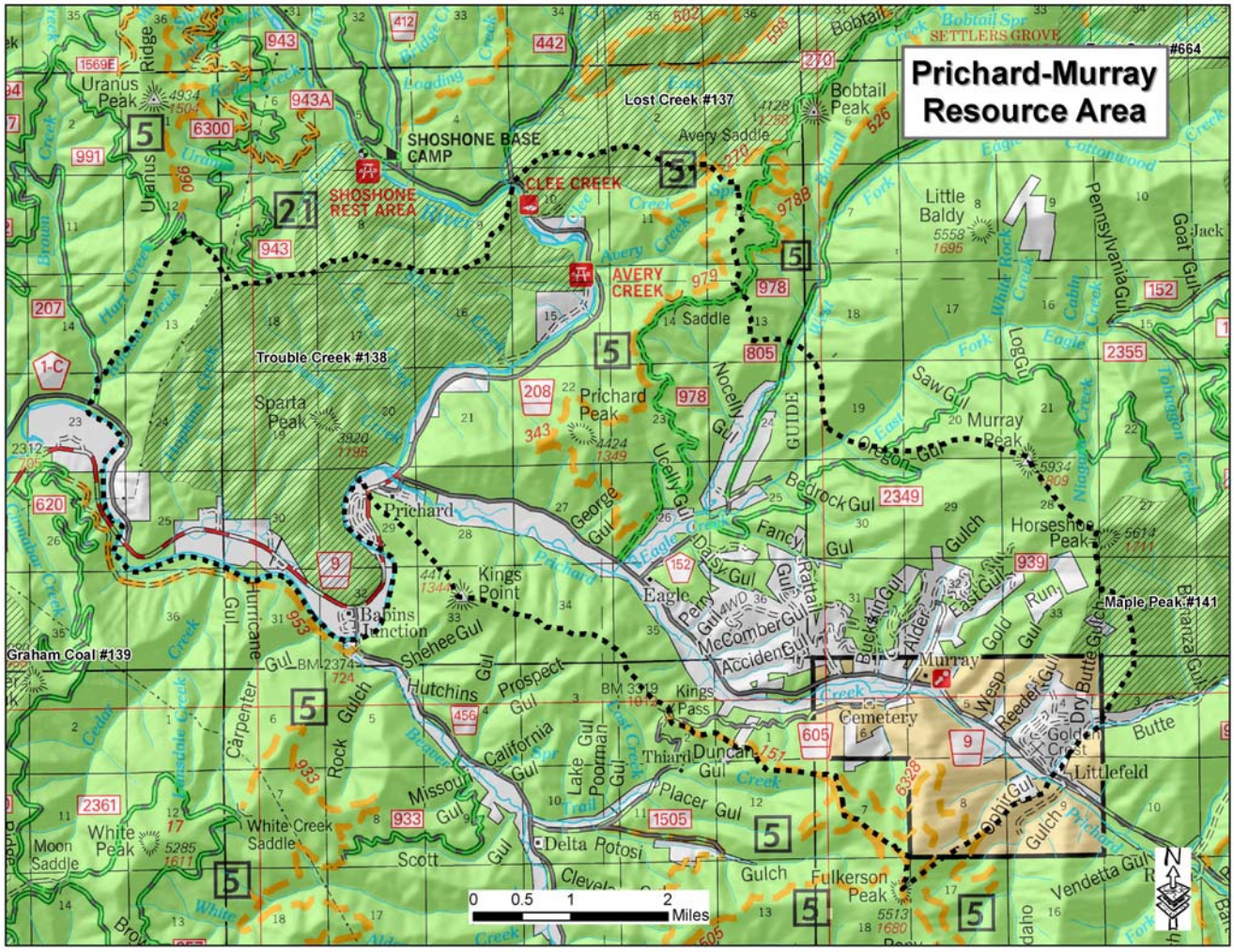


Figure DN-2. Vicinity Map of the Prichard-Murray Fuel Reduction Project Area. (National Forest System lands are represented by green shading; BLM lands are represented by tan shading; and private ownership is represented by white shading. Areas designated for roadless management are represented by hatching.)

1.2. Purpose and Need for Action

Prichard and Murray are among several communities in Shoshone County that were identified as being at high risk from wildfire in a 2001 USDA Forest Service/USDI BLM report, "Urban Wildland Interface Communities Within the Vicinity of Federal Lands That Are at High Risk From Wildfire," (Federal Register pages 43384, 43403, and 43404; Project File Doc. CR-027). The intent of the list is to help federal land agencies, working with State, Tribal, and local partners, accurately assess the level of wildfire risk and the types and extent of treatments required to mitigate the risk.

This specific project was initiated by the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District in response to the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Group's "Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan" (also known as the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, or CWPP; Project File Doc. CR-020). The Community Wildfire Protection Plan recognizes the threat that wildfires pose to the county, and recommends management that would decrease this risk. One of their goals is to reduce the rate of fire spread and acres of land burned by forest fires through the implementation of targeted fuel mitigation treatments where the landscape has the potential to sustain fires that threaten communities in the rural urban interface. Based on the lay of the land, wind patterns, and historical events, a large wind-driven fire (even one much smaller than the 1910 fire) could seriously threaten these communities, as well as many other homes and businesses throughout the area.

Figure DN-3. A home directly adjacent to National Forest, with dense vegetation within feet of the home.

Figure DN-4. Another example of hazardous fuel loading in the wildland-urban interface near Murray. Downed trees in the foreground are 8 to 10 inches in diameter.

Shoshone County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan identifies the area surrounding the Prichard and Murray communities as a priority for treatment (Shoshone County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, Project File Document CR-020, pages 73-75, 85-86) based largely on the following reasons:

- *Approximately 65 buildings around the community of Murray, 164 buildings near Prichard, and an Avista power line are at high-risk to loss in the event of a wildfire in the region.*
- *Forest health issues have created a significant component of dead and dying trees that will increase the fire intensity in the event of a fire ignition.*
- *For fuel reduction activities in specific communities and neighborhoods to have a substantial impact, aggressive, active forest management activities are needed in the forests that surround these communities.*

These findings are supported by the field reconnaissance and information gathering done by Prichard-Murray Project Team members who specialize in fire and fuels management and in silviculture (for more information, please refer to the Specialist's Reports on Fire/Fuels Management and Forest Vegetation, Project File Documents SR-01 and SR-02). As currently unmanaged stands age and exhibit less resiliency to insects, disease and fire, the opportunities to achieve desired structural characteristics and species composition are increasingly limited. Activities are needed to interrupt the pattern of vegetation, which would reduce the potential for high-intensity fires, reduce fire risks, and improve forest composition and structure (Brackebusch, 1973, PF Doc. FF-8). No single management prescription will achieve multi-resource objectives across all stands within a landscape. Silvicultural systems using density and species management, along with the carefully planned use of prescribed fire, are key to managing western forests. Based on current and desired conditions, proposed activities have been identified to address:

- ***Fuel/Fire Behavior Conditions:*** *Reduce dense fuel conditions so potential fire behavior would be less intense and severe.*
- ***Species Composition:*** *Increase the proportion of resilient species composition (western larch, ponderosa pine and white pine) so stands are healthier with less fire risk.*
- ***Structural Stages and Patch Sizes:*** *Create a mosaic of healthy stands that vary in age, tree diameter, and canopy (structural stages) and patch sizes.*

1.3. Healthy Forests Restoration Act Authority

This assessment has been conducted under the authority of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA). Passed in December 2003, the HFRA is intended to reduce the threat of destructive wildfires, while upholding environmental standards and encouraging early public input during planning processes. The legislation helps further the President's Healthy Forests Initiative pledge to care for America's forests and rangelands, reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to communities, help save the lives of firefighters and citizens, and protect threatened and endangered species. The Shoshone County Commissioners and the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group have endorsed the Proposed Action by accepting it as an amendment to the county's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (PF Doc FF-33).

The activities to occur under this decision in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area are appropriate and meet the definition of "authorized" under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act as defined in the 2004 Healthy Forests Initiative and Healthy Forests Restoration Act Interim Field Guide (pp. 9-14, 27-29; PF Doc. CR-021) and as discussed below. Further detail is provided in Section 4 (Findings and Consistency with Laws, Regulations, and Policy).

1.4. Alternative Development and Environmental Assessment

Public interest and input were solicited through the use of area newspapers (legal ads and news articles), the Forests' Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions, letters to interested members of the public, meetings with the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group and the public, and field trips to the area. More detailed information about these collaborative efforts and the comments received during scoping were provided in the June 2007 EA (Appendix C).

Development of alternatives was based on the existing condition of resources, the purpose and need, and issues identified by other agencies and the public (EA, Part 3 - Alternatives). Three alternatives were considered in detail. Although agencies are not expected to develop a full no-action alternative (USDA Forest Service, 2004, p. 10), a no-

action alternative was developed and analyzed in the EA. The No-Action Alternative analyzed for this project represents the effects of not implementing the proposed activities, as well as the effects of past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities.

Alternative 2 was developed to address the treatment needs identified by the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group and by the Forest Service. This is the Proposed Action that was presented to the public during scoping. The proposed activities were identified through a comparison of existing and desired conditions and based on the Specialist's Reports for Fire/Fuels (PF Doc. SR-01) and Forest Vegetation (PF Doc. SR-02). The alternative represents the expected future condition based on effects of proposed fuels reduction and stand improvement activities as well as past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities (described in Appendix B and the Specialists' Reports). The treatments proposed under Alternative 2 in the Prichard-Murray Fuel Reduction Project Area have been accepted by the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group and the Board of County Commissioners as an amendment to the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (PF Doc. FF-33).

Under Alternative 2, some proposed harvest and prescribed burning treatments along main roads and near communities would be located within stands of allocated old growth (EA, Table 7). Early in the process, two environmental organizations in the region (Kootenai Environmental Alliance and The Ecology Center) expressed concern about the effects of proposed management activities in stands allocated for old-growth management (PF Doc. PI-22 and PI-22). If activities substantially change characteristics of the stands, they may no longer meet the criteria for old-growth allocation. Management in old growth requires an acute awareness of anticipated effects, which can best be compared through formulation of alternatives that either actively manage old growth or exclude it from treatment; there are risks and benefits associated with both approaches. In order to compare the benefits of fuel reduction treatments in the wildland urban interface to the potential risks and effects to allocated old growth stands, **Alternative 3** was designed with no proposed harvest or prescribed burning activities within allocated old growth, regardless of the unit's location or proximity to communities.

Detailed descriptions of the alternatives, existing conditions, and environmental effects that would occur under each alternative were analyzed and documented in the Prichard-Murray Environmental Assessment (EA), which was mailed to the public in June 2007.

1.5. Objection Process

The HFRA provides a pre-decisional administrative review process (referred to as the "objection" process) pursuant to 36 CFR 218, subpart A (it is not subject to notice, comment and appeal provisions pursuant to 36 CFR 215; see 36 CFR 218.3). The objection period began after release and distribution of the EA, as announced to the public by notification in the cover letter for the EA and through publication of a legal notice in the newspaper of record (*Coeur d'Alene Press*, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho) on July 5, 2007.

Two letters of objection were received in a timely manner: one from Mike Mihelich (on behalf of the Kootenai Environmental Alliance, Lands Council, and WildWest Institute), and the other from Jonathan Oppenheimer (on behalf of the Idaho Conservation League). The District Ranger and representatives of the interdisciplinary planning team met with Mike Mihelich on August 14, 2007; and met with Jonathan Oppenheimer via conference call on August 16, 2007. Based on these meetings, it was determined their major issue was related to commercial harvesting of timber in allocated old growth. The objectors' concerns are based on a recent ruling from the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which found that the Forest Service had not demonstrated that treatment in old growth would not damage the viability of old growth dependent species, which violated NFMA (Ecology Center v. Austin). Alternative 2, the Proposed Action meets Forest Plan Standards for Old Growth Habitat Management (Specialist's Report on Forest Vegetation, page VEG-29), but uncertainty remains as to whether the Forest Service's effects analysis for old growth dependent species is adequate under the court precedent.

Both Mike Mihelich and Jonathan Oppenheimer recommended that Alternative 3 be selected to meet the hazardous fuels reduction objectives while protecting old growth habitat. Mr. Mihelich specifically recommended limiting commercial harvest to trees 18 inches and less in diameter.

