

**DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Environmental Assessment
For
Grand Junction Watershed Project**

**U.S.D.A. Forest Service
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
Grand Valley Ranger District
Mesa County, Colorado**

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Grand Junction Watershed Project documents the analysis of a number of vegetative projects that will reduce and mitigate natural fuels accumulations, improve wildlife habitat and improve the condition of several non-motorized trails, thereby providing improved conditions and ensuring continued protection of the City of Grand Junctions Watershed.

The purpose of and need for action is to restore pre-suppression ecosystem functions and to modify, reduce and remove a build up of fuels (woody debris) as well as improve vegetative health; improve, repair and restore impacted non-motorized trails; and increase diversity of wildlife habitat.

Specific objectives include:

- Design treatments that will limit fire severity and intensity.
- Limit the potential movement and infiltration of ash or soil into city water courses or facilities thereby returning the entire basin to a more healthy and functional ecosystem.
- Modify continuous horizontal and vertical fuel profiles in areas strategically identified so as to gain maximum basin wide protection at the least possible cost across agency and city property boundaries.
- Promote a diversity of age and size classes among key vegetation types.
- Meet the intent of the Federal agencies fuels management programs to reduce fire risk and hazardous fuel build-up within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Most of these areas are within, or adjacent to, an at-risk community as identified in recommendations in a community wildfire protection plan (CWPP) or those areas within 1 mile of the boundary of an at-risk community.
- Reduce impacts of existing authorized trails to water quality, wildlife and fish habitat and overall watershed condition.
- Improve and increase wildlife winter range habitat conditions through a variety of mechanical and prescribed fire methods.

DECISION

As the District Ranger for the Grand Valley Ranger District, I have reviewed the EA and the project record, including the Response to Comments, the Biological Evaluation/ Biological Assessment, the Management Indicator Species Assessment and various resource specialist reports. It is my decision to implement Alternative 1, the Proposed Action and associated design criteria:

- 1) prescribe burn approximately 5300 acres of Gambel oak, serviceberry, sagebrush, grass and isolated areas of both pinyon/juniper and aspen over an eight to ten year rotation, beginning 2008.
- 2) mechanically treat approximately 3000 acres by using either a roller chopper, hydro-axe or crews to thin, chop or masticate dense stands of pinyon/juniper or oak.
- 3) Pre- and/or post-treat with appropriate tools such as herbicide treatments, seeding, etc.
- 5) re-introduce fire back into fire-adapted ecosystems where possible.
- 6) construct, re-construct and/or re-route trails to ensure a more sustainable non-motorized trail system and reduce sedimentation into streams / municipal water supply sources.
- 7) decommission and/or rehabilitate non-system routes.

General implementation of the projects (unit layout, contract preparation contract administration) will be completed by qualified Forest Service personnel and reviewed by the District Ranger and staff. Contract administration will be conducted on a regular basis to assure contractor compliance with project specifications. Forest Service personnel will administer contract activities on City lands and provide the City with regular updates as work progresses.

These treatments are described below:

A. Prescribed Burning Treatments:

Treatment Blocks 1 – 9

These blocks are located entirely on NFS lands and encompass approximately 5,300 acres. The dominant vegetation type is Gambel oak (oakbrush) with scattered pinyon/juniper, pockets of sagebrush, grass and isolated aspen. Preliminary plans are to use a combination of an aerial ignition system (helicopter with helitorch or sphere dispenser) and handcrews. Implementation will be in the spring in order to make use of snow cover above the burn and adequate fuel moisture throughout the project. All of the blocks will not be burned within a single spring season, but targeted for completion over several years, conditions permitting to create a variety of age classes of vegetation.

B. Mechanical Treatments:

Units A, B & C: These units are located on both City and NFS lands encompassing 466 acres. The dominant vegetation is pinyon/juniper of varying densities and with mixed understories (oakbrush, pinyon/juniper other brush

species). There are several areas of cheat grass infestation that will be sprayed prior to mechanical or prescribed burning.

These units lend themselves to mechanical treatment with more gentle terrain (slopes under 30%) and relatively easy access to the project site by mechanical equipment. Part of these units may require hand thinning to protect resources.

Unit A, Unit B and 77 acres of Unit C will be hand-thinned and piled. Thinning prescriptions will be similar to those outlined in Units D, E, F and G. The remaining 135 acres of Unit C will be either hydro-axed or roller chopped.

Post treatment review of these units for appropriate seeding of species, weed control will be completed by an IDT (wildlife biologist, fuels and range scientist).

