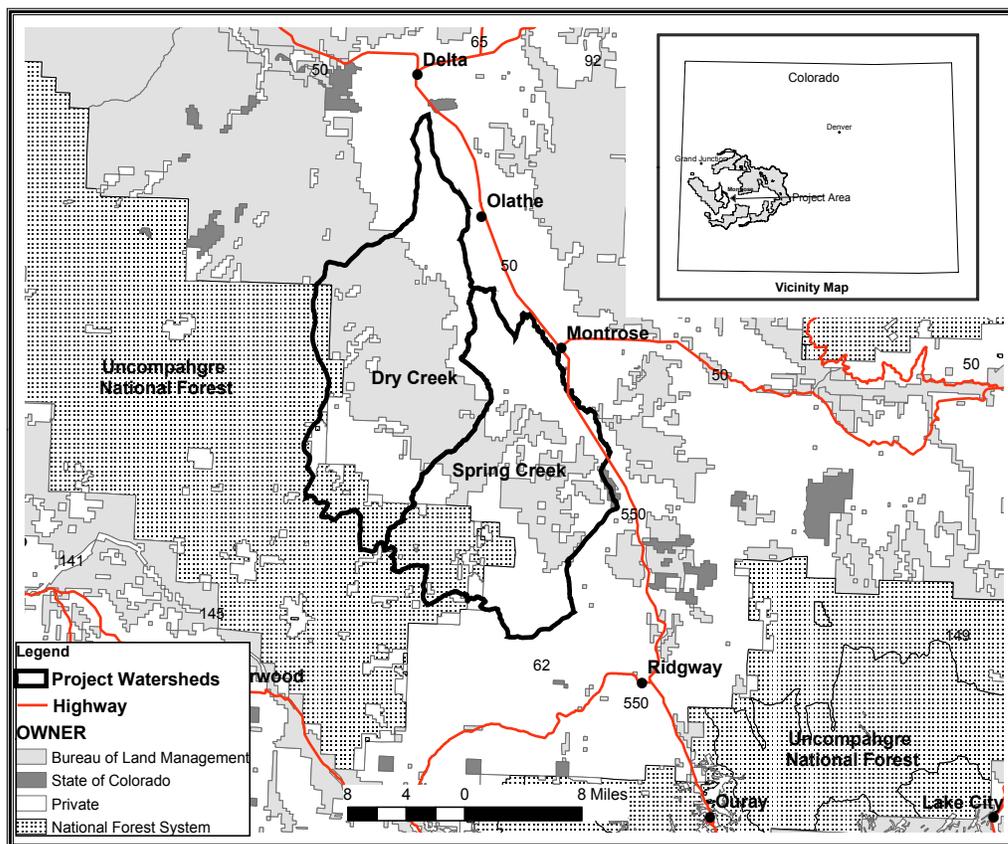


Scoping/Notice of Opportunity to Comment
Forest Service
Dry Creek/Spring Vegetation Treatment Proposals
November 2003

The Forest Service is considering proposals to apply various treatments to vegetation in the National Forest portions of the Dry Creek and Spring Creek watersheds southwest of Montrose, and is inviting public comment. The map below shows the vicinity of these treatment proposals. Specific proposals are listed and described in following pages.

Map 1:



A joint BLM/Forest Service scoping notice covering many of these proposed treatments, as well as proposed treatments on Public Lands administered by BLM was sent out in May of 2003. This notice is more site-specific, adds areas of proposed treatment not previously considered, and meets requirements of scoping and notice of opportunity to comment unique to the Forest Service.

Background: The U.S. Forest Service (FS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have written a joint vegetation management strategy for the Spring Creek and Dry Creek watersheds. This document is available from either the Forest Service in Delta, Colorado, or from the BLM in Montrose, Colorado, upon request.

Dry Creek and Spring Creek watersheds were selected for analysis and planning through a collaborative community involvement effort and an interagency interdisciplinary planning approach. Criteria used for selecting these two watersheds included the potential to improve conditions on previous projects within the watersheds, a high density of wintering mule deer combined with a low amount of high quality winter range, an opportunity to improve Gunnison sage grouse habitat, and the high level of Wildland-Urban interface (WUI) areas.

Vegetation issues identified in the vegetation management strategy indicate that the structure, composition and landscape pattern of many current vegetation cover types in these two watersheds may be inconsistent with historic conditions. From the vegetation management strategy, selected treatment proposals have been identified to take forward into this NEPA process for consideration for implementation in the next five to ten years.

