



File Code: 1950-1

Date: August 28, 2007

Dear Interested Parties:

The Hahns Peak/Bears Ears (HPBE) Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests is seeking public comments on the **Prospector Timber Sale and Fuels Reduction Project (Prospector)**, a proposal to conduct vegetation management treatments that would prescribe fuel reduction treatments and silvicultural treatments to address a growing residential/forest interface, declining forest health, large-scale beetle epidemic, and increasing standing dead within the Prospector Analysis Area.

Forest Health And Need For Action

The current mountain pine beetle infestations and their impact on lodgepole pine forests in northern Colorado and southern Wyoming have very likely been influenced by a number of factors: (1) an abundance of older, dense, large diameter lodgepole pine stands; (2) prolonged drought, where the onset of increasing mountain pine beetle infestation overlaps the onset of an extended and severe drought from 1998 – 2003; (3) earlier melting of the smaller, drought-influenced snowpacks, resulting in extended and more severe drought conditions that reduced the tree's defenses during the summer when bark beetle flight and attack of hosts occurs; (4) higher temperatures, allowing for an expansion of the one-year mountain pine beetle lifecycle into areas of lodgepole pine forests at higher elevations (>9,500 feet elevation) where, traditionally, the two-year life cycle was the norm (Tishmack *et al.* 2005); and (5) greater survival of mountain pine beetle brood in these high elevation lodgepole pine forests due to their completion of development within a single year rather than the two-year life cycle typical at these elevations. Over the past eleven years (1996 – 2006) mountain pine beetle populations have increased to levels that have not been witnessed in northern Colorado or southern Wyoming in recent recorded history. Both the intensity and the extent of tree mortality are significant.

The aerial survey data and available ground survey results from the Lakewood Service Center report (LSC-07-06) indicate that the mountain pine beetle is at epidemic levels in lodgepole pine forests across northern Colorado, including Arapaho, Routt, and White River National Forest lands in Eagle, Grand, Jackson, Routt, and Summit Counties in Colorado, and southern Medicine Bow National Forest lands in Albany and Carbon Counties in southern Wyoming. This epidemic extends to forests across the western United States and into Canada and Alaska.

The building mountain pine beetle epidemic on the above-mentioned National Forests and other land ownerships in the associated Counties is not likely to depart from the projected rapid increase in losses to lodgepole pine stands unless a period of prolonged and severe low temperatures (<-30° F) occurs during late fall-winter-early spring months. A severe cold weather event may result in the death of large numbers of the developing bark beetle brood and bring the epidemic to an end in some localized areas, as happened during the mountain pine beetle outbreak in Grand and Summit Counties, CO, in 1984 – 1985 (Lessard *et al.* 1987) and during the spruce beetle epidemic in the Flat Tops Wilderness on the White River National Forest in 1951 (Schmid and Frye 1977).



The findings of the aerial survey analysis indicate that losses of lodgepole pine to mountain pine beetle have increased significantly in extent and in number over the past eleven years (1996-2006) across northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. The cumulative area of lodgepole pine containing trees killed by mountain pine beetle is approximately 975,000 acres in northern Colorado. Approximately 23% – 68% of the acreage in the lodgepole pine forest cover type on private lands and 32% – 70% on National Forest lands contain trees killed by the bark beetle. In southern Wyoming, approximately 120,000 acres of forested land contain trees killed by the mountain pine beetle. Approximately 1% – 6% of the acreage in the lodgepole pine forest cover type on private lands and 2% – 19% of National Forest lands have been impacted.

Bark beetle ground surveys documented the epidemic conditions and the increasing impacts of the mountain pine beetle on the lodgepole pine resource over five years in thirteen analysis areas and nine different geographic locations across northern Colorado and the adjacent Albany and Carbon Counties in Wyoming.

On June 25, 2007 a Mountain Pine Beetle Epidemic Declaration for Northern Colorado and Southern Wyoming was signed by the Deputy Regional Forester which made available more expedited NEPA authorities offered by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, as consistent with Forest Plan direction or covered by plan amendment.

Mary Peterson, Forest Supervisor for the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests approved this project as an “authorized project” under Title I of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) (P.L. 108-148) Sec.102 (a)(4). The HFRA provides authorities for expedited project planning and decision-making for vegetation treatments on National Forest System lands that are currently experiencing disease or insect epidemics; or are at imminent risk of such epidemics because of conditions on adjacent land. Use of this authority requires a determination by forest health specialists that a bark beetle epidemic exists. That determination was rendered June 25, 2007.

