United States
Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

August 11, 2008

Gold Crown
Fuels Reduction Project
Decision Notice &
Finding of No Significant Impact
Sandpoint Ranger District
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Bonner County, Idaho

View of Gold Hill from Lake Pend Oreille, looking southeast, near US 95 Long Bridge.
August 2007

Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Sandpoint Ranger District
Bonner County, Idaho

August 2008

Lead Agency:	USDA Forest Service
Responsible Official:	Ranotta McNair, Forest Supervisor Idaho Panhandle National Forests 3815 Schreiber Way Coeur d'Alene ID 83814 (208) 765-7223
For Further Information, Contact:	Jennifer Costich-Thompson, project leader Sandpoint Ranger District 1500 Highway 2, Suite 110 Sandpoint ID 83864 (208) 443-6811

Copies of this Decision Notice (DN) and Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI) are available upon request in either printed format or on compact disc (CD) from the Sandpoint Ranger District. This document is also available on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' website at www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/index.html.

Abstract: The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project is a fuel reduction and forest health restoration project in the area commonly known as Gold Hill, located between Bottle Bay and Sagle Slough, and approximately 2 miles southeast of the City of Sandpoint.

Decision Summary

This Decision Notice documents my choice for a course of action for the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project Project. I have decided to select and approve implementation of Alternative B as described in the project Environmental Assessment (EA) completed in April 2008.

Alternative B includes a combination of mechanical treatments, hand treatments and prescribed burning to reduce forest fuels and the expected intensity of wildland fire on approximately 573 acres of the Sandpoint Ranger District. Alternative B also includes road maintenance, road construction, and road reconditioning/reconstruction activities necessary to implement the forest health restoration and fuels reduction treatments.

Background

The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project is designed under the requirements of the HFRA and in response to the 10 year Comprehensive Strategy. The project focuses primarily on reducing hazardous fuels and forest health restoration activities. The entire project area is located in an area commonly referred to as Gold Hill. The project is flanked on the east by Bottle Bay and on the west by Sagle Slough and a high-traffic railway. The area has been incurring high rates of new development and population growth during the last twenty years, as well as being a popular recreation location for adjacent landowners and residents in the City of Sandpoint. Two tracts of National Forest System (NFS) lands are centered within the project area, which lies entirely within the county-defined wildland-urban interface (WUI).

The project area is located on NFS lands in the Sandpoint Ranger District, in the vicinity of Gold Hill, approximately 2.5 air miles southeast of Sandpoint, Idaho, within sections 5-6 of Township 56 North, Range 1 West of the Boise Meridian; sections 30-32 of Township 57 North, Range 1 West of the Boise Meridian; and section 25 of Township 57 North, Range 2 West of the Boise Meridian, in Bonner County, Idaho. The general area is locally known as the Gold Hill or Gold Mountain area, and is bisected by Forest Road 2642.

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

The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project area and treatment units are surrounded by and share common boundaries with private property and associated infrastructures such as

telephone and other service lines and municipal watershed infrastructure (copy of Bonner County CWPP and WUI map kept at Sandpoint Ranger District office).

The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project is designed to accomplish fuels reduction and forest health restoration treatments on NFS lands located between Bottle Bay and Sagle Slough, in the area commonly referred to as Gold Hill. The objectives of the project are to:

- Reduce hazardous fuels and lessen the risk of a landscape fire event on NFS lands in the area;
- Improve the health and resilience of the residual NFS forest stands; and
- Enhance the effectiveness of future fire suppression tactics in the area.

The project will remove surface, ladder and crown fuels through a combination of mechanical, hand, and prescribed fire treatments. This will decrease the overall expected fire intensities and likelihood for extreme fire behavior (torching, spotting, crown fire) and create a more predictable fire environment where direct attack suppression, in the case of a wildfire, would be a feasible and safe option for controlling a fire near the at-risk community.

The overall goal of reducing forest fuels is to increase firefighter and public safety. Treatments as designed would remove hazardous forest fuels in all forest structure layers and would encourage the utilization of forest products, including biomass.

The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project was designed through a collaborative process starting on October 18, 2007. Efforts to seek public involvement included sending press releases to the local paper (The Bonner County Daily Bee), posting announcements at the Gold Hill trailheads, incorporating live interviews with local radio stations, participating in BonFIRE meetings during the summer and fall of 2007, and mailing informational letters and comment forms to adjacent landowners and other interested parties. A public meeting was held on December 08, 2007, and a separate meeting was requested by a member of a conservation group. The culmination of the collaborative process was the formal scoping which began on December 19, 2007, when 114 letters were mailed to individuals, organizations and agencies to gather comments for the proposed action. From those, 49 responses were received. Responses were reviewed and analyzed for content, and substantive comments were directed to those specialists whom were best able to respond, either in their documentation or project files. Issues identified in this process were used to analyze the expected effects from implementing the proposed action and no action alternatives, and have been disclosed in the Project EA that was completed and issued in April 23, 2008. The EA was made available to the public for a 30 day review and objection process pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218 Subpart A.

On May 22, 2008 an objection to the Proposed Action was filed by The Lands Council (TLC). TLC expressed concerns related to how we are meeting our obligations under HFRA, NEPA, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), E.O. 13186, the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the IPNFs' Forest Plan, the Clean Water Act (CWA), as well as the Administrative Procedures Act (APA). Additionally, they sought explanation

regarding the rationale for the project and meeting the project's purpose and need; appropriate old growth management and using diameter limitations; explanation related to goshawk analysis; and clarification related to soil productivity analysis.

On June 23, 2008 Reviewing Officer Kathy McAllister (USDA Forest Service, Northern Region) concluded her review of the project objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.8 (7)(b) and issued her decision on the disposition of the objection.

The Reviewing Officer found that many of the issues raised by the objector, along with the suggested remedies, were indeed already completed and part of project file and associated analysis. Other remedies suggested by the objector were considered and explanations provided. The Reviewing Officer determined that the project is in compliance with laws and regulations and clearly demonstrates how the project is consistent with the HFRA, including use of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The objection process, issues raised in the objection, and remedies to the issues are discussed thoroughly later on in this document.

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

Decision

I have decided to select Alternative B as described in the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment issued in April 2008. Alternative B as summarized in the EA, proposed fuel reduction and/or forest health treatments on 573 acres, along with associated road maintenance and construction activities.

The fuels reduction work will be governed by a timber sale contract to remove standing live and dead ladder and crown fuels, including sawtimber and other biomass (small trees, tops and limbs) that are excess to other resource needs such as for maintaining soil productivity, large down woody material for wildlife and to reduce soil disturbance and compaction during treatment activities. Road maintenance, construction, as well as reconditioning and/or reconstruction are also necessary as part of the proposal to complete the work proposed. Details of the treatments and associated road work are described below.

Proposed Forest Health and Fuels Reduction Treatments

Table DN-1. Summary of treatments for the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project

Silvicultural Treatment	Acres	Slash/ Fuels Treatment	Acres
Thinning	128	Grapple Pile & Burn	86
		No slash treatment necessary	7
		Corridor Piles & Burn	35
Thinning with Group Selections	214	Grapple Pile & Burn	99
		Prescribed Broadcast Burn	110
		Yard Unmerchantable Material; Landing Pile & Burn	5
Regeneration Harvest	208	Prescribed Broadcast Burn	148
		Yard Unmerchantable Material; Landing Pile & Burn	39
		No slash treatment necessary	15
		Grapple Pile & Burn	6
Overstory Removal; Precommercially Thin saplings	6	Hand Pile & Burn (adjacent to road)	1
		No slash treatment necessary	5
Special- Hazardous Fuels Harvest on Rock Outcrops	11	Prescribed Broadcast Burn	11
Hand Thin	6	Hand Pile & Burn	6
Total Acres	**573**		**573**

Table DN-2. Logging methods under the proposed action.

Harvest/Logging Method	Acres
Combination- Tractor/Line Pull	50
Hand Work	6
Helicopter	65 (88*)
Mechanical (Tractor or Cut-To-Length Equipment)	203 (180*)
Skyline	238
Tractor swing to skyline	11
Total	**573**

Treatment Type 1– Thinning

Approximately 128 acres of forest stands will be treated using a commercial thinning harvest. Areas where this treatment will be used are generally dense forest stands where removal of some merchantable trees is necessary to attain fuel reduction and silvicultural objectives. These stands tend to be dense with overlapping tree canopies and contain substantial amounts of "ladder" or ground fuels. Thinning reduces competition within forest stands, increase residual tree growth and vigor, and trends stands towards species compositions and structures that are more ecologically resilient to potential disturbances.

These stands will be thinned by harvesting approximately one-half of the trees. The larger, healthier trees will be favored for retention. Thinning will create spaces between tree crowns, decreasing the probability that fire could travel from one crown to another. In addition, some of the smaller, "understory" trees will be removed from these areas to reduce the "ladder" fuel component and decrease the chance that a ground fire can travel from the forest floor up into the tree crowns.

The resulting slash from the thinning, as well as some fuels on the forest floor, will then be disposed of in the following manner. Some of the fuels will be mechanically-piled by an excavator type machine, with a "grapple" thumb (known as "grapple-piling"). Piles will be burned after allowing them to dry out. Some of the area harvested using a skyline system will require subsequent slash to be treated by grapple-piling the skyline corridors and burning the piles after they dry out. A limited area within this treatment type will not require slash treatment.