Units D, E, F & G: These units also represent both City and NFS Lands. The four units cover 330 acres. The vegetation type, terrain and fire potential are similar to Units A, B & C and will not be further described in this section.

These units were identified as those more suited to hand cutting/piling due to their relative inaccessibility by large pieces of mechanical equipment and lack of road access.

Project specifications will be require removal of up to 40% of both the under and overstory, piling that material onsite and burning the piles as conditions permit (usually with continuous snow cover).

Unit E may not be treated as extensively as the rest of the units due to the number of perennial streams within this immediate site area. This unit will be designed with the assistance of either the Forest Soil scientist or hydrologist.

Post treatment review of these units for appropriate seeding of species, weed control will be completed by an IDT (wildlife biologist, fuels and range scientist).

Units H, I & J: These units are on the upper slopes of the Kannah Creek basin covering 928 acres, and are dominated by oak and encroaching pinyon/juniper at lower elevations; and isolated sagebrush and aspen. The units are all on NFS lands and will include both mechanical treatments and prescribed fire.

Project details will allow mechanical treatment (hydro-axe or roller chopper) in units H and J.

Accessibility into Unit H may be difficult and preclude the use of some mechanical options; therefore this unit may be treated by fire rather than mechanically.

Unit I will be treated with fire after Units H and J are treated so they can be used as barriers to limit fire spread from Unit I implementation.

Post treatment review of these units for appropriate seeding of species and weed control will be completed by an IDT (wildlife biologist, fuels and range scientist).

Unit K: This is a small 18 acre unit centered around the Wildrose Campground, adjacent to the Lands End Road on NFS lands. This site is predominantly oak and will be treated mechanically. Some hand-thinning/felling may have to occur near facilities.

Post treatment review of these units for appropriate seeding of species and weed control will be completed by an IDT (wildlife biologist, fuels and range scientist).

Unit L: Unit L is 20 acres in size and located on NFS lands. I have decided not to close any dispersed camping areas at this time since dispersed recreation opportunities are limited along the Lands End Road. Each of the dispersed sites will be reviewed and appropriate measures taken to ensure resource protection while providing the public the opportunity to disperse camp.

The small cheat grass stand will be treated with herbicide and the area will be rehabilitated including closing the unauthorized trail system in order to prevent future long term soil erosion.

No mechanical or prescribed burning will occur in this unit.

Post treatment review of these units for appropriate seeding of species and weed control will be completed by an IDT (wildlife biologist, fuels and range scientist).

Unit M: Unit M is a 47 acre unit located on NFS lands and is adjacent to the Lands End Road. No mechanical or prescribed burning will occur in this unit.

Herbicide treatment along the road right-of-way (~100' either side of the road) and within areas of extensive cheat grass infestations will be targeted. These areas will then be seeded.

Post treatment review of these units for appropriate seeding of species and weed control will be completed by an IDT (wildlife biologist, fuels and range scientist).

Units N, O, P, & R: These units are located on BLM lands and will be covered under a separate analysis.

Unit Q: Unit Q is 702 acres and located on NFS lands. Unit Q was previously treated in the 1960's but experienced extensive pinyon/juniper regrowth and has a dominant cheat grass understory. It will be treated mechanically.

Prior to mechanical treatment, pre-treatment of undesirable and noxious weeds will be completed to reduce the potential seed spread. It will be laid out to specifically address key wildlife winter range needs. This unit will be seeded at the time of treatment.

Unit Q may require access via a closed trail (located on BLM land] or from Unit P. If the closed trail is utilized, it will be fully rehabilitated and re-seeded.

Post treatment review of this unit for appropriate seeding of species, additional weed control will be completed by an IDT (wildlife biologist, fuels and range scientist).

C. Trail Reconstruction/Re-routes

Extensive trail maintenance, re-routes, reconstruction and stabilizing will occur within the Kannah Creek Basin. Specific trail logs and inventories have been completed and those sections requiring work will be addressed over an 8-10 year cycle.

Non-system routes will be reviewed for resource impacts and closed as deemed necessary.

All trails within the basin are non-motorized and will remain as such.

