



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Idaho Panhandle
National Forests

Sandpoint Ranger District
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Sandpoint, ID 83864-9509
(208)263-5111

File Code: 1950

Date: April 7, 2009

Dear friends and neighbors of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests,

Enclosed you will find your copy of the Decision Notice for the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment. The Decision Notice was signed on April 6, 2009. Also included are the District's responses to the comments we received on the environmental analysis, as well as the Finding of No Significant Impact for the selected alternative. You can view all of these documents and more on our website:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/index>.

We have heard your comments and concerns throughout the evolution of this project and have not taken your comments lightly. While I realize that not all public concerns will be fully satisfied, I believe the decision addresses the purpose and need of the project and the issues that were raised in a way that will improve forest conditions now and in the future. Hopefully the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact will help you understand the reasons for my decision, even if you don't agree with all aspects of it.

If you would like further information regarding this project please contact the project leader, A.J. Helgenberg (208-263-5611 or email: ajhelgenberg@fs.fed.us). The decision is subject to administrative appeal. The process for appealing the decision is described at the end of the decision notice. Thank you for your participation and continued interest in the management of our National Forests.

Sincerely,

RICHARD P. KRAMER
District Ranger



DECISION NOTICE

TUMBLEDOWN HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Sandpoint Ranger District
Bonner County, Idaho

I. DECISION and RATIONALE

A. The Selected Alternative

After careful review of the environmental assessment (EA) for the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), comments from the public, resource reports, and the project file, I have decided to authorize the implementation of Alternative 2 as presented in the EA. Hazardous fuel reduction activities and associated transportation management activities will occur on 671 acres of National Forest System Lands. These activities will take place adjacent to concentrations of private homes and property along Forest Road 278 in the North Gold, North Twin, South Twin, Tumbledown, Cedar, Canyon, and Brush Creek drainages; (Township 53 North., Range 1 West, Sections 1, 2 and 3; Township 54 North, Range 1 West, Sections 10, 11, 14, 15, 22, 23, 25, 26, and 35, B.M.) (Figure 1).

Alternative 2 includes vegetation treatments and associated road maintenance and temporary road construction developed to respond to the purpose and need for the project (Figures 2 and 3). Vegetation treatments will entail the removal/harvest of small-diameter trees and brush to decrease fuel loadings and disrupt fuel continuity over approximately 671 acres (Figures 2 and 3). These treatments are designed to reduce the risk of wildfire spreading to adjacent land, and increasing the chance of successful suppression efforts. A combination of mechanical methods will be used to remove saplings, brush, and primarily small-diameter (i.e., 4 to 14 inches in diameter) mixed conifer species in areas of tree mortality attributed to insect attack, competition, and/or root disease. Small pole and immature size-class stands occupy the majority of the project area. This is the result of stand-replacing fire, salvage logging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and subsequent fire suppression activities. Within these stands, some of the individual trees have grown to a diameter at breast height (DBH) approximating 14 inches, but the majority of the trees in the areas to be treated are in the 9 to 10-inch size range. In the project area, trees that are contributing to conditions unfavorable to a long-term reduction of ladder fuels and live and dead fuel loadings will be removed. Trees in the treatment areas displaying vigorous growth, resistance to insects and disease, and trending toward mature structure will be retained. Priority will be given to retaining cedar-dominated riparian areas and large, healthy larch, ponderosa pine, and white pine. Openings created by fuels reduction treatments will be planted with white pine, western larch, and ponderosa pine.

Prescribed fire will be used to reduce hazardous fuels and recycle forest nutrients. In areas where slopes permit, an excavator will be used to pile woody debris. These piles will then be burned in late fall during periods of low fire danger. These treatments will result in long-term reduction of ladder fuels as well as reduction in live and dead fuel loadings. The project will be implemented over a period of three to six years. A detailed unit summary of the types of treatments that will be implemented with this decision follows.

Treatments Details

Units 1-6, 10-14, 16, 20, 25-32 (505 acres) – Irregular Shelterwood and Commercial Thinning

Irregular shelterwood is a silvicultural term that describes a variable spatial arrangement of dominant and codominant trees of desired species (such as western white pine, ponderosa pine, and western larch) to provide seed and shade. This method will be applied where there is a lack of desirable trees to allow for a commercial thinning. Areas with a greater density of desired trees will receive a commercial thinning. Harvest will focus on leaving good form, full crowned, healthy trees (in the upper crown classes) in the following order of preference: western white pine, western larch, ponderosa pine and western redcedar, as well as some healthy Douglas-fir. In some areas (Figure 3) fuels will be machine grapple piled and the piles burned. Underburning will generally take place on slopes steeper than 35 percent. Some tree planting will