Purpose And Need For The Proposed Actions The purpose for the proposed actions is to change vegetation age classes and vegetation conditions in specific amounts and patterns across National Forest System lands in the Dry Creek and Spring Creek watersheds so that they meet, or will be on track to meet vegetation mosaic objectives. “Vegetation Mosaic” is the term used to describe the pattern and amounts of vegetation age classes across a landscape. There are three vegetation mosaic objectives on FS lands, each specific to a major vegetation or habitat type, and each designed to promote one of the following: 1) habitat for Threatened & Endangered species (Canada Lynx), 2) optimal fuels arrangement to prevent spread of wildfire into areas with residences or power transmission lines, and 3) natural ecosystem function. Only one objective applies to each part of the landscape; where each objective applies is determined by the vegetation type, habitat type or presence of wildland-urban interface.

The need for the proposed action is based on an analysis which found the existing vegetation mosaic does not meet the vegetation mosaic objectives on most of the publicly owned lands in the Dry Creek and Spring Creek watersheds (USFS, BLM 2003).

1) Results of analysis of existing vegetation conditions. Existing vegetation age classes were analyzed relative to the vegetation mosaic objectives within each of the two-watersheds (UP Mosaic Group 2003). The analysis showed that each of the areas assessed had some problems relative to the objectives: they were either more than 10% away from the age class targets, and/or more than 10% away from the patch size targets. Some were missing significant amounts of acres of some age classes, and had a substantial number of acres in excess of other age classes. In many areas there was an abundance of mid and early-mid age classes, which is the result of the chainings from the 1960s. Past timber harvest in the ponderosa pine zone has created even aged and dense stands that are susceptible to stand replacement fires and insects and disease. In other areas there was too little early seral, late seral and old growth. The nature of the problems appears to be a combination of past management practices, and the issue or driving force behind the vegetation mosaic objective.

2) Mule deer decline. There is evidence that mule deer have declined on the Uncompahgre Plateau, as they are in much of the West. Data ranging from hunter success, winter aerial counts, and radio collar surveys is indicating that deer numbers have declined substantially in the last 20-30 years, and habitat quality is thought to be the

biggest contributing factor (Watkins et al, 2001). Observations of browse conditions in deer winter ranges in the region indicate many stands of shrubs are dominated by older, unproductive plants that have been chronically hedged by browsing, and that the understory vegetation is often depleted. In addition, much of the winter range is currently vegetated by middle-age vegetation--young trees and dying shrubs. This particular seral stage does not produce much forage for deer. Additionally, based on 1998 census quadrat surveys by the CDOW, more than 45% of the mule deer wintering on the Uncompahgre Plateau occurred south of Roubideau Canyon in Unit 62. This area primarily consists of the Dry Creek and Spring Creek watersheds. There are opportunities to “short stop” elk on Forest Service land by improving habitat conditions along the band of upper elevation winter range thus reducing inter-specific competitive pressure on lower elevation mule deer winter range.

3) Hazardous fuels distribution and arrangement. The two-watershed area lies south and west of Montrose, a rapidly growing community. Lower parts of the watershed have a great deal of intermingled private and public land. Many of the private parcels are being subdivided and residential construction within this vegetation zone is considered moderately hazardous for wildfire risk due to hazardous fuels. Several major electric transmission lines pass through these watersheds, and pass through these same fuel types. Fire management specialists have evaluated the distribution of fuels on nearby public lands, and determined that the vegetation is very homogeneous and very continuous. This could result in large, high intensity fires near human development. These fuels, and the potential fire behavior, also reduce the safety of firefighters attempting to control a fire (Huisjen, personal communication).

4) Poor vegetation conditions.

a) Past vegetation treatments. Large scale chainings, range improvements, and logging in the past altered the vegetation mosaic across these watersheds and established nonnative, competitive species into the native vegetation types. Now many of these treatments have aged, and there are extensive stands of mid-seral vegetation. In many of these, the understory is dominated by the introduced species.

b) Poor past grazing management. There is a history of sudden and severe overgrazing on the Uncompahgre Plateau that followed settlement. While grazing pressure and numbers have declined tremendously since that time, problems associated with overgrazing persist in some areas in the form of depleted herbaceous communities, domination by weedy exotic plants, and domination by unpalatable species. In some areas, native woody or unpalatable species dominate at high densities so that they tie up available resources and prevent establishment of palatable herbaceous plants. Many range managers believe this is a phenomenon brought about by heavy grazing (National Research Council, 1994).

