

RED DIRT INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT PROJECT

ANALYSIS AREA

Red Dirt Analysis Area is within the Yampa Ranger District of the Medicine Bow - Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland. It is located on Forest System lands and is situated north of Colorado Highway 134 and south of Colorado Highway 40. The area is predominately lodgepole pine, spruce/fire and aspen forest types interspersed with openings of sagebrush and riparian vegetation types.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Insect epidemics are one of the natural processes in forested landscapes. Some uses and values of the forest are compromised by large scale tree mortality resulting from insect attacks. Recreation, wood product production, scenery, wildlife habitats and water resources are all adversely affected by insect epidemics and the subsequent increased risk of these areas to large, high intensity wildfires.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to mitigate the impacts of large scale forest mortality due to the existing beetle epidemic, to usher in and protect the new forest regeneration, and to reduce the risk of high intensity wildfires and extreme water flows within the Red Dirt Analysis Area.

There is a need to:

1. Salvage and reforest lodgepole stands impacted by Mountain Pine Beetle activity,
2. Protect existing young forest stands from expected future fire activity,
3. Reduce fuel loading associated with beetle killed trees,
4. Create defensible fire zones adjacent to private land boundaries,
5. Decommission roads and segments of roads that are likely to cause adverse impacts to stream networks,
6. Reduce long term impacts of mature tree mortality in Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive wildlife species habitats, and to
7. Pre-commercially thin sapling sized lodgepole pine stands to accelerate development of large tree characteristics.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

The Yampa Ranger District, Routt National Forest, proposes to authorize treatments on specified areas of the Red Dirt Analysis Area in order to meet or move towards Desired Future Conditions in a specified timeframe. The proposed action consists of three management strategies and their associated actions to limit the short and long-term impacts of forest mortality associated with Mountain Pine Beetle populations. These management strategies include; salvage logging of beetle killed pine, commercial thinning of spruce/fir, pre-commercial thinning of sapling lodgepole pine stands, non-commercial fuels treatments and watershed improvement projects.

Commercial/Silvicultural actions are proposed on approximately 7619 acres of National Forest System Lands. Table 1 displays each of the proposed management strategies and actions discussed, along with their relationship to the revised 1997 Routt Forest Plan.

Salvage

Salvage management actions include removing any merchantable timber within already beetle killed areas. Other actions designed to reduce the fire hazard include cutting and piling of dead trees, burning slash piles, or underburning in beetle killed areas that increase the future risk of large, high intensity wildfires adjoining urban interface areas and campground areas.

Thinning

Forest thinning related actions are primarily aimed at changing the forest conditions to accelerate tree growth. Most of these actions consist of silvicultural interventions that would remove a percentage of existing trees in order to increase the space left between the remaining trees in the stand. Other actions include removing the infected overstory in order to establish or protect younger trees in the stand. These actions all change the physical attributes of existing forested stands and would provide a long-term response to existing and future wildlife habitat development. Forest thinning is also proposed for existing regenerated forest stands to reduce their risk to future fire events.

Roads

Associated with silvicultural treatments is the need for new road construction to access treatment areas. It is estimated that approximately 7.43 miles of new road would need to be constructed. Additionally, there are approximately 16 miles of existing roads that are negatively impacting water resources in the analysis area, primarily due to the proximity of road segments to stream zones. The proposed action includes evaluating the feasibility of relocating or decommissioning some of these roads.

Table 1: Description of Proposed Management Strategies by Management Area.

Management Area – or Management Emphasis and acreage within the Analysis area	Appropriate Treatment Strategies	Types and amount of treatments proposed	Associated Treatments	Desired Future Condition or Desired Outcome
MA 1.12 – Wilderness (Approximately 64 acres of National Forest System Lands)	None	None	None	Forested vegetation in late successional or generated by natural processes such as fire, insects or disease – evidence of these disturbance processes is present.
MA 2.1 – Special Interest Area (Approximately 1,098 acres of National Forest System Lands)	None	None	None	Landscape has predominantly natural appearance, insects and disease and wildfires are allowed to influence forest structure if compatible with other Special Interest values.
MA 4.2 – Scenery (Approximately 1,849 acres of National Forest System Lands)	Salvage and Reforestation	145 acres of Silvicultural Treatments designed to enhance visual quality.	0.28 miles of temp road construction 2.78 miles of road reconstruction.	High quality scenery, allows timber harvest and other uses. Appearance is predominantly natural.
MA 4.3 – Dispersed Recreation (Approximately	Salvage and Commercial	376 acres of Silvicultural	2.26 miles of road	Vegetation composition and structure will exist in a range of