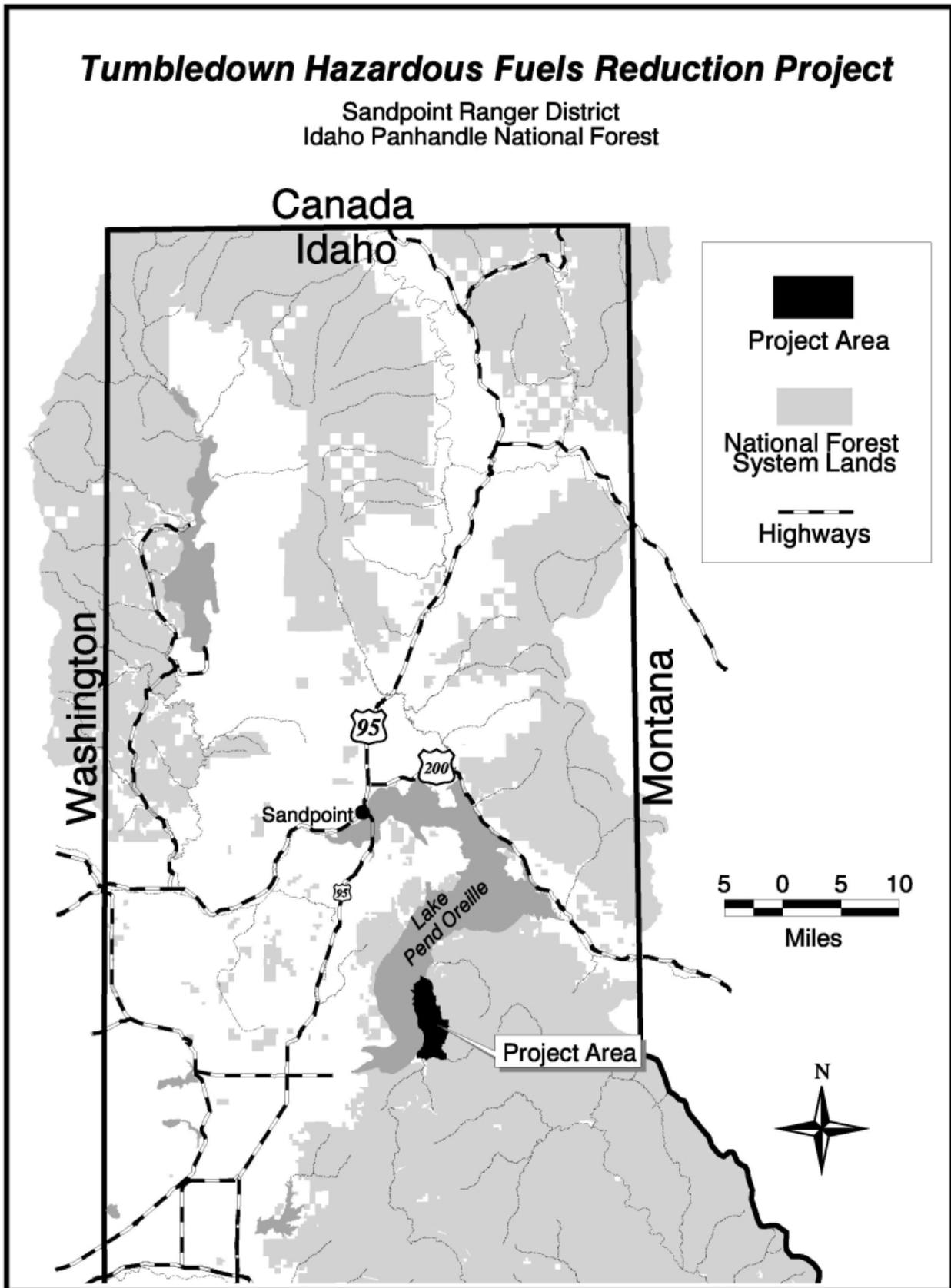


Figure 1. Vicinity map

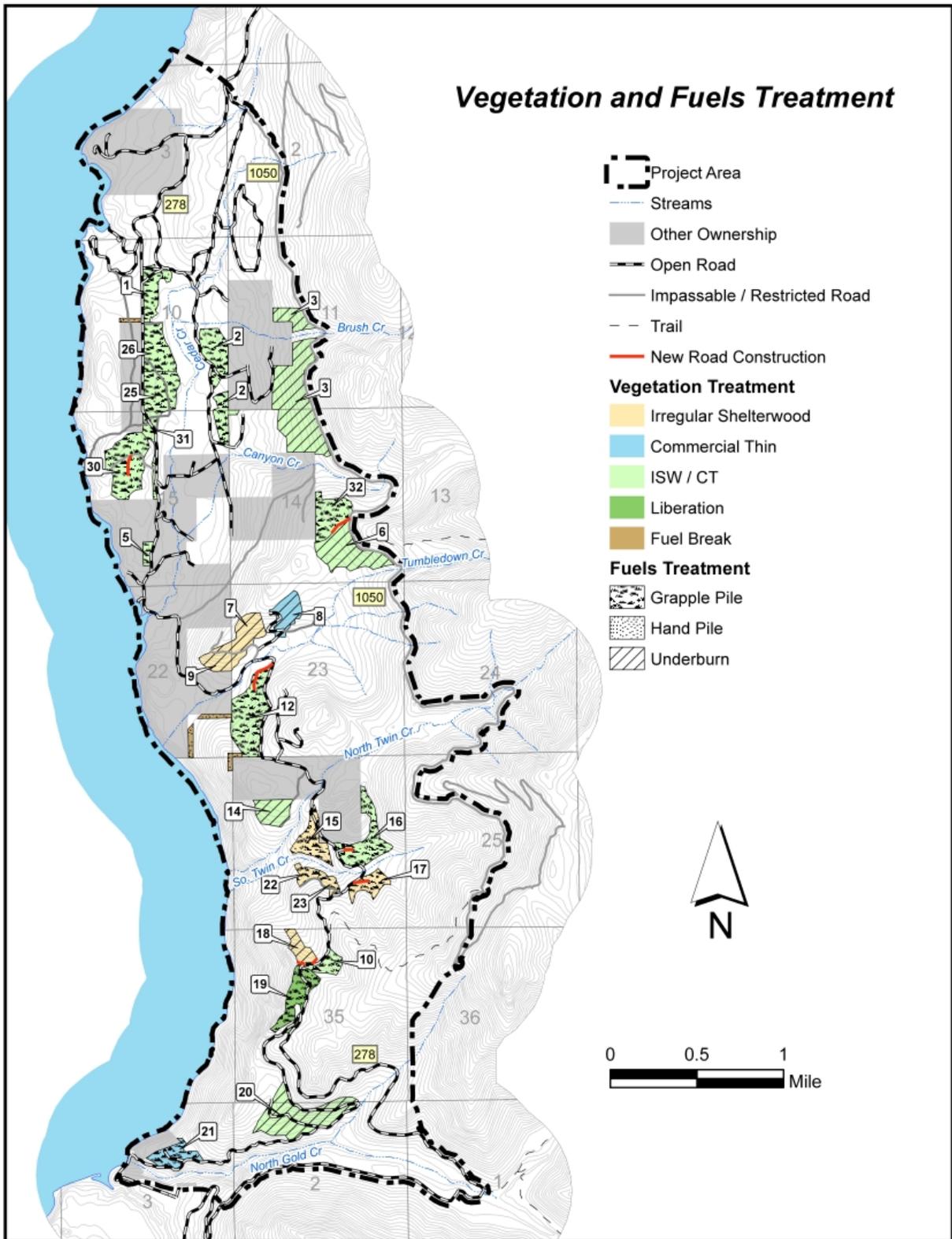


Figure 2. Vegetation treatment map (Alternative 2)

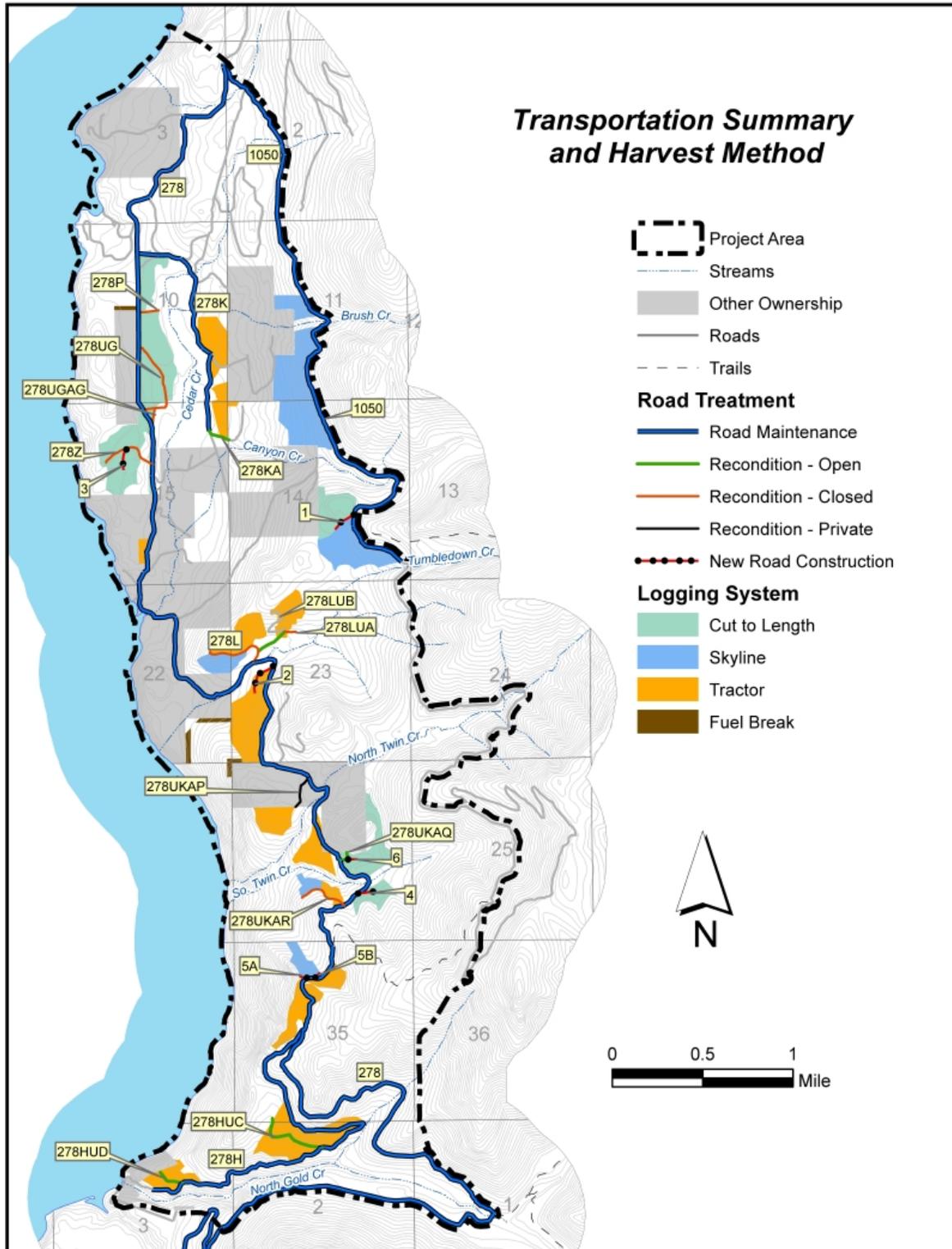


Figure 3. Fuel Treatment Map (Alternative 2)

follow timber harvest in order to establish desirable and/or fire-resistant species such as ponderosa pine, white pine and western larch.

Units 8, and 21 (35 acres) - Commercial Thin

The focus in these units is on “low thinning” to remove trees in the lower crown classes that provide ladder fuels to the larger surrounding trees. The larger trees with higher crowns will be favored to leave. Some spot-grapple piling will be needed in small areas with concentrations of activity fuels. No planting will be needed.

Units 7, 9, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23 (95 acres) - Irregular Shelterwood

Some grapple piling for fuels reduction will occur on slopes up to 35 percent and underburning will be done on steeper slopes. Tree planting of western white pine, larch, and ponderosa pine will follow to establish these early-seral, fire-resistant species.

Units 19 (25 acres) – Liberation Cut

This is a release harvest in a stand not past the sapling stage to free the favored trees from competition with older overtopping trees. This unit has thousands of sapling-sized western hemlock, larch, western redcedar, lodgepole pine, and Douglas-fir per acre in need of precommercial thinning and release from poor formed, overstory trees. The prescription will decrease fuel loadings and disrupt fuel continuity, increasing the chance of successful suppression efforts. No planting will be needed.

Units 99 (11 acres) – Fuelbreak

The fuelbreak will consist of felling hardwoods and brush species, precommercial thinning of conifers, and hand piling and burning of piles in an approximately two-chain (132-foot) strip along strategic areas (primarily adjacent to private land).

Fuel Treatments

Fuels will be treated in order to help improve the ability to suppress wildfires, restore fire as an ecological process, and to prepare the site for planting desired longer-lived species of ponderosa pine, larch, and white pine. To reduce existing fuels and those created by the vegetation treatment, there will be about 366 acres of grapple piling and about 294 acres of underburning. About 11 acres in the project are not conducive to broadcast burning or mechanized activity. In an effort to reduce hazardous fuel loadings and construct fuel breaks, hand crews will be used in these areas.

Logging Systems

Vegetative harvest systems will include harvester/forwarder on about 208 acres, skyline yarding on about 165 acres, and tractor yarding on about 287 acres.

