



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Idaho Panhandle
National Forests

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File Code: 1950
Route To:

Date: September 16, 2005

Subject: Outlet and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project

To: Dear Interested Citizen

I have signed the Decision Memo for the Outlet and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project. This fuels reduction project was originally identified as two separate proposals – the Outlet Fuels Reduction Project and the High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project. Because these two areas are located approximately 2 miles apart, and because initial internal scoping efforts did not lead me to believe that the two proposals were connected actions, I instructed my staff to conduct the environmental analysis for these proposals as separate projects. As the environmental analysis was being completed, it became apparent that neither project would have significant environmental effects. Furthermore, when considered collectively, potential cumulative effects, if any, would be minor. In order to improve efficiency, and because the combined acreages for the two projects will be less than 1,000 acres, I have decided to combine the actions together and issue one decision regarding their implementation.

These projects were first identified through a collaborative effort with the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan. Priest Lake staff further refined the project area based on hazardous fuel conditions, as well as spatial arrangement and proximity to values-at-risk. A total of 228 scoping letters were mailed out to individuals, agencies or organizations. Several field trips with interested parties gleaned valuable information pertinent to project design. Public involvement in the development of fuel treatment projects is very important, and I appreciate the collaboration and input that occurred with this particular project.

I have determined that any effects this project would have upon the environment are so minor that the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary. This decision is not subject to appeal, pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f), and thus may be implemented immediately. You have received this Decision Memo because you either provided comments to the specific project, or requested to receive copies of decision documents for these types of projects. If you have any questions concerning this project, please contact one of the Team Leaders, Luke Hixson or Jennifer Costich-Thompson, at (208) 443-2512. Thank you for your interest and participation in the management of your National Forests!

Sincerely,

for RANOTTA R. MCNAIR
Forest Supervisor



DECISION MEMO

Outlet and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project

**Priest Lake Ranger District
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
USDA Forest Service
Bonner County, Idaho**

INTRODUCTION

The Priest Lake Ranger District has completed an analysis of the environmental effects that could result from conducting hazardous fuel reduction activities on approximately 989 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands. The project is located on NFS lands just south of Outlet Bay, as well as adjacent to State Highway 57, Dickensheet Road and Gleason McAbee Road, in sections 2, 3, 10 and 11, Township 58 North, Range 5 West of the Boise Meridian; sections 6, 7, 18 and 19 Township 59 North, Range 4 West of the Boise Meridian; and sections 12, 13, 24, 26, 27, 33, 34, 35 and 36 Township 59 North, Range 5 West of the Boise Meridian, within Bonner County, Idaho. Please see the Vicinity and Project Area maps for more precise location of the project area.

I have determined that any effects this project would have upon the environment are so minor that the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary. I have decided to implement the project as described in this document. In this memo I provide some background information about the project and describe the importance and objectives of the project. Details of project activities are listed as well as a discussion of how I used the scoping process to help me refine the initial plan. Finally, I describe why I am not required to prepare an EA or EIS for this project, and I illustrate how the project is consistent with the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) Forest Plan and other relevant regulations and laws.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This fuels reduction project was originally identified as two separate proposals- the Outlet Fuels Reduction Project and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project. However, for reasons explained below, I have decided to consider the two proposals as a single action and make one decision regarding their implementation.

In the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan, the general area from the Outlet Bay community south along Highway 57 to the Gleason-McAbee Falls and Dubius Creek area was identified as high priority area for hazardous fuels mitigation work. As my staff began evaluating this area in more detail, it became apparent that within this larger area there were two separate, smaller locations that had the greatest fuel hazard concerns- the area from the Outlet Bay road south to the Dickensheet Junction and the area from the High Bridge south to approximately the Gleason-Boswell road. Because these two areas are located approximately 2 miles apart, and because initial, internal scoping efforts did not lead me to believe that the two proposals were connected actions, my staff conducted the environmental analysis for these proposals as separate projects. As the environmental analysis was being completed, it became apparent that neither project will have

significant environmental effects, and when considered collectively, potential, cumulative effects, if any, will be minor.

After reviewing the environmental analysis that was conducted for these projects and the scope of the proposed activities, I have determined that I could either issue separate decisions for each of the two projects or I could combine the actions together and issue one decision. In order to improve efficiency, I have decided to combine the proposed actions together and issue a single decision.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Outlet and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project area was identified as a priority for hazardous fuel reduction treatments in the Bonner County Fire Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan (2004). The plan was a collaborative endeavor led by the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Committee, in an effort to not only define Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in Bonner County, but also to identify and mitigate fire risks on federal, state and private lands. Wildland urban interface is defined as the area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels, including all wildland within 2.0 miles of structures or development.

Most of the project area and all of the proposed treatment units are within the WUI. The federal lands within the project area currently consist of a range of hazardous fuel conditions, including high tree densities, excessive ground fuel loadings, as well as significant quantities of live, ladder fuels. In addition, many of the forest stands within the project area show evidence of severe stem and root decay as well as insect infestations, which continue to contribute to the hazardous fuel loadings. These fuel conditions increase the likelihood that a fire could move into the crowns of the trees, increasing the possibility of intense fire behavior which could impede efforts to suppress wildfire.

Initially, the area from Outlet Bay south to the Dickensheet Junction was identified as a priority for treatment because the hazardous fuel conditions in conjunction with the steep terrain in a narrow canyon and topography-influenced winds, could potentially produce severe fire behavior. In the event of a wildfire in this area, the severe fire behavior could result in flame lengths, spread rates and fire intensities higher than firefighters could safely and effectively suppress (see Fire and Fuels Evaluation in the Outlet Project file.) This area was identified as a critical priority because the only viable evacuation route southward out of the Priest Lake area (until the junction with Dickensheet Road) is Highway 57, which is confined within the narrow canyon where severe fire behavior is predicted. From Outlet Bay to the Dickensheet junction, the narrow canyon of the Priest River exacerbates the hazard because the topographic effects of the canyon could funnel winds and greatly influence fire behavior and intensity. In the event of a fast moving wildfire, these emergency evacuation routes could easily become unusable due to intense heat, falling trees and/or dangerous, dense smoke.

The Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Planning Group identified the area from the High Bridge over the Upper West Branch Priest River south to the Ivan White Road and adjacent to the Gleason-McAbee Road as a priority for hazardous fuel reduction treatments. This area includes significant acreage of NFS land, but is intermingled with private ownerships and public infrastructure. The primary travel routes throughout this area are often narrow, unpaved roads that

wind through both public and private forest stands. In addition, many of the roads have hazardous fuel conditions right at the edge of the road bed.

Furthermore, many forest stands adjacent to both State Highway 57 and Gleason-McAbee Road (which are both considered evacuation routes) contain a high percentage of hazard trees. Hazard trees are defined as either dead trees or trees that exhibit symptoms of root defect/ damage, stem decay or a lack of structural integrity. During a fire or wind event, many of these hazard trees could fall onto the roadways, effectively blocking primary evacuation routes, as well as hindering access for fire response personnel.

All of these factors illustrate the area's vulnerability to catastrophic wildfire and the potential to place human lives, both public and firefighters, at risk. In addition, many other resources and values are also at risk, including private land, homes, natural resources, recreation areas, visual aesthetics, private wells, power lines, as well as other public infrastructure.

In responses to the scoping notice for this project, many residents expressed their concerns about the existing conditions of nearby forests on NFS land, including the areas adjacent to their property. As a result, many landowners in the area adjacent to the project supported the proposed actions as a means to reduce the hazardous fuel conditions on nearby NFS lands.

Because of the existing fuel conditions and the concerns described above, I have found there is a need to reduce hazardous forest fuels on NFS lands in this area, in an effort to enhance the safety of the emergency evacuation routes and improve our ability to suppress wildfires. As stated above, the forest stands in the project area include a range of hazardous fuel conditions that could increase the likelihood of extreme fire behavior and thereby render evacuation routes unusable, as well as impede wildland fire suppression and WUI fire protection efforts.

To ensure this hazardous fuel reduction project will be effective, I have the following specific objectives.

- Treat areas adjacent to the emergency evacuation routes, which potentially will alter fire behavior, decreasing fire severity adjacent to the roadways and maintaining the use of the routes during emergencies.
- Treat areas adjacent to values-at-risk in the wildland urban interface, in order to potentially alter fire behavior, which will effectively reduce the negative impacts of a severe wildfire to values-at-risk, as well as provide safer conditions for both the public and firefighters.

Proposed Action

In order to reduce hazardous forest fuels and meet the specified objectives of this project, forest vegetation will be treated using one of nine methods. Treatment methods were chosen depending upon the site-specific forest conditions, types and degree of fuel hazards present, values-at-risk and the effectiveness different treatments have at providing a long-term solution. I am approving:

- 632 acres of commercial thinning, grapple piling slash and burning piles;
- 193 acres of irregular shelterwood harvest, followed by underburning;

- 77 acres of irregular shelterwood harvest, followed by grapple piling slash and burning;
- 56 acres of seed tree harvest, followed by underburning;
- 16 acres of hazard tree falling, pruning, slash piling and burning;
- 7 acres of improvement harvest, followed by underburning;
- 5 acres of overstory removal, followed by precommercial thinning of advanced regeneration in understory and piling and burning of logging slash;
- 2 acres of pruning trees and slashing ladder fuels, followed by slash piling and burning; and
- 1 acre of right-of-way clearing, followed by slash removal, chipping, or piling and burning.

See Appendix A for a description of treatment type, units and acres by sale area. Per this decision, I have made changes to the original proposed actions sent out for public scoping. A summary of those changes is documented in the “Scoping, Comments and Collaborative Efforts” section. I am also approving the proposed mitigation measures and/or associated design features, in an effort to minimize or eliminate potential adverse environmental impacts. See Appendices B and C for site-specific design features for each of the associated sale areas.

Some forest stands have lighter amounts of hazardous fuels and will only require understory slashing, overstory pruning, hazard tree falling and handpiling of fuels to reduce the hazard. However, in other areas hazardous fuel accumulations and insect/ disease damage is extensive, sometimes exacerbated by very little species diversity. In these areas, residual vegetation will continue to add to the fuel hazard as insect and/or disease infested trees continue to die and fall down or break. Therefore, mechanical removal of the hazardous fuels is necessary.