Meaningful discussion ensued over the juxtaposition of three allocated old growth stands proposed for treatment under Alternative 2 relative to community at risk values. Two of the stands (Units 38 and 41) are immediately adjacent to private land and structures, and the third is along Forest Highway 9, a primary emergency access and evacuation route. Both parties indicated they were amenable to proposed prescribed burning activities only (without commercial timber harvest) to reduce fuels in these stands. Mr. Oppenheimer was concerned about the loss of large trees during burning, and asked that the Forest Service consider ways the trees could be protected that were not cost prohibitive.

The concerns and suggestions raised by the objecting organizations have been considered in selecting an alternative for implementation, as described in Section 2 (The Selected Alternative). A summary of the response to objections and additional citations are located in the Project File (Documents RO-01 through RO-13).

Reviewing Officer Kathy McAllister (USDA Forest Service, Northern Region) considered the Prichard-Murray Resource Area project and 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, retention of large trees, and monitoring requirements (PF Doc. PI-54). 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.

2. The Selected Alternative

2.1. The Decision

After considering public comment, the analysis provided in the EA, and Finding of No significant Impact (FONSI), I have decided that a **modified Alternative 3** would be the most effective at meeting the stated purpose and need in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area, while addressing concerns brought forward in the objection process (for further discussion, please refer to Section 1.5 of this document).

The modification to Alternative 3 is the addition of three prescribed burn-only units in allocated old growth stands that are located adjacent to community structures or the primary ingress/egress route along Forest Highway 9. These units were analyzed under Alternative 2 in the Prichard Murray EA, and are unit numbers 10b, 38 and 41 (see attached map.) Addition of these units increases the amount of prescribed burning (with no harvest) by 223 acres. All other activities are the same as analyzed under Alternative 3.

As modified, Alternative 3 is hereafter referred to as the **Selected Alternative**. I have decided to implement these activities on lands managed by the Forest Service as described in the following tables and the enclosed Selected Alternative Map.

Table DN-1. Summary of activities on National Forest System lands under the Selected Alternative.

Activity	Selected Alternative
Road Work	
System road construction	*0.0 miles*
Temporary road construction	*0.2 miles*
Road reconstruction	*0.6 miles*
Road reconditioning	*0.0 miles*
Road decommissioning	*2.0 miles*
Prescribed Burning (no harvest)	**(26 units) 1,633 acres**
Fuelbreak Construction (no harvest)	**(6 units) 22 acres**
Commercial Harvest - Shelterwood *(all helicopter yarding)*	**(7 units) 47 acres**
Commercial Harvest - Thinning	**(11 units) 256 acres**
Cable yarding	*45 acres (18%)*
Helicopter yarding	*185 acres (72%)*
Tractor yarding	*26 acres (10%)*
Commercial Harvest - Combination Thinning and Regeneration	**(5 units) 242 acres**
Cable yarding	*215 acres (89%)*
Helicopter yarding	*0 acres (0%)*
Tractor yarding	*27 acres (11%)*
Fuel Treatment in Harvest Units	(23 units) 545 acres
Hand piling	*3 acres (<1%)*
Grapple piling	*75 acres (14%)*
Grapple piling with underburning	*66 acres (12%)*
Grapple piling with chunking	*15 acres (3%)*
Underburning	*386 acres (71%)*
Timber volume	
Hundred cubic feet (ccf)	*11,550*
Thousand board feet (mbf)	*5,775*
Total all treatments	**(55 units) 2,200 acres**

Table DN-2. Treatment activities under the Selected Alternative in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area.

Unit	Acres	Description of treatment
1	101	Regeneration harvest on no more than half the unit, with thinning in the remainder of the unit where appropriate based on site conditions/species composition (96 acres cable yarding, 5 acres tractor yarding), followed by underburning
2	9	Regeneration harvest on no more than half the unit, with thinning in the remainder of the unit where appropriate based on site conditions/species composition (all tractor yarding), followed by underburning
3	67	Regeneration harvest on no more than half the unit, with thinning in the remainder of the unit where appropriate based on site conditions/species composition (57 acres cable yarding, 10 acres tractor yarding), followed by underburning on all but 2 acres, where slash would be grapple piled
4	9	Regeneration harvest on no more than half the unit, with thinning in the remainder of the unit where appropriate based on site conditions/species composition (7 acres cable yarding, 2 acres tractor yarding), followed by underburning
5	55	Regeneration harvest on no more than half the unit, with thinning in the remainder of the unit where appropriate based on site conditions/species composition (all cable yarding) , followed by underburning in the regeneration areas and grapple piling in the thinned areas
7	14	Thinning harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by underburning to reduce fuels
8	20	Thinning harvest (12 acres cable yarding, 8 acres tractor yarding), then underburning to reduce fuels
9	15	Thinning harvest with tractor yarding, followed by grapple piling and chunking of slash to disperse fuels
10	109	Thinning harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by underburning to reduce fuels
10b	52	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
13	22	Thinning harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by underburning to reduce fuels
14	12	Thinning harvest with cable yarding, followed by underburning to reduce fuels
15	16	Thinning harvest with cable yarding, followed by underburning to reduce fuels
17	6	Construction of a fuelbreak
18	1	Construction of a fuelbreak
19	9	Construction of a fuelbreak
20	4	Construction of a fuelbreak
21	1	Construction of a fuelbreak
22	1	Construction of a fuelbreak
23	29	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
24	76	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
25	40	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
26	141	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
27	31	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
28	81	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
29	20	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
30	6	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
31	8	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
32	41	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
33	29	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
34	82	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
35	142	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
36	29	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
37	16	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
38	127	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
39	23	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
40	151	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
41	67	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
42	186	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
44	102	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
46	6	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
47	28	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
48	72	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
49	51	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
51	8	Thinning harvest (3 acres tractor yarding, 5 acres cable yarding), with grapple piling of slash
60	3	Shelterwood harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by grapple piling and planting
61	26	Thinning harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by grapple piling of slash
62	11	Thinning harvest with helicopter yarding followed by a combination of grapple piling and underburning
63	10	Shelterwood harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by grapple piling and planting
64	6	Shelterwood harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by grapple piling of slash
65	10	Shelterwood harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by grapple piling of slash
66	8	Shelterwood harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by underburning to reduce slash
67	1	Shelterwood harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by underburning to reduce slash
68	3	Thinning harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by hand piling of slash
69	2	Prescribed burning to reduce fuels (with no timber harvest)
70	9	Shelterwood harvest with helicopter yarding, followed by grapple piling of slash

2.2 Specific Activities That Will Occur Under the Selected Alternative

Prescribed Burning without Harvest (approx. 1,633 acres)

The objective of this treatment is to reduce fuels and adjust fuel continuity at stand and broad landscape scales as well as rejuvenate the shrub species desirable for wildlife. Prescribed burning will occur in three units within stands allocated for old growth management (Units 10, 38 and 41).The location of the remainder of the prescribed burning (without harvest) focused on areas that are shrub/grass and/or have scattered or low canopy cover. These treatments will primarily reduce surface and ladder fuels. Fire will consume the surface fuels. Ladder fuels will be reduced when crowns are scorched and lower branches are killed. Conifer mortality will reduce crown fuels, but will be limited because of the lack of conifers in most of the burn areas. In some cases prescribed burning could enlarge existing shrub/grass openings by killing some smaller conifer encroachment that has developed.

Fuelbreak Construction (approx. 22 acres)

The Selected Alternative includes fuelbreak construction adjacent to private lands (a total of 22 acres in 6 units). The objective of fuelbreak construction is to reduce surface and ladder fuels immediately adjacent to homes, private property, and access routes. These treatments will involve thinning of small trees and brush, pruning of lower branches, and piling and burning or chipping of surface fuels and residual slash. Fuelbreaks will be constructed primarily within the Home Ignition Zone, or within approximately 150-300 feet of homes or access routes. Although slash is usually left over winter to allow nutrient recycling, slash in these treatment areas may not be left over winter due to the hazard the fuels would pose to adjacent homes. Snags that pose a safety hazard will be removed. Fuelbreaks will create defensible space, allowing the home to be defended by firefighters in the event of a wildfire, and increasing the chances that the home would survive an approaching wildfire.

Shelterwood Harvest (approx. 47 acres)

Shelterwood (also called regeneration) harvests are designed to establish and maintain a dominant stand component of the long lived early seral species of western larch, white pine and/or ponderosa pine. The location of shelterwood units focus on stands with serious insect and disease conditions and risk. Many of these sites are experiencing ongoing mortality due to root diseases.

Douglas-fir is a prominent species in the stands targeted for shelterwood harvesting. Douglas-fir is highly susceptible to root diseases. Root diseases are currently the most prominent landscape-altering process in the Coeur d'Alene River Basin (Specialist's Report on Forest Vegetation, p. VEG-8). Leave trees will remain to serve as a seed source and as structure, in the short and long term, and in some cases to maintain visual quality. The shelterwood units will have up to 25 trees per acre on sites in groups (1/2 to 5 acres in size) and single trees at irregular spacing. The largest and healthiest western larch, white pine, and ponderosa pine will be left, consistent with large tree retention requirements of the HFRA (PL 104-148, Section 102[f]; PF Doc. CR-024)..

Harvest of some large-diameter trees may occur, however the effort under the Selected Alternative is to leave the largest, most resilient trees to remain over the long term. Leave groups will be identified on the landscape (and later prescribed burned) to ensure that at least 80% of the trees/areas do not have high mortality during prescribe burning treatments. Variability will be substantial within treatment areas because the amount of tree retention will be based on what is currently available on the site.

After harvest is complete, a fire/fuels specialist and silviculturist will assess fuel conditions in the unit and determine whether the prescribed fuels treatment could be implemented safely and effectively as planned without further fuels treatment, or if additional fuel treatment methods (such as slash piling, leave tree protection, or slashing) are needed to meet the objectives of the silvicultural prescription before prescribed burning occurs. Prescribed burning will only occur when soil moistures are above 25 percent.

A site-adapted species/seed source will be utilized in all regeneration areas. Site preparation, fuel treatment, and tree planting will occur within five years of harvest in areas treated with regeneration harvest. Site preparation and/or fuel treatment may include a combination of slashing, pruning, prescribed burning or grapple piling, depending on post-harvest conditions that meet site preparation, hazard reduction, and overall treatment objectives.

Commercial Thinning (approx. 204 acres)

The objective of commercial thinning is to reduce the shading and crowding of the western larch and ponderosa pine crowns, providing the growing space needed by these resilient species over the long term. Commercial thinning will also reduce the canopy bulk density of stands, reducing the crown fire hazard. This intermediate tending activity will focus on leaving the most resilient species/trees and improve the likelihood of their continued growth. It will improve the likelihood of stands becoming large, old and have resiliency to disturbances such as fire,

insect, disease, etc. Commercial thinning harvests focus on areas and stands with the healthiest and highest representation of larch and ponderosa pine.

Commercial thinning will meet the definition of commercial thinning from below (in the lower crown classes), with 45-75% of the existing canopy remaining after treatment. Harvest will focus on thinning or daylighting around the existing western larch and ponderosa pine. Variability will be substantial within treatment areas because the amount of tree retention would be based on available components.

Following harvest, at least 85-100 trees per acre over 7 inches diameter at breast height will remain overall. Harvest of some large grand fir and Douglas-fir may occur if they are competing with the more resilient western larch and ponderosa pine. In addition, depending on resiliency and arrangement, some Douglas-fir, grand fir, western red cedar and western hemlock will be retained. Retention of trees and/or species other than western larch will be based on short- and long-term objectives of 'leave trees' and their resiliency to planned treatments and natural disturbances. Harvesting will be followed by fuel reduction activities such as prescribed burning, grapple piling, chunking, or a combination of these treatments.

Combination Thinning and Regeneration Harvest (approx. 242 acres)

Under the Selected Alternative, a combination of thinning and regeneration harvest is proposed on 242 acres (5 units) where resilience can be improved through tending activities and where there are serious insect and disease conditions and risk. In these units, no more than half of the unit would be regeneration harvested. Commercial thinning would only occur in those areas of the unit where resiliency and the retained canopy can be reasonably maintained over both the short and long term. These are areas on the ground where a slight shift in aspect creates variable stand conditions that require a blend between regeneration and thinning treatments.