Road Maintenance and Construction

A complete roads analysis plan for this project area was prepared through an interdisciplinary team process. No new permanent roads will be constructed. Treatment areas will be accessed using existing classified roads, existing unclassified roads, and new temporary roads. Approximately 1.87 miles of road that is currently impassible and needed for this project will be opened during project activities, and closed after treatment activities are completed. Alternative 2 will construct approximately 0.71 miles of new temporary roads. Temporary road construction is necessary to access National Forest System (NFS) land adjacent to private property and NFS Road #278 in the project area. Each new temporary road constructed will not exceed one half mile in length, and the combined distance of all new temporary road constructed in the project will not exceed one mile.

Traffic on newly constructed temporary roads and on roads opened for the project will be limited to project related activities. Newly constructed temporary roads and roads opened for the project will be gated during the project and decommissioned or placed back in storage after project activities are completed.

Table 1. Treatment Summary

Unit	Treatment Acres	Harvest System (Acres)*			Underburn Acres	Grapple/Hand Pile Acres	Reforestation Acres
		CTL	T	S			
1	22	22				22	16
2	39		39			39	33
3	93			93	93		40
5	5		5			5	
6	40			40	40		27
7	22		22		22		22
8	18		18		18		
9	14			14	14		14
10	11		11			11	9
12	49		49			49	40
14	18		18		18		8
15	21		21			21	21
16	33	33				33	23
17	14	14				14	14
18	11			11	11		11
19	25		25			25	
20	56		56		56		28
21	17		17			17	
22	7			7		7	7
23	6		6			6	6
25	33	33				33	22
26	28	28				28	17
30	44	44			10	34	34
31	9	9				9	6
32	25	25			12	13	13
Fuelbreak	11					11	
Total	671	208	287	165	294	377	411

Table 2. Status of roads in the project area before and after implementation

ROAD NUMBER	TREATMENT	Miles	Current Status	Status After Project
FSR 1050	Road Maintenance	3.70	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278	Road Maintenance	12.80	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278H	Road Maintenance	2.60	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278HUC	Recondition	0.50	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278HUD	Recondition	0.15	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278K	Road Maintenance	1.50	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278KA	Recondition	0.20	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278L	Recondition	0.38	Classified/Storage	Classified/Storage
FSR 278LUA	Recondition	0.10	Classified/Impassible	Classified/Decommission
FSR 278LUB	Recondition	0.20	Classified/Open	Classified/Open
FSR 278P	Recondition	0.11	Classified/Impassible	Classified/Decommission
FSR 278UG	Recondition	0.51	Unclassified/ Impassible	Unclassified/Decommission
FSR 278UGAG	Recondition	0.11	Unclassified/ Impassible	Unclassified/Decommission
FSR 278UKAP	Recondition	0.20	Private Road	Private Road
FSR 278UKAQ	Recondition	0.10	Unclassified/Open	Unclassified/Open
FSR 278UKAR	Recondition	0.32	Unclassified /Impassible	Unclassified/Decommission
FSR 278Z	Recondition	0.34	Classified/Storage	Classified/Storage
Temporary Road 1	New Construction	0.14	N/A	Decommission
Temporary Road 2	New Construction	0.21	N/A	Decommission
Temporary Road 3	New Construction	0.12	N/A	Decommission
Temporary Road 4	New Construction	0.09	N/A	Decommission
Temporary Road 5a	New Construction	0.05	N/A	Decommission
Temporary Road 5b	New Construction	0.04	N/A	Decommission
Temporary Road 6	New Construction	0.06	N/A	Decommission

Table 3. Transportation Activity Summary

Action	Miles
Road Maintenance	20.60
Reconditioning of Open Roads	1.35
Reconditioning of Closed Roads	1.87
Temp Road Construction	0.71
Grand Total	24.53

B. Design Features That Will Be Implemented

Aquatics

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. No side casting of waste 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. If culvert cleaning is conducted with heavy machinery, this machinery shall be used only from the established road prisms.
8. Dispose of materials suspected to contain harmful contaminants such as timber preservatives, red lead, fuel oil, solvents etc. appropriately as required by applicable regulations.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. Sidecasting of snow should be avoided in areas adjacent to streams where there is potential to cause snow or ice damming.
12. All debris, except snow and ice, that is removed from the road surface and ditches shall be deposited away from stream channels at agreed upon locations.
13. 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.
14. Snow Removal will adhere to the Standard Forest Service Timber Sale Contract Provisions (C5.316).
15. Damage from, or as a result of, snow removal will be restored by the following summer.
16. All road maintenance actions will meet BMPs and INFISH Standards and Guidelines
17. Road maintenance activities in live water and which generate the potential for instream sedimentation or channel alteration are prohibited after September 1 through July 15th on sites adjacent to or upstream of known or potential bull trout populations and/or spawning areas, namely Gold Creek, North Gold Creek, Kickbush Gulch, and Granite Creek.
18. If brush cutting is needed within riparian areas (particularly stream crossings) heavy machinery shall be used only from the established road prism or it will be done with hand tools to the same specifications.
19. 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.

20. The final culvert replacement plan for the Tumbledown Creek and Rd 278 intersection/crossing will require a review by zone biologist and hydrologist to ensure channel function is not impeded and INFS standards (RF-3) are met. This site will also require a site evaluation and documentation for the feasibility of road alignment shifting to reduce encroachment upon RHCAs and channels. If it is determined that realignment is feasible a plan will be submitted requesting funding for realignment. The site can be repaired but a long term option must be evaluated and presented. These plans will be part of the annual monitoring program.
21. The #278 crossing of Tumbledown Creek culvert is a fish barrier for native salmonids. An oversized 5-foot diameter culvert will be countersunk below the grade of the existing streambed. A section of stream above the culvert will be realigned with the new culvert to allow better passage of flows and ensure fish passage.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. To prevent injury to small fish during drafting, utilize 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.
25. 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.
26. RHCAs include 300-foot (slope distance) protection zones for streams that have fish; 150-foot protection zones for perennial streams with no fish; 100-foot protection zones for intermittent streams and sensitive landtypes; and 150 feet slope distance from the edge of the maximum pool elevation around ponds, lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands greater than 1 acre. Ephemeral draws will have a 50-foot (slope distance) protection zone if they are either directly tied to an intermittent channel or lack large woody debris and vegetation that prevent scouring or headcutting.
27. The portion of unit 17 east of the most westerly tributary will be dropped for protection of aquatic resources. Much of the proposed unit is perennially wet due to the topography and north aspect of the hillside. The first primary tributary is buffered with a 150' RHCA, which now forms the unit's eastern boundary. Temporary road construction to the remaining portion of unit 17 will not cross any perennial tributaries
28. Within unit 12, two tributaries to Tumbledown Creek will require an RHCA buffer that extends to the inner gorge of the drainage. If temporary road construction extends over either tributary an 18 inch culvert at both crossing will be required. Culverts will be removed and channel banks will be recontoured when temporary road is decommissioned.
29. Within unit 8 road reconstruction of 278LUA will end at the eastern boundary in the NE ¼ of the NW ¼ of section 23 before the road encroaches in the RHCA of Tumbledown Creek. A slash filter windrow and waterbars will be installed to reduce surface erosion in the RHCA.
30. Within unit 15, if skid trails are located adjacent to the RHCA buffer on South Twin Creek, slash filter windrow will be required to reduce potential for sediment delivery.
31. Units 20 and 21 will require slash mats on skid trails where feasible and trees will be limbed and lopped in the woods. The southern boundary of unit 20 and a portion of unit 21 south of the 278H road will be excluded since they encroach upon landtype 106.
32. A slash filter windrow will be constructed above the 278H on the south boundary of unit 20 to mitigate for any sediment transport leaving the unit boundary. No skidding of trees will occur on the 278H.
33. Waterbars will be installed at even intervals on the 278H road to reduce surface erosion. No haul will

occur on this road after September 30 to prevent sediment delivery to North Gold Creek during bull trout spawning.

34. No trees will be removed from the south side of Brush Creek at the 1050 crossing to the NW corner of unit 3.
35. In unit 19, a wet area at the southern boundary in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 35, is greater than 1 acre and source to an intermittent stream flowing northwest of the 278H road, which is perennially wet. This portion of the unit will be dropped for protection of aquatic resources.
36. Unit 1 will use the road to the west that parallels the 278N that is outside of the 300-foot buffer and provides access to the same area. This road will be used as an alternate route to avoid reconstructing a road within the 300-foot RHCA. The 278P will be seeded and blocked to further use after the sale.

Wildlife

1. Goshawk Nest Protection – If an active goshawk nest is located within the project area during marking or implementation, a 30 acre year round no activity buffer will be placed around the nest and a 420 acre no activity buffer will be implemented from April 15 through August 15, to protect the goshawk pair and young from disturbance during the breeding season.
2. Wildlife Tree Management – Large diameter snags are sparse within the project area, which is likely due to past fire, timber harvest and firewood cutting activity. Snags and live tree replacements will be retained where opportunities exist in treatment units at levels recommended by scientific literature (Bull et al. 1997).

The 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

High hazard snags and snags in 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, with all veteran, relic or fire remnant ponderosa pine and western larch trees marked as leave trees. Trees killed by root disease will be avoided, where possible, to meet retention objectives because of their rapid deterioration and fall-down rate.

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.

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 will be designated as first choices for live tree replacements.

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 will be at risk from broadcast burning.