Design Features

The following design features will be required during project implementation:

- Stream courses will be protected by leaving a buffer of undisturbed vegetation along their banks as identified by the Forest Hydrologist / Soil Scientist.
- Riparian areas will not be used as ignition points within any prescribed fire unit.
- Post or concurrent seeding will take place on areas determined to be susceptible to invasion by noxious or invasive plant species.
- No new roads will be constructed.
- Treatment units will be laid out in such a manner as to create the greatest opportunity for vertical and horizontal vegetation diversity and for wildlife, while meeting the critical need to reduce fuel loading.
- Pre- and post-spray treatments will occur in those areas having noxious or invasive plants, but specifically in those areas with pinyon/juniper and indicators of cheat grass or other noxious or troublesome weed populations.
- All burn pile sites within the Pinyon/Juniper community will be sprayed with herbicide and seeded.
- Treatments will not occur during periods deemed critical by wildlife specialists for elk and deer seclusion. Established seasonal closures are from December 15th – April 1st.
- Surveys for *Sclerocactus glaucus* will be conducted on City owned treatment units. If found, these areas will be avoided.
- Prior to and immediately following project implementation, mechanical equipment will be washed in order to prevent weed seed from being transported into or out of the area.
- Notices will be posted at existing roads or trail heads at least 2 weeks prior to project implementation.
- During periods of high visitor use (Memorial Day, Lands End Hill Climb, July 4th and Labor Day] suspension of work within the watershed may occur if determined to be a safety concern.
- A silvicultural prescription will be developed for those Units that are to be hand thinned. These sites are all Pinyon/Juniper.
- Use of rubber-tired mechanical equipment will require that soil conditions be dry to prevent rutting or any other adverse soil disturbances. Regular monitoring during site visits will be done by the assigned COR.
- If wetlands are identified within treatment units during project layout, they will be excluded from treatment. A 100 ft. buffer will be provided to minimize blowdown of surrounding trees. If water levels are low during implementation measure the 100 ft. distance from the edge of the hydrophytic vegetation along the edge of the wetland.
- No ground based equipment operation will occur in riparian buffer zones except at designated locations (approved by hydrologist or fish biologist or soils scientist) for crossings.
- Build firelines outside filter strips unless tied into a stream, lake, or wetland as a firebreak with minimal disturbed soil. Retain organic ground cover in filter strips during prescribed fires.

- Construction of fire line will include installation of water-bars to dissipate water energy and prevent erosion. Additionally, rake litter and other material or scatter slash over the line, once it is safe to do so.
- Chipped material will be distributed to avoid deep continuous ground coverage. The desired pattern is patchy, mosaic, and discontinuous. Masticated wood “chunks” will be distributed to deep avoid continuous ground coverage. The desired pattern is patchy, mosaic, and discontinuous.
- In areas where the and boulder cover is sparse, operate heavy equipment for land treatments only when soil moisture is below the plastic limit, or protected by at least 1 foot of packed snow or 2 inches of frozen soil.
- Conduct prescribed fires to minimize the residence time on the soil while meeting the burn objectives. This is usually done when the soil and duff are moist.

Monitoring

The following monitoring will be required as a result of implementing this project:

1. A Monitoring Assessment will be conducted by an interdisciplinary team at Year 5 and Year 9 to determine if program objectives are being met and recommendations to continue, discontinue or change the treatments as originally developed. If necessary, an alternative management strategy will be completed and submitted to all partners prior to the end of Year 10.
2. Monitoring of project progress and effects will be take place per direction outlined within the Forest Plan. Correction of deviances outside the standards of the Forest Plan will be implemented as they are discovered and documented.
3. Monitoring will occur on an annual basis to assess the effectiveness of spraying.
4. Monitoring of burn piles within the Pinyon/Juniper community will also be a part of the project and will be sprayed and seeded as needed.

RATIONALE FOR MY DECISION

I have selected Alternative 1 based upon the following factors and criteria:

Completion of this initiative will meet the goals and intent of the 1991 Amended GMUG Forest Plan (USFS). It will also meet the intent of “A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment: 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy” August 2001 and the 2003 Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). This act also authorizes projects that reduce the risk wildland fires pose to the quality of a municipal water supply or to its maintenance. Specifically, HFRA Sections 102(a)(2) and (3) provides for expedited vegetation treatments on NFS lands in Condition Class 3 in all fire regimes and in Condition Class 2 in Fire Regimes I, II, or III that are:

“in such proximity to a municipal water supply system or a stream feeding such a system within a municipal watershed exhibiting that significant risk exists from a fire disturbance event would have adverse effects on the water quality of the municipal water supply or the maintenance of the system, including a risk to water quality posed by erosion following such a fire disturbance.”