Within mechanical treatment areas, a variety of treatments will be used, including thinning, precommercial thinning as well as seed-tree or irregular shelterwood harvest (see Tables 1A and 1B in Appendix A). After treatments, some areas will have openings large enough to successfully plant and grow tree species that are less susceptible to insect and disease attacks. Other areas already have advanced regeneration in the understory and will require precommercial thinning. Vegetation removed during mechanical treatments will be disposed of through the sale of commercially valuable wood products, such as timber, pulp and bio-fuel. Surface fuels left after mechanical harvest will be disposed of by piling and burning or through broadcast burning. Right-of-way clearing (including chipping or mowing brush and small diameter vegetation) will occur adjacent to Highway 57, Dickensheet Road and the Gleason-McAbee Road. Overall, treatment areas and treatment types were designed and planned to disrupt fuel continuity across the landscape and adjacent to values by removing ladder and surface fuels, in addition to tree thinning.

A complete roads analysis plan for this project area was prepared through an interdisciplinary team process. No new permanent roads will be constructed. Treatment areas will be accessed using either existing, open roads or older roads and skid trails that have grown closed. Roads that are currently impassible and needed for this project, will be reopened during project activities and closed to their pre-project status after treatment activities are completed. Coordination with the State of Idaho Department of Transportation and Bonner County Road Department will occur during right-of-way clearing operations and reopening of access points to county and state roads.

In addition to the listed fuel treatment activities, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, district fish biologist, and the project hydrologist have identified the following opportunities to improve stream quality and/or fish habitat in Dubius Creek, an unnamed tributary to Priest River, Binarch Creek and Lamb Creek. I have decided to approve these opportunities and will implement them as funding becomes available.

Improvements associated with the Outlet FR Sale

- Road improvement work on the 219 road at two crossings on Binarch Creek including: ditch armoring, installing check dams in ditch, constructing sediment basins, seed/mulch cut slopes, and possible installation of relief pipes. This work would reduce the amount of sediment entering Binarch Creek and help meet TMDL goals.
- Installation of a fish passage structure at the State Highway 57 and Binarch Creek crossing. A Forest Service fish biologist and hydrologist will collaborate with both the state highway department and the Fish and Wildlife Service to design and install the structure to minimize any sedimentation from entering Binarch Creek. This structure would facilitate bull trout movement into Binarch Creek.
- Road improvement work on the Outlet Bay Road at the Lamb Creek crossing including: ditch armoring, installing check dams in ditch, constructing sediment basins, and seed/mulch cut slopes. This work would reduce the amount of sediment entering Lamb Creek and help meet TMDL goals.

Improvements associated with the High Bridge FR Sale

- Dubius Creek crossing along Gleason-McAbee Road- Improvements will include culvert extensions and flared ends to minimize erosion and sedimentation caused by road maintenance and high seasonal water flow. Currently, it appears that there could be some road grade slumping (due to both continual out-grading of the road surface and seasonal water flows.)
- Unnamed tributary to Priest River (crossing with 1320B Rd.)-Although westslope cutthroat trout were found downstream of the crossing, no channel or fish habitat exists upstream of the crossing. Improvements would be aimed at reducing sedimentation and erosion caused by the road grade on the south side of the crossing. At present, runoff flows down the steep road grade on the south side of the crossing and over the culvert at the low spot of the grade. That overland flow has caused some rilling of the road bed and erosion around the culvert. Improvements will include armoring the fill around the culvert and placing water bars on the grade south of the crossing (following fuel reduction treatment activities.) I have also decided to relocate the low spot (in effect, creating a hardened rolling dip) and allow water to runoff the grade just south or north of the tributary crossing. The fill around the newly-created rolling dip will be armored, and crushed rock will be used for the grade just south of the crossing. All pit run will be used from an existing source.

DESIGN FEATURES

Design features and/or mitigation measures were identified to minimize or eliminate adverse environmental impacts that may occur with implementation of the proposed action. Please see appendices to the Decision Memo for site-specific design features for each of the associated sale areas.

SCOPING, COMMENTS AND COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

During the development of the Bonner County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan, these two potential sale areas were identified as priorities for hazardous fuels reduction treatments on the Priest Lake Ranger District. After this general area was identified as a concern for hazardous fuels, scoping began in August of 2004. An Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) of Forest Service employees met and reviewed the initial proposal that had been developed by Forest Service fuels specialists. As a result, some modifications were made to address and integrate other resource concerns/objectives into the proposal.

As a result of interdisciplinary team work, the following modifications were incorporated into the proposed action for the High Bridge Fuel Reduction sale:

- Unit 3 was dropped from the project due to the distance from the primary harvest areas and the length of road that would have to be reopened to access a relatively small unit.
- Unit 5 was dropped because a small portion of the identified area needing treatment was actually old growth, and in order to access the unit, an existing temporary road would need to be reopened which dissected an old growth stand.
- Because the IPNF North Zone Botanist located a sensitive plant within the Dubius RHCA proposed for treatment (unit 31), we decided to directionally handfall hazard trees, leaving them as coarse woody debris recruitment in the RHCA. Mechanized equipment or skidding operations will not be allowed within the RHCA buffers. (Appendix C: Botanical Design Features #2, #4; Water Quality Design Features #3, #4)
- Additionally, the Botanist set a 600-foot, no entry, buffer on the Dubius Fen Network (which is actually the large wetland at the southern end of the project area, between Moores Creek and Dubius Creek drainages.) This area is especially sensitive and should not be exposed to any mechanized equipment. (Appendix C: Botanical Design Feature #5)
- Units 27 and 28 were dropped because not only were they partially dissected by the newly imposed Dubius Fen RHCA buffer of 600 feet, but after field review, it was also obvious that portions of the two units met standards for recruitment to old growth stand status.
- After field reviews, units 1, 6, 9 and 10 were dropped because the stands were fairly open in places. Although some ladder fuels were present, there was not evidence of a high need for fuel reductions. In places within units 9 and 10, it was apparent that some precommercial thinning must have been performed on the stand at least 30-40 years ago.
- Boundaries on unit 14 were adjusted to avoid entrance into vernal pools associated with the large wetland between units 13 and 14. This effectively decreased the size of unit 14 by half.
- Initial boundaries and treatments proposed for units 23 and 24 were adjusted to more effectively treat fuels within the species composition present, as well as the present and predicted stand conditions. In addition, due to proximity to private residences and the

Gleason-McAbee Road, a commercial thinning prescription for unit 23 was more desirable than the regeneration harvest initially discussed.

- After field reconnaissance, some old-age trees were found within units 20 and 21. As a result, a trained stand exam technician performed a thorough, systematic, extensive common stand exam that included age measurements. Statistics proved that this area did not meet standards for either old-growth recruitment or allocation. However, because proposed treatments in these units includes hazard tree falling, removal of live, ladder fuels and a commercial thinning (primarily from below), treatments will likely enhance the stand characteristics and maintain the existing old-age relics within the stand. This could increase the likelihood that in the future this stand could perhaps meet standards for recruitment to old growth status.
- Because of the high density of roads and skid trails within the project area, the ID team performed a thorough roads analysis and made recommendations to the line officer.
- During field reconnaissance, the need for potential stream crossing improvements was identified. These improvements (road crossings with both Dubius Creek and the unnamed tributary to Lower Priest River) show evidence of some erosion and road-derived sediment delivery. My decision approves improving stream crossings for these two streams.

A scoping notice for the Outlet area went out to the public that included a "Request for Comments" letter mailed to 130 individuals, agencies or organizations on December 20, 2004. The comment period ended January 21, 2005. We received comments from 26 individuals, organizations and agencies. Seven responses had no specific comments toward the project and four of these requested continued correspondence. Another seven comments had only questions or concerns. Twelve comments voiced outright support for the project and nine of these had additional questions or concerns. In total, the agency received 64 separate comments, concerns, or questions. From this, we determined 1) what other potential issues existed, 2) what comments needed further consideration, and 3) what comments did not warrant further consideration (see Response to Comment in the project file). The comments that were identified through the scoping process and addressed in the project design and/or analysis are described in table 2.

Several comments that were received warranted further consideration and resulted in the following changes to the original proposed action. I have incorporated these changes in my decision to approve vegetation treatments as described above.

- Unit 18 was changed to an irregular shelterwood treatment instead of a traditional shelterwood treatment to enhance visual quality through irregular, patchy spacing. (See Appendix A, Table 1A.)
- Unit 3 was changed from a thinning to an improvement cut. (See Appendix A, Table 1A.)
- In an attempt to address sediment production concerns and a desire to maintain or reduce open road densities for wildlife, no new roads will be constructed. The one proposed temporary road was dropped from consideration and all activities associated with the project will be based off of existing road prisms. (Appendix B, General Design Criteria #6)
- Opportunities were identified within the proposed action, which would improve water quality and fish habitat for Binarch and Lamb Creeks.
- To maintain visual quality, treatments will be blended into the surrounding landscape and trees will be spaced and clumped irregularly. (Appendix B, Visual Resources Design Criteria #3)
- Where feasible, slash will be pulled back from veteran or relic live trees and snags to protect them from the adverse effects of prescribed burning. Where necessary, an unharvested

perimeter will be left around large, relic, fire-burned trees and short snags to protect these trees from harvest operations. (Appendix B, General Design Criteria #9)

- In order to minimize disturbance to private residences, helicopters will not be allowed to operate on weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day, between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. on weekdays, or on holidays throughout the year. (Appendix B, General Design Criteria #4)

A scoping notice for the High Bridge area went out to the public that included a "Request for Comments" letter mailed to 98 individuals, agencies or organizations on December 27, 2004. The comment period ended January 31, 2005. We received comments from 22 individuals, organizations and agencies. We received two responses that had no specific comments regarding the project, but requested continued correspondence. Five responses expressed support for the proposed project, and three of those comments expressed additional questions or suggestions. The remainder of the responses voiced questions, comments and/or suggestions. Using these responses to scoping, we determined 1) what other potential issues existed; 2) what comments were substantive and needed further consideration; and 3) what comments did not warrant further consideration (see Response to Comment in the project file). The comments that were identified through the scoping process and addressed in the project design and/or analysis are described in table 2.