Treatment Type 2– Thinning with Group Selection Openings for Reforestation

Approximately 214 acres of forest stands will be treated using a thinning with group selection method. Stands designated for this treatment generally require some spacing between tree crowns to reduce fuels; however, within these stands there are also some small (2-7 acre) pockets of severe root disease-infected trees. Therefore, the severely infected trees and susceptible species in these pockets will be harvested entirely, resulting in openings large enough to plant preferred species, such as western larch, western white pine, or ponderosa pine (depending on the site.)

Fuels and slash will then be treated through the following methods: grapple-piling and burning; grapple-piling skyline corridors and pile burning, or prescribed, broadcast burning following harvest. (Only certain species and larger size classes of residual trees can tolerate a broadcast underburn.) A limited number of acres within this treatment type may require slash treatment through yarding of unmerchantable material (YUM) to landing, where it will be piled and burned.

Treatment Type 3 – Regeneration Harvest and Reforestation

Approximately 208 acres of forest stands would be treated using an irregular shelterwood method of stand regeneration. Regeneration harvests primarily need to occur where the stand density, homogeneity within the stand, or the degree of insect or disease infestations do not allow for a thinning prescription. Areas where this treatment will be used are generally very dense forest stands, which can not withstand a thinning treatment.

In many cases, the stand is either suffering from severe mortality (due to competition, insect attacks, or disease infection) or the majority of trees are so dense that they grew tall and "spindly" and would not be wind-firm following a thinning treatment.

The resulting treatment areas will look "clumpy" in nature, because groups of trees rather than solitary trees will be left scattered throughout treatment areas. Trees favored for retention in these treatment areas will include larger, healthy trees (which provide diversity and visual quality), as well as the early seral species, such as white pine, larch, and ponderosa pine.

Following, or in conjunction with, a regenerative harvest the areas will also be slashed to remove small undesirable and cull trees, the primary ladder fuel component. Then to reduce fuels and prepare the sites for planting, some of the treatment acres will be broadcast burn. Other areas within this treatment type cannot successfully be broadcast burned, so slash and non-merchantable material in these areas will be "yarded" to a landing, piled, and burned. A limited area within this treatment type will have slash "grapple-piled" and burned, and a few remaining acres will not require slash treatment.

After the regenerative harvest and slash/fuel treatments are completed, the sites will be planted with site-appropriate, preferred tree seedlings. Fire, disease, and insect-resistant species suited to the site (such as larch, ponderosa pine, and/or white pine) will be favored for planting, to help increase diversity and the long-term resilience of the resulting new forest stand.

Treatment Type 4 – Special Hazardous Fuels Harvest on Rock Outcrops
Approximately 11 acres of forest stands will be treated using this method. These are dry, rocky outcrops described earlier in the "Background Information" section. Some of these outcrops are located in areas that we can effectively treat and reinstitute a fire regime more similar to historic fire intervals. Large, relic trees will be left, but younger, encroaching trees will be harvested. Then these areas will be burned, rejuvenating grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The resulting openings, which will have a very natural appearance that blends into the landscape character, would be maintained in the future by prescribed broadcast burning every 10-30 years.

Treatment Type 5– Hand Thinning & Piling
Approximately 6 acres will be treated using this method, primarily adjacent to the northernmost portion of the Gold Hill Trail (trail no. 3). This treatment will focus on disposal of both ladder and ground fuel accumulations immediately adjacent to the trail, which represents a significant fire risk. In this area, the ground fuel accumulations are so heavy that should a fire start, it would almost certainly move up into the crowns of the overstory, becoming a more significant, stand-replacing fire. Hand treatment will consist of slashing ladder fuels, cutting up larger down fuels on the ground, piling the fuels and burning piles to reduce the hazard.

Treatment Type 6 – Overstory Removal/Precommercial Thinning
Approximately 6 acres will be treated using this approach. The area slated for this treatment is a stand that was regenerated about 13 years ago, using a shelterwood method. The overstory trees are scattered Douglas-fir, western hemlock, grand fir, and cedar which were left to "shelter" the larch and white pine seedlings planted in the understory. Now that the larch and white pine plantings are older (6-15 feet tall), they are beginning

to compete with the overstory trees for sunlight. Therefore, the overstory needs removed to allow the planted seedlings/saplings room to grow and thrive. If left untreated, the shade from the overstory would actually inhibit growth in the new stand, potentially resulting in death of those preferred species.

In this treatment type, there are so few overstory trees that will be removed, that slash treatment will be minimal. Harvest-related fuels will be handpiled adjacent to the 2642 road, to be burned during the appropriate season.

In addition, following the overstory removal, because other shade-tolerant seedlings (such as grand fir and hemlock) have also started to establish within the stand, both planted and natural regeneration will be precommercially thinned. An early thinning such as this improves the growth and vigor of the stand, reduces competition, decreases certain fungal diseases, and helps maintain both diversity and a component of the preferred disease and insect-resistant species.

Proposed Road Work

In order to determine the road-related activities necessary for this project and future management on NFS lands within the project area, a Roads Analysis Process (RAP) was completed, with input from foresters, silviculturists, road engineers, geotechnical specialists, soils scientists, hydrologists, and fisheries biologists, under the direction of a line officer. Road needs, for this project and future management, were determined, potential road locations were identified, such locations were analyzed, and feedback from specialists was incorporated into the road plan. Some initially considered road locations were dropped from the proposal due to resource concerns; other road segments were identified as potential opportunities for road maintenance improvements. None of the existing roads on NFS lands within the project area were determined to be unnecessary; therefore, no roads are proposed for decommissioning (other than the temporary roads proposed.)

FS Road 2642, also known as Sky Meadow Lane, currently provides the primary access into the proposed treatment areas, as well as crossing and accessing numerous private residences the first 2.0 miles. The road extends north, then northwest, off of the Sagle Road. In order to efficiently and successfully access many of the proposed treatment areas, some road construction and maintenance activities on NFS lands also need to be accomplished. Approximately 2.0 miles of proposed, new system road construction will be placed into “storage” following completion of project activities. “Storage” conditions would, in essence, close the new roads to motorized use, reduce maintenance needs, minimize potential hydrologic impacts, and maintain wildlife security in the area. About 0.3 miles of existing system road will need to be reconditioned/ reconstructed in order to implement project activities. These roads are currently closed with an earthen barrier, which will be re-established following project implementation. Approximately 0.20 miles of new, temporary roads will need to be constructed to access units 29 and 34. Following project implementation, the new, temporary roads will be completely obliterated, recontouring the road prisms back to the pre-construction slope conditions. Additionally, routine road maintenance will occur on about 8.5 miles of existing roads in the project area. Table DN-3 below, summarizes the proposed road-related activities.

Table DN-3. Gold Crown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Proposed Road Treatments.

Proposed Road Work	Miles
New Permanent System Road Construction- be gated during the project activities and placed in storage following project activities (includes new road segments labeled FS Road 2642 B, FS Road 2642 D, and an extension of FS Road 2642 E)	2.0 miles
Maintenance of Existing Road Access (FS Road 2642/ Sky Meadow Road, as well as existing FS road 2642 F)- requires maintenance, to include brushing, blading, drainage repairs, etc.	8.5 miles
Reconditioning/ Reconstruction of Existing Road – reconditioning of existing, system road which is currently barriered (includes existing FS Road 2642 A and the first 0.25 miles of FS Road 2642 E)	0.30 mile
New Temporary Access- temporary road prism construction necessary to access unit 34 (adjacent to Bottle Bay Road) and unit 29 (an extension off of FS Road 2642 F). Following project implementation, these roads will be obliterated.	0.20 mile

Timing of Proposed Activities

The proposed action will be accomplished using a timber sale contract. As with all timber sale projects, associated activities occur in a certain order, and accomplishment of such a timber sale may require 5-7 years from the time a contract is awarded. So that harvest and fuel reduction treatments can be performed, the first items to be accomplished with this project will include all required road maintenance, road construction, and road reconditioning activities. When road work is completed, harvesting can begin. Harvesting schedules for different units may depend on contractor needs or design features developed as part of the project. However as harvest is completed within each unit, slash clean-up and fuels reduction work will occur based upon the specific prescription developed for each unit.

One note of mention is that some helicopter harvest is planned for the project, including units 15, 25, 26, 27, and 28. Currently, sawlog timber markets are such that helicopter harvest is more difficult economically. As a result, the District is seeking other opportunities to make these units more feasible. In addition, another option may be to create two sales out of this project, trying to sell the helicopter sales when markets make it more economical. Therefore, the treatments within those units slated for helicopter harvesting/yarding may potentially occur at a later date.