3. Marking Guides – Since treatment units exhibit a variety of stand conditions, harvest prescriptions and tree marking should reflect this variation. Throughout the layout and design, maintain the natural, irregular spacing of leave trees, given existing stand conditions. Even though the treatment prescriptions focus on removing over-topped, suppressed, poor formed individuals, it is desirable to leave some crown overlap.
4. Swales – Within all treatment units, small inclusions of moist pockets or swales of western red cedar will be left untreated and will not be impacted by harvest activities.
5. Unit 12 – No project activities within the patch of late successional cedar in Unit 12.
6. Retention of Hardwoods – Other than in the fuel break units, aspen and birch trees will not be

harvested. If these species need to be cut for safety reasons, they will remain on site. Merchantable and submerchantable conifers will be harvested or slashed, respectively, in and around the aspen patch located in Unit 14 and any other aspen patches discovered during project layout, in order to reduce competition for water, nutrients and sunlight.

7. Vegetation Screen – Vegetation buffers will be left along the eastern boundary of Units 25 and 26 to provide security screening for wildlife and minimize unauthorized access along the meadow complex. Buffers will be approximately 100 to 200 feet, depending on the type of cover and topography and will transition from a no-cut zone into the treatment prescription.
8. Unit 1 Cutting Boundaries – The cutting boundaries in Unit 1 should be off-set to provide leave strip/cover patches associated with Old Barton Hump units.
9. Grapple Piling – In areas where grapple piling is prescribed for fuels reduction, leave approximately 2 slash piles per acre unburned to provide habitat for small forest mammals (e.g. snowshoe hare).
10. Bat Protection – If mines are found to be utilized by Townsend's big-eared bat or fringed myotis, the timber harvest recommendations from the Species Conservation Assessment and Conservation Strategy for the Townsend's Big-eared Bat (Pierson et al. 1999) will be implemented. This strategy delineates a 0.25-mile radius "no activity" buffer around mines to avoid disturbance during critical periods (e.g. maternity roosts, hibernacula). Since it is inconclusive what the critical time periods are, the "no activity" buffer will be year round.
 - "Bat-friendly" closures will be installed, where feasible, on abandoned mines found to support Townsend's big-eared bats or fringed myotis.
 - Any other mine adits found in the project area that potentially provide habitat for bats will be buffered by a 500-foot no harvest buffer around the entrance.
 - Sensitive Species – If any sensitive species is located during the project layout or implementation, management activities will be altered, if necessary, to ensure that the proper protection measures are taken.
 - If any endangered, threatened, or sensitive species are located within the areas affected by the proposed action, project activities will be altered, as necessary, in order for the proper protection measures to be taken.
 - To avoid potential disturbance or conflicts with the Whiskey Rock bald eagle nest, no project activities will occur in Unit 1 from February 1 through August 15, unless the nest is determined to be inactive by wildlife personnel.

Rare Plants

1. Any changes to the proposed action that may occur during layout will be reviewed, and rare plant surveys will be conducted as necessary prior to project implementation. Newly documented occurrences will be evaluated, with specific protection measures implemented to protect population viability. Such measures could include the following:
 - Dropping units from harvest activity
 - 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
 - Modifying harvest methods, fuels treatment or logging systems to protect TES plants and their habitats
 - 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.

Noxious Weeds

1. 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.

- Gravel or borrow pits on federal lands 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 potential new invaders is included in the project file.
- 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.
- All newly constructed roads, skid trails, landings, fuelbreaks 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.
- All straw or hay used for mulching or watershed restoration activities will be certified weed-free.

Soils

1. Tractor Yarding- Existing skid trails and slash mats are used in previously logged units whenever available to reduce additional impacts from harvest and site preparation activities. All new skid trails are designated and laid out to take advantage of the topography and minimize disruption of natural drainage patterns. Where terrain is conducive, trails are spaced at maximum distance. Excavated skid trails are to be fully re-contoured after logging is completed. All skid trails are seeded with the latest seed mix recommended at time of implementation. Equipment avoids operating in moist or wet depression areas. This specifically affects units 1, 2, 16, 17, 19, 25, 26, and 32 where seasonal seepage occurs.
2. Skyline Yarding - The leading end of logs should be suspended during yarding. Yarding across any designated RHCA requires full suspension.
3. Road Construction and Reconditioning- An engineer or hydrologist will review locations of all roads longer than 300 feet prior to construction. Temporary road construction proposed in Units 12, 17, 18, 30, and 32 and road reconditioning of existing non-system roads in Units 16, 23, and 25 utilizes the existing old roadbed where present will obliterate them after harvest activities are concluded. This includes culvert removal, decompaction and/or re-contouring of the road prism, seeding, and incorporation of woody debris and organic matter. In areas where current improvements are advantageous (i.e. FR1050), the road will be further stabilized to reduce adverse effects from slumping. All landings will be located on roads.
4. Protection of Landslide Prone Areas– Portions of several units are on potential high mass failure landtypes. These include a small portion of Unit 30, the southwest corner of Unit 19 above Lake Pend Oreille, and the southern boundary of Units 20 and 21 adjacent to FR278H. Limited cutting, modification of the unit boundary, or exclusion, especially when the area is adjacent to a cut slope, is recommended.
5. Nutrient protection on Machine or Hand-Piled Areas- The following soil nutrient management recommendations from the Intermountain Forest and Tree Nutrient Cooperative (IFTNC) and Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) is applied as appropriate to each activity area where organic material is removed:
 - Practice conventional removal (lop and scatter) rather than whole tree removal. The “lop and scatter” technique should be practiced during intermediate as well as final harvest operations.
 - Let slash remain on site over winter so mobile nutrients such as potassium can leach from fine materials back to the soil.
 - Light broadcast burn or underburn for release of potassium and other nutrients.
 - Avoid mechanical site preparation.
 - Plant species appropriate to the site.

6. Slash should be left for one wet season over a minimum of 4 to 6 months (not including summer months from July through September) to recycle nutrients back into the soil. As this is a hazardous fuels reduction project, determination of fire risk where slash is left untreated for prolonged periods of time will be made by the district fire management officer. Where fire risk is considered high, such as along main roads, private land boundaries, and structures, flexibility will be given to treat slash prior to it being left for 6 months.
7. Retention of Coarse Woody Debris- Management of coarse woody debris and organic matter will follow the USFS Region 1 guidelines from Graham et al. (1994). In units where existing coarse material is not sufficient (i.e. Units 5, 7, and 16), project activities ensure that enough coarse woody debris is left to sustain long term soil productivity, while still meeting fuel reduction objectives (Recommendations for these habitat types are 5-15 tons/acre for dry and 17-33 tons/acre for moist sites).
8. Protection during Grapple Piling or Mechanical Harvest Activities – Mechanical harvest or grapple piling equipment utilizes existing trails, operates on a slash mat whenever enough material is available, avoids saturated soil conditions, and stays on slopes less than ~40 percent to prevent soil disturbance in excess of guidelines. Only areas that are reasonably accessed by ground-based equipment are treated and none of the trails are excavated to facilitate access
9. Protection During Prescribed Burning Activities- Prescribed underburning and pile burning should take place only when the upper surface inch of mineral soil has a soil moisture content at or above 25 percent by weight or 100 percent duff moisture. This is particularly important in Units 1, 3, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 30, 31, and 32 where soil productivity on the primarily west- and south-facing slopes is reduced and could be impacted through severe burning of the often shallow soils.
10. Protection of Soils from Weed Infestation - Weed mitigation measures and prevention practices occurs in accordance with the requirements of the Sandpoint Noxious Weed Control EIS (USDA Forest Service 1998b) for all landings and road disturbances.

Transportation

1. An engineer or hydrologist will review locations of all roads longer than 300 feet prior to construction. Temporary road construction proposed in Units 12, 16, 18, 30, and 32 will utilize the existing old roadbed where present and will be obliterated after harvest activities are concluded. This includes culvert removal, decompaction and re-contouring of the road prism, seeding, fertilizing, and incorporating woody debris and organic matter. In areas where current improvements will be advantageous (i.e. FR1050), the road will be further stabilized to reduce adverse effects.
2. Newly constructed temporary roads adjacent to South Twin and Tumbledown Creeks (temporary roads #4 and #2 accessing units 17 and 12) will be built, used, and decommissioned within a single season.
3. Temporary road #2, accessing unit 12, will have a slash filter windrow on the north edge of the road to ensure that no sediment enters Tumbledown Creek.
4. Road segments identified for weed treatment and proposed for decommissioning will be treated prior to decommissioning.
5. Temporary roads will be located in a manner to prohibit unauthorized use during the project, closed with gates, and will be obliterated after project related activities are completed.
6. Each new temporary road constructed will not exceed one half mile in length, and the combined distance of all new temporary road constructed in the project will not exceed one mile.
7. Approximately 1.87 miles of road that is currently impassible and needed for this project will be opened during project activities, secured with gates during project activities, and closed to pre-project status after project activities are completed.
8. When the purchaser is working behind a gated road the gate shall be closed at the end of each day in order to not establish use on these roads.

