

## Decision Memo

### Knott Ranch Salvage Sale

USDA Forest Service  
Paonia Ranger District, Gunnison National Forest  
Gunnison County, Colorado

Township 49N, Range 5 ½ W, Section 13, and T 49 N, R 5W, Sections 7, 8, 18, and 19, NMPM

#### **Background**

Knott Ranch Timber Sale, located on the Black Mesa, was sold in 2001. Most of the nine cutting units were logged from September to December of 2004. A severe windstorm occurred in Western Colorado on October 4, 2005. This and subsequent wind events blew down more than five hundred trees within the cut units. Most blowdown occurred along roads, particularly at junctions with skid trails. Blowdown included various sizes of spruce (the spruce in the project area is all Engelmann spruce), subalpine fir, and aspen trees.

Large downed spruce trees are ideal hosts for spruce beetles (*Dendroctonus rufipennis*). Spruce beetles bore under the bark of fresh down trees and may produce 50 to 100 offspring apiece. Two years later, the second-generation beetles emerge and infest green standing trees if fresh blowdown is lacking. Spruce beetle populations are currently low on the Black Mesa. This means that management of blowdown concentrations can reduce future beetle mortality in standing trees.

#### **Purpose and Need for Action**

The purpose and need for the Knott Ranch Salvage Sale is to:

- Remove (salvage) recent downed spruce to prevent populations of spruce beetles from building in this host material and protect the adjacent healthy forest from emerging bark beetles.
- Remove (sanitation) standing live spruce that have current broods of beetles.
- Capture the commercial value of dead trees before significant amounts of decay occur from woodborers and decay fungi.
- Provide commercial forest products to local timber industries and offer timber sales of a size that enable smaller companies to competitively bid on the sale.
- Reduce fuel loadings associated with the blowdown to reduce fire intensities from potential wildfires.

The Paonia Ranger District wants to salvage this downed timber because:

While spruce beetles are native to Colorado forests, limiting their populations by removing windthrown spruce keeps their impact low. In the absence of fresh down host material, emerging beetles will infest standing live spruce trees. Managing spruce beetles is consistent

with Forest Plan goals and objectives: to manage the vegetation in a manner that will provide and maintain a healthy and vigorous ecosystem resistant to insects and diseases; and to utilize the commercial timber sales program to help decrease the risk of insect and disease infestation.

Down trees deteriorate more quickly than standing dead trees. Wood borers and decay fungi decrease the commercial value of the timber. Timely salvage of down material can provide logs to local timber operators and mills. Small timber sales such as this one provide an opportunity for smaller businesses to competitively bid on sales and successfully operate within specified time frames.

## **Decision**

I have decided to implement removal of merchantable down trees, trees attacked by spruce beetles, and the minimum number of trees needed for access, from approximately 215 acres identified on the “Knott Ranch Salvage Proposed Units and Proposed Access” map dated 10/29/07. Exact unit boundaries will be determined during on-the-ground layout, but the total acreage will not exceed 215 acres. Approximately 150 to 200 hundred cubic feet (CCF) of timber will be removed through a commercial timber sale. This is equivalent to 75 to 100 MBF of timber; about 15 to 20 log truck loads.

Specifically, the salvage sale would remove windthrown spruce and intermingled windthrown subalpine fir from portions of previous unit numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Standing dead spruce still containing beetles, and live spruce with beetles girdling at least 2/5 of the tree, would also be removed. At this time, the 215 treated acres are expected to be sold as one small sale, along with a small unit in the previous Bear Pen Timber Sale unit 1, which was evaluated by the Paonia Small Sales EA. The sale(s) would be offered in 2008. Additional sales could be offered in this area if future windstorms topple significant numbers of trees; a new environmental document would be produced in the future if warranted.

It is anticipated that most access would involve long skidding or forwarding distances. Three closed system roads may be re-opened for access to units 6, 1, and 3. Units 1 and 3 might alternatively be accessed with skid trails (see map). One temporary road, a quarter-mile long, is expected to be needed in unit 5. This would be on the same footprint as the previous temporary road. Slash used to block the previous temporary road would be pushed aside during use and brought back in afterward. The previous temporary road was ripped, so some smoothing would be needed, with ripping or scarification after use. Re-opened system roads and temporary roads would be signed during use as closed to the public. Temporary roads and main skid trails would be obliterated by the purchaser after timber harvest. Re-opened system roads would be re-closed.