Roads and Landings

The Selected Alternative requires 0.2 miles of temporary road construction to access proposed Unit 8 (displayed on the enclosed Selected Alternative map). Also, approximately 0.6 miles of road will be reconstructed to improve the existing road so Unit 5 can be accessed safely by vehicles and heavy equipment.

Approximately 2 miles of the lower portion of Road 990 in the Brown Creek subwatershed will be decommissioned to address existing mass wasting concerns, and four channel/road crossings that are failing will be stabilized (Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources, p. AQ-16). This action is expected to reduce sediment in Brown Creek at its confluence with the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and mitigate any potential increase, however slight, from the harvest activities in Rookie Creek (EA, Section 3.C.3, p. EA-16). No increase in sediment would be expected in lower Rookie Creek as a result of harvest units, because the units are located far from stream courses and no harvest would occur within riparian habitat conservation areas identified by the Inland Native Fish Strategy.

Under the Selected Alternative, 8 helicopter landings will be needed. Helicopter landings require a flat, open landing site. In the Prichard-Murray Resource Area, sites were chosen with the objective of minimizing disturbance while staying in close proximity to harvest units. Four of the landings already exist and have been used before, so little or no work is required. On the remaining four, varying levels of work are required to level out the landings. In addition, flight paths in and out of the landing sites may need to be cleared of standing trees to allow safe access and egress by the helicopter. All soil disturbance will be seeded with an appropriate seed mix. All eight landings would comply with all applicable safety regulations.

2.3 Specific Features Designed to Protect Resources

Features Designed to Protect Threatened, Endangered & Sensitive Plants (EA, Page EA-14)

Known Sensitive plant occurrences in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area will be buffered from harvest and other project-related activities by a minimum of 100 feet (there are no known occurrences of Threatened/Endangered plants in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area).

Prescribed fire ignition will not occur within riparian habitats, although fire will be allowed to burn into riparian areas. Higher fuel moistures in riparian habitats during prescribed burning conditions will likely limit the spread of any prescribed fire (Specialist's Report on TES Plants, p. TES-14). To limit ground disturbance, fire line will be minimized in riparian areas. Fire line construction will be limited to those occasions when fire line is needed to contain the burn. However, fuelbreaks will be used in riparian areas such that the total amount of fire line may be minimized while still allowing safe and efficient implementation of prescribed burning. Should rare plants be located during implementation, one or more of the following protective measures will be implemented: 1) drop the proposed unit from activity; 2) modify the proposed unit or activity, 3) implement a 100-foot slope distance buffer, and/or 4) implement Timber Sale Contract provisions for Protection of Endangered Species, and Settlement for Environmental Cancellation.

Features Designed to Reduce the Spread of Noxious Weeds (EA, Page EA-14)

Noxious weed prevention strategies on the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District are conducted based on the Noxious Weeds Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (USDA Forest Service, 2000; PF Doc. NW-2). Measures to protect Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive plant population viability and habitat capability during noxious weed treatment would be implemented following guidelines provided in that document. All roads used for implementation of harvest activities would be treated for noxious weeds, both prior to and after project completion. To help reduce the spread of noxious weeds and prevent the introduction of new invader species, a contract clause related to equipment washing would be used in all construction and timber sale contracts.

Features Designed to Protect Aquatic Resources (EA, Page EA-15)

Best Management Practices (BMPs) – All activities would be designed to protect water quality and aquatic resources through the use of BMPs, which are the primary mechanism to enable the achievement of water quality standards. Forest Service Handbook 2509.22 (Soil and Water Conservation Handbook) outlines BMPs that meet the intent of the water quality protection elements of the Idaho Forest Practices Act (Appendix A of the Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources).

Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS) – In development of the proposed action, standards and guidelines of the INFS (USDA Forest Service, 1995, pages A-6 through A-15; PF Doc. CR-003) were used specifically to protect water and aquatic biota within the Resource Area with application of streamside buffers. If Threatened or Endangered fish species are located during project implementation, protective measures would be implemented in compliance with the Inland Native Fish Strategy, including implementation of Timber Sale Contract provisions for Protection of Endangered Species, and Settlement for Environmental Cancellation.

Protection Of Wetlands, Seeps, Bogs, Wallows and Springs – All known or discovered wetlands, seeps, bogs, elk wallows and springs less than one acre in size would be protected from timber harvest or road construction with an appropriate buffer for the species as prescribed by the District Botanist and Wildlife Biologist.

Features Designed to Protect Soils (EA, Page EA-15)

To reduce the impacts to soils and soil productivity, the Selected Alternative utilizes Soil and Conservation Practices as described in the Soil and Water Conservation Practices (SWCP) Handbook (FSH 2509.22) and identified in Appendix A of the Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources. This handbook outlines Best Management Practices (BMPs) that protect the soil resources at a higher level than do existing Idaho Forest Practices rules and regulations, thereby incorporating all Idaho state standards.

Fine organic matter and large woody debris would be retained on the ground for sustained nutrient recycling in harvest units, consistent with Graham et al (1994; PF Doc. SOIL-21). In addition, only log-length yarding would be allowed in harvest units to further improve nutrient recycling (no whole-tree yarding). On units designated for tractor harvest, planned skid trails would be established at approximately 100-foot spacing to reduce overall soil compaction and displacement; skid trails would converge at the landings. Scheduling harvest activities to occur when the soil profile is dry helps to reduce the effects from compaction (Poff, 1996, p. 482; PF Doc. SOIL-47). Prescribed underburning would be of low intensity and would occur when the soil's surface horizon has at least 25% moisture content in order to protect the site's surface organic component (Specialist's Report on Fire/Fuels, p. FF-5).

In those areas where machine or hand piling of slash is proposed, the foliage and branches would remain on site over winter, allowing potassium to leach out from the slash material before further treatment. Since this is a fuels reduction project, determination of fire risk where slash is left untreated for prolonged periods of time would be made by the District fire management officer. Where risk is considered high, especially near structures, flexibility would be given to treat slash prior to it being left for 6 months.

Features Designed to Protect Wildlife Habitat (EA, Page EA-15)

Snags will be retained to meet the Northern Region Snag Management Protocol (PF Doc. VEG-20 and VEG-21). Long-lived, seral conifer species (western white pine, ponderosa pine and western larch) of all sizes will be favored to retain on the site unless removal is unavoidable due to safety reasons or special circumstances.

All roads closed to the public that are opened, constructed or reconstructed for the project will be closed with a gate or barrier during project activities. All of these roads will be effectively closed following project activities. At the end of project activities, all closure devices will be replaced in as good as or better condition than currently exists. Temporary roads will be recontoured following harvest activities.

Incidental trees charred during prescribed burning operations will be retained on site, providing black-backed woodpecker habitat. Prescribed burning will be implemented in a manner that will avoid disturbance of roosting

bats by preventing fire within 400 meters of the entrance to a cave or mine when bats are present, unless a site-specific assessment indicates a more appropriate distance to avoid effects of heat and smoke on bats (PF Doc. WL-58). Areas upslope of cave or mine openings will be protected to prevent erosion and disturbance (a map of mine locations is in the project file; see PF Doc. WL-26).

If any Threatened or Endangered wildlife species are observed in the resource area during implementation, the district wildlife biologist will determine any project modifications necessary under the timber sale contract provisions to protect the species and its habitat based on applicable laws, regulations and management recommendations for the species. If any Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive species is found to be nesting in an area scheduled for prescribed fire or silvicultural manipulation, activities will be delayed in the area as recommended by the wildlife biologist.

2.4 Mitigation Measures

Analysis of proposed activities indicate potential effects that are well within applicable regulatory thresholds (for example, those identified by the Forest Plan, Community Wildfire Protection Plan, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, etc.) for all resources except aquatics; therefore, mitigation measures were identified as necessary only to reduce effects to aquatic resources.

Aquatic Resources: The 3,700-acre Brown Creek subwatershed is located primarily outside of the Prichard-Murray Resource Area project boundary. Only Rookie Creek, a tributary to Brown Creek, lies within the portion of the resource area where timber harvest and prescribed burning are proposed. Rookie Creek is a one-square mile subwatershed, which is too small to be modeled and have reliable predictions for water yield and peak flows (AQ-Appendix D). Under the Selected Alternative, Approximately 21% of the watershed will be treated; resulting in 10% percent equivalent clear-cut acres (see Rookie Project File AQ-159). No increase in sediment is expected in lower Rookie Creek as a result of harvest units, because the units are located far from stream courses and no harvest will occur within riparian habitat conservation areas identified by the Inland Native Fish Strategy.

There is a slight potential that in-stream sediment from channel erosion in the lowest reach of Rookie Creek could occur due to areas of mass wasting upstream of the monitoring site and the potential for increased water yield. Inventories identified several failing culverts and mass-wasting sites along the lower portion of Road 990 in Brown Creek (Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources, p. AQ-16), which could result in increased water yield and delivery of instream sediment (Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources, p. AQ-31). Under the Selected Alternative, mitigation activities will restore approximately 2 miles of this road and stabilize four channel/road crossings. This action is expected to reduce sediment in Brown Creek at its confluence with the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and mitigate any slight potential increase in water yield from the harvest activities in the lowest reach of Rookie Creek.

2.5 Implementation and Effects Monitoring

There are no specific monitoring requirements identified for this project; however, the Forest Plan documents a system to monitor and evaluate Forest activities related to timber, visual resources, recreation, cultural resources, wildlife, water/fish, Threatened and Endangered species, minerals, lands and environmental quality (Forest Plan, Chapter IV, pages IV-10 through IV-12; PF Doc. CR-002). For example, sale administrators and other contracting representatives will monitor all timber sales to ensure that activities are conducted in accordance with contract specifications (that activities occur where and when they should to protect resources such as soils and wildlife, that yarding is accomplished as planned and specified in the contract to protect soils, that seedlings are planted at the appropriate spacing, etc.). Reforestation success in regeneration areas will be monitored until the District silviculturist certifies that they meet stocking requirements.

In addition, BMPs will be incorporated into many different phases of the project. The district hydrologist and engineering representative will review the location of all proposed temporary roads and all road maintenance to assure compliance with BMPs, and will monitor all temporary and reconstructed roads to ensure that they were built or restored to specifications. A sale administrator will visit each active cutting unit at a frequency necessary to assure compliance with the BMPs and the timber sale contract. Minor contract changes or contract modifications would be agreed upon and enacted, when necessary, to meet objectives and standards on the ground. Monitoring of BMPs has determined that recent projects on the IPNF have been implemented as designed and have achieved the desired objectives (IPNF Monitoring Reports for 2004 [pp. 37-44, 60; PF Doc. CR-026], 2003 [pp. 41-46, 76-77; PF Doc. CR-022], 2001 [pp.27-40; PF Doc. CR-017], and 2000 [pp. 34-41, PF Doc. CR-016]).

Based on these conditions, monitoring will be consistent with requirements of the HFRA (PL 108-148, Section 102[g]); PF Doc. CR-024).

2.6 Rationale for Selected Alternative

Now that I have identified my decision and described the activities that will occur, let me explain why I selected Alternative 3 as modified. I based my decision on how effectively each alternative would meet the purpose and need for this project, their fit on the landscape, and their responsiveness to concerns of adjacent landowners and other members of the public.

The purpose and need for action in this area (described in Section 1.2 of this document) is a reflection of the concerns identified by the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Group in their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (PF Doc. CR-020) and those of adjacent landowners. One of the Fire Mitigation Group's goals is to reduce the rate of fire spread and acres of land burned by forest fires through the implementation of targeted fuel mitigation treatments where the landscape has the potential to sustain fires that threaten communities in the rural urban interface. The Fire Mitigation Group identified the area surrounding the Prichard and Murray communities as a priority for treatment. Field reconnaissance and information gathering conducted by our project interdisciplinary team members who specialize in fire and fuels management and in silviculture validated the Fire Mitigation Group's concerns.

Based on the analysis provided in the EA, implementation of either action alternative would be preferable to taking no action at all. Alternatives 2 and 3 provide a measured degree of fuel reduction and stand improvement activities, and would construct fuelbreaks adjacent to homes, private property and access routes. While the need for changing species composition and structure, thereby improving stand resiliency to fire across the resource area, is considerable, Alternatives 2 and 3, and the Selected Alternative start trending the forest toward more desirable conditions. The No Action alternative perpetuates the continued decline in the area's forest health, its increasing susceptibility to large fire, and the associated risks to the communities of Prichard and Murray.