Some public comments and suggestions resulted in a further refined proposed action. Changes as a result of public scoping include:

- Following a field trip with concerned landowners on 2/9/2005, the property owners in attendance showed support for the fuel reduction project, and one property owner asked us to look at an additional stand adjacent to his property boundary. As a result, unit 32 (~30 acres) was added to the High Bridge FRP and is slated for a commercial thinning from below. Primarily live, ladder fuels and immature sawlog and pole size trees will be removed, favoring retention of healthy white pine, larch, spruce, cedar and some true firs, along with some scattered, old, relic larch. (Appendix A, Table 1B)
- One landowner also expressed visual concerns about his boundary with unit 23. As a result, we agreed to modify the prescription for the forest stand within 50-100 feet of his property boundary. He would like small, irregular clumps of trees and regeneration left scattered near his boundary to add visual variety and create a transition into the rest of the unit 23, which is scheduled to be a commercial thinning unit. (Appendix C, Visual Resource Design Criteria #3)
- On 2/24/2005, we held a field trip with the Native Plant Society, Kinnikinnick Chapter, to show them both the High Bridge and Outlet FRP. We discussed stand conditions, and within High Bridge FRP went on a field trip to view stands adjacent to a wetland that they voiced concerns about. Following the field trip, although most members still had concerns about possible weed dispersal as a result of the projects, most were in favor of our fuel reduction efforts. Roads, landings and gravel pits used for the project will be pretreated with herbicide to limit weed dispersal, under the auspices of the Priest Lake Noxious Weed EIS Record of Decision (02/1997). Contractors will be required to wash vehicles and equipment prior to entry into the project area. Weed monitoring will be conducted during the project activities, including tree planting and inspection. (Appendix C, General Design Feature #1)
- Some local property owners expressed concern about a stand within the project area that was recently (within the last 12 years) acquired by the FS. The previous owner had clearcut the stand, but had not restocked the stand or performed site preparation. As a result, the current stand is densely-stocked, 20-30 foot tall lodgepole pine, much of which is infected with

western gall rust and lodgepole pine dwarf mistletoe. Nearby property owners view this as not only a fire hazard, but also as an eye-sore. Because it was too late in the planning stage to include this stand for PCT, I worked with Priest Lake Ranger District's Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) staff to get this stand on their list for priority precommercial thinning in 2006.

Comments	Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance of fuel breaks, effectiveness of proposed treatments, and use of best available science in the fuels analysis. 	<p>The treatments identified within the proposed action have been developed with long-term goals in mind. The project area will be monitored beyond the scope of the project to evaluate the effectiveness of treatments and identify future maintenance needs. Successive treatments will be identified as conditions dictate. Treatments may include prescribed burning, thinning, or handpiling. The fuels analysis was developed with the best available science and most accurate computer modeling. Existing fuel breaks were evaluated to determine their effectiveness at meeting the project objectives. The current fuel breaks from both naturally occurring openings and past treatments within the project area were found to be inadequate. Treatment unit locations for this project were identified based on a combination of fire behavior modeling and landscape ecology. The current sites for fuels reduction were selected at a stand level in the context of the surrounding landscape. Additionally, a process was used to minimize the extent and location of the fuel breaks while both maintaining naturally occurring stand structures and meeting the purpose and need of the project. For instance, units 13 and 17 within the Outlet FR sale area were identified because of their high hazardous fuel condition rating and juxtaposition to current fuel breaks. The location of these units, combined with the location of current fuel breaks, creates a much more effective disruption of the fuel continuity than the current fuel breaks would provide alone. The fuels analysis also takes into account onsite factors such as fuel loading, canopy closure, and canopy height as well as fire history, fire regime, and expected weather conditions. Treatment effectiveness was evaluated with two different scenarios: a landscape level fire moving into the WUI and a fire initiating within the WUI (see fire and fuels report in the project file).</p>
<p>Vegetation Communities—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure accuracy of old growth delineations and protect old growth stands. Reduce impacts to threatened, endangered or sensitive plant species. 	<p>The characteristics, species diversity and composition, canopy cover, etc. were assessed for forest stands within the project area utilizing walk-through stand exams, aerial photographs and the TSMRS database. In addition to the old growth stands identified by TSMRS, there were two cases (units 20 and 21 of the High Bridge FR sale) when individual, old-age class trees were present within stands and warranted a thorough, extensive stand exam, including age calculations. As stated in the Old Growth Report, statistics revealed that neither stand met recruitment or allocated old growth requirements; however, project design would retain large, old tree, except where they pose hazards. In addition, no old growth stands will be entered or treated in conjunction with this project.</p> <p>During 2004 and the spring of 2005 a thorough botanical survey was completed by the IPNF North Zone Botanist. As declared in the botanical BA and BE, no threatened or endangered plant species were observed. A few individuals and/or small colonies of sensitive species were located during the inventory, and one location resulted in the modification of unit 8 boundary (of the High Bridge FR sale). All known populations of federally-listed and sensitive species will be protected from treatment activities (See Appendix B, General Design Features #1; and Appendix C Botanical Design Features – all).</p>

<i>Comments</i>	<i>Response</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit fragmentation/ degradation of plant habitat, including wet meadows and wetlands. • Limit introduction and dispersal of noxious weeds and mitigate effects of weedy species. • Use of controlled burning as an alternative to harvesting vegetation. 	<p>Neither fragmentation nor degradation of native plant habitat are desirable outcomes of this project. In fact, mitigation measures that limit soil damage and noxious weed spread have been designed with this concern in mind. The habitat guild for each treatment area has been reviewed to determine if threatened, endangered or sensitive plant habitat exists. If a treatment area contained such habitat, the area was surveyed by the zone botanist. Within the Outlet FR sale area, unit 4 was relocated in order to provide a buffer along quality habitat. Within the High Bridge FR sale area, wetlands were given full INFish RHCA buffers for this project. Therefore, within High Bridge sale area, no treatment activities will be performed within the RHCA buffers, with the exception of units 30 and 31, which will include hazard tree falling (but not removal) adjacent to the Highway 57 corridor. In February of 2005, district staff hosted a field trip to visit the project area and discuss these concerns with members of the Native Plant Society. (See Appendix C, Botanical Design Features – all)</p> <p>Prevention of noxious weed introduction and dispersal is an important part of this project. Using protocol established in the Priest Lake Noxious Weed EIS, all existing, open and drivable roads, as well as Forest Service gravel pits slated for use, will be pretreated with herbicide to prevent spread of weeds. In addition, as stipulated contractually, all harvest and fuel treatment contractors must have vehicles and equipment washed prior to entry into the project area. All disturbed sites (i.e. reopened roads, landings, etc.) will be rehabilitated and seeded using a site-appropriate IPNF native and desirable non-native seed mix after completion of treatment activities. Furthermore, monitoring would be implemented to determine the effectiveness of noxious weed treatments and to determine the extent of noxious weed infestations. (See Appendix B, General Design Feature #3, Soil Design Feature #5; and Appendix C, General Design Feature #1; Soil Design Feature #5)</p> <p>Use of controlled burning as an alternative to harvesting vegetation was considered. However, given the hazardous fuel conditions present within and outside the project area and the proximity to private land and structures, prescribed fire treatments alone would be both unsafe and ineffective in reducing the hazardous fuels. Therefore, in this project, prescribed fire would be used to reduce surface fuels following harvest in areas where its use can be both effective and safe (see Fire and Fuels Report in the project file.)</p>

<i>Comments</i>	<i>Response</i>
<p>Aquatic Resources—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure water quality standards are met or exceeded, especially for the Upper West Branch and Lower Priest River adjacent to the project area, as they both have TMDL listings for sediment. • Treatment within the RHCA warrants the development of a watershed analysis and opportunities should also be sought for improvement projects, which would reduce current sediment loads. • Maintain adequate RHCA buffers and adhere to INFish guidelines, to protect native fish species. • Describe and mitigate the effects of the project on shallow, private wells in the area. 	<p>Maintenance or improvement of water quality is an important aspect of this project. The Hydrology Section of the project file analyzes the impacts of this project to both of these watersheds in detail and has found that there will be no significant effect to either watershed as a result of this project. As described in the Hydrology Section of the project file, not only are hazardous fuel reduction treatments far outside the RHCA buffers of the Upper West Branch and Lower Priest River, but the degree and extent of treatments will not affect water quality.</p> <p>INFISH states, that in the absence of a watershed analysis, management actions must not retard the attainment of the interim RMOs. This project will not have any detrimental direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to aquatic resources and therefore, would not retard the attainment of the interim RMOs. Several water quality improvement opportunities have been identified with the proposed action, which would reduce current sediment loads. Project activities will not result in a net sediment increase to Binarch Creek, Lamb Creek, Upper West Branch, Dubius Creek, the unnamed tributary to Lower Priest River, Moores Creek or Lower Priest River (see hydrology reports in project file).</p> <p>As per standard INFish Guidelines, appropriate RHCA buffers were designated for each wetland and stream within the project area. Wetland and stream locations were also ground-truthed following GIS interpretations. Within the High Bridge sale area, no treatment activities will be performed within RHCA buffers, with the exception of units 30 and 31. Units 30 and 31 will include hazard tree falling and hand removal of hazardous fuels adjacent to primary travel routes. Within the Outlet sale area, even though some treatments would be performed within the RHCA buffers, all Riparian Management Objectives will be attained. Both the Hydrology report and the Fisheries BA/BE found that these minor fuels treatment activities within the RHCA would have no effect on either the hydrology of the streams/wetlands or the fish present in those systems. (See Appendices B and C, Water Quality Design Features)</p> <p>Although a private landowner in the High Bridge sale area was concerned that nearby fuel reduction treatments could decrease the availability of sub-surface recharge to his shallow well system, the Hydrology Report discloses that, if anything, the fuel reduction treatments would likely result in a slight increase to sub-surface recharge. Because fewer trees would be present within treatment units, there would be less evapotranspiration, resulting in a slight increase to soil water recharge. Therefore, a slight net increase in availability of sub-surface water to shallow well systems could also potentially result.</p>