c) Weeds. Noxious weeds as well as other exotics are well established in the two watersheds. Some of the noxious weeds such as spotted knapweed are moving from disturbed sites of invasion into nearby undisturbed communities. Areas where the plant community is in poor condition are especially susceptible to invasion. Cheatgrass probably presents the greatest threat to the vegetation in the two watersheds. It is already widespread in some lower elevation areas, and is a particular

threat to invade poor condition communities or burned areas.

d) Bare ground and lack of adequate groundcover. Bare ground is vulnerable to erosion, and inhibits infiltration of water. The condition of the plant community greatly influences the amount of bare ground and surface soil protection (National Research Council, 1994). Assessments of similar plant communities in other parts of the region have indicated that semi-arid communities with high densities of woody, unpalatable species often have high levels of bare ground, as do heavily grazed areas and mid seral plant communities in the sagebrush/pinyon-juniper zone (BLM 2001).

e) Low plant species diversity. Many areas do not appear to be supporting the predicted variety of species that should be present, which has resulted in near monocultures of sagebrush, introduced grasses, and pinyon and juniper trees on BLM lands, and even aged stands. Diversity is one component of the condition of a community, which reflects its ability to recover from a disturbance, and its ability to use resources efficiently (National Research Council, 1994). Communities that have reduced diversity and high density of competitive species may not be able to increase in native species diversity without some outside intervention.

f) Perceived problems brought about through fire suppression. Fires have been actively suppressed in the two watersheds since the 1940s, and before that were most likely reduced by heavy livestock grazing of fine fuels. The ability of fires to affect large acreages and transform the vegetation community has been witnessed in the region with other wildfires, and is still evident on parts of the two watersheds where burned snags are still visible. Land managers believe that the suppression of such a powerful mechanism for shaping vegetation has led to a deficit in the amount of younger vegetation in the two watersheds compared with what would be there if fire suppression had not occurred. Research from Mesa Verde National Park indicates that the fire interval was as long as 400 years in the Park's high elevation pinyon-juniper woodland (Floyd-Hannah and Romme 1993). However since that report was written, nearly half of the pinyon-juniper woodlands in the park have burned in 6 separate fires (San Miguel 2003). More recent, but not yet completed work on various pinyon-juniper woodland stands on the Uncompahgre Plateau indicates that stand ages vary substantially (Eisenhart 2003 personal communication) indicating different fire return intervals may be associated with different parts of the region.

g) Power line protection. In addition to the broader treatments described above, specific treatments of the WAPA and Tri-State Powerline corridors are proposed to reduce fuel loading and the continuity of fuel under and adjacent to these lines. Vegetation conditions near these lines are conducive to damaging fires. While the literal fire-proofing of these power facilities is neither practically possible nor desirable, the likelihood of these power lines either serving as a wildfire ignition source or being severely damaged by a wildfire can be reduced. The Forest Service goal in this proposal is to reduce the probability of the Western Area Power Authority and Tri-State power transmission facilities located on the Uncompahgre Plateau sustaining considerable damage in the event of a wildfire. The Forest Service proposes to achieve this goal through a vegetation and fuels-management strategy that will alter fire behavior in the forest environment adjacent to these power transmission facilities. The Forest Service proposes to achieve this goal through tree

thinning and fuels reduction within about 900 feet of the power lines. Commercial and non-commercial tree thinning will create a more-open canopy structure to reduce the ability of tree crowns to maintain a high-intensity crown fire in the vicinity of the power lines. Reduction of dead ground fuels and live and dead “ladder” fuels will reduce the intensity of a ground fire in near the power lines, consequently decreasing the likelihood of a ground fire spreading into the main tree canopy.

Specific Proposed Actions: The attached maps, tables and narratives describe proposed treatment locations, treatment acreages, treatment methods and associated access management.