Alternative 2 treats more acres than Alternative 3 which seems preferable, but the uncertainties associated with planned commercial harvest treatments in stands allocated as old growth have raised concerns with some of our interested publics, and also the courts (*Ecology Center v. Austin, Lands Council v. McNair*). Alternative 3 removes these concerns by precluding any treatment in old growth stands. However, three of the old growth stands proposed for treatment under Alternative 2 are immediately adjacent to private land and structures or Forest Highway 9, a primary ingress/egress route for the area. I am not comfortable leaving the fuels buildup and wildfire risk in those stands unmitigated. After careful evaluation of concerns raised in previous court rulings and the objection process, and a frank discussion with the objectors, I believe the Selected Alternative can advance the objectives of the Prichard Murray project while addressing concerns about commercial harvest activities in old growth. Modifying Alternative 3 to incorporate prescribed burning in these three old growth stands (Units 38, 41, and 10b) utilizes fire under controlled conditions to reduce natural fuels build up and further reduce wildfire threats to nearby community values at risk. Originally, Unit 10b was proposed for timber harvest and prescribed burning, but after further field review, the project interdisciplinary team has determined that fuel reduction objectives can still be achieved by conducting the underburning only. All three units will continue to be managed as allocated old growth because the characteristics that meet old growth definitions will be maintained after prescribed burning (Forest Vegetation Specialist's Report, p. VEG-27 and VEG-28).

Treatments proposed in the other old growth stands under Alternative 2 and the associated risks would be precluded at this time.

I believe the Selected Alternative provides a more balanced response than the other alternatives to the purpose and need for fuels reduction treatments in and around the Prichard and Murray area, while allowing flexibility for future management of allocated old growth. It is also consistent with law, regulation and policy, including the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and it has beneficial, negligible or no adverse effect to other resource values (as described in the Section 3.2 of this decision, the attached FONSI, and Chapter 3 of the Prichard-Murray EA).

3. Comparison to Other Alternatives

3.1 Comparison of Effectiveness in Meeting the Purpose and Need

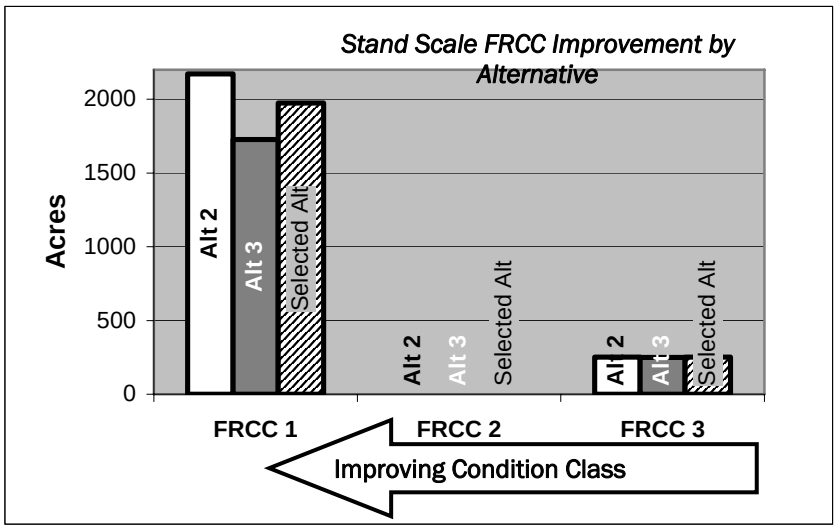
Purpose and Need #1 of 3: To reduce dense fuels so that there is less risk to life, property, and natural resources.

Effectiveness of alternatives in meeting this need was measured through the amount of area treated which improved or maintained Fire Regime Condition Class. Figure DN-5 below shows the resulting Fire Regime Condition Class of the treated areas under the action alternatives. There are no stands in Fire Regime Condition Class 2 under any alternative. Alternative 1 would not improve or maintain condition class, and so is not shown on the graph; the long-term result of Alternative 1 is likely to be a deterioration of Condition Class.

Alternative 2 would move 2,172 acres from Condition Class 3 into Condition Class 1. Alternative 3 would result in 1,728 acres moving into Condition class 1, which is 444 acres less than would result under Alternative 2. Under either of these action alternatives, approximately 250 acres of treatment area would remain in Condition Class 3. While treatment on these 250 acres would reduce fuels considerably, there would not be enough change in stand structure or composition to meet the threshold for change in Fire Regime Condition Class.

The **Selected Alternative** is similar to Alternative 3, but includes three key fuel reduction treatments on 223 additional acres along Forest Highway 9 and near community structures.

Figure DN-5. Resulting Fire Regime Condition Class of lands treated in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area, by alternative.



Fire Regime Condition Class	% of NFS lands in the Resource Area under Alt. 1	% of NFS lands in the Resource Area under Alt. 2	% of NFS lands in the Resource Area under Alt. 3	% of NFS lands in the Resource Area under the Selected Alternative
Fire Regime Condition Class 1 – LOW RISK of loss of key ecosystem components.	31	44	42	43
Fire Regime Condition Class 2 – MODERATE RISK of loss of key ecosystem components.	0	0	0	0
Fire Regime Condition Class 3 – HIGH RISK of loss of key ecosystem components.	69	56	58	57

Purpose and Need #2 of 3: To increase the proportion of resilient species so stands are healthier with less fire risk.

Effectiveness of the alternatives in meeting this need was measured through changes in forest cover types (from Douglas-fir, grand fir, or western hemlock to western larch, white pine and ponderosa pine). Table DN-3 provides a comparison of forest cover types under each alternative.

Alternative 1 (No Action) would not respond to this need, because no activities would occur to increase the proportion of fire-resilient species such as white pine and western larch and ponderosa pine. As a result, species composition would continue to trend toward the less resilient Douglas-fir, grand fir, and western hemlock (Specialist's Report on Forest Vegetation, page VEG-14).

Under Alternative 2, species composition would be improved, trending toward the desired condition (see Table 6). The desired conditions reflect a healthy, sustainable and resilient ecosystem. Long-lived seral tree species (white pine, western larch and ponderosa pine) are better adapted and more resilient than other species in mixed and low-severity fire regimes and other natural disturbances of northern Idaho. Maintenance and conversion to long-lived early seral species are more likely to provide a long-term improvement in stand and landscape structures and arrangement.

Alternative 3 would improve species composition, trending toward the desired condition, but to a lesser degree than Alternative 2, because fewer acres would be treated (see Table DN-3).

Under either action alternative, the prescribed burning and fuelbreak treatments would not change forest cover types (Forest Vegetation Specialist's Report, p. VEG-14). Overall, long-lived early seral species composition would increase by three percent under Alternative 2 and two percent under Alternative 3 (Forest Vegetation Specialist's Report, p. VEG-9).

The responsiveness of the **Selected Alternative** will be the same as those described for Alternative 3.

Table DN-3. Comparison of desired, existing and predicted (%) species composition (by forest cover type) on National Forest System lands in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (does not include nonforest).

Forest Cover Type	Desired (%)	Existing and Alt. 1 (%)	Alt. 2 (%)	Alt. 3 and Selected Alt. (%)
white pine, larch and ponderosa pine	35-45	4	7	6
lodgepole pine	5-15	2	2	2
Douglas-fir, grand fir, western hemlock, and cedar	15-30	88	85	86
subalpine fir and mountain hemlock	<5	1	1	1

Purpose and Need #3 of 3: To create a mosaic of healthy stands that vary in stand structure (age, diameter and canopy) and patch sizes.

Effectiveness of the alternatives in meeting this need was measured through changes in stand structure (to a more balanced composition of seedling/sapling, small/medium timber, and mature/large timber) and in patch sizes (from smaller to larger patch sizes).

Alternative 1 (the No-Action Alternative) would not respond to this need any further than the ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities, because no new activities are proposed that would create a mosaic of healthy stands. The No-Action Alternative represents a continuation of the trend away from desired conditions. As stands mature, openings caused by root disease and other pathogens and insects would be common. Over time, landscapes would have increasing areas of multiple stories and multiple ages, with low and broken canopies. Such landscapes may be more susceptible to disturbances such as fire, insects, diseases and wind damage. Canopy cover would decline from the current modeled level of 60 percent overall to a level of 40% over the next 100 years (Specialist's Report on Forest Vegetation, p. VEG-19). Many of these areas are unlikely to provide the same mature structures as the areas of large white pine or western larch that were once a component of the Prichard-Murray Resource Area. Over the long term, patch boundaries would become less distinct as stands become more multi-storied and the landscape becomes more homogenous. Over time, the potential for large-scale disturbances (such as fire) would increase (Specialist's Report on Forest Vegetation, p. VEG-20).

Alternatives 2 and 3 would both demonstrate a slight trend toward desired healthy, sustainable structures within the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (refer to the tables below). Prescribed burning would reduce current fuel loading on all treated sites. Neither alternative would substantially change patch size or arrangement, although both would create vegetative interruptions that would reduce the potential for fire spread. Cumulatively, the mosaic of vegetation resulting from proposed and reasonably foreseeable activities would create breaks in vegetative structure that would reduce the potential for high intensity fires.

Treatment would occur in nine units (a total of 438 acres) of allocated old growth under **Alternative 2**. The unit proposed for regeneration harvest would be dropped from old-growth allocation because the structural stage would change to seedling/sapling, and would no longer meet the definition for old growth.

Under **Alternative 3,** there would be no treatment activities in allocated old growth. The nine units proposed for treatment under Alternative 2 would not be treated under Alternative 3, so there would be no loss of old-growth characteristics in these stands over the short term. Over the long term, there would be an increased risk of uncontrolled wildfire, which would have the potential to cause a total loss of old-growth characteristics in areas of stand-replacement fire.

Under the **Selected Alternative**, there would be three units (Units 38, 41, and the eastern portion of Unit 10) proposed for prescribed burning in stands allocated for old growth management, due to their proximity to structures or the Forest Highway 9 ingress/egress route. These units would continue to be managed as allocated old growth because the characteristics that meet old growth definitions would be maintained (Forest Vegetation Specialist's Report, p. VEG-27 and VEG-28).

Table DN-4. Desired, existing and predicted structural stages (%) on National Forest System lands in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (2 percent of the resource area is non-forest).

Structural Stage	Desired (%)	Existing and Alt. 1 (%)	Alt. 2 (%)	Alt. 3 and Selected Alt. (%)
Seedling/sapling	10-30	7	8	8
Small/medium timber	20-40	53	52	52
Mature/large timber	40-55	38	38	38

Table DN-5. Comparison of desired, existing and predicted patch sizes on National Forest System lands in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area.

Patches	Desired range in size (acres)	Existing and Alt. 1 (acres)	Alt. 2 (acres)	Alt. 3 and Selected Alt. (acres)
Average patch size in young timber	200 to 700	36	36	36
Average patch size in small/ medium timber	200 to 700	257	248	246
Average patch size in mature/ large timber	200 to 700	173	171	172
Average patch size overall in the resource area	200 to 700	137	133	133

3.2 Comparison of Effects to Other Resources

The purpose and need discussed above focused on fire/fuel and forest vegetative conditions. The following compares the effects of the No-Action and Selected Alternative on other resources.

Effects to Rare Plants

Indicators of Impacts: Analysis was conducted using sensitive plant surveys, current distribution and condition of sensitive plant populations in habitats similar to those found in the proposed treatment sites. The types of proposed treatments were used to determine the likely extent of effects to existing populations and habitat from the proposed activity based on current knowledge and professional judgment (PF Doc. SR-03, p. TES-2).

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), there would be no direct effects to any Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive (TES) species; or any Forest Species of Concern (FSOC) because none of the proposed activities would occur (TES Plants Specialist's Report, p. TES-10). Forest Plan standards and legal mandates would be met. However, indirect effects to Threatened, Sensitive, and FSOC plant habitat and populations are likely for certain guilds and species (there are no Endangered plants identified for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests) due to the gradual increase in fuel loads through time with continuing fire suppression. The greater the fuel loading, the greater the risk of a high intensity

burn and stand replacing fire, with possible loss of rare plants and habitat. The increase in ignition risk and a resulting fire would also have an array of effects for sensitive plant species, ranging from beneficial to intolerant, depending on factors like the intensity of the fire, and the species ability to survive the event and compete in early successional habitat (TES Plants Specialist's Report, pp. TES-10, 11).