9. No log hauling on weekends or holidays.
10. Area road closures implemented for quality hunt in Idaho Fish and Game big game Management Unit 4 will be followed on road 1050 accessing units 3, 6, and 32.
11. Prior to log hauling, a base of coarse gravel will be added to road 278 travelway where the following streams cross road 278: Tumbledown Creek, Gold Creek, Branch North Gold, Kickbush Gulch, Granite Creek, and Tom's Gulch in order to reduce sedimentation. In addition cleaning specific lengths of ditchline, and installing water bars or rolling dips along road 278 will occur. This work will occur prior to hauling.
12. An undersized culvert at the crossing of 278 and Tumbledown Creek will be replaced with a larger culvert in order to create fish passage for westslope cutthroat trout. This work will be completed prior to log hauling.
13. Active haul routes will be posted for logging traffic.

Vegetation

1. Fuel reduction treatments will focus on leaving good form, full crowned, healthy trees (in the upper crown classes) in the following order of preference: western white pine, western larch, ponderosa pine and western redcedar as well as some healthy Douglas-fir.
2. Fuel reduction treatments will employ a combination of mechanical methods to remove saplings, brush, and primarily small diameter (i.e., 4 to 14 inches in diameter) mixed conifer species in areas of mortality attributed to insect attack, competition, and/or root disease.
3. Provide for long-term reduction of ladder fuels as well as reduction in live and dead fuel loadings by increasing desired potentially long-lived early seral tree species through regeneration cutting and planting in areas where shorter-lived species (e.g., Douglas-fir, grand fir) have high mortality or are at risk of high mortality.
4. Priority will be given to retaining cedar-dominated riparian areas and large, healthy larch, ponderosa pine, and white pine.
5. Openings created by fuels reduction treatments will be planted with white pine, western larch and ponderosa pine.

Fire/Fuels

1. Prescribed underburning and pile burning should take place only when the upper surface inch of mineral soil has a soil moisture content at or above 25 percent by weight or 100 percent duff moisture. This is particularly important in Units 1, 3, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 30, 31, and 32 where soil productivity on the primarily west- and south-facing slopes is reduced and could be impacted through severe burning of the often shallow soils.
2. Slash should be left a minimum of 6 months to recycle nutrients back into the soil. As this is a hazardous fuels reduction project, determination of fire risk where slash is left untreated for prolonged periods of time will be made by the district fire management officer. Where fire risk is considered high, flexibility will be given to treat slash prior to it being left for 6 months.
3. Pile burning will occur in compliance with the Idaho/Montana Airshed Group. In order to prevent smoke from settling in valley bottoms no burning will be initiated during times when air quality restrictions are in place.

Heritage Resources

1. Special provisions are utilized in all contracts to provide for protection of all existing recorded heritage resources. They also require that the contractor promptly notify the Forest Service upon discovery of a previously unidentified cultural resource.

II. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project was first identified through a collaborative effort with the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Group. The interdisciplinary team and adjacent landowners further refined the treatment areas based on hazardous fuel conditions, site-specific concerns, as well as spatial arrangement and proximity to values-at-risk. Valuable information pertinent to project design was gleaned from meetings and conversations with interested parties. All of this resulted in a well-designed project that met the needs of people living in our community as well as those living outside the area.

A decision was made to implement the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project using a Hazardous Fuel Reduction Categorical Exclusion (CE 10) on May 7, 2007. This decision authorized road improvements to benefit aquatic systems and fuel reduction treatments on approximately 700 acres of National Forest System lands. Much of the aquatic restoration work authorized by the decision was completed during the low water period of 2007. The undersized culvert where FSR 278 crosses Tumbledown Creek was replaced, and the FSR 278 crossings of Tumbledown Creek, Gold Creek, Branch North Gold Creek, Kickbush Gulch and Granite Creek were improved with the application of crushed rock and improvements to the ditch lines.

On November 25, 2008, Judge Garland Burrell of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California signed an order in Sierra Club v. Bosworth, 04-2114, enjoining the use of the Hazardous Fuel Reduction Categorical Exclusion (CE 10). No fuel reduction treatments had taken place on the Tumbledown Project at this point. All project activities were suspended and a mutual agreement was reached between the government and the purchaser to cancel the contract. In December of 2008, an EA was produced to determine whether or not the activities proposed in the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project would result in significant effects and thus warrant preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

III. SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A. OUTREACH

In July of 2005, a proposal for the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project was mailed out to 242 individuals, organizations, agencies, tribes, and local media on the Sandpoint Ranger District mailing list to gather comments to be used in developing the proposed action. The project was also placed on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Activities that month. In response to this scoping effort, comments were received from 21 people, organizations, and agencies. These comments are included in the project file and are available for public inspection upon request.

In August of 2006, we sent out an update letter on the project to 238 individuals, organizations, agencies, tribes, and local media on the Sandpoint District mailing list. The proposed action was refined between these two mailings. The changes were a result of ground verification of vegetative conditions, making some areas higher priority and others lower priority for treatment, as well as comments received during scoping. A more detailed account of the modifications made can be found in the project file along with issue disposition of the 2005 and 2006 comments.

In addition to refining the proposed action due to public comment and further ground reconnaissance, the second mailing was required due to a court decision, Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck, in which the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of California struck down the Forest Service provision at 36 CFR 215.4(a). That provision had excluded projects such as this one from public notice, comment, and appeal. The comment period was intended to provide those interested in or affected by the proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to my decision. We received 17 responses.

A decision was made to implement the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project using Categorical Exclusion #10 on May 7, 2007. This decision authorized fuel reduction treatments on approximately 700 acres of National Forest System lands. A copy of the decision was mailed to the 36 scoping respondents who had expressed interest as well as to local media outlets.

In December of 2007, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth circuit issued a ruling preventing the Forest Service from approving or implementing Hazardous Fuels Reduction projects using Categorical Exclusion #10 authority. In response to this ruling, we have prepared an Environmental Assessment to determine whether or not the activities proposed in Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project would result in significant effects and thus warrant preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

On December 9, 2008 the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction EA and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact was mailed to 36 parties who had submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest during earlier

public involvement efforts. The Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction EA and supporting specialist reports were also posted on the IPNF's website, and on December 12, 2008 a legal notice was published in the IPNF's newspaper of record, *The Coeur D'Alene Press*, to tell the public that the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction EA was completed and available for public review and comment. The legal notice stated that any decision to proceed with actions described in the EA will be subject to administrative appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215 by any party which submitted comments or expressed interest during the 30-day comment period. The period began the day after the legal notice was published and ended January 12, 2009. The Response to Comments presents comments received during the 30-day comment period along with the Forest Service's responses.

B. ISSUES

No significant issues or unresolved conflict concerning alternative uses of available resources warranting detailed consideration of additional alternatives were found (EA, pages 11-16). Issues are addressed below in my rationale for the decision; in the Response to Comments; in the review of comments from scoping (Project File); and through project design including harvest unit location, logging methods, silvicultural prescriptions, and design features of the project .

C. ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Original Proposed Action

The selected alternative has evolved over several years. The initial proposal for the Tumbledown project looked at all "high-risk stands" (stands with high fuel loading that were not trending toward desired species compositions and structures, or stands at high risk of mortality). Prior to its initial release to the public in 2005, the proposed action had been modified through an interdisciplinary process as ground truthing occurred and resource concerns were addressed. Various treatment areas were dropped because of difficult access, the need to maintain corridors and secure areas for wildlife, high social value, and the potential for effects on aquatic and wildlife resources. Other areas were added or dropped or their prescriptions changed as ground verification revealed new information making them higher or lower priority than we originally thought.

Additional temporary road construction was also a component of the original proposed action. The majority of these temporary road segments were eliminated as treatment areas were dropped due to resource concerns, or when proposed locations were determined to be too risky or unfeasible. The original treatment proposal was also modified in response to public scoping comments and meetings with local landowners and community members. Given the evolution of the project and proposed activities that has occurred, it would no longer be prudent to analyze the original proposed action in detail. This alternative was thus dropped from further consideration.

An Alternative Only Involving Rehabilitation and Recovery

We were encouraged by a scoping respondent to examine the long-term benefits of not spending money for road maintenance or other management activities and administration in the project areas.

Given the intermix of private and National Forest System Lands in the project area, continued fire suppression is inevitable. Current stand conditions and fuel loading have increased the chance of a stand-replacing wildfire that would be resistant to suppression. It follows that hazardous fuels reduction in the area is a priority.

Improvements to the transportation system are being made to facilitate the reduction of hazardous fuels. The road management in the project was informed by a project area level roads analysis process (RAPS). The RAPS examined the existing transportation system with the intent of identifying road-associated resource risks and opportunities and to determine if existing roads were needed.

Currently closed roads that will be opened to facilitate fuel treatments will be returned to pre-project status (closed) via decommissioning at the completion of the project. Temporary roads will also be decommissioned at project completion. Road maintenance will benefit both local residents and visitors to the forest while reducing, or eliminating current risk to aquatic resources.

Rehabilitation and recovery alone wouldn't achieve the project's goal of reducing fire hazard. The high priority of the project area for hazardous fuel treatments, and the necessity of utilizing a transportation system to carry out these activities led us to drop this alternative from further consideration.

An Alternative Emphasizing Prescribed Burning

We were encouraged by several scoping respondents to consider an alternative that emphasized the use of prescribed burns as the primary treatment to reduce fuels and shift species composition. We were also

encouraged to consider applying prescribed burns in un-logged units.