As previously mentioned in the decision document and EA, Design Features will be implemented to assure the project preserves the character of the Kannah Creek Basin, the quality of water emanating from the watershed and the recreational activities normally found within the area while still placing a portion of the area under management. Both fuels reduction, improved wildlife winter range habitat and improved trail conditions will result from the completion of this initiative.

Under Alternative 2, none of the hazardous fuels loads would be treated. This would lead to a further accumulation of natural fuels and increase the chance of a destructive fire occurring within the analysis area as time passes. The negative impact of such a fire is documented in the Effects Section of the EA showing “modeled fire scenarios” starting at two locations within the analysis area. Based on these reasons and conditions within the foreseeable future, I did not select this alternative.

Alternative 1 with the associated design criteria and monitoring requirement is consistent with the overall management direction provided within the Forest Plan and the new Fire Use Amendment signed in 2007. Implementing the Forest Plan meets the requirements of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA, P.L. 92-378) and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA, P.L. 94-588).

Public Involvement

The following list details all of the methods used to ask the public for comments concerning vegetation management activities within the Grand Junction City watershed.

- As required under the NEPA process, (36 CFR 215.3), a legal notice was published in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel for the GJ Watershed Project in August 2007. Fifty seven individual letters were sent to interested parties and individuals; two (2) comment letters or oral recordings were received. A content analysis of the comments is located in the Response to Comments section of this document.
- The proposal has been listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests since August 2007. This document was also posted on the Forest’s web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/>.
- Two presentations were made to the Grand Junction City Council detailing the proposed initiative, costs and timelines for project implementation and completion. These meeting are televised on the local Cable TV channel.

- The 30-day opportunity for comment was offered concurrent with scoping.

Alternative 2 – No Action Alternative

NEPA requires the consideration of a “No Action” alternative (40 CFR 1502.14d) where none of the proposed treatments outlined in Chapter 1 would occur. Vegetative conditions would continue to stagnate affecting both available wildlife habitat and increasing the potential of a large catastrophic fire. Modeled fire events were included in the EA, pages 31 – 33. There would be no project induced effects to water quality, vegetation, air or the spread of noxious weeds or undesirable plant species.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I find that implementing Alternative 1, the proposed action as designed and mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the human environment and is therefore excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement. This determination is based on the analysis of environmental effects documented in the EA, (Chapter 3). The following discussion focuses on factors I considered in determining what constitutes “significant” effects on the environment.

1. Fuels reduction activities will result in some disturbances to water, soils, visuals, wildlife and vegetation. I find these impacts to be not significant because the physical and biological effects are confined to the various treatment areas and to a lesser degree the adjacent lands. With implementation of the design criteria and required mitigation measures, adverse effects to water, soils, visuals, wildlife and vegetation are not significant.
2. I find no significant effect to public health and safety because Alternative 1 design criteria and standard practices either restrict activities to specified time periods of lower use, or include traffic warning signs, or utilize adequate transportation systems, which effectively minimizes the effects on public health and safety. The opportunity to better protect life and property from an intense wildfire is provided by removing hazardous fuels from around public and private facilities located on National Forest System lands and from around private land boundaries.
3. State and Federal standards for water quality and soil protection will be met with the implementation of the Watershed Conservation Practices for Best Management Practices, and project design criteria features..
4. A reasonable dispute over the nature or extent of the effects presented in the EA has not been raised during public scoping or the public comment period (Response to Comments). Disagreement with proposed actions on a National Forest does not constitute the controversy envisioned by the framers of 40 CFR 1500. Therefore, I find that implementing Alternative 1 is not highly controversial.
5. The effects of vegetation treatment and trail rehabilitation activities associated with Alternative 1 are understood and well documented in research literature and in monitoring of similar projects. I find that the

implementation of Alternative 1, as designed, will not involve unique or unknown risks.

6. I find that Alternative 1, as designed and mitigated is neither precedent setting nor a connected action to other proposed activities.
7. Based on the cumulative impacts analysis in the EA (Chapter 3), I find the activities associated with Alternative 1 combined with other past, present, and future activities do not present a significant impact.
8. I find that no significant impact to heritage resources will occur because eligible sites will be avoided and protected and additional heritage resources that may be discovered during project activities also will be protected. In accordance with the National Historical Preservation Act the USFS proposes to use a phased inventory process under the regulations for phased inventory found in the code of Federal Regulations 36 CFR part 800. The Northern Ute Tribe will be consulted upon discovery of any potential Traditional Cultural Properties. The intent of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 95-341) will be met.
9. A Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation (1/25/2008) has been prepared for the EA in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-205). A Management Indicator Species Assessment was also completed in February of 2008.
10. I find Alternative 1 complies with Federal, State and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment and therefore there is not a significant impact (EA, Chapter 3).