Typically less than a dozen healthy trees are cut for access on a salvage sale of this size. The most likely place that access trees would be cut would be for the two possible skid or forwarder trails to units 1 and 3 (see map).

Regeneration of openings created by windthrow will be evaluated after the salvage sale. Aspen sprouted in many parts of the project area following the 2004 harvest. With blowdown removed, it is expected that more aspen will sprout. Spruce and subalpine fir natural regeneration also

exists in the project area. Openings more than a tree length in width will be evaluated after the sale; if natural regeneration is insufficient, the openings may be planted with spruce seedlings.

## **Design Features**

In addition to the standard provisions found within the timber sale contract, the Watershed Conservation Practices Handbook for Best Management Practices (FSH 2509.25 Chapter 2) and standards and guidelines in the GMUG Forest Plan (1991), I have decided to implement the following design features:

### Wildlife

- No logging operations will be allowed from May 1 through June 15.
- Young growth (seedling to pole size spruce, subalpine fir, and aspen) will be maintained and protected from excessive logging damage.
- An average of at least three 15 to 24 inch diameter snags per acre, and an average of at least three 10 inch diameter, 10 foot long down logs per acre, will be maintained within forested blocks as part of the Forest Plan Standards for snags and down woody debris.
- Goshawk surveys will be conducted each spring before logging starts.
- No active or inactive goshawk nests have been found within the timber sale area. If a nest is discovered then a 30-acre no-harvest buffer will be provided. No activities shall be allowed within ¼ mile of an active northern goshawk nest from March 1 to July 31 if they will cause nesting failure or abandonment (Forest Plan standard and guideline). No more than 25% of the post fledging area around the nest will be disturbed until August 30.

### Roads, Travel Management, and Recreation

- Skid trails and temporary roads will follow existing footprints from the previous sale.
- Temporary roads and re-opened system roads will be signed as closed to the public.
- Temporary roads will be obliterated by the purchaser after timber harvest. Re-opened system roads will be re-closed.
- No timber hauling will be allowed on weekends or national holidays between November 15 and May 1.
- Snowplowing will be prohibited unless allowed by the District Ranger.

### Slash Treatment

- In order to dry the cambium of green spruce, spruce slash greater than 8 inches in diameter and with 50% or more intact bark will be further cut into lengths no longer than 18 inches, or have the bark peeled on two sides.
- Maximum slash height will be 24 inches. Slash will be scattered away from residual trees and open roads.

- Stumps will be cut no higher than 12 inches in height.
- Small piles of slash will be used to block skid trails.

Noxious Weeds

- The purchaser will seed exposed areas of raw soil as designated by the Forest Service. Certified weed-free seed will be used. The seed mix will be prescribed by a Forest Service Range Management Specialist.
- K-V Funds will be used to survey and treat the project area for noxious weeds in the second and third years after logging is completed.

**Reasons for Categorical Exclusion**

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment because it falls under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 31.2, Categories #13 and #14. The proposed action is compared to the categories in the following table.

**Table 1: Categorical Exclusion Requirements**

<b>Allowed under Category 13</b>	<b>Allowed under Category 14</b>	<b>Proposed Action</b>
Salvage of dead and/or dying trees	Commercial and non-commercial sanitation harvest of trees to control insects or disease	Salvage and Sanitation
	Removal of infested/infected trees and adjacent live uninfested/uninfected trees as determined necessary to control the spread of insects or disease	Remove infested trees
Not to exceed 250 acres		215 acres treatment
No more than ½ mile temporary road construction		¼ mile
Incidental removal of trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing		Less than a dozen trees expected to be cut

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. These are displayed in the following table.