**** This page intentionally left blank****

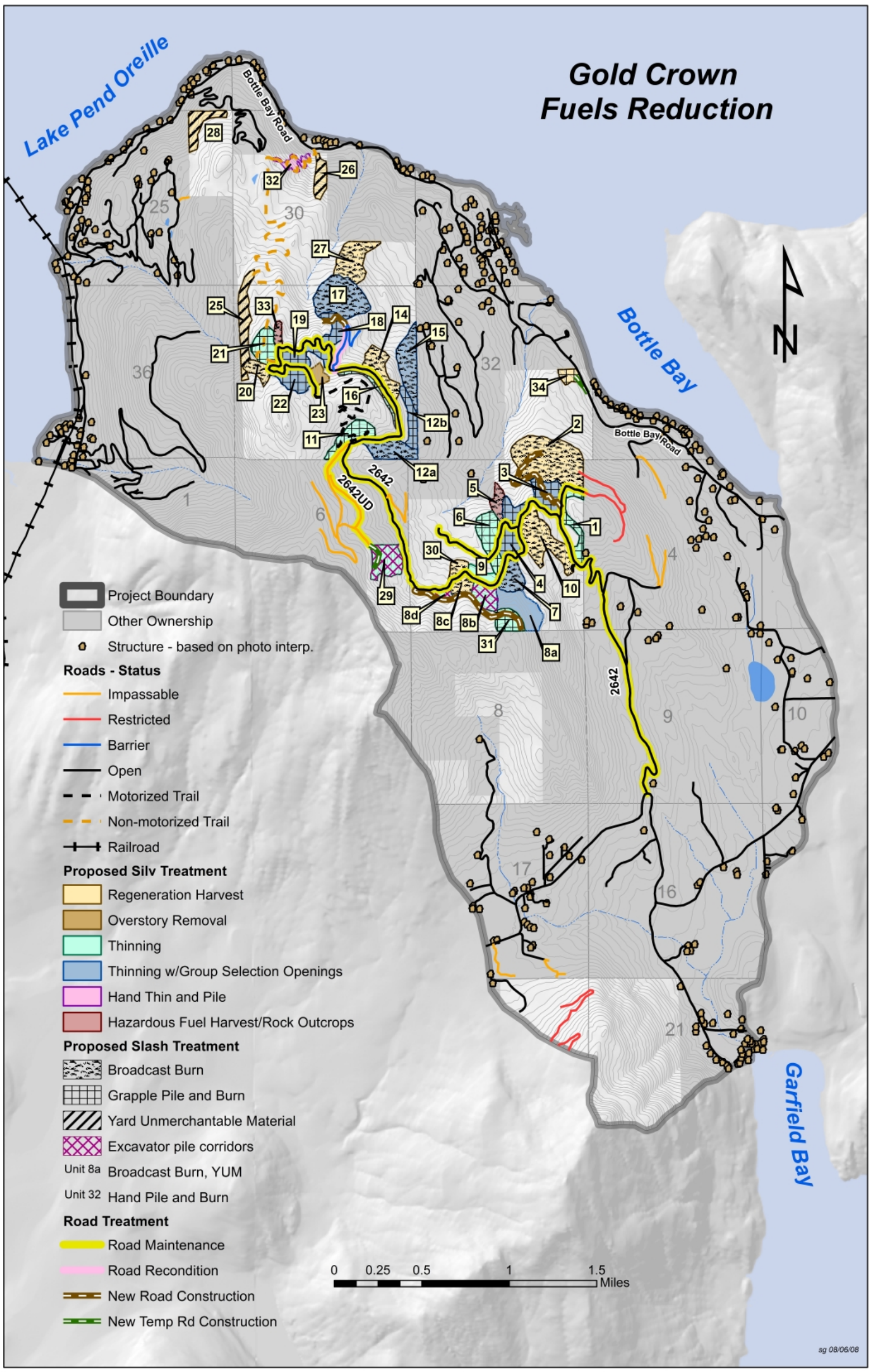

Figure DN-1. Map of Proposed Action and Project Area- Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project

**** This page intentionally left blank****

Design Criteria and Mitigations

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

Features Designed to Protect Fisheries

1. Prohibit timber harvest within any RHCA, regardless of fish-bearing potential. Verify proper Riparian Habitat Conservation Area designations have been set. Appropriate RHCA categories shall be verified by a qualified field biologist or hydrologist during unit layout and if needed shall be adjusted conservatively to provided adequate resource protection. The minimum RHCA widths are 300 ft for fish-bearing streams, 150 ft for perennial non-fish bearing streams, and 60 ft (one-half the site potential tree height) for seasonal streams for this project.

2. For existing and planned roads, meet Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs) and avoid adverse impacts to inland native fish by minimizing roads and landings in RHCAs, implement road management that addresses regulation of traffic during wet periods, avoid sediment delivery to streams from the road surface, and avoid disruption of natural hydrologic flow paths (INFS Road Standards - USDA Forest Service 1995).

3. Locate fuel storage areas outside of RHCAs and provide facilities to contain the largest possible spill. Leaks of motor oil and hydraulic fluids from heavy equipment should be monitored and controlled to prevent water contamination. (BMP 11.07, 11.01, 15.11)

4. When conducting surface blading and surface replacement utilize natural moisture or delivered water in blading operations to ensure rapid consolidation and compaction of the disturbed surface material. (BMP 15.18)

5. When conducting surface blading and surface replacement remove and re-incorporate material from the outside edges of the roadway that may result in the formation of a berm or other barrier to proper dispersal of water. (BMP 15.18)

6. DO NOT side cast waste fill material within RHCAs, waste material must be end hauled to an appropriate disposal location. Outside of RHCAs, side casting of minor amounts of material, such as oversize rock, may occur if no other practical solution exists. In no instance should side cast material be placed in a manner that results in oversteepened fill slopes, additional road width or impede proper drainage. (BMP 15.18)

7. On site disposal of material may be appropriate if the material can be incorporated into the road surface or drainage structure. Do not dispose of material within RHCA, floodplain or other wetlands. (BMP 13.03, 15.18)

8. Cleaning of ditch relief culverts on cross drain structures such as open top culvert will not be done with flushing water within the RHCAs. Flushing of these structures outside of

the RHCA can only be done if there is no potential for sediment delivery to any defined stream channel. (BMP 15.21)

9. If culvert cleaning is conducted with heavy machinery, this machinery shall be used only from the established road prisms. (BMP 14.17)

10. Dispose of materials suspected to contain harmful contaminates such as timber preservatives, red lead, fuel oil, solvents etc. appropriately as required by applicable regulations. (BMP 11.07, 11.11, 15.11)

11. Maintain a packed snow floor and/or utilize shoes on blades, dozers and other snow removal equipment to minimize amount of road surface material placed in snow berms. (BMP 15.24)

12. Do not side cast into or adjacent to streams snow containing significant amounts of dirt, debris or other materials removed from the roadway. This snow may need to be hauled to an appropriate disposal location. (BMP 15.24)

13. Sidecasting of snow should be avoided in areas adjacent to streams where there is potential to cause snow or ice damming. (BMP 15.24)

14. Snow berms left on the shoulder of the road will be removed and/or drainage holes will be opened and maintained. Drainage holes will be spaced as required to obtain satisfactory surface drainage without discharge on erodible fills. (BMP 15.24)

15. Snow Removal will adhere to the Standard Forest Service Timber Sale Contract Provisions (C5.316).

16. Road maintenance activities in live water and which generate the potential for instream sedimentation are prohibited from April 1 to July 15th on sites upstream of trout populations and/or spawning areas, namely Gold Gulch and tributaries.

17. When a stream parallels within five feet of a road the brush cutter will be turned vertically to cut only the vegetation growing towards the road and not the vegetation providing canopy to the stream. (BMP 15.12, 15.19)

18. Any soil disturbance adjacent to stream channels shall receive evenly distributed weed free mulch coverage with brush and trees to reduce sheet erosion. Mulch generated during the clearing phase of the rehabilitation work shall be used to the maximum extent practicable. (BMP 15.12, 15.19)

19. Utilize good surface preparation and multiple pass application of chloride products to minimize runoff and promote infiltration of the product. Dust abatement chemicals should be applied shortly after blading (within 1 week). The road should have good moisture content, in order to get the calcium chloride to adhere well to the fines. The purpose of multiple pass application is to avoid spraying off the road, particularly when crossing streams. Chemicals should be applied in a manner that minimizes calcium chloride from running off the road. (BMP 15.22)

20. Drafting rates will be such that no noticeable decrease in wetted width of the stream will occur. Should it be necessary to create a temporary barrier or blockage to the stream (to create a pool deep enough to draft from), during drafting an agency fish biologist will evaluate the site and may identify further mitigation.

21. If drafting water from fish-bearing streams, prevent injury to small fish during drafting by using either 3/32-inch or smaller mesh intake screens or double rolled 1/8-inch hardware cloth crimped at both ends when drafting water for dust abatement operations.

22. Adhere to BMP 15.23 Traffic Control During Wet Periods by repairing any failing drainage features on 2642 main road and 2642C road. At the time of implementation there may be additional drainage features along the road network that need to be repaired and incorporated into the Road Package.

Fire, Fuels and Air Quality Design Features

1. **Prescribed burning treatments** will be conducted according to established standards in FSM 5142 – Prescribed Fire Management. A site-specific burn plan will be prepared for each area to be burned. Burning will only occur when weather, fuel conditions, and available resources are at the levels specified in the prescribed burn plan. Site conditions may dictate the use of other fuel treatment methods prior to implementation of the burn in order to prepare for this prescribed fire.
2. Because post-harvest fuel conditions cannot be completely predicted, assessments will need to be made by a fire/fuels specialist and a silviculturist after completion of harvest activities. A determination will then be made as to whether the burn can be implemented safely and effectively without further fuels treatment, or if some modification of the fuels is required to meet the objectives of the silvicultural prescription.
3. **Slash and Pile Burning** – Landing slash and excavator piles will be burned in late fall after heavy rains and during cooler temperatures when the risk of escape into adjoining stands and damage to residual timber is lessened.
4. **Fuel Breaks** – If natural fuel breaks are not present, fire lines and fuel breaks will be constructed around the perimeters of all burn units. Where possible, fire lines and fuel breaks will be constructed on ridges, benches, and the toe of the slopes, using the advantage of the terrain to best control the fire.
5. **Use of Water and Engines** – Fire hose will be installed along critical sections of fuel breaks using water supplied from fire engines when access is available. An emergency spill clean up kit would be on site in the unlikely event of a spill outside the containment system.