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Forest Plan Consistency: Alternative 1, as designed, is consistent with the overall management direction provided within the 1991 Forest Plan, as amended. Factors that were considered in determining whether this project is consistent with the Forest Plan are as follows:

1. The selected alternative assists in reaching multiple use objectives listed in Chapter II, pages 72 to 73 of the Forest Plan.
2. The selected alternative responds directly to Forest Plan goals listed in Chapter III, pages 2 to 4. The planned activities will not detract from or jeopardize any of the Forest Plan goals.
3. The selected alternative is consistent with Forest Plan Management Direction, Standards and Guidelines.

National Forest Management Act Consistency: Alternative 1, as designed will restore pre-suppression ecosystem functions and to modify, reduce and remove a build up of fuels (woody debris) as well as improve vegetative health; improve, repair and restore impacted non- motorized trails; and increase diversity of wildlife habitat on National Forest System lands. Under 16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(E), I find that Alternative 1 meets the following management requirements:

1. Soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged (EA; Chapter 3);
2. Streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water are protected from detrimental changes in water temperatures, blockages of water courses, and deposits of sediment where treatments are likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat (EA; Chapter 3,) 2008 Biological Evaluation, 2008 Biological Assessment).

APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal by parties who have expressed interest during the analysis process.

A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7, and must meet all requirements of 36 CFR 215. Appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel.

The publication date of the legal notice in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal (36 CFR 215.15 (a)). Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Notices of Appeal may be sent to the following addresses:

<p>U.S. Postal Service Address: Appeals Deciding Officer U.S.D.A., Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region 740 Simms Golden, Colorado 80401</p>
<p>Physical Street Address for delivery services or hand delivery (Office hours are 8:00 to 4:30) Appeals Deciding Officer U.S.D.A., Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region 740 Simms Golden, Colorado 80401</p>
<p>E-mail delivery To: appeals-rocky-mountain-gmug@fs.fed.us (Electronic appeals must be in Microsoft Word, Word Perfect or plain text file format.)</p>
<p>Facsimile delivery (303) 275-5134</p>

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, the fifth business day following the close of the appeal filing period.

CONTACT PERSON

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Connie Clementson, District Ranger Grand Valley Ranger District, 2777 Crossroads Blvd, Unit 1, Grand Junction, Colorado, 81506 or by phone at (970) 242-8211.

CONNIE CLEMENTSON
Grand Valley District Ranger

Date

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS RESULTING FROM SCOPING
Grand Junction Watershed Project
Comment Content Analysis

Introduction and Summary

A scoping letter for the Grand Junction City Watershed Fuels and Fire Hazard Assessment was mailed as required under the NEPA process, (36 CFR 215.3), a legal notice was published in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel for the GJ Watershed Restoration Project on August 2007. Fifty seven individual letters were sent to interested individual, agencies and organizations on August 7, 2007. In addition, 2 presentations were made to the City council regarding the project proposal and broadcast on the local TV Cable channel. A total of 1 comment letter and 1 oral comment were received. A content analysis of the comments is located in the project record.

One comment letter was from a retired Fire Ecologist for the Bureau of Land Management. His comments were positive and contained the following suggestions to improve the outcome of proposed projects within the analysis area.

Substantive comments from this letter were reviewed. Summaries of these comments were compiled and presented under issue headings below. A response is provided after each comment summary.

COMMENT: Mature stands of Ponderosa Pine within or between Units C, D, E, and F are at significant risk due to the advanced stage of understory development within and around these stands. Treatment of these areas to provide stand protection, while labor intensive and costly, would serve to preserve the timber type and the unique characteristics of that ecosystem and vegetation type.

RESPONSE: The initial reconnaissance of the Kannah Creek area indicated that the main stream bed of Kannah Creek needed both to be buffered and was not at significant risk of damage from wildfire. However, the initial recon was not a 100% inventory. Ponderosa Pine, due to both its scarcity and size within the drainage should be protected. A closer look at the area will be made in the Spring of 2008 and as necessary, a Unit(s) will be established to remove ladder fuels around Ponderosa stands or individuals.