Issues to be Considered: Issues identified by the ID Team, so far, and to be considered in the environmental analysis are as follows:

Effects on soils

- Soil loss
- Erosion
- Compaction

Effects on water

- Sediment
- Yield
- Riparian Function
- Wetlands

Effects on wildlife

- Threatened/Endangered or Sensitive Species and specifically Canada lynx
- Habitat Capability for Pine dependent species
- Habitat Capability for elk/deer
- Management Indicator Species

Goshawk

Pine Marten

Abert's squirrel

Elk/Deer

Effects on vegetation

- Diversity/Pattern/Mosaic
- Age/Structure/Ecological Function
- Insect/disease
- Noxious weeds

Exotic species

Effects on air

- Smoke from Rx Burning

Effects on cultural/heritage resources

Effects on recreation

- Dispersed Recreation
- Travel Management
- Hunting

Effects on grazing management

- Forage Production
- Vegetation Composition
- Displacement of Permitted livestock

Effects on fire Hazard/Fuels

- Hazard (of catastrophic fires, large events)
- Risk of escaped fire from Rx burning
- Risk to urban facilities
- Hazardous fuels distribution/arrangement

Cumulative Actions: Cumulative actions to be considered in the analysis include:

- Past timber harvest in the area
- Current small timber sales
- Happy Canyon roller chopping project
- Sims Mesa Hydroax project
- BLM vegetation/fuels treatments below National Forest.
- Winter recreation/snowmobiles/snow plowing
- Ongoing grazing
- Urban Development on Dave Wood/Sims Mesa/Government Springs

Alternatives: Alternatives being considered for treatment areas other than power-lines at this time include:

- No Action
- Proposed Actions
- Proposed actions with no harvest or thinning of timber
- Proposed actions limited to access using only existing 4wd or higher standard roads, i.e., no construction of new access either through new temporary roads, or improvement/widening of existing trails and ATV routes.

Alternatives treatments for the power-line protection include selective thinning with no commercial harvest of larger sized trees.

Scoping and Opportunity to Comment: This scoping and opportunity to comment will serve as both scoping for these projects under the requirements of NEPA, and the 30 day opportunity to comment required at 36 CFR 215.3. The Responsible Official for this project will be Robert L. Storch, Forest Supervisor of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. Legal notice of this opportunity to comment will be published in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel. Only those who submit timely and substantive comments will be accepted as appellants of the final decision. Also, for appeal eligibility, each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request.

NEPA documentation and Decision: At this time the Forest Service plans to document the effects of these proposals in an environmental assessment (EA). As the 30-day opportunity to comment is being offered at this time, a Decision Notice (DN) documenting the Responsible Official's decision will be issued shortly after the EA is completed. The DN will be sent to those requesting it or expressing interest by commenting at this time. A legal Notice of Decision will be published in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel shortly after the Decision is made.

Submitting Comments: The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice (of opportunity to comment) in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel. Comments may be submitted in hard copy through the mail, email, fax, or delivered by hand. Office hours for hand delivery are 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, weekdays.

Mail comments to: Dry Creek/Spring Creek Vegetation Treatment
2250 Highway 50
Delta, Colorado 81416

Fax comments to: 970-874-6698

Email comments to: comments-rocky-mountain-gmug@fs.fed.us

Further Information: For more information regarding this project please contact Blake Patton at 970-240-5300 or Jeff Burch at 970-874-6600.

Proposed Actions

Project #	Acres	Vegetation Type	Treatment Method(s)	Objectives	Access #
1	40	Mature PP/oak	Thin, underburn	Stand improvement	1
2	68	PP plantation	Thin, prune limbs	Stand improvement	1
3	77	Mature PP/oak	Underburn	Stand improvement	1
4	73	Mature PP/oak	Underburn	Stand improvement	1
5	110	Mature PP/oak	Underburn	Stand improvement	1
6	183	Oak,scattered PJ	Mechanical Roller-chopping	Alter seral stage	1
7	101	Aspen/conif.	Rx burn	Alter seral stage	2
8 *	167	PP/mtn shrub	Mechanical Roller-chopping	Alter seral stage	2
9 *	101	PP plantation	Pruning	Stand improvement	2
10	78	Mature PP/oak	Thin, underburn	Stand improvement	2
11	390	Mature PP/oak	Thin, underburn	Stand improvement	1
12	315	Mature PP/oak	Thin, underburn	Stand improvement	1
13	545	Mature PP/oak	Thin, underburn	Stand improvement	2
14	68	Mature aspen	Fuelwood harvest	Alter seral stage	1
15	240	Spruce/fir	Thin, handpile/burn	Stand improvement	1
16	182	PP/mtn shrub	Rx burn	Alter seral stage	4
17	185	PP/mtn shrub	Rx burn	Alter seral stage	3
18	635	Oak,scattered PP	Mechanical/ roller-chopping	Alter seral stage	3
19	447	Oak,scattered PP	Mechanical/ Roller- chopping	Alter seral stage	3