The use (and potential benefits) of prescribed fire was considered throughout the diagnosis and planning process used to develop the proposed action. This resulted in the use of prescribed fire being proposed on about half of the total treatment acres.

In treatment areas that won't be broadcast burned, an excavator will generally be used to pile woody debris in areas where slopes permit. These piles will then be burned in late fall during periods of low fire danger. This was done to minimize the risks associated with prescribed fire use given the proximity of these areas to private land.

Using prescribed burning alone to reduce hazardous fuels in unlogged areas would not be effective at achieving the objectives of the purpose and need. Safe and controllable prescribed fires are planned in spring and fall when weather and moisture conditions help fire managers keep fire intensities and severities low. In stands where vegetative treatments are proposed, shady conditions would make burning in spring or fall conditions difficult. In order to get a fire to burn in these shady, dense stands, ignition would have to take place in hot, dry and/or windy conditions. This would increase the chance of a lethal crown fire occurring which would be hard control, and would likely produce undesirable effects. (EA, fire effects discussion "How Easily An Unwanted Fire Could Be Suppressed," pages 45-46).

Because the use of prescribed fire was considered and integrated throughout the planning process (which resulted in a large part of the fuel treatments proposed in Alternative 2 involving prescribed fire), and because the use of prescribed fire alone in the stands proposed for treatment would entail high risk, an alternative emphasizing fire use was dropped from further consideration.

An Alternative Permanently Closing all Non-Essential Roads

During scoping, a member of the public encouraged the Forest Service to decommission or relocate as many roads as possible within the project area. The road management in the project was informed by a project area level roads analysis process (RAPS). This process examined the existing transportation system with the intent of identifying road-associated resource risks and opportunities, and to determine if existing roads were needed following project completion. Recommendations from the RAPS process were subsequently incorporated into the proposed transportation system management. An distinct alternative permanently closing all non-essential roads was dropped from further consideration because the scoping respondents' premise that permanently closing all non-essential roads would save money, protect water quality, protect wildlife, and safeguard threatened, endangered and sensitive species, and their habitat was a strong consideration in the formulation of the proposed action.

D. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

No-Action Alternative

This alternative provided a baseline for comparison of environmental consequences of the proposed action to the existing condition and is a management option that could be selected by the Responsible Official. This alternative continues standard protection and maintenance activities such as fire suppression, access management, and road maintenance. Ecosystem processes such as insects and diseases in trees, and vegetation succession with fire exclusion would continue their current trends. No commercial timber harvest or road construction would occur. Some incidental tree removal would occur through firewood cutting. This alternative proposes no actions that are contained in the selected alternative described below.

Over time more fuels would accumulate as trees continue to succumb to insects and disease, increasing the continuity of surface fuels, increasing ladder fuels, and thus lowering the gap between surface fuels and the canopy. The shade intolerant understory would continue to grow and replace the overstory as it falls to the forest floor, increasing the continuity of the canopy. The rate of spread and flame lengths in this situation would increase: combined with the ladder fuels, lowered canopies, and the continuity and densities of the canopy, the potential for sustained crown fire would be increased. High flame lengths and fireline intensities would affect our ability and strategies to suppress wildfires. (EA, pages 44-45)

Selected Alternative

The selected alternative is the proposed action (Alternative 2) presented in the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment. See Section I above for details about the selected alternative.

IV. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

I have made my decision to implement Alternative 2 based on:

- How well the management action addresses the project's purpose and need;
- Consideration of the Forest Plan standards and guidance for the project area;
- Limited environmental consequences as documented in the Finding of No Significant Impact, EA, and associated resource reports;
- Consideration of issues that were raised during public involvement.

A. PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need for the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project was derived from field reviews and surveys of the resources in the area and the differences between the existing condition and the desired condition in the project area (EA, Page 3) It responds to goals and objectives of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) Forest Plan, the National Fire Plan, the Healthy Forests Initiative, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan.

Project Purpose:

Reduce the risk to life and property from wildfire, increase firefighter and the public's safety, and reduce fire suppression costs through forest fuels modification. This will be achieved by:

- Reducing surface forest fuel loading and ladder fuels
- Reducing the number of trees with interlocking crowns that contribute to crown fire initiation and crown fire spread

Project Need:

This project is being considered due to the hazardous fuel loadings that currently exist on National Forest System lands adjacent to private lands in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). A combination of ground fuels and dense forest canopy in the project area have created a high fire hazard. The project area is susceptible to stand replacing wildfire due to the available surface fuels and the dense, continuous fuel in the crowns of the trees. This places multiple values (private land, homes, power and phone lines, agriculture, domestic water sources, wildlife habitat, and visuals) in the area at risk. In addition to reducing the risk of severe wildfire, treating these fuels will also improve the emergency ingress/egress route in the event of a wildfire. The only available automobile ingress/egress route for residents in the project area is Forest Road 278. Portions of this travel route are through dense, overstocked stands of timber that have high fuel loadings. In the event of a fast moving wildfire, this potential evacuation route could easily become unusable due to intense heat, falling trees and/or obscured visibility due to smoke.

- The selected alternative will reduce hazardous fuels and improve our ability to suppress fire in the Tumbledown project area. Research shows that fuel treatments help modify fire behavior so that some wildfires can be suppressed more easily. The most appropriate fuel treatment strategy is often removing ladder fuels and decreasing tree crown density followed by piling and the burning of the piles to reduce surface fuels (EA. Page 45).
- The majority of the Tumbledown project area is currently classified as a Fuel Model 10 due to composition (dead, down material, live ladder fuels, and timber overstory), fuel loading, and expected fire behavior. In this fuel model, fires burn in the surface and ground fuels with greater intensity than the other timber litter models. Crowning, spotting, and torching of individual trees is more frequent in this fuel model leading to potential fire control difficulties. This is due to the amount of 1, 10, and 100-hour fuels present, which under the right conditions (high temps, low relative humidity, etc.) are receptive and will carry a fire. By implementing Alternative 2, a majority of the area that is currently Fuel Model 10 will be modified to more closely represent a Fuel Model 8. The areas not included in this fuel model conversion are the riparian zones and leave pockets of moist habitat types such as western red cedar where no commercial harvest will occur. (EA, Pages 44-45).

B. IPNF FOREST PLAN (1987)

The development of the project's purpose and need was guided by the IPNF Forest Plan goals, standards and objectives (EA, page 8). The selected alternative is designed to meet this purpose and need (EA, page 16). Guidance also came from Forest Plan Management Area direction, goals and standards including those for Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas as specified by the Inland Native Fish Strategy standards and guidelines (EA, pages 30-34 and Appendix D, "Fisheries Management Direction & Guidelines").

I have evaluated the selected alternative and compared it to the Forest Plan standards, goals and objectives within the Tumbledown Project Area. When evaluating the selected alternative's compliance with the Forest Plan, I considered that there are no old growth stands in the project area and no activities will occur in old growth stands (FONSI, page 1; EA, page 38). The selected alternative meets Forest Plan Standards for old growth (EA, page 38; Appendix F, "Forest Plan Standards for Old Growth and Old Growth Review"). All regeneration cutting will occur on lands suitable for timber production and can be adequately restocked within five years of the final cut (EA, page 38). Detrimental soil disturbance will not exceed 15 percent in any activity area and the selected alternative will meet IPNF Forest Plan Standards for Soils (FONSI, page 2; EA, pages 48-50). This project will have no effect on, is not likely to adversely affect, or is not likely to contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to management indicator species (FONSI, pages 1-2 and 4; EA, pages 21-26). I have determined that the selected alternative will meet Forest Plan standards and will contribute to meeting the goals and objectives of the Management Areas within the project area (FONSI, page 4; EA, pages 21-51).

C. CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES

We received comments from many individuals and several organizations and agencies on our proposed action and our environmental assessment. Issues were also raised internally by the Interdisciplinary Team. The process of demonstrating compliance with law or regulations was frequently aided by the examination of these internally raised issues. The main issues raised during project development are summarized in this section; all comments received on the EA and our responses to these comments are appended to this Decision.

It is worth emphasizing that the proposed action was designed to address the following issues via the location of harvest units, the use of riparian buffers, the selection of appropriate logging methods, the development of site-specific silvicultural prescriptions and design features, and the requirement of timber sale contract provisions for protection of resources. (Refer to previous discussion of the "Original Proposed Action" under "ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL")

Effects on Fire Behavior

Concerns related to fuel characteristics, fire behavior and associated resource impacts in the project area were used to develop the proposed action alternative. These concerns were repeated throughout the interdisciplinary team and public involvement processes. The effects of fuel treatments on fire behavior was modeled using predicted fireline intensity and resistance to control. This modeling shows that activities associated with the selected alternative will positively modify fire behavior. There will be reduced potential for high intensity and fast moving crown fires. Both flame lengths and rate of spread will be greatly reduced in treated areas. This will reduce wildfire risk to life and property, increase both firefighter and public safety and reduce fire suppression costs. (FONSI, page 3; EA, pages 3 and 43-47).