**Table 2: Possible Extraordinary Circumstances**

<b>Category of Possible Extraordinary Circumstances</b>	<b>Presence</b>	<b>Determination</b>
Steep Slopes or Highly Erosive Soils	Not Present	No effect
Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat	Canada lynx may be present	“No Adverse Effect”
Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds	Not Present	No effect
Congressionally Designated Areas	Not Present	No effect
Inventoried Roadless Areas	Not Present	No effect
Research Natural Areas	Not Present	No effect
Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archeological Sites or Historic Properties or Areas	No sites eligible or potentially eligible to NRHP	No effect

Copies of the following documents may be found in the project file:

- Biological Assessment
- Biological Evaluation
- Cultural Resource Report #R2006-020408-067

**Public Involvement**

Knott Ranch Salvage Sale has been listed in the GMUG Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions since January 10, 2007. A scoping letter and notice of opportunity to comment was mailed to 38 potentially interested parties on December 26, 2006. In addition, a legal notice was published in the Delta County Independent on January 3, 2007. Two comment letters and one phone call were received. A Comment Content Analysis has been completed.

**Findings Required by Other Laws**

1. This decision is consistent with the Amended Land and Resource Management Plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (Forest Plan) approved in 1991. The project is consistent with the Forest-wide standards and guidelines and the standards and guidelines for management areas 6B (livestock emphasis) and 7A (wood fiber emphasis).
2. Flood plains, wetlands, prime lands, threatened and endangered species, minerals, and cultural resources have been considered. Design features have been incorporated into this project as needed. No adverse effects to resources will occur.

3. In May 2005 the Forest Supervisor on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) issued an amendment that, in part, revised the list of Management Indicator Species (MIS). This list revision was completed under the authority and guidance provided in 36 CFR 219.19 (1982 Rule). Also as part of this amendment, the GMUG used authority provided in 36 CFR 219.14(f) in the 2005 planning Rule (2005 Rule) to make monitoring of MIS populations discretionary. However, on March 30, 2007, the Forest Service was enjoined by the 9th Circuit District Court from implementation of the 2005 Rule. That ruling invalidated the authority provided by 36 CFR 219.14(f).

Revision of the GMUG list of MIS was completed under authorities provided in the 1982 Rule and, therefore, remains valid and in effect. However, since the 2005 Rule has been enjoined and, therefore, authority granted in 36 CFR 219.14(f) invalidated, the GMUG has reinstated MIS requirements per the 1982 planning regulations to monitor both habitat and populations. Regardless of the planning rule in effect, the GMUG has considered and will continue to consider the “best available science” in forest and project level planning, including data and analysis needs for MIS.

The scope of analysis for management indicator species is determined by forest plan management direction; specifically, its standards and guidelines (Chapter II) and monitoring direction (Chapter IV). The GMUG National Forest’s Forest Plan (Forest Plan) establishes monitoring and evaluation requirements that employ both habitat capability relationships and, at the appropriate scale, population data. The analysis completed for this project examined how the project directly, indirectly and cumulatively affects selected MIS habitat and populations and how these local effects could influence Forest-wide habitat and population trends (see project record). Further, the analysis indicates that the project contributes to meeting Forest Plan direction as it relates to MIS.

4. Resource protection requirements and vegetative manipulation requirements in 16 USC 1604 (g) (3) (E) and 16 USC 1604 (g) (3) (F) are met by this project.

### **Implementation Date**

If no appeal is received within the 45-day time period, implementation of this decision may begin on, but not before, the 5<sup>th</sup> business day following the close of the appeal-filing period.

### **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to appeal by parties who expressed interest during the analysis process and prior to the close of the 30 day comment period.

A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it 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 Delta County Independent.

The publication date of the legal notice in the Delta County Independent 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.

Appeals may be delivered by the following means:

For U.S. Postal Service delivery, delivery services, or hand delivery to a physical street address:

Appeals Deciding Officer  
U.S.D.A., Forest Service  
Rocky Mountain Region  
740 Simms  
Golden, Colorado 80401

Office hours are 7:30 to 4:30.

For Fax delivery: 303-275-5134

For email delivery of an appeal: [appeals-rocky-mountain-gmug@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-rocky-mountain-gmug@fs.fed.us).

Electronic appeals must be in Microsoft Word, Word Perfect or plain text file format.

### **Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this decision, you may contact Kitty Tattersall, Paonia and Grand Valley Timber Zone Forester, at the Forest Headquarters Office, phone (970) 874-6694 or email [ktattersall@fs.fed.us](mailto:ktattersall@fs.fed.us).

You may also write to:  
Levi Broyles, District Ranger  
Paonia Ranger District  
North Rio Grande Avenue  
Paonia, CO 81428

My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Project Record.

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LEVI K. BROYLES  
District Ranger, Paonia Ranger District

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Date

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