Under Alternatives 2, 3 and the Selected Alternative, potential rare plant habitat in the dry forest guild will be most affected over the short term by prescribed burning activities, while timber harvest will affect primarily moist forest habitat (Specialist's Report on TES Plants, p. TES-9). Activities may impact sensitive plant individuals or habitat in the dry and moist forest guilds, but implementation features (including plant surveys and other protective measures described in Section 3.C.2) will prevent a trend toward federal listing or a loss of species or viability (Specialist's Report on TES Plants, p. TES-15). Activities will have no impact on other rare plant guilds. Over the long term, activities will trend watershed and vegetative conditions toward the desired future condition (Specialist's Report on TES Plants, p. TES-15).

Table DN-6. Acres of potentially suitable rare plant habitat in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area before and after proposed activities (with acreage difference in parenthesis).

Rare Plant Guild	Existing/Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Selected Alt.
DRY FOREST (habitat for clustered lady's slipper, bank monkey flower)	2,860	893 (-1967)	1,678 (-1,182)	1,455 (-1,405)
MOIST FOREST (habitat for deerfern, Constance's bitter-cress, moonworts, Idaho barren strawberry)	3,902	3,625 (-277)	3,791 (-111)	3,791 (-111)
WET FOREST (habitat for ball-bearing lichen, Devil's matchstick lichen)	13	13 (no change)	13 (no change)	13 (no change)
GRASSLAND (habitat for Spalding's catchfly)	5,543	5,543 (no change)	5,543 (no change)	5,543 (no change)

Effects to Noxious Weeds

Indicators of Impacts: Analysis of effects to noxious weeds was conducted using results of noxious weed surveys and the documented distribution of weed species in habitats similar to those found in the proposed treatment sites. The types of proposed treatments were used in determining the risk of weed spread (low, moderate or high) and introduction of new weed invaders from the proposed activity based on current knowledge and professional judgment (Specialist's Report on Noxious Weeds, p. NW-4).

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), the lack of fuels treatment would, over time, further increase the risk of high severity conditions in the event of a wildfire because there are no activities proposed to reduce fuels or increase the amount of long-lived, fire-resistant western larch and fire-dependent white pine. This is a concern to management of noxious weeds because high severity burned areas have more exposed mineral soil, which would be susceptible to weed invasion. Areas where mortality results in substantial canopy loss would be at greater risk of weed spread, particularly in dry habitats that are already in an open to semi-open condition and dominated by grass-forb understories. Stands with higher rates of fuels accumulation would be at increased risk of a severe wildfire, exposure of mineral soils, and increased risk of weed spread (Specialist's Report on Noxious Weeds, pp. NW-4, NW-5).

Direct and indirect effects under the No-Action Alternative would include a natural reduction in forest canopy cover due to forest insect and disease induced mortality. Canopy loss would make conditions in the dry Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine/western larch cover types more suitable to certain common weed species such as St. Johns wort, thistles, toadflax, and spotted knapweed (Specialist's Report on Noxious Weeds, pp. NW-4). Indirectly, the lack of fuels treatment under the No-Action Alternative would, over time, increase the risk of high severity fire in the event of a wildfire. Areas where continued tree mortality results in substantial canopy loss would be at greater risk of weed spread, particularly in dry habitats which are already open to semi-open and dominated by grass-forb understories. Stands with higher rates of fuels accumulation would be at increased risk of a severe wildfire, exposure of mineral soils and increased risk of weed spread.

Under Alternatives 2, 3, and the Selected Alternative, most of the harvesting will occur in grand fir/Douglas-fir cover types. The disturbances caused on harvested acres, newly constructed roads, decommissioned roads, and in burned areas (particularly on the drier cover types) will increase the risk of weed invasion. Activities will reduce

(but not eliminate) the risk of weed spread by applying specific design features, including roadside pre-treatment, grass seeding and equipment washing (described in Section 3, Part C, and in the Specialist's Report on Noxious Weeds). Cumulative effects with this alternative would be low to moderate. Weed infestations are already present in the Resource Area on federal and private lands, and county road right-of-ways. The Forest Service does not have control over activities occurring on private lands; weed introduction and spread is likely occurring. The District is working on an ongoing basis with the State of Idaho, county officials, and members of the public to control noxious weeds within the Inland Empire Cooperative Weed Management Area, which includes the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (Specialist's Report on Noxious Weeds, p. NW-6). Post-activity monitoring for weeds and weed treatment will occur as funds are available.

Effects to Aquatics

Indicators of Impacts: The main concerns related to aquatic resources are effects to water quality, stream channels, and fish habitat. Environmental consequences to these resources were measured through changes in the magnitude, intensity or duration of water yield, peak flows, and sediment yield (Aquatic Resources Specialist's Report, pages AQ-23 through AQ-25).

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), no activities would be implemented, therefore there would be no direct effects (Aquatic Resources Specialist's Report, p. AQ-25). Nor would ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities have any measurable cumulative effects (Aquatic Resources Specialist's Report, pp. AQ-35, AQ-37). The only potential change to peak flow and water yield under the No-Action Alternative would be if a large-scale, high-intensity wildfire were to occur within the area. Under such a scenario, measurable changes to peak flows and water yields would occur, with the degree of change dependent on how far the fire spread.

Under Alternatives 2 or 3, treatment activities will have little to no risk of measurable effects to the magnitude, intensity and duration of peak flows and sediment yields (see the following table). The risk of stream channel changes will be low to none (Aquatic Resources Specialist's Report, pp. AQ-26 through AQ-31). Salmonid redds, aquatic life, and associated habitat will not be affected by the anticipated changes in conditions (Aquatic Resources Specialist's Report, p. AQ-27). Cumulatively, the ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities will not have any effect on sediment yield, water yield, peak flows, stream channel morphology, or fisheries populations or habitat; therefore this project will not impair beneficial uses within the Prichard-Murray Resource Area or downstream in the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River (Aquatic Resources Specialist's Report, pp. AQ-35 through AQ-38).

There is a slight potential that in-stream sediment from channel erosion in the lowest reach of Rookie Creek could occur due to areas of mass wasting upstream of the monitoring site and the potential for increased water yield. Inventories identified several failing culverts and mass-wasting sites along the lower portion of Road 990 in Brown Creek (Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources, p. AQ-16), which could result in increased water yield and delivery of instream sediment (Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources, p. AQ-31). Mitigation activities will restore approximately 2 miles of this road and stabilize four channel/road crossings. This action is expected to reduce sediment in Brown Creek at its confluence with the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and mitigate any slight potential increase in water yield from the harvest activities in the lowest reach of Rookie Creek (see Section 2.4, Mitigation).

Effects under the Selected Alternative will be the same as those described for Alternative 3, because the additional 223 acres of prescribed burning (without harvest) will not result in an increase in peak flow or water yield. Mitigation activities described under Alternatives 2 and 3 will occur under the Selected Alternative, reducing sediment in Brown Creek at its confluence with the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and mitigating any slight potential increase in water yield from the harvest activities in the lowest reach of Rookie Creek

Table DN-7. Comparison of Changes to Peak Flow and Water Yield in the Resource Area, by alternative.

Indicator	Alternative 1 (% increase over existing)	Alternative 2 (% increase over existing)	Alternative 3 and the Selected Alternative (% increase over existing)
WATER YIELD Effects of commercial harvest and resulting canopy openings on the % increase in water yield.	Prichard Creek 0% Upper Prichard Creek 0% Eagle Creek 0% Brown Creek 0% Hopkins Creek 0% Range = 0 to 0% Mean = 0.0%	Prichard Creek 0% Upper Prichard Creek 0% Eagle Creek 0% Brown Creek 1% Hopkins Creek 0% Range = 0 to 1% Mean = 0.2%	Prichard Creek 0% Upper Prichard Creek 0% Eagle Creek 0% Brown Creek 1% Hopkins Creek 0% Range = 0 to 1% Mean = 0.2%
PEAK FLOW Effects of commercial harvest and resulting canopy openings on the % increases in peak flows.	Prichard Creek 0% Upper Prichard Creek 0% Eagle Creek 0% Brown Creek 0% Hopkins Creek 0% Range = 0 to 0% Mean = 0.0%	Prichard Creek 0% Upper Prichard Creek 0% Eagle Creek 1% Brown Creek 1% Hopkins Creek 0% Range = 0 to 1% Mean = 0.2%	Prichard Creek 0% Upper Prichard Creek 0% Eagle Creek 0% Brown Creek 1% Hopkins Creek 0% Range = 0 to 1% Mean = 0.2%
SEDIMENT YIELD Effects of commercial harvest and road activity on % increase in sediment yield.	Prichard Creek 1% Upper Prichard Creek 2% Eagle Creek -1% Brown Creek 0% Hopkins Creek 0% Range = -1 to 2% Mean = 0.4%	Prichard Creek 3% Upper Prichard Creek 3% Eagle Creek -1% Brown Creek 1% Hopkins Creek 2% Range = -1 to 3% Mean = 1.6%	Prichard Creek 2% Upper Prichard Creek 3% Eagle Creek -1% Brown Creek 1% Hopkins Creek 2% Range = -1 to 3% Mean = 1.4%

* *Includes reasonably foreseeable activities on National Forest System lands (under the Jo Cat timber sale) and activities on private land within the Prichard-Murray Resource Area boundary. Refer to Appendix B for a list of these activities.*

Effects to Soils

Indicators of Impacts: The IPNF Soil NEPA Analysis Process (Niehoff 2002; PF Doc. SOIL-34) was used to determine whether proposed activities would detrimentally impact or have cumulative effects on soils (Specialist's Report on Soils, pp. SOIL-10 through SOIL-12). Direct effects include compaction, severe burning, or displacement on the soil surface, which is the most productive layer and also the easiest to disturb (Specialist's Report on Soils, p. SOIL-10). Compaction, displacement and severe burning can affect the soil's physical, chemical and biological properties, which can indirectly affect the growth and health of trees and other plants. Compaction reduces soil permeability and infiltration, which can cause soil erosion. Displacement reduces plant growth where topsoil and organic matter are removed. Severely burned soils can become water repellant, leading to increased erosion and runoff, and/or reduced productivity. Acres of detrimental disturbance were calculated by multiplying the areas of activity disturbance by the disturbance coefficient derived from monitoring reports (PF Doc. SR-06, p. SOIL-10). Indirect effects to soils include the loss of site productivity due to the removal of large woody debris and potassium.

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), there would be no direct impacts to soils because no new road construction, logging or fuel treatment activities would occur (Specialist's Report on Soils, page SOIL-12). Throughout the landscape, tree mortality from insects, diseases and weather events would continue, increasing organic matter. In moist habitat sites the increase in organic matter is beneficial to overall soil productivity. In dry habitat types, increases of organic matter mean an increase in fuel loading, which may result in a high severity fire. In the event of a severe wildfire, there would be a greater loss of the soil's organic matter, nutrient availability, water infiltration, all of which affect the soil's productivity (Specialist's Report on Soils, page SOIL-12).

Under Alternatives 2, 3 and the Selected Alternative, soil-disturbing activities will not exceed Forest Plan standards due to design features (Specialist's Report on Soils, pp. SOIL-14, SOIL-15). To consider the worst-case scenario, the analysis assumed that all proposed harvest treatments would occur during non-winter conditions, when the

disturbance potential would be the greatest. There will be a total of approximately 33 acres of disturbance under the Selected Alternative (the same as Alternative 3, since only additional acres of prescribed burning were added to the Selected Alternative). Fuels reduction and stand improvement activities would reduce the effects that a wildfire would have on soils, because there would be a reduction in currently elevated surface fuel loading on treated sites that otherwise would have the potential to cause higher levels of severely burned soils (Specialist's Report on Soils, p. SOIL-20). Cumulatively, soil-disturbing activities will not exceed 15 percent detrimental conditions, and will maintain at least 85 percent of each activity area in a condition of acceptable productivity potential (Specialist's Report on Soils, p. SOIL-21).