Comments	Response
<p>Wildlife Resources—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe and mitigate the effects of the project on threatened, endangered or sensitive wildlife species, as well as management indicator species (MIS). • Assure big game winter range needs are attained. 	<p>The Wildlife Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation for this project found that there would be no significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects to federally listed wildlife species or management indicator species as a result of project implementation. The effects to threatened, endangered and sensitive species have been documented and were not found to be significant. Design features have been incorporated into the project design to reduce potential negative effects to wildlife species. (See Appendices B and C, Wildlife Design Features)</p> <p>The majority of the project area lies within IPNF Forest Plan Management Area (MA) 4—Timber Production within Big Game Winter Range, which requires maintenance of big game winter range needs. The Wildlife BA/BE has determined that a mosaic of habitats required for effective big game winter range will still exist following project implementation. Therefore, this project will not have a significant impact on the amount or quality of big game winter range within the project area.</p>
<p>Planning Comments—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the project identified? 	<p>The project area and project objective, as well as other fuel reduction projects, were identified through a collaborative effort with the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan, as well as through further needs identification in the Priest Lake Fuels Strategy. Many areas along the Highway 57 corridor were initially identified as a high priority for hazardous fuel reduction treatment by the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Planning committee. Each member of the committee represents different ownerships, jurisdictions, and concerns. The committee specifically identified this area as an area of concern due to hazardous fuel conditions. This specific project area was further prioritized through the County’s plan because of the primary travel routes which bisect the project area, the topography adjacent to the travel corridors, as well as the high intensity of both private homes/structures and public infrastructure in the area. After the area was identified and prioritized, the Priest Lake Ranger District, which has jurisdiction over the National Forest System lands in this area, developed the Outlet Fuels Reduction Project to address and remedy the hazardous fuel conditions within that area. Furthermore, following scoping for the project, a landowner approached us and asked us to add an additional unit for treatment near his property boundary. After a walk-through inspection of the stand, we determined that the stand could indeed be improved through fuel reduction treatments, especially since the landowners’ property already has been treated for fuel hazards.</p> <p>The Healthy Forest Restoration Act stipulates that the county Fire Mitigation Plans would be used to map the WUI areas within each county or a distance of 1.5 miles would be used around areas, which meet the definition of WUI. Bonner County and some other counties chose to use 2 miles instead of 1.5 when they mapped the WUI treatment areas (see fire and fuels report in the project file).</p>

<i>Comments</i>	<i>Response</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="237 272 642 367">• Was the IPNF Wildfire Hazard-Risk Assessment used in planning this project? <li data-bbox="237 542 642 701">• Proximity to other fuel reduction projects—If the projects are so similar why weren't they prepared together using an EA or EIS? 	<p data-bbox="674 269 1864 500">The IPNF Wildfire Hazard-Risk Assessment was originally developed to explore wildfire hazard risk methodology for the Forest Plan revision. This assessment was not fully completed and therefore was not used. In fact, the more recent developments of condition class ratings, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, and the collaborative county fire mitigation plans have replaced the IPNF Wildfire Hazard-Risk Assessment. Therefore, this assessment is not applicable for this or any other project. Additional information on the Bonner County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan and the fuel reduction strategy being used on the Priest Lake Ranger District is located in the project file.</p> <p data-bbox="674 537 1892 1304">As fire management staff began preparing hazardous fuels treatment proposals in support of the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Mitigation Plan and the Priest Lake Fuels Strategy, the district received comments from environmental organizations that suggested we were segmenting what should have been larger projects into smaller ones in order to avoid the necessity of preparing an EA or EIS. Specifically, the district received a comment (KEA, 1/15/05) that suggested that the 57 Bear Paws, Outlet and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Projects should be considered together in a single EIS because of potential cumulative effects to aquatic resources. The 57 Bear Paws project is located approximately 3 miles south of the High Bridge project, and the High Bridge project is located approximately 2 miles south of the Outlet project. However, the area between the High Bridge and Outlet areas was not determined to be a high priority for hazardous fuel reduction. Although all three projects are geographically-separated from one another by substantial distances, I am aware that portions of the projects overlap into shared watersheds, and some of the watersheds within these projects include streams listed on the 303-d list. Therefore, I did direct my staff to consider whether or not the fuel reduction projects (Outlet and High Bridge FRP) could have effects that could cumulatively add together with other ongoing and future, foreseeable activities (including 57 Bear Paws FRP) to form significant effects to those streams. Cumulative effects analysis conclusions revealed that these projects would not have significant cumulative effects to the listed streams (see Hydrology Section in the project files). In addition, during the planning stages of these projects, my staff collaborated with the Idaho State Department of Environmental Quality to identify improvement projects that could be implemented in these areas to improve water quality (see project file). As the environmental analysis was being completed, it became apparent that neither the Outlet nor the High Bridge Fuels Reduction Projects would have significant environmental effects and when considered collectively, potential cumulative effects would be minor.</p> <p data-bbox="674 1341 1877 1401">After reviewing the environmental analysis conducted for these projects and the scope of the proposed activities, I could either issue separate decisions for each of the two projects or I could combine the</p>

<i>Comments</i>	<i>Response</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it appropriate to utilize the categorical exclusion authority for this project? 	<p>actions together and issue one decision. Similar actions may be combined into one environmental document, at the discretion of the agency (40 CFR 1508.25). To improve efficiency, I decided to combine the proposed actions together and issue a single decision.</p> <p>Using the categorical exclusion authority for this combined project is very appropriate. Not only is the project's primary objective hazardous fuels reduction within the wildland urban interface, but the actual units proposed for hazardous fuel reduction treatment do not exceed the 1000 acres limitation. Additionally, no new permanent roads need to be constructed in order to attain the objectives, and no extraordinary circumstances exist.</p>
<p>Cumulative Effects—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the cumulative effects of this project to hydrological, wildlife and fisheries resources when assessed with other ongoing and future, foreseeable activities in the area? 	<p>Cumulative effects of this project along with other ongoing and future, foreseeable activities in the area were analyzed in detail. For each resource area, a determination was made as to what, if any, direct and/or indirect effects would occur with the implementation of this project. If any direct and/or indirect effects would occur, those effects were analyzed along with the potential effects of other projects to determine if the effects would be cumulatively significant. If we had determined that the cumulative effects may be substantial and/or significant, the preparation of an EA or EIS would have been warranted. However, we determined that the cumulative effects were not significant and no extraordinary circumstances existed. Therefore, I made the determination that the use of the categorical exclusion authority is entirely appropriate.</p>

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED PROJECT

I have determined that this action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment because (1) it is within Category 10 listed in Chapter 30, Section 31.2 of the USDA Policies and Procedures Handbook (FSH 1909.15-2003-2, 31.2, Category 10); and (2) there are no resource condition present that lead to a finding of extraordinary circumstances that might cause the action to have significant effects (Table 3). See the discussion that follows.

Category 10 allows prescribed burning up to 4,500 acres and mechanical treatments of hazardous fuels up to 1,000 acres. My decision includes approximately 989 acres of mechanical treatments; therefore is within the acreage limit of the category.

In addition, the hazardous fuel reduction actions:

- 1) Are within the WUI;
- 2) Have been identified through a collaborative effort with the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee, as well as the Priest Lake Fuels Strategy, and is consistent with the framework in the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan;
- 3) Have been conducted consistent with agency and Departmental procedures and are consistent with the Forest Plan;
- 4) Will not be conducted in wilderness areas or wilderness study area;
- 5) Will not include the use of herbicides or pesticides to treat hazardous fuels;
- 6) Will not involve the construction of new permanent roads or infrastructure; and
- 7) Will not include the sale of vegetative material that do not have hazardous fuels reduction as their primary purpose.

The road repair and maintenance activities associated with this project fall within category 31.12 (4). Planting of native tree species in suitable areas fall within the scope of category 31.2 (5). The fisheries and water quality improvement activities fall within the scope of category 31.2 (7).

Subsequently, I have determined that according to FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30.3(2) no resource conditions are present that lead to a finding of extraordinary circumstances that might cause the action to have significant effects. The table below documents this finding.

Table 3. Test for extraordinary circumstances.

<p>a. Federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.</p>	<p>The proposed action may affect but not likely to adversely affect the gray wolf population because it would not affect security or prey densities for the wolves (see Wildlife Biological Assessment/Evaluation in the project file).</p> <p>The proposed action may affect but not likely to adversely affect the grizzly bear because the activity is outside the timeframe when grizzly bears would be expected to utilize the area and there will be no net increase in road density (see Wildlife Biological Assessment/Evaluation in the project file).</p>
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<i>Resource Condition</i>	<i>Applicability to the Project</i>
	<p>The proposed action will have no effect on the woodland caribou because the project is not within a designated management unit (see Wildlife Biological Assessment/Evaluation in the project file).</p> <p>The proposed action may affect but not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle because project implementation would not alter nesting and feeding habitat and no nest sites are within or adjacent to the project area (see Wildlife Biological Assessment/Evaluation in the project file).</p> <p>The proposed action will have no effect on the Canada lynx for the High Bridge sale area because the sale area is not within a designated management unit (see Wildlife Biological Assessment/Evaluation in the project file). However, within the Outlet sale area, the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the Canada lynx because the proportion of suitable habitat within the sale area will not be substantially altered (see Wildlife Biological Assessment/Evaluation in the project file.)</p> <p>The proposed action will have no effect on white sturgeon and may affect but not likely to adversely affect bull trout because there may be impacts to habitat associated with the implementation of identified opportunities with the proposed action (see Fisheries Biological Assessment/Evaluation in the project file).</p> <p>The proposed action will have no effect on threatened and endangered plant species (see Plant Biological Assessment in the project file).</p> <p>The proposed action will have no impact on most sensitive species. When effects may occur to sensitive plant, fish, and wildlife species, they are minor in nature. They may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely to contribute to a trend toward federal listing or result in reduction of viability to the population or species. (see Wildlife, Fish, and Plant Biological Evaluation in the project file)</p>
b. Flood Plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds	<p>The project will not result in the loss of or otherwise affect wetlands or alter the current floodplain.</p> <p>The project will not affect any municipal water source (see hydrology report in the project file).</p>
c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas	<p>The project is not located within wilderness, wilderness study or national recreation area.</p>
d. Inventoried roadless areas	<p>The proposed action is not located within inventoried roadless area.</p>
e. Research natural areas	<p>The proposed action is not located within a research natural area.</p>

<i>Resource Condition</i>	<i>Applicability to the Project</i>
f. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.	No known cultural resources will be affected (see heritage report in the project file)
g. Archaeological sites or historic properties.	The proposed action will not affect any known archaeological sites or historic properties (see heritage report in the project file).

The associated documents for making the above determinations are included in the project file located at the Priest Lake Ranger Station.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE FOREST PLAN AND FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

The activities being proposed within the High Bridge Fuel Reduction Project are designed to protect the soil, water, fish, wildlife and archaeological resources with minimal added investment. This project is located in three different Management Areas (MA) as designated within the 1987 Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) Forest Plan. MA 1 emphasizes long-term growth and production of commercially valuable wood products. The proposed activities are consistent with this management direction and would provide for timber production. MA 4 emphasizes big game winter forage production and maintenance on lands designated for timber production. As discussed in more detail in the wildlife specialist report for this project, implementation of project activities would help develop the type of timbered stands that are important to wintering big game. MA 16 stipulates the management of riparian areas to feature riparian-dependent resources while producing other resource outputs. The activities being proposed here are designed to protect and enhance riparian habitats while providing other benefits.

I have also found that these activities are consistent with all of the other goals, objectives, and standards that are specified in the IPNF Forest Plan concerning wildlife, fish, water, soil, old growth and visual resources.