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2,585 acres of National Forest System Lands)	Thin	Treatments designed to improve public safety and maintain stand conditions.	reconstruction.	successional stages.
MA 5.11 – General Forest and Rangelands - Forest Vegetation Emphasis (Approximately 4,803 acres of National Forest System Lands)	Salvage, Reforestation and Commercial Thin	1171 acres of Silvicultural Treatments designed to reduce fuel loading and fire hazard, improve tree growth, and regenerate forest stands.	1.86 miles of new road construction 1.54 miles of temp road construction 6.61 miles of road reconstruction.	Vegetation composition and structure will exist in a range of successional stages to meet wildlife, range, and timber objectives.
MA 5.12 – General Forest and Rangelands - Range Vegetation Emphasis (Approximately 14,226 acres of National Forest System Lands)	Salvage, Reforestation and Commercial Thin	1912 acres of Silvicultural Treatments designed to reduce fuel loading and fire hazard, and regenerate forest stands.	2.50 miles of new road construction 2.31 miles of temp road construction 4.80 miles of road reconstruction.	These areas are managed to sustain values associated with areas of woody vegetation and open grassland and to provide habitat and forage for livestock and wildlife.
MA 5.13 – Forest Products (Approximately 19,666 acres of National Forest System Lands)	Salvage, Reforestation, Commercial Thin and Pre-Commercial Thin	3762 acres of Silvicultural Treatments designed to reduce fuel loading and fire hazard, improve tree growth, and regenerate forest stands.	2.35 miles of new road construction 3.03 miles of temp road construction 13.5 miles of road reconstruction.	Areas managed to produce commercial wood products.
MA 7.1 – Residential/Forest Interface (Approximately 444 acres of National Forest System Lands)	Salvage, Reforestation and Commercial Thin	253 acres of Silvicultural Treatments designed to reduce fuel loading and fire hazard, and regenerate forest stands.	0.72 miles of new road construction.	Areas are managed to build and maintain cooperative relationships with landowners and other governments with jurisdiction.
Private Lands	As determined by Landowner	As determined by Landowner	As determined by Landowner	Forest Service will coordinate actions to match agency objectives and actions to match adjacent landowners actions and objectives to the extent that budget and Resource Management Plan allows.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

FOREST SERVICE SCOPING AND ANALYSIS SCHEDULE

Scoping is an important part of the environmental analysis process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a Proposed Action (36 CFR 1501.7). For these reasons, you are encouraged to take the time to consider the proposed action, and to submit your comments by **April 25, 2008**.

This letter and request for public comments has been mailed to other federal, state, and local agencies, adjacent landowners, and individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by decisions related to our proposal. Notice of this public involvement effort has also been given through the local news media.

Comments can be submitted on the Web at: **r2_mbr_vis@FSNOTES**. When submitting comments on the web, the **SUBJECT LINE** must be "**Red Dirt**" to ensure proper routing. All future documents and information on the Red Dirt Integrated Management Project efforts will be posted at www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/forest_health and you are encouraged to use this site for all your participation in the analysis. When submitting your comments, please include your full name and address.

Written comments should be submitted to: Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, Attn: Ric Ondrejka, 300 Roselawn, Yampa, Colorado 80483. Telephone Number: (970) 638-4516. Fax Number: (970) 638-4635. After receiving your comments, the Forest Service will identify and analyze the issues raised, use the issues to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action, and issue a draft Environmental Analysis. Currently, plans are to complete a final Environmental Analysis and Decision Notice for the analysis. Completion of these documents during the spring 2008 would allow implementation of the selected alternative during the summer of 2009.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation would start in the summer of 2009 and is expected to occur for 5 to 8 years.

FOIA REQUIREMENTS

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those commenting, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality. If the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