Effects to Wildlife

Indicators of Impacts: Wildlife species listed under the Endangered Species Act, Sensitive species, and Management Indicator species known to occur on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests were screened for their relevancy to the Coeur d'Alene River Basin and the Prichard-Murray Resource Area by reviewing sighting records, planning documents, habitat suitability index (HSI) models and other sources such as historic records and scientific literature. Relevancy is determined based on whether there is evidence of species or habitat present within the analysis area, and whether any such species or habitat could potentially be affected by the proposed activities. Some habitat and species may occur in the Coeur d'Alene River Basin yet not be applicable to the Prichard-Murray Resource Area or surrounding areas. Some wildlife species or their habitat are present in the analysis area but would not be measurably affected, either because they would not be impacted by proposed activities, the impacts would not be sufficient to influence their use or occurrence, or the species' needs can be adequately addressed through design of the project. No further discussion or analysis is necessary for those species and/or suitable habitat that are not found in the project area or for those which would not be measurably affected.

The analysis revealed that there would be no significant impact to any of the species considered, and there would be no loss of viability to populations or species under any alternative. The long-term benefits to wildlife species would outweigh the short-term disturbance to species during implementation of project activities. The discussions below identify the species' status and their probability of occurrence in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area, and provide a synopsis of effects to each wildlife species potentially affected. For each Threatened and Endangered species (gray wolf, Canada lynx, and bald eagle), the Forest Service is completing the necessary coordination in accordance with the Section 7 Counterpart Regulations (PF Doc. WL-67) that complement the general consultation regulations at 50 CFR 402 by providing an alternative process for completing section 7 consultations for Federal agency projects that support the National Fire Plan. (***Note: Bald eagles were removed from the list of Threatened species as of August 8, 2007, after the Prichard-Murray EA was released to the public.)***

Table DN-8. Synopsis of Impacts to Endangered/Threatened Wildlife in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area.

Alt.	Impacts
GRAY WOLF – Endangered Species (moderate probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur; over the long term brush fields could be reduced, resulting in lower prey populations.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Activities will not jeopardize individuals or populations. Viability will be maintained since the goal to have 30 breeding pairs well established.
CANADA LYNX – Threatened Species (low probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. After 50 to 100 years, denning habitat and prey could increase. In the event of a stand-replacing fire, large patches of pre-forage habitat could be created, followed by high-quality forage habitat for 25 to 35 years following the fire.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	No short-term effects because none of the proposed treatment units are in lynx habitat or any lynx analysis unit. Habitat changes over time will be the same as under the No-Action Alternative. This alternative will have no effect on lynx.
BALD EAGLE – Threatened Species (high probability of occurrence) Note: Species was de-listed on August 8, 2007	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Natural changes over time would not adversely affect bald eagle habitat.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	No effect on bald eagle or its habitat because no activities are proposed that would affect roost trees, potential nest trees, or foraging habitat in the resource area.

Table DN-9. Synopsis of Impacts to Sensitive Wildlife in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area.

Alt.	Impacts
FLAMMULATED OWL (high probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, there would be a decline in habitat as natural processes and fire suppression contribute to conditions favoring dense understories in ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir stands.
Alt. 2	Proposed activities would occur on 522 acres of suitable habitat. While suitable habitat would be affected, long-term viability of the species would be maintained for the next 100 years due to snag retention that would provide nesting habitat.
Alt. 3	Proposed activities would occur on 247 acres of suitable habitat. While suitable habitat would be affected, long-term viability of the species would be maintained for the next 100 years due to snag retention that would provide nesting habitat.
Selected Alt.	Activities will occur on 470 acres of suitable habitat. While suitable habitat will be affected, long-term viability of the species will be maintained for the next 100 years due to snag retention that will provide nesting habitat.
BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (low probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, natural mortality due to insects would result in snag recruitment. Potential stand-replacing fires would increase forage habitat for about 5 years, after which the forage value would be greatly reduced.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Proposed treatments will reduce tree density and understory in about 3% of the resource area, affecting individuals. Viability will be maintained for the next 100 years because habitat is well-distributed and abundant across the Forest Service's Northern Region.
FISHER (low probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, there would be a trend toward the late-successional forest that is preferred by fishers, and mortality of trees would increase snags and downed wood, improving habitat. Potential stand-replacing fires would set back the trend.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Proposed fuelbreaks will affect 4 acres of capable fisher habitat, displacing individuals over the short term. Over time, viability will be maintained because there are movement corridors available both inside and outside the analysis area; guidelines will ensure that snag habitat is provided; and allocated old growth will be maintained at 10% or greater across the IPNF.
COEUR D'ALENE SALAMANDER (moderate probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, stand-replacing fires could reduce habitat by increasing peak flows.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Since most treatment sites occur on dry hillsides unlikely to support salamanders, the proposed activities are not expected to affect the salamanders or their habitat. Buffers around potential habitat will ensure viability of the species.
TOWNSENDS BIG-EARED BAT & FRINGED MYOTIS (moderate probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. In the event of a wildfire, smoke would be produced at levels that could be fatal for bats that occupy mines.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Individuals or habitat may be impacted in activity areas over the short term, but no known populations will be affected. Guidelines will be applied to protect bat habitat, ensuring viability of the species.
BOREAL TOAD (low probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	The No-Action alternative would not affect boreal toads or their habitat.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Although prescribed burning will greatly reduce the number of logs providing foraging and cover sites for toads, it will also burn tree roots, leaving empty burrows that could be used by toads over the winter. The proposed treatments will have no effect on toad breeding habitat, because no ponds have been found on national forest lands in the resource area.
HARLEQUIN DUCK (high probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	The No-Action alternative would not affect harlequin ducks or their habitat.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Activities will not affect harlequin ducks or their habitat because this alternative will not introduce sediment to the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River (most treatments will not occur in or near harlequin duck habitat).
PYGMY NUTHATCH (high probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time,
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Activities could impact individual nuthatches or their habitat, but will not cause a loss of viability to the population or species. Thinning and prescribed burning will reduce the forest canopy in pygmy nuthatch habitat stands by up to one-third. However, the number of large-diameter snags will be maintained or increased, so there will be no impact to suitable nesting habitat.

Table DN-10. Synopsis of Impacts to Management Indicator Wildlife Species in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area.

Alt.	Impacts
PILEATED WOODPECKER – Old-growth (high probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, there would be a trend toward the late-successional forest that is preferred by pileated woodpeckers, and mortality of trees would increase snags and downed wood, improving habitat. Potential stand-replacing fires would set back the trend.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Over the short term, individuals or habitat could be affected by disturbance in activity areas, but all woodpecker snag habitat will be retained. Over the next 100 years, viability will be assured because the recommended level of snags will be retained.
PINE MARTEN – Old-growth (low probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, there would be a trend toward the late-successional forest that is preferred by pine marten, and mortality of trees would increase snags and downed wood, improving habitat. Potential stand-replacing fires would set back the trend.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Over the short term, individuals or habitat could be affected by disturbance in activity areas. Marten denning and foraging habitat will be provided in the treated areas after approximately 90 years. Over the next 100 years, viability will be maintained because the recommended level of snags will be retained, there are movement corridors available for dispersal of the species, and allocated old growth will be maintained at 10% or greater across the IPNF.
NORTHERN GOSHAWK – Old-growth (high probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, there would be a trend toward the late-successional forest and would continue to provide habitat for one or more nesting pairs of goshawks, but would still fall well below the recommended level of one pair per 10,000 acres.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	No short term effects because none of the proposed treatment units are within suitable goshawk habitat. Over time, treatment will trend trees toward a larger diameter and result in the necessary large structure component that is currently lacking in the resource area. Treatment of patches larger than 40 acres will provide large patches of interior habitat for nesting in about 150 years. Viability for the species will be maintained over the next 100 years because habitat is well-distributed and abundant across the Forest Service's Northern Region.
ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK – Big-game (high probability of occurrence)	
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, there would be a loss of forage habitat as immature stands trend toward mature forest structure and the vigor of brush fields declines. As currently mature stands decline, there would be a reduction in thermal cover. There would be no activities to improve browse habitat. In the event of a stand-replacing fire, cover habitat could be converted to forage habitat.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	There will be no change in elk habitat potential because of the limited amount of proposed road construction. Over the long term, activities will result in an increase in forage. Treatment of patches larger than 40 acres will result in large security patches in about 50 years.

Table DN-11. Synopsis of Impacts to Nongame & Land Birds in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area.

Alt.	Impacts
Alt. 1	No short-term effects because no new activities would occur. Over time, current trends would continue with below-historic levels of white pine and western larch and the wildlife species associated with them. Some mature stands would trend toward old forest; however, many stands would never achieve old growth characteristics due to insects, disease, and fire.
Alt. 2, 3 and Selected	Over the short term, brush field burning will decrease cover and shelter for nongame species for 5 to 10 years. Prescribed burning could increase snags over both the short- and long-term. Restoration of fire as an ecological process will result in a trend toward historical conditions and provide additional biodiversity with maintenance of brush fields on south-facing slopes. Over the long term, restoration of white pine, ponderosa pine, and western larch could benefit nongame and land bird species.

Effects to Recreation

Indicators of Impacts: There are no developed campgrounds, picnic areas, or other structural recreation developments in or near the Prichard-Murray Resource Area. The only recreation trail in the area is Kings Pass Trail 151. Portions of the resource area are within the boundaries of three inventoried roadless areas (IRAs), including 477 acres (4 percent) of the Lost Creek IRA, 4,854 acres (82 percent) of the Trouble Creek IRA, and 267 acres (3 percent) of the Maple Peak IRA. The three inventoried roadless areas have been classified in the Forest Plan as having common scenic characteristics, natural appearing and visually appealing, but lacking any special features or distinctive attributes that would set them apart from similar landscapes in the Coeur d'Alene Mountain Range.

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), there would be no effect to the natural integrity, apparent naturalness, and distinctive features of the inventoried roadless areas. However, continued fuel buildup along the boundaries of the roadless areas may result in impacts should a large fire occur. In addition, the continued risk of severe wildfire poses a long-term risk to the quality of recreation opportunities in the area, since burned trees and possible erosion caused by vegetation burnout could damage Trail 151, the surrounding scenery, and sense of visitor enjoyment (Specialist's Report on Recreation, page REC-2).

Under Alternatives 2, 3 and the Selected Alternative, implementation of proposed activities would result in temporary impacts to recreation (smoke, dust and noise). Over the long term, the intensity of potential wildfires would be reduced following treatment. Under the Selected Alternative, there are no activities proposed in the Maple Peak IRA, therefore there would be no effects on the natural processes and attributes of the area. Prescribed burning and fuel break development are proposed in the Lost Creek and Trouble Creek IRAs. In the Lost Creek IRA, approximately 180 acres are proposed for prescribed fire, with creation and maintenance of a 4-acre fuelbreak (in Unit 20). In the Trouble Creek IRA, approximately 725 acres are proposed for prescribed fire, with a total of 16 acres in fuelbreaks.

Prescribed burning will have practically no effect on the natural processes and attributes of the roadless areas, since burning mimics natural processes. Prescribed burning reduces fuel concentrations while leaving the primary tree composition intact.

The fuelbreaks would follow property boundaries. Some trees (with no commercial value) would be removed, limbs would be pruned and brush thinned to a distance of no more than 200 feet along the national forest-private land boundary (therefore intruding no more than 200 feet into the roadless areas). No roads would be constructed and mechanized equipment would not be used in development of the fuel break. The effects of the fuelbreak would be minor and would not compromise the attributes of the roadless area.

Effects to Trail 151 would be the same for Alternatives 2, 3 and the Selected Alternative, with harvest activities adjacent to the trail.

Effects to Scenery

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), there would be no immediate effects to scenery in the vicinity of the Prichard-Murray Resource Area, because no activities are proposed. Old harvest units would continue to recover tree growth, slowly muting unnaturally-appearing visual effects. However, over the long term, increased vulnerability to severe wildfire could bring detrimental changes to the scenic conditions, such as blackened landscape and loss of vegetation (Specialist's Report on Scenic Resources; p. SCE-2).

Under Alternatives 2, 3 and the Selected Alternative, effects of harvest and prescribed burn units would be slight. Effects to scenic resources would be short term; as seasons change, vigorous growth of grasses and new brush would be supported in the treatment areas (Specialist's Report on Scenic Resources, pages SCE-2, SCE-3).