- Forest Plan standards for threatened, endangered and sensitive species will be met. A Wildlife Biological Assessment/ Biological Evaluation was prepared for each sale area. In addition, the process of consultation with an expert agency, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, has been performed under the Joint Counterpart Endangered Species Act, section 7 consultation requirements final rule, published on December 8, 2003 (68 FR 68254) (see Wildlife Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation in the project file).
- The Outlet and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project is consistent with the Forest Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) (USDA Forest Service 1987) as amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (USDA Forest Service 1995). (Additional information regarding InFISH strategy and compliance is available in the hydrology and fisheries sections of the High Bridge and Outlet project files.) In the

1987 Forest Plan, the primary fisheries standard for land management activities was to “limit the effects from National Forest activities to maintain at least 80% of fry emergence success in identified fishery streams”. The Forest has recently amended the Forest Plan and eliminated this standard. The standard was eliminated because evaluating the effects on stream habitat characteristics is a more accurate and reliable way to determine the effects to fisheries and juvenile survival. Even though the fry emergence standard is no longer applicable for this project, the project would still meet the intent of the old standard as the activities are not expected to deliver sediment to project area streams and would not alter or influence fry emergence within the project area (see Fisheries Biological Assessment/ Biological Evaluation in the project file).

- Management activity on National Forest System lands will not significantly impair the long-term productivity of the water resource and state water quality standards including concentrations of total sediment or chemical constituents will be met or exceeded. Best Management Practices will be implemented as stipulated in the Idaho Forest Practices Act and the Forest Service Soil and Water Conservation Best Management Practices Handbook. There will be no effect to public water systems. The physical integrity of non-fisheries drainages, including first and second order streams, will be maintained. The WEPP erosion model was used to estimate sediment delivery to stream channels, but the model results were considered and balanced with site visit information, monitoring, current research and professional judgment. In addition, the INFish Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs) and Riparian Habitat Conservation Area (RHCA) Standards and Guidelines for the protection of aquatic resources will be followed. In the absence of a watershed analysis, the interim RMOs and RHCA widths apply. This project will not have any significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects to aquatic resources and therefore, would not retard the attainment of the interim RMOs (see hydrology report in the project file).
- Soil-disturbing management practices will strive to maintain at least 85 percent of the activity area in an acceptable level of productivity. Management activities will strive to maintain adequate amounts of coarse woody debris and will encourage nutrient cycling. In addition, the other design features and mitigation measures specified for soils would minimize effects to soil productivity (see soils analysis in the project file).
- This project fully complies with the forest-wide IPNF Forest Plan Old Growth Standards 10a-i, as no verified or recruitment old growth stands will be entered or affected (Zack, 2005).
- Established, visual quality objectives (VQOs) will be met. There are currently areas not meeting the VQO because the mortality rate for timber is high, past management practices, and/or natural disturbance regimes have made it impractical. Proposed treatments will actually help transition these areas to their designated VQO status more quickly than if left untreated. Visual quality objectives will be achieved by blending and shaping existing vegetation characteristics, effectively emulating natural vegetation patterns. In addition, the other design features and mitigation measures

specified for visuals would further minimize effects to the scenic resource (see visual analysis in the project file).

The Outlet and High Bridge Fuels Reduction Project is consistent with the IPNF Forest Plan Fire Management Guidelines and Standards. Not only is this project in support of the National Fire Plan, the Priest Lake Fuels Strategy and the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan, but as directed in the IPNF Forest Plan, the project was designed to treat hazardous forest fuels such that future fire potential rate of spread and fire intensity would be decreased and so that human life, property and natural resources (i.e. old growth) would be protected. Therefore, all IPNF Forest Plan requirements pertinent to Fire Management would be fulfilled or exceeded.

The proposed action is also consistent with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, National Forest Management Act, State of Idaho's implementation of the Clean Water Act, rules pertaining to the Idaho Forest Practices Act, Executive Order 12962 and the Inland Native Fish Strategy.

Findings related to Forest Plan consistency and applicable laws are documented in individual reports located in the Outlet and High Bridge Fuel Reduction project files at the Priest Lake Ranger Station.

DECISION

After considering the potential environmental effects that this action could have, I have made the decision to implement the project as described in this memo. I have based my decision on the review of individual specialists reports, the Biological Assessments and Evaluations, the low risk of detrimental environmental impact, public comments received regarding the project, as well as the following considerations:

1. As shown above, this action fits a category of activities that does not require that I prepare an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the proposal.
2. I have demonstrated in this memo and within the associated project file, that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would compel me to prepare an EA or EIS.
3. I have also considered the potential for cumulative effects and concluded that cumulative effects, if any, are minor in nature and will not be significant.
4. The activities identified in the proposed action will help provide for firefighter and public safety by altering the potential fire behavior, should a wildland fire either start within or move through this area. The project is designed to interrupt fuels enough that a wildland fire moving through the crowns of trees would lose fuel continuity and drop from a crown fire to a surface fire. Surface fires are often suppressed more safely and effectively.

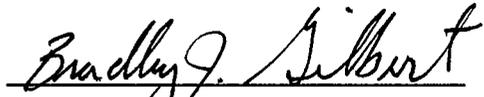
5. Reducing hazardous fuels and the potential for large fire spread, both from and to private land, as well as reducing the risk to the values in the area and the emergency evacuation routes, will occur as a result of this project.
6. This project is in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

The implementation of this project may begin immediately after the signature date on this Decision Memo.

REVIEW AND APPEAL RIGHTS

Pursuant to 36CFR 215.12(f), this decision is not subject to a higher level of review or appeal. Additional information concerning this project is available for public review at the Priest Lake Ranger Station, 32203 Highway 57, Priest River, Idaho 83856 or by contacting one of the Team Leaders, Luke Hixson or Jennifer Costich-Thompson, (208) 443-2512.



9-16-05

for

RANOTTA K. MCNAIR
Forest Supervisor

Date

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Appendix A—Treatment, acreages, and description of treatments

Table 1A. Outlet Fuel Reduction Sale Area-- Treatment types and acreages.

1	145	Irregular Shelterwood/Underburn (* See description of treatment types)	Re-open 1320 ft
2	9	Irregular Shelterwood/Pile and Burn	Re-open 3380 ft
3	7	Improvement Cut/Underburn	None
4	7	Irregular Shelterwood/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
5	1	Slash, Handpile, Prune and Burn Piles	None
6	7	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
7	6	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
8	3	Irregular Shelterwood/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
9	11	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
10	18	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
11	30	Irregular Shelterwood/Pile and Burn	Re-open 320 ft
12	14	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
13	2	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
14	1	Right-of-Way Clearing Only	None
15	12	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
16	1	Slash, Handpile, Prune and Burn Piles	None
17	36	Mechanical Thin/Pile and Burn	Re-open 2380 ft/use existing
18	12	Irregular Shelterwood/Pile and Burn	Use Existing
Total	322		

Table 1B. High Bridge Fuel Reduction Sale Area-- Treatment types and acreages.

2	68	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Maintenance of existing, open, & drivable road and Hathaway Rd.
4e	16	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing open, drivable road entering FS gravel pit
4w	38	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing open, drivable roads, including unnamed road and Hathaway Rd.
7	71	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing open roads, including Gleason-Boswell Rd.; reopen short access spurs (which are currently barriered) for access to Highway 57
8	23	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road.
11	10	Irregular shelterwood; understory burn	Reopen short, barriered spur road.
12	16	Seed tree; understory burn	Use existing, open, drivable road.
13	25	Irregular shelterwood; understory burn	Use existing, open, drivable road.

<i>Proposed Unit</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Treatment Type</i>	<i>Road Requirements</i>
14	8	Irregular shelterwood; understory burn	Use existing, open, drivable road (1320B).
15	40	Seed tree; understory burn	Use existing, open, drivable road (1320B).
16	69	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road (1320B).
17	9	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road.
18	16	Irregular shelterwood; grapple pile & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road.
19	5	Irregular shelterwood; understory burn	Use existing, open, drivable road (1320B).
20	12	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road (1320B).
21	35	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing open, drivable road entering FS gravel pit
22	5	Overstory Removal; precommercial thinning; pile & burn	Use existing, open, driveable road.
23	35	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road; haul out Gleason-McAbee Rd.
24	60	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road; haul out Gleason-McAbee Rd.
25	38	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Reopen short access spurs off of Gleason-McAbee Rd.; haul out Gleason-McAbee Rd.
26	11	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Reopen short access spurs off of Gleason-McAbee Rd.; haul out Gleason-McAbee Rd.
29	10	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road, including temp. easement over private land, as well as Dubius Creek Road and Gleason-McAbee Rd.
30	9	Hazard tree falling; slash, prune & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road.
31	7	Hazard tree falling; slash, prune & burn	Use existing, open, drivable road.
32	31	Commercial thinning; grapple pile slash & burn	Reopen short access spurs off of Gleason-McAbee Rd.; haul out Gleason-McAbee Rd.
TOTAL	667		

HAZARDOUS FUEL TREATMENT TYPES

Commercial/Mechanical Thinning; Grapple Piling Slash; Burning

Approximately 632 acres of forest stands will be treated using this method. Areas where this treatment will be used are generally dense forest stands where it is necessary to remove some merchantable trees. These stands tend to be very dense with overlapping tree canopies. In addition, most of these areas contain substantial amounts of “ladder” fuels and have moderate to high quantities of woody fuels on the forest floor.

These stands would be thinned by harvesting some of the overstory, removing approximately one-half of the tree canopy. These thinnings will primarily entail individual tree selection, while in some areas, small group selection harvests are necessary. The larger, healthier trees will be favored for retention. This thinning activity would create spaces between tree crowns, which will, in turn, help to decrease the probability that fire could travel from one crown to another. In addition, most of the smaller, “understory” trees will be removed from these areas to reduce the “ladder” fuels and decrease the chance that a ground fire could travel from the forest floor up into the tree crowns. The slash created by harvest activities will be left on site for approximately one season to allow mobile nutrients to leach back into the soil. With the exception of leaving some large logs on the site to maintain soil productivity, most of the fuels on the forest floor will then be piled by an excavator type machine with a “grapple” thumb (grapple-piled). The piles of fuel will be burned later, after allowing them to dry out.

In addition to the activities described above, one other activity will occur in certain areas within the units that are designated with treatment type 1. In the units that abut portions of primary roads, some spot hand piling of fuel and spot pruning of lower tree limbs will occur. These activities will generally occur within 50 to 100’ of the main roads and are designed to reduce the surface fuels more than the mechanical piling would allow and to further reduce the ladder fuels.