COMMENT: Results of vegetative treatments (prescribed fire or mechanical) within the Pinyon/Juniper community are at risk of developing significant cheat grass understories. This is especially true on poorer sites (dry, rocky, shallow soils). Use of post-treatment seeding may not be an effective deterrent in these cases. Use of herbicides in combination with seeding may be one of the effective ways to establish perennial grasses.

RESPONSE: This comment is valid and through the design processes a number of these issues have been addressed. With the exception of burning piles of slash with the units requiring hand thinning, no prescribed fire is planned in the PJ. The burn pile “footprints” will be monitored and treated with herbicide, seed and fertilization as needed to try to prevent a cheat grass community from being developed. Monitoring these sites will take place over the next several growing seasons to assure these treatment activities are meeting the intent of the project design criteria. Some additional spraying will be done within the watershed to assess the effectiveness, the practicality and the effectiveness of spraying to control cheat grass on a larger landscape scale.

COMMENT: The use of fire within the oak ecosystem is problematic with mixed results. Single entries with fire as the treatment agent usually results in a stand that is more susceptible to fire in the short term than the original stand might have been due to both prolific sprouting and an increase in the 10 and 100 hour fuel loads.

In stands that have developed into more “tree like” form, use of fire may be desirable. This species is unable to tolerate much basal heat in order to be killed and as a result the larger tree forms of Oak could be lost. This will allow the stand to revert back to a less desirable seral state.

Piles that are burned will be both monitored and seeded after the completion.

RESPONSE: Single fire entries do in fact prove much less effective than if the stand had been left in its original state. Short-term fire effects will be an increase in the number of oak sprouts regenerated and there will be a gradual increase in the 10 and 100 hour dead fuels. Current design criteria do include revisitation of the sites somewhere between 5 to 8 years after the initial burn(s).

Stands that demonstrate a more tree like form will be identified and not purposely ignited. However, some of these stands may have fire burn into them. Efforts will be made to protect as many of these sites as possible.

The following comments were presented orally by a land owner within the Kannah Creek drainage to the Grand Valley District. Further discussion with him narrowed the list of his concerns to the following questions and concerns:

COMMENT: Already concerned about wildlife in the area. A change proposed to vegetation may have adverse impact to hunting, fishing, and camping rights in the Kannah Creek basin. Public campground will be shut down. – Annotated on August 6th, 2007.

RESPONSE – RECREATION RIGHTS- (ACCESS): The proposed action/purpose of need details the various timeframes and treatment

methods for each unit of the project area. Also, the proposed action includes some design features to limit public use at specific times accordingly to various types of treatments.

The potential and necessity does exist to limit public access in areas within Units 1 – 9, proposed as prescribed fire treatments. In the various units proposed for mechanical treatment or hand felling of trees, a potential may exist to limit public access at any season of the year.

The proposed action calls for the removal of a dispersed campsite, but does not remove the public picnic area (Wild Rose). There are no campgrounds within the analysis area.

Finally, the potential may exist to limit public use of the picnic ground when mechanical treatments occur. These design features ensure public safety around the use of prescribed fire and mechanical equipment.

Our recreation use monitoring efforts can be used to validate and generalize that the highest season of use on the trail system and the periphery of the Kannah Creek basin occurs in the fall hunting seasons (September, October, and November). Any limits placed on recreational access will only affect a minority of forest users who desire spring access into upper portions of the Kannah Creek basin. The concern raised of the closure of a public picnic area (Wild Rose) is outside the scope of the proposed action and was a determination of the GMUG - Recreation Facility Analysis.

COMMENT: Hunts/Fishes: Coal Creek – Indian Point – Mesa/Delta County Line. Feels project is to remove public from accessing public land. When burn and change vegetation, quality of animal populations will not encourage hunting. – Annotated on January 16th, 2008.

RESPONSE – ELIMINATION OF PUBLIC USE- (RECREATIONAL HUNTING/FISHING): The primary wildlife management agency for the State of Colorado (DOW - Northwest Regional Office) was provided a scoping document with the purpose and need, proposed action, and possible alternative to the proposed action during the 30-day comment period. The purpose of our scoping document gives external agencies an opportunity to express concerns where their expertise, jurisdiction, or public's interests are at stake. We did not receive any comments from the Division of Wildlife on any potential impacts to recreational hunting and fishing activities due to these proposed vegetative treatments.

The proposed action will enhance big game habitat and may result in holding elk and deer on the National Forest longer in the fall and winter, instead of private land below the Forest. This would result in improved hunting opportunities on National Forest System Lands.