Effectiveness of Fuels Treatments

We heard concerns over the effectiveness of fuel treatments associated with the project. Fuel treatment effectiveness was measured by comparing predicted fireline intensity and resistance to control for the existing condition with post treatment conditions. This analysis is presented in the fire and fuels section of the EA (pages 43-47). This comparison shows that treatments will effectively moderate fire behavior, a key to achieving the project's purpose and need (EA, pages 3 and 7).

While fuel treatments including timber harvest, prescribed fire and piling have been demonstrated to be effective (EA, pages 44-47; Fire Fuels Report), benefits beyond the modification of fire behavior will be derived from the fuels treatments. While the removal of shade tolerant species (grand fir, Douglas Fir) reduces the available fuels providing a pathway for fire to burn into the tree crowns, it also facilitates a

reintroduction of the historic fire régimes, a desired condition consistent with the purpose and need (EA pages 7, 34-38 and 44-47).

Effects on Big Game Security

The potential for impacts on big game security was brought up during the project's development. Effects on area restrictions in Idaho Fish and Game area Game Management Unit 4A and increased road hunting were of concern. Project-related activities will not interfere with, or alter quality hunt restrictions in the project area (EA, page 24 and Appendix A; Wildlife Report). Treatments will retain hiding cover where the lack of ground fuel and dense forest canopies have not created a high fire hazard (EA, pages 16-17). Additional features designed to provide wildlife security include the retention of vegetation buffers and cover patches, as well managing roads and gates to avoid the establishment of use patterns (EA, Appendix A).

Effects of Road Construction

Road construction has the potential to affect soil productivity, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and vegetative communities. Design features and mitigation measures were identified to reduce the risk of adversely affecting soil, fish, wildlife, and vegetative resources from road construction (EA, Appendix A). The potential for, and magnitude of resource impacts from road construction was minimized by limiting the amount of new construction, utilizing existing road prisms and decommissioning any new construction when activities are completed (EA, Appendix A). All resource areas considered the effects of road construction the effects of road construction are analyzed in these resource sections (EA, Pages 21-51). Our awareness and concern with the effects of road construction is further illustrated in the discussion of the "Original Proposed Action" under "ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL" earlier in this document.

Effects on Water Quality

Timber harvesting, fuel treatments, road building and decommissioning as well as road maintenance have the potential to deliver sediment to live streams and increase water yield, which can affect water quality. Existing springs and domestic water sources can also be affected. The interdisciplinary team made a concerted effort to minimize adverse effects to water quality through project design and site-specific mitigation (EA, pages 26-30 and Appendix A).

The selected alternative will protect water quality and meet the aquatic resource standards and objectives described by the IPNF Forest Plan using a combination of Design Features (Appendix A), Best Management Practices (Appendix C) and Inland Native Fish Strategy guidelines (Appendix D). This combination of water quality protection measures makes Alternative 2 consistent with Federal, State, and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. This consistency includes compliance with the requirements of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act as amended by the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1251. Pollutants of concern will not increase in any water quality limited segments a result of implementation of Alternative 2 (EA, pages 26-30). Additional compliance documentation and information is contained in the Hydrology Report, Appendix A (Design Features), Appendix C (Best Management Practices), and in Appendix D (Inland Native Fish Strategy Standards and Guidelines).

Effects on Fish Habitat

The potential for changes in water quality and channel characteristics affecting fish populations and/or habitat was one of the primary considerations during the development of the project. The fisheries analysis found that the selected alternative will not jeopardize the continued existence of bull trout or westslope cutthroat trout and is consistent with the Endangered Species Act. The selected alternative will maintain habitat for bull trout (IPNF management indicator species, listed as a Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act) and westslope cutthroat trout (IPNF management indicator species, listed as a Sensitive species on the Region 1 Sensitive Species List), and viability will be maintained (EA, page 34). The selected alternative will maintain habitat and thus will not affect the fishery potential (EA, page 34). These conclusions are supported by the hydrology analysis which predicts no adverse effects on water quality (See Water Quality Issue Discussion Above)

Additional documentation and information concerning the selected alternatives effects on fish habitat is contained in the Hydrology Report, the Fisheries Report, Appendix A (Design Features), Appendix C (Best

Management Practices), and in Appendix D (Inland Native Fish Strategy Standards and Guidelines). Detailed information concerning about water quality, habitat elements, channel conditions, and streamflow for the project area streams is contained in the Matrix of Conditions in the project file. Replacement of the undersized culvert where FSR 278 crosses Tumbledown Creek, and improvements to the surfacing and ditches of the FSR 278 crossings of Tumbledown Creek, Gold Creek, Branch North Gold Creek, Kickbush Gulch and Granite Creek have been completed with effects as expected. Documentation and monitoring of these improvements is available in the project file.

Effects of Project Activities on Sensitive and Rare Plants

Canopy alterations and/or ground disturbance can affect rare plant populations or suitable habitat. Field surveys for rare plants were completed in all treatment areas. The surveys confirmed that there is no suitable aquatic, peatland, dry forest, subalpine or cold forest habitat in or near treatment areas. Potential for occurrence of rare moonworts was found to be low throughout most of the project area. Some activity areas contain suitable habitat for clustered lady's slipper and pine broomrape. Populations of clustered lady's slipper (*Cypripedium fasciculatum*), yellow lady's slipper (*C. parviflorum* Salisbury var. *pubescens* [Wildenow] O.W. Knight) and pine broomrape (*Orobanche pinorum* Geyer) were found in areas originally proposed for treatment; these areas have been dropped from the project, and will be protected by site-specific buffers that have been established by the project botanists. Complete results of the field surveys are in the project file.

Effects on Soil Productivity

Soil productivity can be reduced by removing of organic materials and associated nutrients, or through detrimental impacts such as compaction, displacement, rutting, surface erosion, puddling, or severe burning. Site visits were made to all proposed ground-base units in order to assess existing conditions and to field check data records (Project File). Mitigation and design features (EA, Appendix A) will be employed to limit or prevent detrimental impacts such as compaction and displacement. Protection of nutrient capital will be accomplished requirement of overwintering of slash and coarse woody debris retention requirements (EA, Appendix A).

The selected alternative will meet Forest Plan Standards and Region 1 Soil Quality Standards (EA, pages 49-50). Soil-disturbing activities will not exceed 15 percent detrimental conditions and will maintain at least 85 percent of each activity area in a condition of acceptable productivity potential (Soils Report). Potential detrimental disturbance may affect 69 acres (without system roads) out of the 671 acres of harvest and fuel treatments (Soils Report).

Without action, continued fuel buildup will increase the risk of high-intensity wildfires that could kill much of the vegetation in both upland and riparian areas. High soil temperatures produced during high-intensity fires can create water repellent surface soil conditions that greatly reduce water infiltration and increase overland flow and erosion. Increased runoff combined with a lack of vegetation cover to protect slopes and filter sediments could lead to increased peak stream flows, excessive sediment delivery, and consequent adverse impacts to soil quality (EA, pages 48-49) .

Effects of Project Activities on Noxious Weed Introduction and Spread

Ground-disturbing activities such as temporary road construction, skid trails, log landings, timber harvest and fuel treatments have potential to create suitable weed habitat. Weed prevention measures will reduce but not eliminate the risk of direct and indirect impacts from project activities. In an effort to reduce the potential for noxious weed introduction and spread, we will employ a suite of mitigation, monitoring and design features as outlined in Appendix A and follow guidance for weed treatment established in the Sandpoint Noxious Weed Control Project FEIS and ROD. I believe these measures adequately address the weed potential associated with my decision. The selected alternative and its potential effects comply with laws, regulations and Forest Plan direction affecting the management of Noxious weeds (EA page 39 and Noxious Weed Specialist Report).

Without action, a wildfire occurring in the project area would likely be less controllable and more intense than wildfire following the implementation of Alternative 2 (EA, pages 7 and 43-47). The effects of a stand-replacing fire on noxious weed introduction and spread would be greater than that expected from the selected alternative (EA, page 39). More information can be found in the Noxious Weed Report and in the Response

to Comments appended to this decision.

Effects on Vegetation Communities

Changes in forest composition, structure, and pattern can affect forest health, fire behavior and other resource elements, such as fish and wildlife habitat. The analysis of Alternative 2's effects on forest composition, structure and pattern is presented on pages 34-38 of the EA and are further detailed in the Forest Vegetation Specialist Report. These effects of vegetation community alterations are generally positive, and are designed to meet the purpose and need for the project (EA pages 3-7). The effects of changes in forest composition, structure and pattern on other resource areas that will result from the implementation of Alternative 2 are analyzed and disclosed by resource area in the EA (pages 21-50).

Effects on Old Growth

Several comments were received expressing concern about the project's potential effects on old growth, particularly the ancient cedar grove in the North Gold Creek drainage. The cedar grove referred to is outside of the project area and will not be treated. No old growth stands will be treated in the selected alternative (EA, page 37). Additionally, small pockets of large, old trees, which do not meet the minimum criteria for old growth allocation, will be retained (Appendix A). My decision is consistent with the other Forest Plan Old Growth Management Standards (FONSI, page 1; EA, page 38). Further details regarding the effects of project activities on old growth can be found in the Vegetation Specialist Report, in Appendix F and in the Response to Comments appended to this decision.