Features Designed to Protect Air Quality

1. **Smoke Management** – The Idaho Panhandle Forests is a party to the North Idaho Smoke management Memorandum of Agreement, which established procedures regulating the amount of smoke produced from prescribed fire. The North Idaho group currently uses the services and procedures of the Montana/Idaho State Air shed Group. The procedures

used by the Air Shed Group are considered to be the "best available control technology" (BACT) by the Montana Air Quality Bureau for major open burning in Montana.

A Missoula-based monitoring unit is responsible for coordinating prescribed burning in North Idaho during the months of March through November, they work in collaboration with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, assisting with any recommendations. During the winter months (December through February) the Idaho Panhandle Forests voluntarily collaborate with the Air shed group. This unit monitors meteorological data, air quality data, and planned prescribed burning and decides daily on whether or not to issue recommendations on burning for the following day.

Each year, a list of all prescribed burning (understory and pile burning) planned for the burning season on the Sandpoint Ranger District is input into a data base administered by monitoring unit before March 1st. Before 11:00 a.m. proposed burns for the next day are input into the database. By 3:00 p.m., the same day the monitoring unit posts any recommendations on a website concerning the next day's burns.

2. Historically, prescribed burning on the Sandpoint Ranger District occurs in the spring and fall seasons over a total time span of 45 to 60 days during each season. All burning complies with federal, state, and local regulations.
3. Prescribed burning during spring or fall will generate less smoke than a much hotter stand replacing summertime wildfire. (National Wildfire Coordination Group. December 2001. Smoke Management Guide for Prescribed and Wildland Fire. p. 143-150)

Features Related to Timing of Activities

Timing of Road Decommissioning or Storage – Unless circumstances change during implementation that will extend the duration of time a road is needed, roads would be put into storage within the following timeframes:

1. Temporary roads or road segments proposed for storage that are not needed for post-cutting activities (e.g. fuel treatment) will be put into storage the same season following cutting activities or no later than the following season.
2. Other road segments proposed for storage that are needed for post-cutting activities, such as prescribed burning, will be put into storage within five years of cutting activities or after fuels projects are completed.

Features Related to Vegetation Restoration

Post-cutting Treatments – In regeneration units, fuels treatment will occur within five years following timber cutting or the start of rehabilitation when possible. Site preparation and/or fuels treatment may include a combination of prescribed burning, underburning, grapple piling and hand piling, depending on post-cutting conditions.

Features Designed to Prevent Noxious Weed Introduction and Spread

1. Noxious weed treatment will be conducted according to guidelines and priorities established in the Sandpoint Noxious Weed Control Project FEIS (USDA 1998b).

Methods of control may include biological, chemical, mechanical and cultural. Follow-up treatments and monitoring would be conducted as needed.

2. Gravel or borrow pits to be used during road construction or reconstruction will be free of new weed invader species (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist). A list of weed species considered to be potential new invaders is included in the project file.

3. Any priority weed species (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist) identified during road maintenance will be reported to the District Weed Specialist. A list of priority weed species is included in the project file.

4. Weed treatment of all haul routes, service landings and helicopter landings on National Forest lands will occur prior to ground disturbing activities where feasible. If the timing of ground disturbing activities will not allow weed treatment to occur when it would be most effective, it will occur in the next treatment season following the disturbance.

5. All timber sale contracts will require cleaning of off-road equipment prior to entry onto National Forest lands. If operations occur in areas infested with new invaders (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist), all equipment will be cleaned prior to leaving the site.

6. All newly constructed roads, skid trails, landings, fuel breaks or other areas of disturbance (including maintenance on existing roads) will be seeded with a weed-free native and desired non-native seed mix and fertilized as necessary. Areas that are underburned will be evaluated after the burn and seeded and fertilized as necessary.

7. All straw or hay used for mulching or watershed restoration activities will be certified weed-free.

8. Road segments identified for weed treatment and proposed for decommissioning will be treated prior to decommissioning.

Features Designed to Protect Rare Plants

A qualified botanist would assist with project layout as necessary to ensure protection of documented rare plant populations and microsites of highly suitable habitat. Any changes to the selected alternative that may occur during layout will be reviewed, and rare plant surveys conducted as necessary prior to project implementation. Newly documented occurrences will be evaluated, with specific protection measures implemented to protect population viability. Such measures can include the following;

1. Dropping units from harvest activity;
2. Modifying unit boundaries to provide adequate buffers around documented occurrences, as determined by the project botanist and based on topography, extent of contiguous suitable habitat for documented occurrences and the type of treatment proposed;
3. Modifying harvest methods, fuels treatment or logging systems to protect TES plants and their habitat;

4. Implementing, if necessary, Timber Sale Contract provisions B6.24, Protection Measures Needed for Plants, Animals, Cultural Resources, and Cave Resources; C6.24#- Site Specific Special Protection Measures; and B8.33, Contract Suspension and Modification.

Features Designed to Protect Soil and Site Productivity

1. Use existing skid and forwarder trails where practical. Carefully select trails for the least environmental degradation and optimal efficiency.

2. Limit ground-based equipment to 40% slopes or less. Short pitches within these harvest units that are above 40% slope shall be line-pulled and/or trees shall be directionally-felled.

3. Use skyline harvesting systems on steep slopes (greater than 40%). Maximize distance between harvest corridors.

4. Conventional tractor/ skid trails shall be no closer than 75 feet apart in the summer on dry soils. In the winter on snow or frozen ground, skid trails shall be spaced no closer than 50 feet apart.

5. Harvester/ forwarder trails shall be spaced no closer than 50 feet apart, summer or winter.

6. Strive to maintain narrow trails.

7. Grapple-piling shall be accomplished from skid trails, forwarder routes or slashed-over harvester routes (slash mats).

8. Leave as much coarse woody debris (slash) as is feasible under fuel hazard guidelines. Organic matter helps ameliorate past and present soil impacts. Generally we recommend leaving 7 to 14 tons per acre on dry forest types and 16-33 tons per acre of coarse woody debris on moist forest types. Brown *et al*. (2003) recommends that if woody debris are greater than 6" in diameter, forest managers should leave amounts of woody debris on the high end of these ranges. If the size of the debris is small (less than 6"), strive for the lower end of the suggested range.

9. All equipment shall stay on designated trails, with the exception of feller-bunchers and harvesters.

10. Where feasible, timber harvesters shall place slash in front of the harvest equipment and work on a slash mat.

11. For all ground-based logging, work only when soil is dry, frozen, or snow-packed. Some simplified guidelines for avoiding adverse conditions include:

    - Stop work when you detect trenching or mud. If you can form a fairly strong clod with the soil in the topmost 6 inches, then the site is too moist for work.
    - Winter harvest on Snow or Frozen Soil:

0 inches of frozen soil	Need 10 inches of machine-packed snow.
2 inches of frozen soil	Need 6 inches of machine-packed snow.
4 inches of frozen soil	No snow cover necessary.

12. For units 11 and 22, winter harvest on snow or frozen soil is ***required***. See guidelines listed above (in Soils Mitigation #11).
13. If prescribed burning is proposed, wait an interval (at least 6 months) between the thinning and the underburn. This will conserve site nutrient capital; allow fine fuels to decompose and larger fuels to become firmly in contact with the soil, thus lessening their chance of complete combustion.
14. Broadcast burn when the topmost mineral horizon has moisture content of 25% or greater.
15. Monitor three tractor units (including units 11 and 22) that were harvested using either cut to length or other ground-based harvesting equipment within five years post harvest to evaluate compliance to R1 regional soil guidelines.

Features Designed to Protect Wildlife

Wildlife Tree Retention

Design features for the project were developed to ensure the retention and selection of snags at a level and distribution that have been shown to support viable populations of snag associated species.

1. Snags and live tree replacements will be retained where opportunities exist in treatment units at levels recommended by scientific literature (Bull *et al*. 1997). Retention objectives are consistent with published data that suggests that populations of cavity nesters were viable in stands of ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forests that contained about four snags per acre (Bull *et al.* 1997). While these recommendations attempt to emulate historically available snag densities under pre-settlement conditions, it is recognized that current conditions (e.g., long-term fire suppression that has interrupted the persistence of long-lived seral tree species and the subsequent recruitment of larger-diameter snags) may not make it possible to meet these recommendations.

2. To following minimum amounts of snags and live tree replacements are to be retained within applicable cutting areas:

- **Dry forest habitats:** 4 snags and 8 live tree replacements per acre from the largest trees

- **Moist forest habitats:** 6 snags and 12 live tree replacements per acre from the largest trees

3. Selection of snags will emphasize practices that assure a diversity of snag structural classes and the highest probability of long-term retention (Bull *et al*. 1997). The high hazard snags and snags in the advanced stages of decay will not be used to meet retention objectives (Intermountain Forest and Industry Association *et al*. 1995). Retention practices will focus on ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir and western red cedar, especially veteran or relic ponderosa pine and western larch trees. Trees killed by root disease will be avoided, where possible, to meet retention objectives because of their rapid deterioration and fall-down rate.

4. While retention objectives are accounted for on a treatment-level scale, some snags will be represented on every ten acres of treatment, in clusters or clumps where feasible, to promote good distribution of snags. Large diameter snags not designated for removal (greater than 15 inches dbh) that are felled for safety reasons will remain on site to provide for large woody debris recruitment and long-term site productivity.

5. Criteria for silvicultural prescriptions will include retention of some larger diameter defective or broken-top trees as live trees for future recruitment. Tree designation guidelines for live tree replacements will favor retention of large diameter trees, particularly hollow and broomed trees except when they pose a safety concern. Western larch, ponderosa pine, and western red cedar greater than 20 inches dbh would be designated as first choices for live tree replacements.