4. Findings and Consistency with Laws, Regulations and Policy

National Forest Management Act: The Selected Alternative is also consistent with NFMA consistency requirements:

- *Maintaining diversity:* The Selected Alternative was designed to be implemented in a manner that will protect wildlife and fisheries resources in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (EA, pp. EA-14 through EA-16; PF Doc. SR-07, p. WL-8). Underburning will occur in three units in stands allocated for old growth management. These stands will still maintain their allocation following treatment. 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.
- *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 the Selected Alternative does have economic value associated with timber volume (Table DN-2). However, the Selected Alternative 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]):* No clearcutting or other even-aged management would occur under the Selected Alternative. All treatments are silviculturally appropriate and are within the timber and vegetation practices outlined in the Forest Plan. Under the Selected Alternative, 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 (RAPs) was used to identify the condition of (and recommendations for) each road system in the project area (PF Doc. TRAN-1). Under the Selected Alternative, no new system roads will be constructed in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area. Two-tenths of a mile of temporary road will be constructed to allow access to harvest units. The construction will be completed using Best Management Practices to protect aquatic and soil resources (EA, p. EA-15; and Aquatics Appendix A, PF Doc. SR-05). At the completion of its intended use, the temporary roads will be decommissioned and revegetated with native plants.

Potential physical, biological, aesthetic, cultural, engineering and economic impacts of the Selected Alternative have been assessed and are disclosed in the Environmental Assessment (Part 4 and the Appendices) with supporting information in the Project Files.

IPNF (1987) Forest Plan: The activities planned in the Prichard-Murray Resource 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 (see page EA-1), 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. The Resource Area includes Old Growth Management Units (OGMU) 109, 110, 112, 115, 116, 123, and 127. A detailed review of old growth in these OGMU's occurred in conjunction with the Prichard-Murray Resource Area analysis (PF Doc. SR-02, p. VEG-18). Forest-wide analysis of old growth, which is disclosed in the 2004 Monitoring Report (PF Doc. CR-026), concludes that 12 percent of the IPNF is allocated old growth, with the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District exceeding its' share of the allocated acres (PF Doc. SR-02, p. VEG-29).

Healthy Forests Restoration Act: Activities meet the requirements for authorization under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (EA, Appendix A), 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 blow down, 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 Prichard-Murray Resource Area is almost entirely within the Wildland Urban Interface Area as defined by the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Plan. The Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group has agreed that the treatments proposed in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area are an acceptable version of the Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan recommendations, and has amended their plan to accept the proposed treatments, which they recognized as both cost-effective and feasible (PF Doc. FF-33).
- ***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.*** An estimated 74 percent of lands within the project area boundary are National Forest System lands managed by the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages approximately 6 percent of lands within the boundary, and the remaining 20 percent are privately owned lands (p. EA-2).
- ***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 Prichard-Murray Resource 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 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-12 displays the average diameter of trees to be cut, by species.

  Table DN-12. Average (inches) Diameter of Trees to be Cut, by Species.

Species	Average Diameter of Trees to be Cut (inches)	% of Total Volume
Western Larch	9.8	3%
Western Red Cedar	9.9	2%
Western Hemlock	10.9	15%
Lodgepole Pine	12.0	7%
Grand Fir	12.5	36%
Douglas-fir	13.2	33%
Ponderosa Pine*	14.9	<0.04%
All Species	**11.9**	**100%**

  ** Two large ponderosa pine trees were designated to be cut because they are within the clearing limits of temporary road construction.*

- ***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. Leaving the larger

diameter grand fir or Douglas fir, especially adjacent to existing larch or pine, leaves a risk that they may torch during underburning. This would lead to the loss of the species desired for promotion of fire resiliency.

- *Section 104 (c) and (d) address consideration of alternatives, particularly for projects in the wildland-urban interface.* The Prichard-Murray Resource Area is almost entirely within the Wildland Urban Interface Area as defined by the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Plan. The Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group has agreed that the treatments proposed in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area are an acceptable version of the Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan recommendations, and has amended their plan to accept the proposed treatments, which they recognized as both cost-effective and feasible (PF Doc. FF-33). Three alternatives were analyzed for disclosure in the EA: 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), and Alternative 3 was developed in response to public concerns, to demonstrate the benefits vs. risks of treatment in allocated old-growth stands. The Selected Alternative is based on modifications to Alternative 3, as described in Section 2.1 (The Decision).
- *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 in developing the Prichard-Murray Resource Area proposal and involved the Bureau of Land Management, State of Idaho (Department of Lands), Shoshone County Fire Chiefs, and Shoshone County Commissioners (collectively referred to as the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group), Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, and interested individuals and organizations. Collaboration efforts have also provided opportunities for other members of the public to participate in the project. On September 14, 2004, the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Group held a public meeting to discuss fuels reduction in Shoshone County, including the Prichard-Murray Resource Area. Approximately a dozen area residents attended the meeting. A second public meeting was held on August 23, 2005, to provide information and answer questions regarding proposed activities in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area. Please refer to the Prichard-Murray EA (Appendix C) for additional information regarding collaboration, public involvement, and a list of agencies and persons consulted.

Clean Water Act: The Selected Alternative is consistent with the requirements of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1251). Sediment and metals, the pollutants of concern, will not increase in the water quality limited North Fork Coeur d'Alene River segment from Yellowdog Creek to its mouth. Risks to beneficial uses in all streams of the Prichard-Murray Resource Area will not be changed by this project. In compliance with the current TMDL for the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River, there will be no net increase in sediment or metals into the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River or streams of the project area through the proposed management activities (Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources, p. AQ-42).

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 (PF Doc. FF-42). 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 the Selected Alternative would substantially reduce the particulate matter emissions of potential wildfires (Fire/Fuels Specialist's Report, p. FF-16).

National Historic Preservation Act: Surveys to locate heritage resources within the Prichard-Murray Resource Area have been completed (PF Doc. HR-01). All known heritage resource sites would be protected under either alternative, as directed by the Cultural Resources Management Practices (Forest Plan, Appendix FF; PF Doc. HR-01). 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. The Selected Alternative will be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act as amended (EA, pp. EA-21 through EA-27; PF Doc. SR-03, p. TES-16; PF Doc. SR-05, p. AQ-42; PF Doc. SR-07, p. WL-44).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act: Although some current habitat may be lost over the short term as a result of activities, taking no action could have similar effects (EA, p. EA-24; PF Doc. SR-07, p. WL-43). Efforts to trend stands in the resource area toward historic species composition and age structure and to maintain the ecological processes that created these conditions will eventually benefit nongame and land bird species.

Safe Drinking Water Act and Amendments of 1996 (Including State of Idaho Implementation): The Selected Alternative 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 Aquatics Appendix A.

Idaho Forest Practices Act: No municipal watersheds are within the effects area of the Prichard-Murray Analysis area. The Town of Murray does draw its domestic water from sources within the Prichard Creek watershed. Proposed activities are away from water sources used for domestic purposes. BMPs (Aquatics Appendix A) or Soil and Water Conservation Practices (PF Doc. AQ-53) will be applied under the Selected Alternative, and all activities are in compliance with the guidelines in the Soil and Water Conservation Handbook.

Executive Order 12962 – Recreational Fishing: The Selected Alternative is consistent with this executive order regarding aquatic systems and recreational fisheries. Short-term effects of this project may affect westslope cutthroat trout individuals, but would not lead toward a trend in federal listing. Long-term effects (i.e., net reduction in sediment) are expected to benefit westslope cutthroat trout survival and habitat.

State of Idaho Governor's Bull Trout Plan: The mission of the Governors Bull Trout Plan (1996; PF Doc. AQ-11) is to "…maintain and or restore complex interacting groups of bull trout populations throughout their native range in Idaho." Bull trout in the N.F. Coeur d'Alene River system are not known to currently persist based on all the information available at the time of this developed document. In the Plan the Coeur d'Alene River basin is defined as a drainage area that is a key watershed for a bull trout metapopulation, however no map is provided to explain watershed boundary and scope.

Roadless Area Conservation Rule, Interim Directives No. 7710-2001-2 and No. 2400-2001-3, and Wilderness Act of 1964: Activities under the Selected Alternative are consistent with these mandates. Activities would consist of a combination of fuel reduction through prescribed burning, and the creation of fuel breaks to create a defensible line that protects private property as well as the Inventoried Roadless Areas (none of the area is designated wilderness). The land proposed for treatment falls within a one mile distance of the Inventoried Roadless Area boundary. Fuel breaks will follow property boundaries and intrude into Inventoried Roadless no more than 200 feet. No roads or trails will be constructed; no commercial harvest will occur; and no mechanized vehicles will be used within these treatment areas (Specialist's Report on Recreation, pages REC-4, 5). The natural integrity, apparent naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation will be unchanged by implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Environmental Justice Act: The Selected Alternative 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, the Selected Alternative complies with Executive Order 12898.

Best Available Science: 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 Prichard-Murray 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.

5. Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the project activities as documented in this Decision Notice, the Environmental Assessment (Chapter 3 and Appendices), and the Project File. The setting of this project is in a localized area, with implications only for the landscape, drainages and stands in the analysis area. My consideration of the Selected Alternative is based on its impact on the ecosystem, local communities, county, and at the affected resource level. It does not have any large or lasting effect on society as a whole, the nation, or the state.

I find that there are no significant beneficial or adverse impacts on the physical, biological, or social portions of the human environment, and therefore an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. Please refer to the Finding of No Significant Impact (Attachment A).

6. Documents and Project Files

This Decision Notice summarizes analyses that have led to this point in the process. More reports and analyses documentation have been referenced or developed during the course of this project and are part of the Project Files. All project files for the Prichard-Murray Resource Area project are available for review by the public. The project files may be reviewed at the Fernan Office of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, or are available on compact disk upon request. To review the files, please contact the NEPA Coordinator at the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District (Fernan Office), (208) 664-2318.

7. Appeal Rights and Implementation

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 218.10(b)(2). I am the Responsible Official for this decision. For more information regarding this project, contact District Ranger Randy Swick or Ecosystems Staff Officer Sherri Lionberger at the Fernan Office of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, (208) 664-2318.

Ranotta K. McNair

RANOTTA K. McNAIR
Forest Supervisor,
Idaho Panhandle National Forests

10/22/07
Date

Prichard-Murray Resource Area Environmental Assessment
Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

USDA Forest Service
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District
Idaho

Prichard and Murray are among several communities in Shoshone County, Idaho that have been identified as being at high risk from wildfire (USDA Forest Service/USDI BLM report, "Urban Wildland Interface Communities Within the Vicinity of Federal Lands That Are at High Risk From Wildfire," 2001. Federal Register pages 43384, 43403, and 43404; Project File Doc. CR-027). The intent of the list is to help federal land agencies, working with State, Tribal, and local partners, accurately assess the level of wildfire risk and the types and extent of treatments required to mitigate the risk.

This specific project was initiated by the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District in response to the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Group's "Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan" (also known as the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, or CWPP; Project File Doc. CR-020). The Community Wildfire Protection Plan recognizes the threat that wildfires pose to the county, and recommends management that would decrease this risk. One of their goals is to reduce the rate of fire spread and acres of land burned by forest fires through the implementation of targeted fuel mitigation treatments where the landscape has the potential to sustain fires that threaten communities in the rural urban interface. Based on the lay of the land, wind patterns, and historical events, a large wind-driven fire (even one much smaller than the 1910 fire) could seriously threaten these communities, as well as many other homes and businesses throughout the area.

As currently unmanaged stands age and exhibit less resiliency to insects, disease and fire, the opportunities to achieve desired structural characteristics and species composition would be increasingly limited. Activities are needed to interrupt the pattern of vegetation, which would reduce the potential for high-intensity fires, reduce fire risks, and improve forest composition and structure (Brackebusch, 1973, PF Doc. FF-8). No single management prescription will achieve multi-resource objectives across all stands within a landscape. Silvicultural systems using density and species management, along with the carefully planned use of prescribed fire, are key to managing western forests. Based on current and desired conditions, proposed activities have been identified that would:

- ***Fuel/Fire Behavior Conditions:*** *Reduce dense fuel conditions so potential fire behavior would be less intense and severe.*

- ***Species Composition:*** *Increase the proportion of resilient species composition (western larch, ponderosa pine and white pine) so stands are healthier with less fire risk.*

- ***Structural Stages and Patch Sizes:*** *Create a mosaic of healthy stands that vary in age, tree diameter, and canopy (structural stages) and patch sizes.*

Three alternatives were considered in detail - the No-Action Alternative and two action alternatives. **Alternative 1**, the No-Action Alternative, represents the current and expected future condition given the past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities (EA, Section 3.B and Appendix B).