Improvement Cut; Underburn

This treatment is similar to the commercial Thinning/Piling and Burning treatment discussed above. However, rather than piling the remaining fuels with a machine, the site conditions will allow for the surface fuels to be underburned. Burning will take place in the spring or fall. Approximately 7 acres will be treated using this method.

Regeneration Harvest; Grapple Piling and Burning

Irregular Shelterwood-- Approximately 77 acres of forest stands would be treated using a “patchy-shelterwood” method. Patchy shelterwoods entail removal of patchy groups of trees, as well as individual tree removals outside of the designated patches. Patches are designated where disease, insect infestations or decadence are most prevalent, and where treatment will

be most effective. Patches also aid in visual blending of treatment areas. Areas where this treatment will be used are generally dense forest stands with seral or preferred species well-represented. Those desirable seral species will act as not only a seed source, but also as a nurse crop reducing mortality caused by frost in low-lying areas. Typically, the insect and/or disease-infested grand fir, subalpine fir, Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine would be removed, favoring retention of healthier trees.

The slash treatment for this treatment will include slash piling with an excavator type machine. The piles will be burned in the spring, fall or winter after allowing them to dry out.

Regeneration Harvest: Underburn

Irregular Shelterwood Harvest-- Approximately 193 acres will be suitable for this fuel treatment, which can provide both economical and ecological benefits. Forest stands designated for this treatment have seral species well-represented, but scattered. The remaining portions of the stands often have severe insect or disease infestations and high mortality.

As an example, many of the stands slated for this treatment have never been thinned. As a result, many trees are succumbing to stem and root decay, as well as intermittent bark beetle attacks. Wind thrown trees and broken snags litter the forest floor, jack-strawed on top of one another, creating an enormous, hazardous fuel load.

If a thinning were to occur in these stands, the disease and insect-infested trees would continue to die and contribute to the hazardous fuel components. Additionally, since the stands have never been thinned, some areas have dense trees of a small diameter when compared to their height. Therefore, if they were thinned, favoring the healthiest trees, the majority of the trees would not be wind-firm. So even if they survived insect and disease, they would likely blow over or be broken or weighted down by the first heavy snow season, creating the appearance of “wet noodles.”

Therefore, treatment scheduled for these stands would include an irregular (patchy) shelterwood harvest, similar to the type discussed above. However, rather than piling the slash with a machine, the slash would be underburned. Following, or in conjunction with harvest, the areas could also be slashed to remove small undesirable and cull trees. Then the area would be underburned. This would allow for the reductions in the slash, but would also help promote and prepare the site for dry site seral species such as larch, white pine, and ponderosa pine. In addition, underburning would reduce detrimental impacts to soils by minimizing site entries and limiting equipment compaction. Burning would take place in the spring or fall.

* The 145-acre irregular shelterwood designated within the Outlet FR sale area is actually comprised of four different forest stands and will be harvested using a group shelterwood. Within this treatment unit, several 5-10 acre groups and strips will remain unharvested. Harvested groups will be concentrated in areas of severe insect or disease infestation and high mortality and will not exceed forty acres in size. Patchy, group shelterwood harvests of

this type also aid in visual blending of treatment areas, decreasing the potential for negative impacts to visual integrity. (See “Silvicultural Prescriptions” in the Outlet FR project file.)

Seed Tree Harvest—Approximately 56 acres will be treated in this manner. The forest stands slated for this treatment are similar to those described for irregular shelterwood harvest; however, there are even fewer desirable, insect/disease-resistant trees in the existing stand. As a result, it will be necessary to remove even more trees during harvest activities. Slash treatment will also include slashing of the majority of the understory, followed by underburning.

Overstory Removal;Precommercial Thinning;Fuel Piling and Burning

Approximately 5 acres will be treated using this approach. This unit is a distinct two-storied stand. The overstory is a 60-70 year old lodgepole stand, which is starting to succumb to stem diseases and root rot. Due to high stress and age, these lodgepole pine are also at high risk of succumbing to mountain pine beetle attack. Many of the overstory trees have already died and fallen or have broken off, adding to a ground fuel component. The reason this unit will be treated differently than other regeneration units is that the understory regeneration is more advanced and has a desirable species component. After overstory removal of the lodgepole pine, the understory will be precommercially thinned, favoring retention of healthy western white pine, larch, spruce, and Douglas-fir.

Slash; Prune; Pile and Burn Piles

Within these areas, the treatment reduction objectives can be met without removing any commercially merchantable trees. Rather, most of the trees to be cut down in these areas are less than 5” in diameter. The larger trees will be left and the smaller trees will generally be thinned out. The fuels created through this slashing and most of the existing ground fuels will be piled either by hand or with a machine. In addition, in some of the areas, the lower limbs will be pruned up to 8’ on the bole of the trees that will remain to further reduce the ladder fuels. Only trees greater than 3” in diameter will be considered for pruning. Approximately 2 acres will be treated using this method.

Right-of-Way Clearing

Along Highway 57 and the Dickensheet road, there are areas near the roadway that were once clear of trees. These areas tended to be on the cut and fill slopes of the highway and/or located within 25’ of the road surface. Since these areas were initially cleared, they have revegetated with dense, 15’-30’ tall conifer trees. These trees are very close to the highway and they represent a fuel hazard that is contributing to the threat of the egress route. Therefore, in some locations along the highway and county roads within and adjacent to the other treatment units, clearing of these trees would occur. The Priest Lake Ranger District would work with the State and County Roads Departments to clear these trees off and to chip or otherwise treat the slash in these areas. Approximately 1 acre will be treated using this method.

Handfelling Hazard Trees; Slashing; Hand Piling; Pruning and Burning within RHCAs Adjacent to Primary Roads

Where hazardous fuel reduction is necessary within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs), a special treatment will be required. Within the RHCA on Dubius Creek along Highway 57, as well as among the vernal pools and along the roadway drainage ditch that exist within the Upper West Branch drainage, large trees which pose hazards to the egress route (Highway 57) will be handfelled and left within the RHCA. Small diameter trees and regeneration that either pose a hazard to the egress route or present a fuel hazard will be hand slashed and either strategically placed within the RHCA or hand piled and burned. Approximately 16 acres would be treated using this method.

Appendix B: Outlet Fuel Reduction Sale Area- Design Criteria

General Features

1. If any threatened or endangered species is located within or adjacent to the project area during project layout or implementation, management activities will be altered, if necessary, to ensure proper protection measures are taken to protect federally listed species.
2. Cultural resource surveys have been completed. All harvest and fuel reduction units will avoid impacts to known cultural resource sites. If any previously undiscovered cultural resource sites are located within or adjacent to the project area during project layout or implementation, management activities will be altered, if necessary, to ensure proper protection measures are taken.
3. Off-road harvesting equipment will be required to be cleaned prior to being allowed in the project area. Currently suitable timber sale contract provisions for washing equipment for noxious weed control purposes will be used. Noxious weeds will be controlled according to direction provided in the Priest Lake Ranger District Noxious Weed EIS.
4. In order to minimize disturbance to private residences, helicopters will not be allowed to operate on weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day, between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. on weekdays, or on holidays throughout the year.
5. Harvest operations will be restricted in units adjacent to designated snowmobile routes during the winter season. No harvest operations will occur on weekends and snowmobile routes must remain in a usable condition during project implementation. Hauling and skidding on the snowmobile routes may be restricted.
6. No new roads will be constructed; access will utilize existing roads. Installation or construction of temporary drainage structures and gravel surfacing may be used to reduce sediment generation and eliminate the potential for sediment delivery to streams.
7. Coordination with the State of Idaho and Bonner County road departments will occur for access points and road mitigation work needed on either state or county roads. Traffic control devices (signs and flaggers) will be used when needed to ensure safe travel on roads and minimize travel interruptions. Haul routes will be posted with signs indicating heavy truck traffic.

8. Directional felling away from property lines, unit boundaries, wildlife buffers, roads and leave islands is required. There will be no skidding across or felling into wet areas.
9. Where feasible, slash will be pulled back from veteran or relic live trees and snags to protect them from the adverse effects of prescribed burning. Where necessary, an unharvested perimeter will be left around large, relic, fire-burned trees and short snags to protect these trees from harvest operations.
10. When feasible, burning will be avoided when smoke can be carried into or confined within valley bottoms. Machine slash piles will be burned in the fall after weather and fuel conditions will reduce the possibility of fire spread. Hand piles may be burned in spring.

Features Designed Specifically for Soil Protection

1. As required by Forest and Regional Soil Quality Standards, the following guidelines will be adhered to in order to maintain soil compaction levels below 15 percent. No harvest operations or road work will occur during spring breakup. Ground-based harvesting will either occur during the winter over a snow layer or frozen soils, or will utilize equipment that can operate on a slash mat. Existing skid roads will be utilized where feasible. Skid trails will be located so as to avoid high cut banks and existing ditch lines. All new skid trails and yarding corridors will be designated and approved by the sale administrator prior to their construction. Where terrain is conducive, skid trails will be spaced at least 100 feet or more apart, except where they converge. Skid trail spacing closer than listed above may be planned when winter logging could occur on at least two feet of packed snow or frozen ground, or where an adequate slash mat exists. When grapple-piling slash, the machine will travel on existing skid trails. Existing landings will be used whenever possible to avoid further soil impacts. New landings will be restored through ripping, seeding, and retaining coarse woody debris.
2. Forest Plan standards for maintaining an adequate supply of large, down-woody material for soil productivity and nutrient cycling will be met. Management of coarse woody debris greater than three inches in diameter and organic matter in cutting units will strive to follow guidelines (which specify leaving 16 to 33 tons/acre on moist sites; 7-14 tons/acre on dry sites). Down wood material (≥ 10 inches in diameter at the small end) will be retained in harvest and prescribed burn units to help meet management guidelines. Cull logs will not be decked but will be left within the unit or returned to the unit and dispersed. Whole tree yarding will not occur for this project.
3. Burning will not occur when soil moistures are below 25%.
4. Timing of activities will be designed to allow slash to remain on site long enough so mobile nutrients can leach back to the soil, especially on potassium limited soils. In

those areas where timing of activities will leave slash in the urban interface during critical periods (i.e. fire season), slash may be piled soon after its creation. However, this activity will not occur on potassium-limited soils in portions of units 1, 2, 3, 7, and 10.

5. The junctions of skid trails and landings with main roads will be recontoured to the original cut bank specifications and seeded with IPNF grass mix for erosion control. Excavated skid trails will be waterbarred and seeded with IPNF grass mix for erosion control.