6. Slash will be pulled back from veteran or relic ponderosa pine and western larch live trees and snags where needed to protect them from the adverse effects of prescribed burning. Grapple piling will be considered to treat fuels on moderate slopes where residual snags would be at risk from broadcast burning.

Retention of Broadleaf Deciduous Trees

1. To maintain forest species diversity and wildlife habitat, aspen and birch trees will not be harvested. If these species need to be cut for safety reasons, they will remain on site for coarse woody debris and long-term site productivity. Selected merchantable conifers in and around aspen patches will be removed to reduce competition for water, nutrients and sunlight.

Grapple Piling

1. In areas where grapple piling is prescribed for fuels reduction, leave one to three slash piles per acre unburned to provide habitat for small forest mammals (snowshoe hare) and forest land birds, except in areas designated as fuelbreaks.

Dry Forest Ecosystems

Because there are fewer ponderosa pine trees in the northern Rocky Mountains than were here historically, it is necessary to retain large Douglas-fir trees in addition to the large ponderosa pine trees, to achieve suitable habitat conditions for species associated with drier habitats (e.g., flammulated owls, white-breasted nuthatch, Cassin's finch). For stands associated with the dry forest ecosystem, harvest prescriptions will be designed to maintain or promote the persistence of a mature ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir community by:

1. Maintaining or creating a relatively open landscape of ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir that is structurally complex with non-uniform spacing of trees and scattered patches of denser vegetation (greater than ¼ acre)
2. Promoting the persistence of large snag habitat
3. Retaining an overstory canopy closure of 35 to 65 percent
4. Fashioning a landscape to accommodate a relatively frequent fire regime

Goshawk Protection

1. Goshawk nest searches will be conducted during project layout and implementation. A no activity area of 40-acres will be placed around any newly discovered goshawk nest or any nest that has been active in the past five years. If the nest tree is not centered within the 40-acre no activity area, an additional no activity distance of at least 745 feet (the radius of a 40-acre circle) may be implemented between the nest tree and harvest units to reduce impacts to habitat around the nest site from project activities. The District Wildlife Biologist will determine if this additional no activity distance will be implemented based on factors such as topography, the location of the nest tree within the 40-acre nest area and the distance of the nest tree from private ownership and/or existing roads.

2. Project activities will be suspended within half a mile of active nest areas from March 15 to August 15 to promote nesting success and provide forage opportunities for adults and fledgling goshawks during the fledgling dependency period. Activity restrictions will be removed after June 30 if the District Wildlife Biologist determines the nest site is inactive or unsuccessful.

Road Design, Skid Trails and Cable Corridors

1. To maintain habitat for snag-dependent species and species dependent on large diameter trees, the location of proposed new roads, skid trails and cable corridors will ensure, wherever practical, that veteran and relic fire survivor trees will not be removed.

Protection of Seeps, Bogs, Wallows and Springs

1. All known or discovered seeps, bogs, elk wallows and springs less than one acre in size will be protected with a "no activity" buffer approximately 100 feet.

Vegetation Screens

1. Intermittent vegetation buffers will be left along the open roads in Units 4, 7, 8c, 10, 12a, 18, 19 and 22 where feasible to provide security screening for wildlife and minimize unauthorized access into these stands. Buffers will vary in sizes and shape, depending on the type of cover and topography.

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Wildlife Species Management

1. If any threatened, endangered, or sensitive species were located during project layout or implementation, management activities will be altered, if necessary, so that proper protection measures can be taken. Timber sale contract provision, Protection of Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species, will be included in any timber sale contract.

Road and Skid Trail Access

To prevent establishment of motorized public use patterns on: temporary roads; new permanent roads to be placed into storage after project activities; and existing, undrivable (barriered) roads that are opened for project activities:

1. When roads are first constructed or reopened prior to use for the project, they will be closed to public motorized use with a gate or other effective closure device.

2. Once project activities start, the roads will remain closed to motorized public use with a gate. Gates will be closed at the end of each day's use, during periods of inactivity, on weekends and on holidays.

3. After completion of project activities, the roads will remain closed to public motorized use with a gate or other effective closure device until the road is decommissioned or put into storage.

4. Decommissioning or storage activities will occur as soon as possible after completion of project activities including planting and fuels treatment.

5. All existing and created skid trails that might provide motorized access from open roads will be closed with large mounds made up of a combination of slash and dirt to help reduce the attraction to use of these trails.

Features Designed to Protect Visual Resources

The following design features will be utilized during project implementation to minimize impacts to visual resources:

1. If hazardous fuel treatment units can be viewed from travel corridors and require pruning, trees shall be pruned at uneven heights. A variety of tree heights, sizes, and species shall be maintained where feasible.

2. Unit boundary and designated tree markings shall not be permanently visible from travel corridors or developed recreational trails.

3. Following sale activities, residual unit boundary signs, marking, and flagging shall be removed adjacent to travel corridors, private land boundaries and public facilities. Any marking paint visible from the travel corridors or designated trails shall be covered over with paint blending in with the bark of the tree.

4. Unit shapes and sizes shall be blended into past treatment areas, as well as natural vegetation and geologic features. In addition, leave trees shall be spaced and clumped irregularly to provide visual variety.

5. As many overstory trees as possible shall be left on each side of gates or closure devices to provide screening and improve access security.

6. Where feasible, edges of units shall be feathered, by retaining more residual trees, so the transition from treated to untreated stands is not abrupt.

7. Power lines shall be screened when feasible.

8. Stump heights in units that can be seen from travel corridors, trails, private land boundaries, and public facilities shall be no higher than 6 inches.

9. Forest residues shall be cleaned up 50 – 100 feet from travel corridors, trails, private land boundaries, and public facilities to maintain visual character.

Features Designed to Protect Recreation Resources

The following design features will be utilized during project implementation to minimize negative impacts to recreational users as well as developed recreation features.

Gold Hill ATV Trail #2 and the Trailhead on Road 2642

1. No ground-based equipment (either harvesting or grapple-piling) shall operate within 75 feet on each side of the trail centerline to prevent ground disturbance and the appearance of other trails, except for crossings approved by the Sale Administrator.

2. Handwork and/or line-pulling will be allowed within the 75-foot buffer where equipment cannot reach the trees.

3. If crossing the trail is necessary with equipment, locations will be designated on the ground and approved by the Sale Administrator and crossings will be limited in number to help reduce resource damage to the trail. Crossing will be rehabilitated immediately adjacent to the trail (scattered with slash, berms eliminated), and trail tread will be reconstructed to its original constructed width of 48” wide and no wider. All logging-created slash will be removed from the trail.

4. Trees shall be directionally-felled away from the trail to minimize negative effects to the trail tread.

5. Public safety will be a critical element of this project. The trail would be closed to the public during active logging operations adjacent to or affecting the trail. Due to the high use and popularity of this trail the length of the closure shall be kept to a minimum and

the trail should be opened once logging operations have finished and the trail has been restored. A Forest Closure Order is needed to close or restrict use on the trail.

6. Unit 11 includes sections of Trail #2. To avoid conflicts with trail users, no logging operations shall occur during the peak summer season (Fourth-of-July through Labor Day) within unit 11, unless otherwise agreed to by the Forest Service Representative (FSR).

7. Stumps within the 75-foot buffer adjacent to the trail will be flush cut no higher than 6" from the ground.

Gold Hill Trail #3 and the Trailhead on Road 2642

1. No ground based equipment (either harvesting or grapple-piling) shall operate within 75 feet on each side of the trail centerline to prevent ground disturbance and the appearance of other trails, except for crossings approved by the Sale Administrator.

2. Handwork and/or line-pulling will be allowed within the 75-foot buffer where equipment cannot reach the trees.

3. If crossing the trail is necessary with equipment, locations will be designated on the ground and approved by the Sale Administrator and crossings will be limited in number to help reduce resource damage to the trail. Crossing will be rehabilitated immediately adjacent to the trail (scattered with slash, berms eliminated), and trail tread will be reconstructed to its original constructed width of 30", no wider. All logging-created slash will be removed from the trail.

4. Trees shall be directionally-felled away from the trail to minimize negative effects to the trail tread.

5. Public safety will be a critical element of this project. The trail will be closed to the public during active logging operations adjacent to or affecting the trail. Due to the high use and popularity of this trail the length of the closure shall be kept to a minimum and the trail shall be opened once logging operations have finished and the trail has been restored. A Forest Closure Order is needed to close or restrict use on the trail. This closure will need to be well advertised and posted at the trailheads.

6. Units 21, 25, 28 and 32 are located adjacent to or could affect sections of Trail #3. To avoid conflicts with trail users, no logging operations shall occur during the peak summer season (Fourth-of-July through Labor Day) within units 21, 25, 28 and 32, unless otherwise agreed to by the FSR.

7. Stumps within the 75-foot buffer adjacent to the trail will be flush cut no higher than 6" from the ground.

General Project Area

1. Closure/warning signs will be posted both at the 2642 Road Entrance, as well as at trailheads for Trails #2 and #3, to deter public use during active logging/hauling operations.

Features Designed to Protect Heritage Resources

1. If the presence of a cultural resource site is identified prior to implementation of operational activities, mitigation measures could include:
    - dropping the proposed activity unit;
    - modifying the proposed activity, and/or;
    - implementing buffers around the point of concern.