Alternative 2 was developed to address the treatment needs identified by the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group and by the Forest Service. This is the Proposed Action that was presented to the public during scoping. The proposed activities were identified through a comparison of existing and desired conditions and based on the Specialist's Reports for Fire/Fuels (PF Doc. SR-01) and Forest Vegetation (PF Doc. SR-02). The alternative represents the expected future condition based on effects of proposed fuels reduction and stand improvement activities as well as past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities (described in Appendix B and the Specialists' Reports). The treatments proposed under Alternative 2 in the Prichard-Murray Fuel Reduction Project Area have been accepted by the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group and the Board of County Commissioners as an amendment to the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (PF Doc. FF-33).

Under Alternative 2, some proposed harvest and prescribed burning treatments are located within stands of allocated old growth (Table 8). Early in the process, two environmental organizations in the region (Kootenai Environmental Alliance and The Ecology Center) expressed concern about the effects of proposed management activities in stands allocated for old-growth management (PF Doc. PI-22 and PI-22). If activities substantially change characteristics of the stands, they may no longer meet the criteria for old-growth allocation. Management in old growth requires an acute awareness of anticipated effects, which can best be compared through formulation of alternatives that either actively manage old growth or exclude it from treatment; there are risks and benefits associated with both approaches.

In order to compare the benefits of fuel reduction treatments in the wildland urban interface to the potential reduction in allocated old growth stands, **Alternative 3** was designed with no proposed harvest or prescribed burning activities within allocated old growth, regardless of the unit's location or proximity to communities.

After considering public comment, the analysis provided in the Environmental Assessment (EA), and the Draft Finding of No Significant Impact that was provided to the public with the EA, I decided that a modified Alternative 3 would be the most effective at meeting the stated purpose and need in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area while addressing concerns brought forward in the objection process (for further information, please refer to Section 1.5 of the Prichard-Murray Decision Notice). **As modified, Alternative 3 is hereafter referred to as the Selected Alternative.**

The Forest Service has prepared this EA to determine whether or not implementing the activities proposed under either action alternative would result in significant effects warranting preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. After considering the environmental effects described in the Prichard-Murray EA, I have determined that neither of the action alternatives would 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 Prichard-Murray Resource Area EA is a project-level analysis. Its scope is confined to addressing the significant issues and environmental effects of the project, and the context of this proposal is limited to the locale of the Prichard-Murray Resource Area. Project activities are limited to the specific fuel and vegetation treatments proposed on lands managed by the USDA Forest Service in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area, although some analyses (such as aquatics and wildlife) considered the extent of effects beyond the project boundaries. While substantially improving hazardous fuels conditions and reducing potential wildfire intensities in the local area and watershed, neither alternative would pose any significant short- or long-term effects. Design features included in this proposal would limit adverse effects to such an extent that any adverse impacts are almost undetectable and immeasurable, even at the local level (discussed in EA Part 3, Section C, and Specialists' Reports, PF Doc. SR-01 through SR-09).

B. Intensity

This refers to the severity of the impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27):

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

and

7. <u>Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts</u>.

Any of the action alternatives would make substantial progress toward reducing potential intensities of wildfire and trending stands away from potential fire behavior that could threaten human life and property. There would also be a slight trend toward desired healthy, sustainable forest structure in the resource area (p. EA-20). While this change is advantageous for the Prichard-Murray Resource Area, the change is such a small percentage of the Coeur d'Alene River Basin that no change would be reflected at the overall basin scale.

Impacts to other resources as a result of implementing proposed activities would be negligible under any of the action alternatives:

- *While there would be direct and indirect effects to rare plant habitat, potentially suitable habitat for rare plants would gradually be improved (p. EA-21). Activities would meet Forest Plan standards and legal mandates.*
- *Existing infestations of certain weed species may continue to increase on Federal lands within the project area and adjacent private lands; however, activities under either alternative would minimize (but not eliminate) the risk of weed spread by application of design features (pp. EA-22).*
- *Treatment activities would have little to no risk of measurable effects to the magnitude, intensity, or duration of peak flows and sediment yields. The risk of stream channel changes would be low to none (p. EA-23). Salmonid redds, aquatic life, and associated habitat would not be affected by the anticipated changes in conditions (pp. EA-23).*
- *Activities would reduce the potential severity of effects that a wildfire would have on soils, because there would be a reduction in the tons per acre of fuels on treated sites (p. EA-24). Soil disturbing activities would not exceed Regional or Forest Plan standards under either alternative.*
- *Effects to wildlife species vary - habitat conditions that favor one species may be detrimental to another. However, specific design features of the action alternatives would minimize the impacts to any given species in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (pp. EA-24 through EA-27;), and there will be no loss of viability to populations or species. The long-term benefits to wildlife would outweigh the short-term disturbance to species during project activities.*
- *The action alternatives would have only temporary impacts to recreation (smoke, dust and noise could impact recreation experiences in the area). Over the long term, there would be less risk to recreation in the area as a result of wildfire, since the intensity of potential wildfires would be reduced following treatment (p. EA-28).*
- *Effects to scenic resources would be slight and short term. As seasons change, vigorous growth of grasses and new brush would be supported in the treatment areas (p. EA-28).*

For these reasons, there would be no significant beneficial, adverse or cumulative effects to resources under any action alternative.

2. <u>The degree of effects on public health or safety.</u>

The reduction in fire fuels under either action alternative would substantially reduce the rate of spread and flame length, increasing safety for both the public and fire suppression crews (EA, p. EA-17). Risk of smoke intrusion into Class I airsheds or non-attainment areas from prescribed burning in the Resource Area would be minimal due to distance and prevailing winds (PF Doc. FF-42). All burning would comply with federal, state and local regulations (EA, p. EA-14). For these reasons, there would be no significant effects on public health and safety under any action alternative.

3. <u>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.</u>

No parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas would be affected by any of the proposed treatments. The project area has been surveyed and analyzed for historic and cultural resources (PF Doc. HR-01). Results of that work indicate that the proposed action would not have any effect on any historical or cultural resources (EA, p. EA-16). With regard to wetlands, the proposed action would exclude all Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) from proposed treatment areas, consistent with Forest Plan guidelines (EA, p. EA-15; PF Doc. CR-002) as amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (PF Doc. CR-003), and state and federal law. These design features would reduce riparian impacts to the extent that none of the action alternatives would pose any significant impacts to wetlands or riparian areas within the Prichard-Murray Resource Area.

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

As used in the Council on Environmental Quality's guidelines for implementing NEPA, the term "controversial" refers to whether substantial dispute exists as to the **size, nature or effect of the major federal action,** rather than the existence of opposition to a use. Extensive public scoping and an extended period of interaction between the project interdisciplinary team and interested individuals, groups and agencies was an integral part of this environmental assessment. Review of public input, of the potential issues raised in scoping of the proposed action, and the standards, guidelines and design features related to the proposed action have resulted in a limited and focused proposed action. While some opposition to the proposed activities does exist due to the proposed harvest activities, most comments were supportive in nature. The effects of the activities in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality.

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

The action alternatives are similar to other fuel reduction projects that have been implemented without significant impacts on the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District and other districts of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. Documentation of past successes with similar projects can be found in the IPNFs' annual monitoring reports (PF Doc. CR-004 through CR-018, CR-022). The Proposed Action is consistent with management direction provided by the Forest Plan. Design features would minimize the potential impacts under any action alternative. There are no impacts that might be uncertain, unique or unknown.

6. <u>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</u>.

This action would not establish a precedent for any future action, nor would it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

8. <u>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.</u>

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 (PF Doc. HR-01). Assessment of historic and cultural resources in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area indicates implementation of this project would not affect any heritage resource eligible for listing in the National Register of historic places, nor would it cause loss or destruction of any significant cultural or historical resources. If any new heritage resources are discovered during project implementation, operations would cease in the area of discovery until adequate protection measures had been agreed upon with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

9. <u>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.</u>

The action alternatives were designed to be implemented in a manner that would protect wildlife resources in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (EA, pp. EA-15, EA-16, EA-24 through EA-27). There would be no significant impact to any species, and there would be no loss of viability to populations or species. The long-term benefits to wildlife would outweigh the short-term disturbance to species during project activities.

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

National Forest Management Act and IPNF (1987) Forest Plan: The action alternatives are 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 Prichard-Murray Resource Area are consistent with the Forest Plan because they would 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 proposed management activities would be in compliance with Management Area direction, including goals and objectives, as described in the Specialists' Reports.

Forest Plan old-growth standards would be met or exceeded. Alternative 2 proposes prescribed fire and timber harvest activities within allocated old growth stands. The stands with noncommercial and commercial thinning/improvement harvest treatments would continue to be maintained as allocated old growth, as activities are designed to maintain the characteristics that meet the old growth definitions. The stand with regeneration harvest would no longer display the characteristics that meet the old growth definitions (because the stand would be in the seedling/sapling structural stage), and would therefore drop out as allocated old growth. The resulting amount of allocated old growth would still exceed Forest Plan standards at both the district and forest levels (Specialist's Report on Forest Vegetation, p. VEG-30).

Alternative 3 does not propose activities within allocated old growth. The Selected Alternative includes prescribed burning (no harvest) on 223 acres within allocated old growth located adjacent to community structures or the primary ingress/egress route along Forest Highway 9.

NFMA consistency requirements include the need to protect species viability and Management Indicator Species habitat. The Proposed Action was designed to be implemented in a manner that would protect wildlife and fisheries resources in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area (EA, pp. EA-14 through EA-16; PF Doc. SR-07, p. WL-7). There would be no significant impact to any species, and there would be no loss of viability to populations or species. The long-term benefits would outweigh the short-term disturbance to species during project activities. 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 would 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 (Part 4 and the Appendices) with supporting information in the Project Files.

Healthy Forests Restoration Act: Activities proposed in the Prichard-Murray Resource Area meet the requirements for authorization under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (EA, Appendix A). The project was initiated by the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District in response to the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Group's "Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan," also known as the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (PF Doc. CR-020). The Community Wildfire Protection Plan recognizes the threat that wildfires pose to the county, and recommends management that would decrease this risk (EA, p. EA-3, 4). The Plan identifies the area surrounding the Prichard and Murray communities as a priority for treatment.

Alternative 1 would not reduce fuels, and therefore would not reduce the risk to communities. Alternative 2 would reduce fuels on more acres than Alternative 3, and the fuel reduction units that are proposed under Alternative 2 (but not under Alternative 3) would contribute to a landscape-scale arrangement of fuel treatments, most adjacent to private lands, thereby providing a level of protection from uncontrolled wildfire that would not be provided under Alternative 3 (EA, p. EA-22).

A collaborative process was used in developing the Prichard-Murray Resource Area proposal and involved the Bureau of Land Management, State of Idaho Department of Lands and Department of Environmental Quality, Shoshone County Fire Chiefs, Shoshone County Commissioners, and interested individuals and organizations (EA, Appendices A and C).

Clean Water Act: The Specialist's Report on Aquatic Resources (PF Doc. SR-05) evaluated potential adverse impacts to water resource and project compliance with the Clean Water Act, and determined that any action alternative would be consistent with the Clean Water Act (EA, Section 4.F). There would be no change in risks to beneficial uses in any stream in the Prichard-Murray Resource 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. There would be no significant impact to any Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate species under any alternative. All action alternatives would be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act as amended (EA, pp. EA-24 through EA-27; and the Specialist's Report on Wildlife).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act: Although some current habitat may be lost over the short term as a result of proposed activities, taking no action could have similar effects (EA, p. EA-27; Specialist's Report on Wildlife). Efforts to trend stands in the resource area toward historic species composition and age structure and to maintain the ecological processes that created these conditions would eventually benefit nongame and land bird species.

Environmental Justice: In accordance with Executive Order 12898, the action alternatives were assessed to determine whether they would 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, any action alternative would comply with Executive Order 12898.

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RANOTTA K. McNAIR
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10/22/07
Date