20	150	Oak,scattered PP	Mechanical/ Roller-chopping	Alter seral stage	3
21 *	49	PP/mtn shrub	Rx burn	Alter seral stage	1
22 *	88	PP/mtn shrub	Thin,Rx burn	Alter seral stage/ Stand improvement	1
23 *	38	PP/mtn shrub	Rx burn	Alter seral stage	1
24 *	27	PP/mtn shrub	Rx burn	Alter seral stage	1
25 *	59	PP/mtn shrub	Thin/Rx burn	Alter seral stage/Stand Improvement	1
26	29	PP/mtn shrub	Mechanical Hydro-ax or Roller-chopping	Alter seral stage	3
27	22	PP/mtn shrub	Mechanical Hydro-ax or Roller-chopping, Rx burn	Alter seral stage	3
28	60	PP/mtn shrub	Mechanical/ Hydro-ax or Roller-chopping Rx burn	Alter seral stage	3
29	206	Oak,mtn shr,PP	Commercial Thin/ RX Burn	Alter seral stage	3
30	67	Oak,mtn shr,PP	Commercial Thin/Rx burn	Alter seral stage	3
31	157	Oak,mtn shr,PP	Mechanical/Hydro-ax or Roller-chopping Rx burn	Alter seral stage	2
32	186	Oak,mtn shr,PP	Mechanical/Hydro-ax or Roller-chopping RX burn	Alter seral stage	2
33	405	Mature PP/oak	Thin, underburn	Stand improvement	
43	250	Mature PP/Oak/PJ	Thin,underburn	Fuels/stand improvement	1
Reforestation	*	Spruce/fir	Plant spruce remove introduced LLP	Stand restoration	1
Travel Management	*	All Forest types	Road closures	Habitat effectiveness	N/A
Vista Points	10	Aspen, S/F	Mechanical	Alter seral stage	1
Power-line Protection	Approx 2000	Aspen, S/F	Mechanical, Tree Harvest,	Reduce ladder fuels, open tree canopy	1

- units have already have had some treatment, but will need further treatments, 1 – Use existing Roads, 2 – Use existing Roads with Maintenance, 3 – Gain access from private lands, 4 – Use Trail access

Unit #1 – This area is a mature stand of ponderosa pine with an oakbrush understory. The area would be thinned, removing the understory ponderosa pine followed by underburning to remove thinning slash and set back the oak to an early seral stage to further reduce fuel loadings and improve browse vigor/production for big game. The Access is off of the Dave Wood road. No R.O.W. is need for this project area. The boundary has been survey.

Unit #2 – This area is a ponderosa pine plantation that has been thinned three years ago and needs to have the trees pruned to reduce the amount of ladder fuels(shrubs and sage brush) which will reduce the risk of losing the stand to wildfire. The thinning and pruning will allow for low intensity fire to burn without total loss of the stand. The entire treatment area is within the Dave Wood Outdoor Education Area on the Ouray Ranger District. The treatment would be part of the resource management demonstration area for local schools. Access is off of the Davewood Road, and the area boundary between Private land and Public lands has been surveyed and posted.

Units 3, 4, 5 – These areas all consist of a mature stand of ponderosa pine with an oakbrush understory. All units would be underburned to reduce natural fuels and set back the oak to an early stage to improve stand conditions. NEPA completed for these units under the Ouray Small Sales EA 2002. The access for these units is off the spring creek rim road.

Unit 6 – This area has an overstory of mature P/J with a mixed-shrub (oak/serviceberry/mountain mahogany) understory. The site would be mechanically treated to reduce fuel continuity and set back the seral stage of the vegetation treated (mosaic pattern or savannah) to reduce fire hazard from Spring Creek canyon. The treatment would be either treated with hydro-axe or roller-chopping. The access is off the spring creek rim road. The boundary between private and public lands has been surveyed and posted.

Unit 7 – This area is a draw with an intermittent stream that has become overgrown with older shrubs and dead/dying trees. This unit will be Prescribed burned to alter the seral stage of the dominant vegetation. The primary emphasis is to improve habitat conditions for wildlife and remove fuel loading to reduce the chance of wildland fire from going on to private lands. This unit is within the boundaries of the Dave Wood Outdoor Education Area on the Ouray Ranger District. The treatment would be part of the resource management demonstration area for local schools. The access is off the Davewood road. The boundary between private and public lands has been surveyed and posted.