Features Designed Specifically for Wildlife Resources

1. Monitor/evaluate lynx habitat through project implementation to assess habitat conditions to ensure that it is accurately classified, and modify as needed.
2. Management activities associated with the proposed action, other than prescribed burning and tree planting when necessary, will not take place between April 1 and June 15 throughout the Reoccurring Use Area (RUA) to avoid displacement of grizzly bears.
3. Any currently impassable or barriered road which is opened, reconditioned or reconstructed to facilitate management activities associated with the proposed action will remain closed (gated) to the public during project implementation and will be decommissioned or put into storage immediately upon completion of all planned activities. There will be no net increase in the miles of open road at any time during the life of this project.
4. To reduce the chance of grizzly bears foraging along open roads and motorized trails, clover will not be included within seed mixes utilized along open roads and motorized trails.
5. Appropriate provisions for site sanitation will be included within all pertinent contract operations associated with the implementation of the proposed activities.
6. This project will meet or exceed Forest Plan Standards for maintaining snags and snag recruitment trees for wildlife. The District will strive to maintain snag densities in excess of Forest Plan standards by following the Regional Snag Management Protocol, which calls for retention of 2-4 snags per acre greater than 20 inches (the Forest Plan standard for snags is 4 per acre that are 10 inches or larger in diameter). On average, four or more large diameter snags per acre will be left, where it is possible. The proposed treatments are expected to increase the amount of down woody material in areas that lack material by leaving some of the resulting logging slash (tops, limbs and probably some of the small diameter non-merchantable snags cut in trails and as safety hazards) during the post-harvest brush disposal treatments (grapple-piling slash concentrations). Where the project area does not currently meet the Northern Region snag protocol standards, snags over 12 inches in diameter would

- be retained contractually, except where they present a safety hazard. In these cases, the snags can be felled but will remain on site to help achieve Forest Plan standards for down wood. Additionally, silvicultural prescriptions are designed to retain large-diameter live trees, especially western larch, western white pine, Douglas-fir and indigenous ponderosa pine, which may be managed for future snag recruitment and retention to increase the number of 20-inch-plus snags in the future.
7. Spacing of leave trees will be reduced adjacent to open Forest Service roads and natural openings to maintain hiding cover and reduce vulnerability of big game.
 8. Post-harvest activities (such as slashing or pre-commercial thinning) will maintain cover and structure for big game and nesting/breeding habitat for neotropical birds. This will be accomplished by leaving and protecting small clumps (<1 acre) of dense grand fir or other regeneration scattered throughout the area, particularly near open roads. Clumps will not be located where their crowns are intermingled within the crowns of larger trees.
 9. In areas where slash piling is prescribed for fuel reduction, an average of one slash pile per acre across treated areas will be left unburned to provide habitat for small forest animals.
 10. If possible, prescribed fire operations will be restricted to prior to June 1 with the objective of reducing impacts to nesting neotropical migrants and other ground-nesting birds.
 11. In order to protect goshawk nest sites, nest searches will be conducted during project layout and implementation. If previously unknown nesting goshawks are found, the nesting and post-fledgling habitat will be maintained. Existing and newly discovered nest sites will be protected by a 30-acre, no activity buffer during any contractual operations. Any activities within one-half mile of the nest will occur after August 15 and prior to March 15 to reduce risk of nest failure. Activity restrictions can be removed after June 30 if the nest site is determined by the district biologist to be inactive or unsuccessful.

Features Designed Specifically for Water Quality and Fish Resources

1. All units within the project area will adhere to the INFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Area (RHCA) buffers. In summary, tributaries identified by the project Fisheries Biologist as fish bearing will have 300 ft. buffers on either side of the channel, perennial, non-fishing bearing streams will have 150 ft. buffers on either side of the channel, and intermittent or seasonally flowing streams will have a minimum of 50 ft. buffers on either side of the channel. Within these buffers, only limited activities will take place. These activities will occur on approximately 30 acres within the Lower Priest River RHCA in units 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 14 and 16. Trees within 150 feet of Highway 57 and which are inside the Lower Priest River RHCA will be carefully evaluated prior to treatment. Large hazard trees, which pose a threat

- to the egress route, will be directionally felled away from the highway. Large down wood structure will be retained for wildlife and soil needs. Small diameter trees and advanced regeneration near the Highway, which present a fuels hazard, will be hand slashed and will be hand piled and burned. Limited mechanical harvesting and grapple piling will occur in units 1, 2, 6, and 7. Approximately 4 miles of existing roads within RHCAs will be used for haul in the project (including 1.4 miles on Highway 57).
2. If winter logging is used, then all access roads must be carefully plowed and frequent cross-drains created to prevent mass failures off of roads. If these roads are plowed for winter access, cross drains would be opened up through snow berms or ice lens every 150 feet as the topography allows. These openings must be maintained for the life of the sale or until snow is off the road prism.
 3. Ditch lines and culverts on county road accesses will be maintained and functional at the end of the project to reduce the potential for road surface erosion entering intermittent streams.
 4. Timber hauling will be restricted/will occur only in accordance with Forest Service Timber Sale environmental protection contract provisions (B5.12 'Use of Roads by Purchaser'). Those provisions explicitly state that the [purchaser] is authorized to use existing Forest Service roads when such use will not cause damage to the roads or National Forest resources and when hauling can be done safely. For protection of soil and water quality, timber hauling on Forest Service controlled roads will be restricted when there are excessively wet or dry weather conditions. Compliance with such restriction shall remain the responsibility of the timber sale administrator (Forest Service representative) for the life of the project. In addition, hauling will not occur during the haul-prohibited period during spring breakup of county roads.
 5. To eliminate the potential for sediment delivery to Lower Priest River from the use of the powerline access road in treatment unit 6, either haul on packed snow conditions or surface the road with gravel.
 6. To eliminate the potential for sediment delivery to Lower Priest River from harvest activities occurring within the RHCA, project activities will not occur between the powerline access roads and Lower Priest River.
 7. Soil and Water Conservation Best Management Practices will be implement as defined in FSH 2509.22, Soil and Water Conservation Best Management Practices Handbook (USDA Forest Service), and will be used for riparian road improvements to avoid the introduction of sediment into the stream.

Features Designed Specifically for Visual Resources

1. For treatment units or portions of treatment units that can be viewed from travel corridors (all units except 13 and 17), any tree pruning that is necessary to meet fuel

- reduction objectives will be done in a way to create an uneven crown height. In addition, a diversity of tree heights, sizes, and species will be maintained.
2. Unit boundaries and tree marking paint on leave trees will be marked away from travel corridors.
 3. Units will be blended into past treatment areas and trees will be spaced and clumped irregularly to provide visual variety.
 4. As many overstory trees as possible will be left on each side of gates for screening and access security.
 5. As many trees as possible will be left on each side of intersections so the transition is not abrupt.
 6. When feasible, power lines will be screened by leaving more vegetation around sensitive viewing points.
 7. Following sale activities and as funding permits, residual unit boundary signs and marking, flagging, and other paint will be removed along travel corridors, private land, and public facilities. Any marking visible from the travel corridors will be covered over with paint blending in with the bark of the tree.
 8. Stump heights in units that can be seen from travel corridors, private land, and public facilities will be no higher than 6 inches.
 9. In areas up to 50 – 100 feet from travel corridors, private land, and public facilities, forest residues will be cleaned up to a greater degree than in other areas, to maintain visual character.

Appendix C: High Bridge Fuel Reduction Sale Area- Design Criteria

General Design Features

1. Off-road harvesting equipment will be required to be cleaned prior to being allowed in the project area. Currently suitable timber sale contract provisions for washing equipment for noxious weed control purposes will be used. Noxious weeds will be controlled according to direction provided in the Priest Lake Ranger District Noxious Weed EIS.
2. In order to minimize disturbance to nearby private residences, harvest and hauling operations will be restricted to the hours between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Furthermore, operations will be restricted on holidays, as well as weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day.
3. Coordination with the State of Idaho Department of Transportation and Bonner County Road Department will occur for access points and road mitigation work needed on either state or county roads. Traffic control devices (signs and flaggers) will be used when needed to ensure safe travel on roads and minimize travel interruptions. Haul routes will be posted with signs indicating heavy truck traffic.
4. Directional felling away from property lines, unit boundaries, RHCA buffers, wildlife buffers, roads and leave islands is required. There will be no skidding across or felling into wet areas.
5. When feasible, slash will be pulled back from veteran or relic live trees and snags to protect them from the adverse effects of prescribed burning. When necessary, an unharvested perimeter will be left around large, relic, fire-burned trees and short snags to protect these trees during harvest operations.
6. All burning seasons are acceptable as long as objectives can be met. When feasible, burning will be avoided when smoke can be carried into or confined within valley bottoms. No burning would occur on weekends or holidays. All burning activities would follow the North Idaho Airshed Group, Montana/Idaho Smoke Management Program which regulates how much burning can take place based on predicted smoke emissions and expected smoke dispersion.
7. Machine slash piles will be burned in the fall or early winter after weather and fuel conditions will reduce the possibility of fire spread. Hand piles may be burned in spring.
8. Improvements such as fences, utility lines, underground cable, signs, etc. would be protected during project activities. Improvements would be shown on project activity maps and contract provisions would be in place to ensure their protection.
9. Existing range improvements (i.e. fences and cattleguards) would be reestablished as needed.

Features Designed Specifically for Archaeological Site Protection

1. Cultural resource surveys have been completed. All harvest and fuel reduction units will avoid impacts to known cultural resource sites.
2. If any previously undiscovered cultural resource sites are located within or adjacent to the treatment units during project layout or implementation, management activities will be altered, if necessary, to ensure proper protection measures are taken.

Features Designed Specifically for Botanical Resources

1. If any threatened, endangered or sensitive plants are located within or adjacent to treatment units during project layout or implementation, management activities will be altered, if necessary, to ensure proper protection measures are taken to protect federally listed species.
2. Directional tree felling away from known locations of federally listed plant species or their buffers will be required.
3. Any reseeded needed for road obliteration, landing rehabilitation, etc. will be required to be comprised of a site-appropriate seed mix for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.
4. In order to protect habitat for federally listed and sensitive plant species, no mechanized equipment will be allowed into the RHCA buffers.
5. The buffer for the Dubius Fen Network (which is the large wetland at the southern end of the project boundary) was increased to 600 feet, in an effort to protect plant habitat for federally listed species.