Features Designed to Protect Forest Vegetation Resources

1. **Retention of Large Old Trees in Stands Not Designated as Old Growth** – Within some units there are portions of stands (<25 acres) with individual and/or groups of large old trees that are not defined as old growth. Silvicultural prescriptions and marking guidelines will specify that these trees be retained.
2. **Retention of Untreated Vegetation in Treatment Areas** - Pockets, stringers, and islands of untreated vegetation will be left untreated in stands where harvest is proposed. These areas will contribute to both structural and compositional diversity, break-up fuel and vegetation mosaic continuity, and blend openings into the surrounding landscape making harvest units appear more natural. Additionally, by leaving untreated areas within and between more open (less vegetated) areas, none of the openings would exceed 40 acres.
3. **Monitoring for Regeneration Success** - All regeneration cutting units will be monitored for regeneration success the first, third (and fifth year if necessary) following planting; as required under NFMA.
4. **No Whole-Tree Yarding -** Whole tree yarding will not be utilized as a slash amelioration method, because it is necessary to recycle nutrients within treatment areas.

General Project Design Features

1. Coordination with the State of Idaho and Bonner County will occur for access points and road mitigation work needed on either state or county roads.
2. All temporary roads constructed in conjunction with the project will be fully obliterated following use in accordance with the Area Road Management Plans and the IPNF Forest Plan.
3. Existing roads, which are currently restricted and utilized for this project, will be returned to their pre-project road status.
4. In order to reduce safety concerns (for both the timber sale purchaser and public), as well as to reduce conflicts in the area with recreational users, all harvest and yarding activities shall occur between Labor Day and Memorial Day.

Rationale for the Decision

Now that I have identified my decision and described the activities that will occur, I will explain my rationale for selecting Alternative B. I based my decision on how effective Alternative B would be compared to the "No-Action" alternative (Alternative A, for baseline comparison) in meeting the purpose and need for this project.

The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project is designed under the requirements of HFRA, and for the purpose of responding to the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy (December 2006), focuses primarily on reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface (WUI). The project concurrently addresses identified hazards and vulnerabilities described in the Bonner County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP). The County Plan was developed in 2004 through a collaborative process and several goals were identified to begin fire risk mitigation within the wildland/urban interface. These goals include fuels modification treatments within two miles of homes and associated infrastructure, including roads, in order to protect humans, their habitations and evacuation routes. The Gold Crown project area is surrounded by, and shares common boundaries with, private residences and associated infrastructures, and the CWPP also identified the area as a high priority for fuels reduction treatment (see a copy of Bonner County CWPP and WUI map kept at Sandpoint district office).

In the wildland urban interface – where people live, work and recreate – letting a wildfire burn is not an option. High-intensity fire is often associated with rapid fire spread and flame lengths beyond the capabilities of any resource (firefighters, dozers or excavators, or even aerial resources) to bring under control using direct attack suppression tactics. Such fires exhibit a high resistance to being controlled and are especially undesirable because they jeopardize public and firefighter safety. Forest composition and structure that exacerbates high-intensity fire behavior includes heavy continuous surface and ladder fuels, such as brush and small trees under a dense overstory. Based upon field data and information gathered by foresters and fuel specialists on the interdisciplinary team (IDT), much of the project area's existing condition is consistent with this type of forest structure and composition, making the area susceptible to intense wildfire behavior as described (the Fuels Hazard Rating map is located in the project file). Due to the IDT findings, the IDT determined a need to change the current fuel composition and improve the overall forest stand health in the area.

Given the fuels condition and location of the Gold Crown project area so close to developed and high-use interface areas, my main concern was focused on implementing fuels reduction treatments that would be effective at reducing the potential intensity of future fires. Based on the analysis provided in the EA (Chapter 3), implementation of Alternative B will address these needs as follows:

- Reducing wildland fuels on NFS lands and lessen the risk of a landscape fire event in the area between Bottle Bay and Sagle Slough;
- Improving the health and resilience of the residual forest stands; and
- Enhancing the effectiveness of future fire suppression tactics in the area.

Fires typically ignite in the surface fuels and build initial intensity there before they can move into tree crowns. A project that is designed to treat crown fuels only, without addressing surface and ladder fuels will be unsuccessful – the likelihood for crown fires may decrease, but the intensity of surface fire will not. Ladder fuels, which serve as a conduit for surface fires to transition to crown fires, will largely be removed within treatment areas utilizing a thinning from below treatment. Because the treatments outlined will result in reduced quantities of ladder fuels, decreased surface fuels and those individuals and species contributing to the surface fuel component, and a more open canopy within treatment areas, crown fire initiation within the treatment areas will be very difficult.

On pages 55-58, the EA summarized the determinations on the effectiveness of treatments to reduce fuels and the effect on fire behavior in the project area as follows:

The proposed treatments (described above) will change the quantity and continuity of fuels. Within the treated areas, fire behavior modeling indicates that fireline intensity and flame length will be reduced. Essentially, treatments would transition areas that would currently burn as Fuel Model 10 to burning as more like Fuel Model 8. Thinning from below will reduce stand density. Removal of dead and dying trees will reduce actual and potential surface fuels available to burn under high-intensity fires.

Table DN-4. Existing potential fire behavior.

Fuel Model	Surface Fire Flame Length (feet)	Rate of Spread*	Fireline Intensity Surface**
8	5.5	1.9	23
10	21	8.3	563

* Chains per hour, (66 feet equals a chain).
**BTUs/ft/sec. See Table 8 for further clarification.

The table DN-4 (above) displays results from fire behavior modeling for the current condition (or Alternative A – No Action). Surface flame lengths under the current condition are 5 feet – which already exceeds the upper limit for direct attack by ground resources. Furthermore, the current canopy base heights are low enough that the likelihood is high for a surface fire to move into the tree crowns and become a higher intensity crown fire.

Decreased surface flame lengths resulting from project activities (to less than 2 feet) will allow firefighters to more safely direct attack a wildfire in order to bring it under control (as fire suppression is a required action in this area). Safe and successful suppression tactics will improve the safety of humans, their homes, associated access roads, and utility lines. Lower surface flame lengths, less ladder fuels, and increased canopy base heights to a point beyond the reach of surface flame lengths will reduce the probability of torching to near zero for several years into the future (EA, Chapter 3). If an individual tree were to torch during a wildfire, treatments will space the tree crowns to a point where fire spread from one tree to the next would be virtually impossible except under the rarest conditions of sustained high winds.

In addition to meeting fuels reduction objectives, project design features and mitigation measures have been incorporated to address issues related to, and/or minimize or eliminate potential negative impacts to: soil productivity; threatened, endangered, sensitive and MIS species and their habitat; rare plants; fisheries and water resources; invasive weeds; old growth forest vegetation; cultural resources; scenery management; recreation; the NFSR transportation system; air quality and other issues.

I believe the selected course of action (Alternative B) provides a balanced response to the purpose and need for fuels reduction and forest health restoration treatments in the Gold Crown project area, whereas the option of doing nothing at this time (the No- Action Alternative A) will continue to jeopardize neighboring homes and associated utilities and evacuation routes in the event a wildfire occurs in this area.

Public Involvement and Collaboration

This project was analyzed using the process of an Environmental Assessment under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, NEPA procedures described in 36 CFR 218. Section 104(e) of the HFRA requires agencies to provide notice of the project and conduct a public meeting when preparing authorized hazardous fuels reduction projects. Section 104(f) encourages meaningful public participation during preparation of such projects.

On December 08, 2007, Sandpoint District Ranger, Richard Kramer, facilitated a collaborative meeting for the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction project area. Invited attendees included the Fire Chief of the Sagle Fire District, the Idaho Deparment of Lands, Bob Hatfield of the BonFIRE committee, as well as two Sandpoint Ranger District personnel who were serving as members of the Gold Crown interdisciplinary team. Over one hundred landowners adjacent to the project area, as well as other interested individuals and organizations were also invited to attend. Collaboration was further encouraged via postings at trailheads within the area and media announcements. In addition to the attendees already listed, eleven interested individuals attended the public meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the merits of conducting fuels reduction projects on NFS lands in the area between Sagle Slough and Bottle Bay, as well as to discuss the options that private landowners could find through the BonFIRE program. The BonFIRE program provides educational information for landowners and seeks grants/federal funding to assist private landowners in improving defensible space around their homesites. All attendees agreed that there was a need to reduce hazardous fuels within this area (both on NFS and private lands) that could adversely affect the adjacent landowners, as well as destroy homes and block evacuation routes if the fuels were ignited. Some attendees also expressed concern that a wildfire could negatively affect scenic values and recreational opportunities in the area.

A scoping letter was then mailed out on December 19, 2007 to 114 individuals, organizations and agencies to gather comments for the proposed action. The comment period ended January 22, 2008. A legal announcement for this scoping notice was also published in the Coeur d'Alene Press on December 19, 2007. Forty-nine comments were received during the scoping period.

Responses were reviewed and analyzed for content, and substantive comments were directed to those specialists whom were best able to respond, either in their analysis documentation, project files, or directly to the commenter.

The Gold Crown EA was finalized and released for a 30-day objection period on April 23, 2008. One objection was received on May 22, 2008 by The Lands Council. Some of the objectors recommended remedies had indeed already been completed and were part of the project file and/or published documentation on the IPNF NEPA website. Many of the remedies have been incorporated into my decision described in this Decision Notice, while others remained unresolved.

Kathleen A. McAllister, Reviewing Officer (USDA Northern Region), reviewed the objections raised by The Lands Council. In her June 23, 2008 disposition letter to the objector, Reviewing Officer Kathleen A. McAllister found that the project clearly demonstrates compliance with the HFRA, as well as all other pertinent laws and regulations. Other findings for the Responsible Official disclosed in the review letter are summarized below:

Objection Issue 1 – Rationale for the project and meeting the project's purpose and need.