Unit 8 – This is the Happy Canyon Wildlife Habitat Enhancement project area. NEPA was completed in 2002. The project will utilize mechanical treatment to set back the mixed-shrub understory of the ponderosa pine stands and oakbrush/PJ to an early seral stage for mule deer and elk. It is designed and planned for implementation in coordination with the adjacent private landowner (NRCS program \$). Due to interest of

the UP group, it is included on this map/list. Additional acres (Unit 8A) were identified for treatment. This unit is within the boundaries of the Dave Wood Outdoor Education Area on the Ouray Ranger District. The treatment would be part of the resource management demonstration area for local schools. The access is on FDR 510.3c. The boundary between private lands and the public lands have been surveyed and posted.

Unit 9 – This is a ponderosa pine plantation that was thinned three years ago. The proposed action now is to follow-up with pruning and removal of shrubs and sage to reduce the ladder fuels and reduce the chance of crown fire destroying the stand. Following pruning, underburning will be used to remove slash. The access is off of FDR 510.3C. The boundary between private land and public has been surveyed and posted.

Units 10, 11, 12, 13 – This area consists of mature ponderosa pine with an understory of mixed-shrubs. The pine within these units will be commercially thinned to reduce stocking. Commercial thinning refers to the removal of commercial size trees greater than five inches at breast height (DBH) from a stand to achieve a certain forest structural objective. In this proposal, commercial thinning will be accomplished by “thinning from below,” which means in general that the smaller diameter trees are targeted for removal. The post thinning stand density goal is to retain about 60FT to 80ft basal area. Then underburned to remove slash and reduce the mixed-shrub understory. NEPA completed for #11 (Ouray Small Sales EA 2002). Access is off of the spring creek rim road. All boundary has been surveyed and posted.

Unit 14 – This is an area of dying aspen. The unit has been designated as a fuelwood cutting area with the ultimate goal of clearcutting the stand to facilitate natural regeneration. The remaining slash will be broadcast burned to reduce the fuel loading and help with the regeneration of the aspen stand. Access is off of the Davewood road. Land lines have been surveyed and posted.

Unit 15 – This is an area of spruce/fir forest mixed with aspen. The proposed action includes thinning and hand piling/burning the slash to reduce fire potential adjacent to the private land. We would be removing the down and dead materials and some of the smaller diameter understory to help reduce the chance of wildfire from going from public lands to private. Access is off of the sawdust pile road. All land lines have been surveyed and posted.

Units 16, 17 – This area consists of mature ponderosa pine with a mixed-shrub understory. The area would be Rx burned to reduce the fuel loadings and regenerate browse for big game species. Burning effectiveness very limited in #16 due to heavy livestock use. Access is off of the spring creek trail, it is limited to ATV and foot travel.

Units 18, 19, 20 – These units consist of gamble oak with scattered ponderosa pine and P/J over story. All areas would be mechanically treated to reduce natural fuels and improve forage/browse conditions for big game. Mechanical treatment will focus on oak with poor growth form and vigor. Retain patches of mature oak. All aspen stands and ponderosa pine and P/J trees will be retained on the site. The methods of treatment would be roller-chopping. The access is off of private lands from the north into unit #20. Access has been given for this project at this time. All land lines have been surveyed and posted.

Units 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 – All of these areas consist of mature stands of mixed-shrubs (oak, serviceberry, mountain mahogany) with scattered over story of mature ponderosa pine. All units been treated mechanically by hydro-ax and force account chain saw crews. The CE was done in 2003, access is off the Sims Mesa road. These units will receive further treatments of under-burning in the next 2-3 years. Unit 22 will possibly need to be commercially thinned.

Within Unit 22 is a 32-acre portion of a proposed commercial timber harvest area (THA#240). Timber would be harvested in a thinning-from-below cut, yielding an estimated xx thousand board-feet of wood products. NFSR 574.1a and NFSR 574, Sims Mesa Rod would serve as the primary haul route into Montrose. These roads would remain open following completion of the timber sale. About two years after completion of the timber sale, a fuel-reduction prescribed burn would be conducted.