Effects on Visual Quality

The potential impact of the project on visual and scenic quality was a concern to myself, members of the public, and the interdisciplinary team. Timber harvest and fuel treatments will result in a discernable change in pattern, form and color. However, these changes will blend with the natural landscape, because layout and timber marking will incorporate group retention boundaries and leave-tree patterns into the design of the units. Vegetation removal will repeat the form, line, color, and texture of the natural occurrences common to the surrounding areas. Prescribed burning activities are also expected to produce short-term effects. There will be a discernible change in color as spotty patterns are created due to needle scorch. These effects will be short-term and appear somewhat like the dying clumps of Douglas-fir and grand fir in root disease pockets currently occurring across the project area (EA, pages 41-43).

The selected alternative will conserve the visual resource and maintain the visual quality objectives described and required by the Forest Plan (EA, page 43). My decision to implement Alternative 2 also takes into account longer-term visual quality issues through reducing fuel loadings and reducing the potential for visual effects caused by a large, severe fire (EA, page 41-43). Further details regarding the consideration of effects of project activities on the visual resource can be found in the Visual Quality Report.

Issues Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Effects on Unregulated Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use

Many respondents expressed concern regarding OHV use in the project area. The travel plan for the project area is displayed on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, Kaniksu National Forest Travel Plan map (2003). Authorized motorized travel routes are identified on this map. Approximately 1.87 miles of road that is currently impassible and needed for this project will be opened during project activities, secured with gates during project activities, and returned to pre-project status after project activities are completed. Alternative 2 will also require the construction of approximately 0.71 mile of new temporary roads. Temporary roads will be located in a manner to prohibit unauthorized use during the project, closed with gates, and will be decommissioned after project-related activities are completed. When the purchaser is working on a gated road, the gate will be closed at the end of each day in order to avoid establishing use on these roads. Temporary roads and reconditioned non-system roads will be decommissioned at the completion of project activities. Decommissioning will include culvert removal, decompaction and/or re-contouring of the road prism, seeding, and the incorporation of woody debris and organic matter into the disturbed area. These activities will make the routes impassable to motorized travel and preclude OHV use.

Effects on Access

Several comments were received regarding road management and the potential for increased motorized access in the Tumbledown Project area. This issue was considered but not analyzed in detail because changing current access restrictions would neither address the purpose and need nor facilitate the implementation of the proposed action. Therefore, changing access was considered outside the scope of the proposed action.

V. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment and associated documents, I have determined that the selected alternative will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment based on context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The Finding of No Significant Impact is appended to this decision notice.

VI. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

To the best of my knowledge, this decision is in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies (FONSI, page 4). The project meets federal, state, and local laws for air quality (EA, page 47), cultural resources (EA, pages 50-51), noxious weeds (EA, pages 38-39), water quality (EA, page 26-30), fisheries (EA, pages 30-34) and Threatened and Endangered species (EA, pages 21-26, 33, 40-41). It also meets National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements (Tumbledown Hazardous Fuels Reduction EA and Finding of No Significant Impact). The selected alternative is consistent with the NFMA and the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Forest Plan. All management activities will be in compliance with Management Area direction, including goals and objectives, as described for each resource in the EA (pages 21-51) and in the associated specialist reports.

NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT (NFMA)

The selected alternative is consistent with the NFMA (EA, page 38, FONSI, page 4) and the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Forest Plan. This alternative does not require any Forest Plan amendments. According to 36 CFR 219.12 (Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 3, January 5, 2005, page 1059) a final determination of suitability for timber production is made through project decisions. There are three stands in the project area (stands 628-02-023, 628-02-067, and 628-03-014) currently designated as unsuitable for timber production that should be classified as suitable. Documentation of this recommended change in classification is located in the project file.

16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E) National Forest System Land and Resource Management Plans

- (i) Timber harvest will not result in irreversible damage to soil, slope, or watershed conditions (EA, pages 26-30 and 48-50).
- (ii) Openings will be restocked within five years after harvest (EA, page 38).
- (iii) Harvests will not seriously or adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat (EA, pages 26-29 and 30-34).
- (iv) Harvesting systems were not selected primarily because they will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber (EA, pages 3, 7, 10 and 17).

16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F) National Forest System Land and Resource Management Plans

- (i) Clearcutting is not occur (EA pages 16-18).
- (ii) An interdisciplinary team reviewed and assessed the project (Tumbledown EA).
- (iii) Harvest units will be shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain (EA, pages 41-43).
- (iv) Maximum size limits for areas to be cut in one harvest operation, will not be exceeded (EA, pages 16-18; Figure 2).

(v) Harvests will occur in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and esthetic resources, and the regeneration of the timber resource (EA, pages 21-51).

CLEAN WATER ACT

The selected alternative will maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the streams in the project area, in adherence with 33 U.S.C. §1251 (FONSI, pages 1-2 and 4; EA, pages 26-30; Response to Comments). The selected alternative will not impact the 303 (d) listings of North Gold Creek for sediment, or the listing of Cedar Creek for temperature (FONSI, pages 1-2; EA, pages 26-30).

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The selected alternative is compliant with the Endangered Species act because it will not adversely affect Threatened or Endangered species or their habitat. The project will have no effect on grizzly bear (EA, pages 22 and 24), woodland caribou (EA, pages 22 and 24), gray wolves (EA, pages 22 and 24), or Canada lynx (EA, pages 22 and 24). The project wildlife biologist determined that the selected alternative is consistent with Forest Plan direction to manage the habitat of species listed in the Regional Sensitive Species List to prevent further declines in populations, which could lead to federal listing under the Endangered Species Act (EA, pages 24-25). There will no effects to any federally listed plant species (EA, page 40). The selected alternative will maintain habitat for, and not jeopardize the continued existence of bull trout or westslope cutthroat trout (EA, pages 33-34).

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

The selected alternative complies with the National Historic Preservation Act (FONSI, page 4; EA, pages 50-51). A comprehensive evaluation of heritage resources was conducted and there are no known sites that will be impacted. Potentially interested tribes were consulted with, and they expressed no concerns about the proposed activities.

FLOODPLAIN AND WETLAND PROTECTION EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11988 AND 11990

Project activities will not adversely affect floodplains or wetlands (FONSI, page 3). No activities will occur on floodplains. Streams that could have floodplains will be buffered from activities (EA, Appendix D). Wetlands in the project area were omitted from treatments and watercourses will be protected with RHCA buffers (EA, pages 27- 28).

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE EXECUTIVE ORDER 12898

Implementation of Alternative 2 will not adversely affect minority or low-income populations. Activities will not result in demographic changes such as displacement of minorities, geographic changes such as land use, or economic hardship such as an increase in taxes. Activities will not have negative effects on public health. Conversely, beneficial effects such as increased opportunities for employment will occur. Timber sale and service contracts will be offered without prejudice toward any particular group, under federal laws, regulations and policies. No disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or during any other portion of public involvement over the course of this analysis (EA, page 51). Based on this, the selected alternative complies with Executive Order 12898.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 12962 (June 7, 1995)

The selected alternative will maintain aquatic habitat (FONSI, page 4; EA, pages 30-34 and 29-30) and thus will not affect the fishery potential, which in turn will not reduce the potential for recreational fishing opportunities.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13112 (February 1999)

Directs federal agencies to "...prevent the introduction of invasive species and provide for their control and to minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species cause...". The selected alternative meets Forest Plan direction and the intent of Executive Order #13112 by providing moderate control actions through project design to prevent new weed species from becoming established (EA, page 39).

VII. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur five business days from the close of the

appeal filing period. The appeal filing period is the 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the paper of record, *The Coeur D'Alene Press*. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

VII. REVIEW AND APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

The documents cited in this decision notice can be obtained from the Sandpoint Ranger District or from the Idaho Panhandle National Forests website:

www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/index

Project file documents are located at the Sandpoint Ranger District.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the (*Coeur D'Alene Press*, Coeur D'Alene, ID). It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Paper appeals must be submitted to one of the following:

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802

Office hours: Monday through Friday, except national holidays, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why my decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the following information:

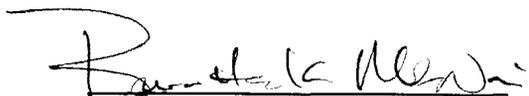
- The appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
- A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
- When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
- The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made (Tumbledown), the name and title of the Responsible Official (Ranotta McNair, Forest Supervisor), and the date of the decision;
- The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, subpart C;
- Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
- Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
- How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

If an appeal is received on this project there may be informal resolution meetings and/or conference calls between the Responsible Official and the appellant. These discussions would take place within 15 days after the closing date for filing an appeal. All such meetings are open to the public. If you are interested in attending any informal resolution discussions, please contact the Responsible Official or monitor the following website for postings about current appeals in the Northern Region of the Forest Service:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/projects/appeal_index.shtml.

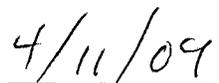
The Responsible Official for this project is Ranotta McNair, Forest Supervisor of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

For more information contact A.J. Helgenberg, Interdisciplinary Team Leader at the Sandpoint Ranger District, 1500 HWY 2, Suite 110, Sandpoint, ID 83864 (208) 263-5111. The documents cited in this decision notice can be obtained from the Sandpoint Ranger District in Sandpoint, Idaho or from the Idaho Panhandle National Forests website (www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/index).



RANOTTA K. MCNAIR

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Date

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