Rationale for both the project and purpose and need of the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction project was discussed in detail in the EA (pp. 11-14). Furthermore, both the EA and Forest Vegetation Report describe the ecological need for the project (on pp. 33-36 of the EA and 8-11 of the FVR). In addition, the project map (Figure 6- p. 31 in the EA) and the treatment types described in the "Alternative B- Proposed Action" section (located on p. 24-28 in the EA) illustrate and fully explain why each unit was proposed for certain silvicultural and fuels treatment types.

Objection Issue 2 – Ensuring appropriate old growth management and using diameter limitations.

The project is in compliance with HFRA and Forest Plan old growth requirements. The Old Growth report (located both in the project file and on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' website (www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/sptnepa/gold_crown/GC_Final_OGreport.pdf) details how each IPNF Old Growth standard has been met or exceeded with this project. Based on the knowledge of the existing project area forest stand conditions, the proposed action, desired future condition, and silvicultural prescriptions, there is no reason to artificially select a 14" dbh diameter limit for harvest trees, and no justification for doing so has been given by the objector.

Objection Issue 3 – Concerns related to goshawk analysis.

The Wildlife Report details both existing conditions and effects analysis of both the No-Action and Action Alternatives. The project and the Action Alternative (Alternative B) is in compliance with Forest Plan standards, and is some respects, is more protective of goshawk than Reynolds,

et al. (1992) recommends. The full wildlife analysis report is available online at: www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/sptnepa/gold_crown/gc_wildlife_report.pdf.

Objection Issue 4 – Concerns related to soil productivity analysis.

The proposed project will meet all IPNFs' Forest Plan and Northern Region (R1) Soil Objectives and Standards. Effects to soils were analyzed and disclosed in the Soil Specialist's report in the project file and summarized on pages 89-99 of the EA. Compliance with the Forest Plan and other regulatory direction is detailed on pages 32-33 of the report and summarized on pages 98-99 of the EA.

Findings and Consistency with Laws, Regulations and Policies

National Forest Management Act

Alternative B is consistent with NFMA consistency requirements:

1. *Maintaining diversity:* Alternative B is designed to be implemented in a manner that will protect wildlife and fisheries resources in the Gold Crown project area (EA, Appendix A). There will be no significant impact to any species, and no loss of viability to populations or species. The long-term benefits will outweigh the short-term disturbance to species during project activities.
2. *Suitability for timber production (16 USC 1605[k]):* Harvest will not occur on sites identified as not suitable for timber production.
3. *Soil, slope or other watershed conditions (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][i] and protection for streams and other bodies of water (16 USC 1604[g][3][E][iii]):* The design of fuels reduction treatments and road work include features designed specifically to protect water, soils, and fisheries, including criteria for road construction, maintenance, as well as reconditioning and some reconstruction. There will be no irreversible damage to soil, slope, or other watershed conditions. Implementation will be based on use of Best Management Practices and design features to protect wetlands, seeps, bogs, wallows, and springs. Fuels reduction treatments are not likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat.
4. *Restocking (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][ii]):* Technology and knowledge exists to ensure that lands are adequately restocked within five years after final harvest. Effects on residual trees and adjacent stands have been considered.
5. *Economic factors (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][iv]):* Economic factors were considered and an Economics Analysis was conducted for the Gold Crown project. Alternative B has economic value associated with timber volume. Regardless, Alternative B was chosen primarily for the reasons documented in this decision (reducing fuels and trending towards vegetative conditions more resilient to fire) and not because of economic value.
6. *Clearcutting and even-aged management (16 USC 1605[g][3][F]):* Even-aged management would occur on approximately 208 acres under Alternative B. All

treatments are silviculturally appropriate and are within the timber and vegetation practices outlined in the Forest Plan. Under Alternative B, no treatments will exceed the 40-acre opening size. Design of treatments included features to protect water, soils, and fisheries.

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

   Under Alternative B, approximately 2.0 miles of new system roads will be constructed in the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction project area. Up to 0.2 mile of temporary roads will be constructed to allow access to harvest units 29 and 34. The construction will be completed using Best Management Practices to protect aquatic and soil resources (EA Appendix A and project file document titled (Fisheries Biological Assessment and Evaluation). At the completion of its intended use, the temporary roads will be decommissioned and revegetated with native plants. A final RAP document was completed and is part of the project file titled "GC_RAP_summary". The document includes recommendations for road maintenance as described throughout this decision document. Potential impacts of Alternative B from the temporary roads, road reconstruction and reconditioning have been assessed and are disclosed in the Environmental Assessment (existing, proposed permanent, and temporary roads that will be used in the project are displayed in the EA Map on pages 31) with supporting information in the project file.

IPNF (1987) Forest Plan

The activities planned in the Gold Crown project area are consistent with the Forest Plan because they will help to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fire and associated risks to life, property, and natural resources; and increase safety for fire suppression crews in the case of a future wildfire. All management activities will be in compliance with Management Area direction (EA page 18 and 19), including all goals and objectives, as described in the Specialists' Reports. All treatments are silviculturally appropriate and are within the timber and vegetation practices outlined in the Forest Plan.

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

percent or more existing old growth, and one or more old-growth stands per OGMU should be 300 acres or larger.

The project file includes documentation of allocated old growth in Old Growth Management Unit (OGMU) 27 that reveals four stands are currently meeting Region 1 minimum criteria (OG_STAT 9) and four stands allocated as recruitment (OG_STAT 11). The Old Growth report states on page 1 that, "In addition to using the TSMRS information, walk-through examinations were conducted in each of the stands proposed for treatment, and forest structure was recorded. No stands proposed for treatment were found to meet old growth criteria, and no errors were found pertaining to old growth within the TSMRS information database."

There is no regulatory direction requiring the Forest Service to designate old growth or replacement/future old growth in OGMUs that currently have less than five percent of stands that meet Region One old growth criteria. The project file documents the Region One old growth criteria, as well as the IPNFs' Forest Plan standards. With regard to Old Growth Standards 10e and 10f, the Old Growth report on pages 3-4 states:

"Old Growth Standard 10e: Old growth stands should reflect approximately the same habitat type series distribution as found on the IPNFs.

The habitat type series distribution of the allocated old growth stands on the IPNFs reflects approximately the same habitat type series distribution on the IPNFs. The 2004 Forest Plan Monitoring report supports this finding (USDA,2005). Therefore, this standard has been met.

Old Growth Standard 10f: One or more old growth stands per old growth unit should be 300 acres or larger. Preferences should be given to a contiguous stand; however, the stand may be subdivided into stands of 100 acres or larger if the stands are within 1 mile. The remaining old growth management stands should be at least 25 acres in size. Preferred size is 80 plus acres.

In OGMU 27, because of the relatively young age of most forest stands in the area, there was not an option of identifying and retaining 300 acre plus old growth patches. This project is consistent with this Forest Plan standard because we identified the largest blocks of old growth for retention or recruitment that occurred within OGMU 27. There simply were not any larger patches of old growth to select.

Past wildfires and historic logging are responsible for the scarcity of old growth in OGMU 27. The majority of stands in OGMU 27 consist of trees regenerated after large wildfire around the beginning of the 20th century. Areas proposed for thinning in the project area, as well as untreated stands throughout the OGMU, will very likely increase the proportion of the OGMU occupied by old growth over the next 50-75 years. As time passes, groups of contiguous stands throughout OGMU 27 will move toward old growth structural status. These assemblages will be 100 acres or more in size, and the potential exists for 300+ acre of continuous old growth to develop on the Gold Hill and Grouse Mountain portions of OGMU 27. Old growth standard 10f would be met."

The old growth issue was disclosed and analyzed in the Old Growth Report (see project file). The Wildlife Report (pp. 7-34) also discusses old growth in relation to sensitive wildlife species and Management Indicator Species (MIS). Because this proposal would not trend any sensitive

wildlife species toward Federal listing, both alternatives are consistent with National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements to provide a diversity of plant and animal communities in the Plan area (16 USC, 1604, 6(g)(2)(B)).

Because this proposal would not trend any sensitive wildlife species toward Federal listing, Alternative B is consistent with National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements to provide a diversity of plant and animal communities in the Plan area (16 USC, 1604, 6(g)(2)(B))(EA Appendix A, Wildlife BE).

Healthy Forests Restoration Act

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

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

Currently, the project area is categorized as being in a condition class 2 and 3 and project activities would trend the area toward an improved condition class (EA Chapter 3 and Fire, Fuels, and Air Quality Report). The entire Gold Crown project area is located within the Wildland Urban Interface as defined by the Bonner County WUI Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP), and the CWPP further identifies the Gold Hill area as a high priority area for hazardous forest fuel reduction treatments.

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

The project **"…focuses largely on small-diameter trees, thinning, strategic fuel breaks and prescribed burns to modify fire behavior, as measured by the projected reduction of uncharacteristically severe wildfire effects…"** (HFRA 2003, sec. 102(f)(1)(A).) This project's treatments focus on removal of smaller, weaker, and insect- or disease-infested trees (Alternative B discussion within Forest Vegetation Resources section of the EA.) Approximately 95 acres of strategic fuel breaks on NFS land bordering private land are planned as part of this project. Although none of the areas identified as a priority for treatment within the project area could currently survive even a low-intensity prescribed, broadcast fire, many of the planned treatments direct slash treatment and even maintenance to be accomplished via prescribed burning. The

measures modeled to project reduction of potential wildfire effects include wildfire flame-length and rate of spread (Alternative A and B sections of the Fire, Fuels, and Air section of the EA.)