Within Unit 25 is a 32-acre portion of a proposed commercial timber harvest area (THA#241). Timber would be harvested in a thinning-from-below cut, yielding an estimated XX thousand board-feet of wood products. NFSR 574, Sims Mesa Road, would serve as the primary haul route into Montrose. This road would remain open following completion of the timber sale. About two years after completion of this timber sale, a fuel-reduction prescribed burn would be conducted.

Units 26, 27, 28 – All of these areas consist of mature stands of ponderosa pine, PJ, and mountain-shrubs. All units would be mechanically treated to reduce continuous fuels and set the mixed-shrub and P/J back to an early seral stage. The larger P/J within Unit 26 will be retained to provide a savanna type mosaic. Within Units 27 and 28, mechanical treatment will remove P/J and brush. The ponderosa pine over story would be retained. Access will need to be granted from private land to do the treatment.

Units 30, 31, 32 – All units are dominated by mature stands of Gambel oak and mixed-shrubs with widely scattered ponderosa pine. Treatment would be to mechanically treat the oak and mixed-shrub to reduce continuous acres and improve forage/browse conditions for big game. All ponderosa pine trees will be retained.

Unit 29, 33 – This area consists of mature ponderosa pine and oak. Within the Unit 33 is about 144 acres of relatively dense commercial-size ponderosa pine forest in which commercial timber harvest is proposed (THA#242 and portions of THA's@241 and #240). Timber would be harvested in a thinning-from-below cut, yielding some small amount of wood products. NFSR 574, Sims Mesa road, and Way 229 would serve as the primary haul route into Montrose. The Sims mesa road would remain open following completion of the timber sale and Way 229 would be decommissioned. About two years after completion of the timber sale, a prescribed burn would be conducted to reduce fuels and regenerate the under story vegetation to improve forage/browse conditions for big game.

Within Unit 29 are two potential timber harvest areas, THA's #243 and #244. Because these is no suitable timber-haul access into this unit, no commercial thinning of ponderosa pine is proposed. Instead, the area will be under burned to improve the forage and browse conditions for big game.

Unit 43 – This area consists of mature ponderosa pine, PJ and oak, The stand will be thinned mechanically by force account crews to allow the area to be under burned without loss of over story. The area can be accessed off the Transfer road. All land lines have been surveyed and posted.

Power-line Protection - Objective: to reduce the likelihood of a fire severe enough to damage power transmission facilities.

Strategy: 1) create more open canopy structure to reduce the probability of sustaining a crown fire; 2) reduce dead ground fuels and live and dead ladder fuels to reduce the likelihood of a ground fire spreading to the crowns and to reduce heat generated by potential fire. “Anchor” treatment to the power-line corridor. Begin at the corridor and treat areas out from corridor up to 800 feet.

- In spruce/fir, thin over-story to 80-120 BA. Remove all dead standing down dead trees. Remove shrub and small trees in situations where their retention could lead to the spread of a ground fire into the main canopy.
- In Aspen/conifer type, remove conifers and leave aspen.
- “Feather” trees back from edge of power-line to eliminate “danger trees” – trees that could fall into the power-line.

Reforestation of Native Tree Species – Reforestation of Native Tree Species – 1970’s-era clearcutting within the spruce/fir forest type created some non-stocked areas. After several unsuccessful attempts to reestablish Engelmann spruce through natural regeneration, the Forest Service planted lodgepole pine, as species not historically present on the Uncompahgre Plateau, to serve as a “cover crop” until Engelmann spruce could re-establish itself. Natural establishment has been slow and restocking has not occurred yet on most of the area. The proposal is to remove all lodgepole pine from the sites where adequate natural regeneration has occurred. Where regeneration of native tree species does not meet Forest Plan standards, Engelmann spruce will be planted in the shade of the lodgepole. In the future after these planted seedlings are established, the lodgepole pine will be cut and removed.

Travel Management – The Forest Service completed revision of the travel plan for the Uncompahgre NF in March of 2002. All decisions on area travel and individual route use/designations were made in that EIS. Site-specific NEPA is now required on the environmental effects of road/trail closures that result in ground disturbing activities.

Only those routes planned for decommissioning which fall within treatment units will be made part of this project. Others within the two watersheds will be taken up at another time.

Vista Points – The Forest Service has three vista points adjacent to the Divide Road that were established in the 1990’s. A turnout and sign were developed next to the Divide road, and the tree cover was removed (clearcut) to provide views of the Forest and distant landscapes. The proposal now is to maintain these openings in an early seral stage at both sites.