Features Designed Specifically for Soils Resource Protection

1. As required by Forest and Regional Soil Quality Standards, the following guidelines will be adhered to in order to maintain soil compaction levels below 15 percent. No harvest operations or road work will occur during spring breakup. Ground-based harvesting will either occur during the winter over an adequate snow layer or frozen soils, or will utilize equipment that can operate on a slash mat. Existing skid roads will be utilized when feasible. Skid trails will be located so as to avoid high cut banks and existing ditch lines. All new skid trails and yarding corridors will be designated and approved by the sale administrator prior to their construction. Where terrain is conducive, skid trails will be spaced at least 100 feet or more apart, except where they converge. Skid trail spacing closer than listed above may be planned when winter logging could occur on an adequate snow layer, frozen ground or where an adequate slash mat exists. When grapple-piling slash, the machine will travel on existing skid trails. Existing landings will be used whenever possible to avoid further soil impacts.

- Newly-created landings will be restored by ripping, seeding and retaining coarse woody debris for nutrient cycling.
2. Forest Plan standards for maintaining an adequate supply of large, down-woody material for soil productivity and nutrient cycling will be met. Management of coarse woody debris greater than three inches in diameter and organic matter in cutting units will strive to follow guidelines (which specify leaving 16 to 33 tons/acre on moist sites; 7-14 tons/acre on dry sites). Down woody material (≥ 10 inches in diameter at the small end) will be retained when feasible in harvest and prescribed burn units to help meet management guidelines. Cull logs will not be decked but will be left within the unit or returned to the unit and dispersed. Whole tree yarding will not occur for this project.
 3. Burning will not occur when soil moistures are below 25%.
 4. Timing of activities will be designed to allow slash to remain on site long enough so mobile nutrients can leach back to the soil, in order to maintain soil productivity levels. None of the treatment units are located on potassium-limited soils, so in those areas where timing of activities will leave slash in the urban interface during critical periods (i.e. fire season), slash may be piled soon after its creation.
 5. The junctions of skid trails and landings with main roads will be recontoured to the original cut bank specifications and seeded with IPNF seed mix for erosion control and weed prevention. Excavated skid trails will be waterbarred and seeded with IPNF seed mix for erosion control and weed prevention.
 6. In those units that will likely experience cumulative detrimental disturbance to soil resources higher than 15 percent post-harvest activities (units 7, 23 and 25), additional mitigation measures and restoration efforts will be pursued. All new and designated, existing skid trails and landings will be restored with a winged sub-soiler (to fluff up the soil.) Then, those skid trails and landings will be seeded using an IPNF site-appropriate seed mix, and will be completed by scattering coarse woody debris. Utilizing the best available information from the IPNF soil scientist, such mitigation measures could improve the detrimental soil conditions by 30% (G. Rone 2005).
 7. In units which will likely experience cumulative detrimental disturbance to soil resources (marginal conditions) (units 1, 2, 4, 8, 12, 20, 21, 22 and 24), we propose to mitigate detrimental impacts by monitoring the soil resource in those activity areas, both post-harvest and post-slash treatment. If actual detrimental disturbance to the soil resource within those activity areas is equal or greater than 15 percent, we will mitigate by using the winged sub-soiler on new and designated existing skid trails and landings (to fluff up the soil), seeding an IPNF site-appropriate seed mix and scattering coarse woody debris.

Features Designed Specifically for Water Quality and Fisheries Resources Protection

1. All treated units within the project area would strictly adhere to the full INFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Area (RHCA) buffers. All hazardous fuel reduction treatments will take place outside of the RHCA buffers, with the exception of hazard tree falling and slashing within units 30 and 31. Full INFISH RHCA buffers were

- delineated as follows: tributaries identified by the project Fisheries Biologist as fish bearing would have 300 ft. buffers on either side of the channel; perennial, non-fish bearing streams and wetlands larger than one acre would have 150 ft. buffers on either side of the channel or pool; and intermittent or seasonally flowing streams and wetlands smaller than one acre would have a minimum of 50 ft. buffers on either side of the channel or pool. Other RHCA criteria may apply.
2. Along Highway 57 there are pockets of mature trees that show signs of severe stem decay and/or root disease. In the event of a wildfire and/or wind event these could fall on the roadway effectively blocking egress/ingress for both the public and fire suppression forces. Some of these trees would be removed in the interest of public and fire fighter safety. Special mitigation will take place where this type of hazardous fuel reduction is necessary within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) along Highway 57 (within units 30 and 31.) Within the RHCA buffer on Dubius Creek, large trees that pose hazards to the egress route (Highway 57) will be hand-felled and left within the RHCA. Small diameter trees and regeneration that either pose a hazard to the egress route or present a fuel hazard will be hand slashed and either strategically placed within the RHCA or hand piled outside of RHCA and burned.
 3. No skidding or hauling across wetlands or RHCA buffers will be allowed.
 4. Directional tree falling away from RHCA buffers will be required. Within units 30 and 31 (which are within RHCA buffers), directional falling will be approved by district fisheries biologist or hydrologist and regulated by the sale administrator.
 5. When watershed improvement opportunities to improve the unnamed tributary to Lower Priest River crossing with 1320 Rd are pursued, precautions should be taken to reduce negative impacts to fish in that system. As per the District Fisheries Biologist, any channel, culvert, armorment or approach modifications should take place in the fall, when water temperatures are cooler and to avoid the spawning season of the resident westslope cutthroat trout.
 6. Implement Soil and Water Conservation Best Management Practices as defined in FSH 2509.22, the Soil and Water Conservation Handbook, with riparian road improvements, in an effort to avoid the introduction of sediment into the streams.

Features Designed Specifically for Wildlife Resources

1. If any threatened or endangered species is located within or adjacent to the project area during project layout or implementation, management activities would be altered, if necessary, to ensure proper protection measures are taken to protect federally listed species. If any endangered, threatened or sensitive species are located within or adjacent to treatment units, activities would be altered as necessary to protect federally listed species.
2. Management activities associated with the proposed action, other than prescribed burning and tree planting/pruning when necessary, will not take place between April 1 and June 15 throughout the RUA to avoid displacement of grizzly bears. The project area is more likely to be used by grizzly bear in the spring because spring is nutritionally critical for bears, especially females with young.

3. Any currently impassable, barriered or restricted road which is opened, reconditioned or reconstructed to facilitate management activities associated with the proposed action, will remain closed (gated) to the public during project implementation and will be decommissioned or put into storage immediately upon completion of all planned activities. This will include ripping, seeding with site-appropriate IPNF seed mix and placing coarse woody debris across the road bed. There will be no net increase in the miles of open road at any time during the life of this project.
4. To reduce the chance of grizzly bears foraging along open roads and motorized trails, clover would not be included within seed mixes utilized along open roads and motorized trails.
5. Appropriate provisions for site sanitation would be included within all pertinent contract operations associated with the implementation of the proposed activities.
6. This project will meet or exceed Forest Plan Standards for maintaining snags and snag recruitment trees for wildlife. The District will strive to maintain snag densities in excess of Forest Plan standards by following the Regional Snag Management Protocol, which calls for retention of 2-4 snags per acre greater than 20 inches (the Forest Plan standard for snags is 4 per acre that are 10 inches or larger in diameter). On average, four or more large diameter snags per acre will be left, where they are available. The proposed treatments are expected to increase the amount of down woody material in areas that lack material by leaving some of the resulting logging slash (tops, limbs and probably some of the small diameter non-merchantable snags cut in trails and as safety hazards) during the post-harvest brush disposal treatments (grapple-piling slash concentrations). Where the project area does not currently meet the Northern Region snag protocol standards, snags over 12 inches in diameter would be retained contractually, except where they present a safety hazard. In these cases, the snags can be felled but will remain on site to help achieve Forest Plan standards for down wood. Additionally, silvicultural prescriptions are designed to retain large-diameter live trees, especially western larch, western white pine, Douglas-fir and indigenous ponderosa pine, which may be managed for future snag recruitment and retention to increase the number of 20-inch-plus snags in the future.
7. Within thinning units, spacing between leave trees will be reduced adjacent to primary roads and open Forest Service roads to maintain hiding cover and reduce vulnerability of big game.
8. Within regenerative harvest units, small clumps of unharvested trees, including saplings and seedlings, will be left strategically near primary roads and open roads in an effort to maintain hiding cover and reduce the vulnerability of big game.
9. Post-harvest activities (such as precommercial thinning) will maintain cover and structure for big game and nesting/breeding habitat for neotropical birds. This will be accomplished by leaving and protecting small clumps (<1 acre) of dense grand fir or other regeneration scattered throughout the area, particularly near open roads. Clumps will not be located where their crowns are intermingled within the crowns of larger trees.
10. In areas where slash piling is prescribed for fuel reduction, an average of one slash pile per acre across treated areas will be left unburned to provide habitat for small forest animals.

11. If possible, prescribed fire operations will be restricted to prior to June 1 with the objective of reducing impacts to nesting neotropical migrants and other ground-nesting birds.
12. In order to protect goshawk nest sites, nest searches will be conducted during project layout and implementation. If previously unknown nesting goshawks are found, the nesting and post-fledgling habitat will be maintained. Existing and newly discovered nest sites will be protected by a 30-acre, no activity buffer during any contractual operations. Any activities within one-half mile of the nest will occur after August 15 and prior to March 15 to reduce risk of nest failure. Activity restrictions can be removed after June 30 if the nest site is determined by the district biologist to be inactive or unsuccessful.

Features Designed Specifically for Visual Resources

1. In areas near primary roads, small clumps of trees will be strategically identified and left unharvested, in an effort to increase diversity and enhance visual integrity.
1. For treatment units that can be viewed from travel corridors, any tree pruning that is necessary to meet fuel reduction objectives will be done in a way to create an uneven crown height. In addition, a diversity of tree heights, sizes and species will be maintained.
2. Unit boundaries and tree marking paint on leave trees will be marked away from travel corridors.
3. Units will be blended into past treatment areas and trees will be spaced and clumped irregularly to provide visual variety.
4. As many overstory trees as possible will be left on each side of gates for screening and access security.
5. As many trees as possible will be left on each side of intersections so the transition is not abrupt.
6. Power lines will be screened when feasible.
7. Following sale activities and as funding permits, residual unit boundary signs and marking, flagging, and other paint will be removed along travel corridors, private land, and public facilities. Any marking visible from the travel corridors will be covered over with paint blending in with the bark of the tree.
8. Stump heights in units that can be seen from travel corridors, private land, and public facilities will be no higher than 6 inches.
9. In areas up to 50 – 100 feet from travel corridors, private land and public facilities, forest residues will be cleaned up to a greater degree than in other areas, to maintain visual character.