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

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

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

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

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

The treatment areas do not contain any allocated, unallocated or any timber stands that meet the Green and others (corrected 2005) criteria for old growth (Old Growth Consistency Report).

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

The project "…maximizes the retention of large trees, as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote fire-resilient stands." (HFRA 2003 sec. 102 (f)(1)(B).) Large, fire-resistant and site-appropriate trees such as ponderosa pine, western larch, and western white pine dominated the presettlement forest of this area. The project plans to retain those relic trees that survived the last, large fires in the area and promotes restoration of historic forest conditions by planting those same species in appropriate harvest units. The analysis supports compliance with requirements for large tree retention outside of old growth stands as appropriate for the forest types addressed and the promotion of fire-resilient stands. The intent of the treatments is to leave the largest and best trees on site, while meeting the purpose of the project to reduce fuels and increase composition of seral species such as western larch, western white pine, and ponderosa pine. Prescribed fire, either pile burning or underburning will occur following harvest in all units. In addition, the project will promote the utilization of biomass.

The project meets the intent of HFRA to "maximize the retention of large trees, as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote fire-resilient stands." The Gold Crown project is located entirely within the Wildland Urban Interface as defined by the Bonner County WUI Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP). Several homes and outbuildings, main travel routes

including Bottle Bay and Sagle Roads, as well as telephone, power and other service lines, are within or directly adjacent to the project area.

As defined in Section 101 (1)(A)(ii) of HFRA, an "at-risk community" is defined as *"a group of homes and other structures with basic infrastructure and services (such as utilities and collectively maintained transportation routes) within or adjacent to Federal land;"* Section 101 (1)(B) and (C) *"in which conditions are conducive to a large-scale wildland fire disturbance event; and for which a significant threat to human life or property exists as a result of a wildland fire disturbance event."*

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

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

A collaborative process was used and has been fully disclosed starting on page 6 and 28-30 of this Decision Notice.

Clean Water Act

Alternative B is consistent with the requirements of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1251). Phosphorus, the pollutant of concern in the Pend Oreille basin, will not permanently increase in the waters of the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project. This pollutant to water quality will be prevented through implementation of BMPs and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. The riparian protection components of the project (INFS RMOs, RHCAs, Forest Service BMPs) are designed to improve condition. Risks to beneficial uses will not be changed by this project. There will be no detrimental increase in sediment or stream temperature through management activities in the Gold Crown project area.

By following site specific BMPs, INFS guidelines, and RHCA buffers, there will be no direct, indirect or cumulative effects on fish habitat and the hydrologist determined the project would be very unlikely to produce negative effects through sedimentation, increased stream temperatures, changes in water yield, or decreased amounts of large wood for stream channel stability, thus no violation to the TMDL regulations or Clean Water Act (EA Appendix A and hydrologist report).

Clean Air Act

The Clean Air Act was designed to “protect and enhance” the quality of the nation’s air resources. The Act encourages reasonable Federal, State and local government actions for pollution prevention. State Implementation Plans (SIPs) are developed by each state to implement the provisions of the CAA. The SIPs describe the State’s actions to achieve and maintain the “national ambient air quality standards” for specific pollunts such as particulate matter. Bonner County is part of Airshed 11 which has no areas of concern, Class 1 airsheds and is in attainment of air quality standards.

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests are members of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group – the coordinated operations of this group being critical in accomplishing land management objectives while minimizing cumulative impacts of smoke from prescribed fire activities conducted by its members. Members of the Airshed Group enter all the burns they would like to accomplish for that calendar year during the pre-season within an internet based reporting system. During the burn season, members propose burns for the subsequent day and then the monitoring unit (along with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality) considers all the proposed burns along with expected dispersion and ventilation and existing air quality to determine burn recommendations.

These procedures limit smoke accumulations to legal, acceptable limits. The Sandpoint Ranger District strictly complies with these procedures. Although prescribed fire creates smoke containing particulate matter, activities associated with Alternative 2 will reduce the particulate matter of potential wildfires (Fire and Fuels Report – EA Appendix A).

National Historic Preservation Act

Surveys to locate heritage resources within the Gold Crown project area have been completed (EA page 121 and 122, and Heritage Resources report). All known heritage resource sites would be protected under either alternative. Any future discovery of heritage resource sites would be inventoried and protected in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act if found to be of cultural significance.

Endangered Species Act

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

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The wildlife report for this project determined that Alternative B, "May impact individuals and habitat, but would not indicate a local or regional change in habitat quality or population status" (Wildlife Report).

Safe Drinking Water Act and Amendments of 1996 (Including State of Idaho Implementation)

Alternative B is consistent with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and Amendments of 1996. BMP's were developed from protection measures recommended from this assessment along with site specific BMP's outlined in EA and hydrology report.

Idaho Forest Practices Act

BMPs or Soil and Water Conservation Practices (EA Appendix A and hydrology report) will be applied under Alternative B, and all activities are in compliance with the guidelines in the Soil and Water Conservation Handbook.

Executive Order 12962 – Recreational Fishing

The goal of EO 12962 is to protect and improve recreational fishery resources. Alternative B would not impact recreational fisheries in any way, therefore it is consistent with EO12962 (Appendix A – Fisheries Biological Assessment and Evaluation).

State of Idaho Governor's Bull Trout Plan

There are no bull trout populations or habitat within the analysis area and according to the analysis, existing fisheries habitat overall would not be impacted. Therefore, Alternative B is consistent with the direction in the Governor's Bull Trout Plan (Fisheries Biological Assessment and Evaluation).

Roadless Area Conservation Rule, Interim Directives No. 7710-2001-2 and No. 2400-2001-3, and Wilderness Act of 1964

Activities under Alternative B are consistent with these mandates. There are no roadless or wilderness areas within or adjacent to the Gold Crown project area.

Environmental Justice Act

Alternative B was assessed to determine whether it would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations, in accordance with Executive Order 12898. No impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or any other portion of public involvement during the course of this analysis. Based on this, Alternative B complies with Executive Order 12898.

Best Available Science

The need to employ the best science is not new, since agency decisions have always required a sound technical basis. What constitutes best available science might vary over time and across scientific disciplines. The Gold Crown Fuels Reduction project, including the EA, Appendices, resource specialist reports, and the project file, demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty and risk, as appropriate.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have reviewed the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and associated project records for the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project. As a result of this review, I conclude that Alternative B (The Proposed Action) is not a major federal action and would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively, with other activities in the general area. Therefore, and Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following factors set forth in 40CFR 1508.27:

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

   The disclosure of effects in the EA found the actions limited in context. The project area is limited in size and the activities limited in duration. Effects are local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

B. **Intensity.** This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible Officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.7):

   a. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effects will be beneficial.

      Impacts associated with the project are discussed in Chapter III of the EA. These impacts are within the range of those identified in the Forest Plan. The actions would not have significant impacts on resources identified and described in Chapter III.

      The effect of the decision to be made is non-significant in the long and short term (EA, Chapter III)

   b. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

Proposed activities would not significantly affect public health and safety. Timber harvesting activities would be conducted in a safe manner to protect the public. Similar actions have not significantly affected public health and safety. A minor impact for a short period may occur to local air quality from the prescribed burning/ broadcast burning treatments and the burning of logging slash. However, burning would be accomplished in accordance with State air quality standards. Prescribed, broadcast burning can also present a risk of escaped fire. Extensive agency experience with similar local projects and conditions show these risks are

low (see Fire, Fuels, and Air Quality Report in the project file). The hydrology analysis indicates that no degradation of water quality, that would constitute a public health threat, would result from the implementation of the proposed action. (see Hydrology Report in project file).

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

   There are no adverse effects to historic places or loss of scientific, cultural, historical, or other unique resources (EA, Chapter III). This project is in compliance with the Region 1 programmatic agreement (1995) between the State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

d. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

   An analysis of the proposed action and alternatives has been conducted using the best information available and the latest methods of analyzing data by professionals in their respected disciplines. Throughout the analysis process, public comments varied in their recommendations on ways to best manage resources within the project area. However, the effects of the proposed alternatives on the various resources (EA, Chapter III) are not considered to be highly controversial by professionals, specialists, and scientists from associated fields of forestry, wildlife biology and management, fisheries, and hydrology. While the selected alternative may be controversial, we do not believe that there is a significant controversy over the effects of this action.

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

Scoping and collaborative efforts did not identify highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks. The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain, nor do they involve unique or uncertain risks. The technical analyses conducted for determinations of the impacts to the resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment. Impacts are within the limits that are considered thresholds of concern. Therefore, we conclude that there are no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

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

This project is not setting a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The sites that would be affected by the proposed action are designated by the Forest Plan for timber production and timber production, within big game winter range. Therefore, this action does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

g. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small components.*

The EA includes all connected, cumulative, and similar actions in the scope of the analysis (see past, present, and future foreseeable activities list in the project file). The cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions have been considered and disclosed in the EA, Chapter III.

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

There are no features in the area affectd that are listed or are being considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. A cultural resource inventory has been completed in the area, and all known cultural resources are protected (EA, Chapter III). The potential for impacting undiscovered sites is mitigated by compliance with the Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and through the use of specific design features (EA, Chapter III and Appendix A).

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

Upon review of the EA and the three Biological Assessments, we find that the selected alternative (Alternative B- The Proposed Action) would not adversely affect threatened or endangered species.

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

The action does not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or permits imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the Gold Crown Fuels Reduction Project is not a major federal action and that implementation of the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement does not need to be prepared for this project.

_____ _____

RANOTTA K. McNAIR **Date**
Forest Supervisor
Idaho Panhandle National Forests