Management Direction and Project Feasibility

Forest Plan Direction

Direction in the Forest Plan is identified at several levels, including:

- **Forest-wide level Management Direction** (Desired Conditions, Goals & Objectives, Standards & Guidelines)
- **Management Area Direction** (Management Area Desired Conditions, Standards & Guidelines)
- **Geographic Area Direction** (Desired Condition, Standards & Guidelines)

Forest Plan direction is implemented with the most site-specific direction (i.e., Geographic Area Direction) taking precedence over the more general direction (i.e., Forest-wide Direction).

Management Area Direction

Management emphasis within the analysis area and larger geographic areas is distributed among several Forest Plan management area prescriptions (see table 1 and 2 below). Application of

management area prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines would move specific portions of the geographic area towards the desired condition (Forest Plan p. 3-1). The descriptions of each management area prescription include: theme, setting, desired condition, and standards and guidelines. This information can be found in the Forest Plan Chapter 2, pp. 2-36 through 2-52.

The proposed action will move the project area toward the desired condition as directed in the Forest Plan with the following actions. Providing forest products through maintenance and improvement of forested stands growth and vigor through silvicultural methods is prescribed through the Forest Plan in 5.13 Management Areas. In 7.1 Management Areas hazard fuel reductions are prescribed around the growing residential/forest interface in the project area to reduce potential fire line intensities and provide for safer and more effective suppression strategies. In 5.11 Management Areas forest insects and disease will be locally restricted. Vegetation patterns will be developed primarily through the use of silvicultural practices, in conjunction with physical site characteristics and management activities will simulate natural vegetation patterns and patch size. In 4.3 Management Areas pest management activities will focus on enhancing or protecting recreation opportunities in the area.

Table 1. Analysis Area Acres by Management Area

Management Area	Description	Acres
4.3	Dispersed Recreation	394
5.11	General Range and Forest	1563
5.13	Forest Products	2866
7.1	Residential/Urban Interface	702
PVT	Private Lands	567
TOTAL		6091

Table 2. Proposed Treatment Acres by Management Area

Management Area	Description	Acres
4.3	Dispersed Recreation	51
5.11	General Range and Forest	230
5.13	Forest Products	952
7.1	Residential/Urban Interface	299
PVT	Private Lands	0
Total		1532

Geographic Area Direction

Analyses at the geographic area level provide a framework for short and long-term projects, for monitoring the effectiveness of Forest-wide goals and management area standards and guidelines, and for achieving Forest-wide goals and objectives. A geographic area (GA) is a piece of land, 100,000 acres or less, in which management is directed toward achieving a specified desired condition. Geographic areas link the Forest Plan to management at a landscape or watershed scale. Application of management area prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines would move the geographic area towards the desired condition (Forest Plan p. 3-1).

The Prospector analysis area was assessed in 2005 with the Sand Mountain Geographic Area Rapid Assessment. The assessment was conducted with Forest Service specialists and county and state partners. The Routt County Fire Management Plan was completed approximately two years ago, which identified communities in the area as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas, and areas of concern from wildfires. Local interests with support from state and federal agencies and non-governmental stakeholders are in the process of completing the North Routt Community Wildfire Protection Plan that provided input for the proposal. The proposed Prospector project is the second of several projects that are expected to be analyzed based on the Sand Mountain Assessment.

Analysis Area

The Prospector Analysis Area (AA) is located in the Sand Mountain Geographic Area, which encompasses approximately 43,971 acres of National Forest System lands on the northwest portion of the HPBE Ranger District. The AA is situated on the west side of the Sand Mountain Geographic Area. Of the 6,091 acres or 13.9% of the 43,971 acre geographic area the proposed action would occur on approximately 25% of the analysis area or 1532 acres.

The proposed project is located in T10N, R85 & 86W, and T11N, R85W, specifically north of Hahns Peak Campground, and west of Columbine, Colorado. The project area can be accessed off of County Road 129 by National Forest Service Roads 488 and 486.

Existing Condition

The proposed Prospector Timber Sale and Fuels Reduction project is dominated by mature and overmature lodgepole pine and aspen with approximately 59% of the proposed treatment area comprised of lodgepole and aspen stands. Mixed conifer stands and Englemann spruce dominated stands comprise approximately 34% of the treatment areas with true fir stands accounting for approximately 7%.

Elevations in the analysis area range from 8,400 feet adjacent to Hahns Peak Lake to an upper elevation along the northwest edge of 9,500 feet. Field reconnaissance indicates a moderate to high infestation of mountain pine beetle in much of the treatment area, with some stands with moderate to high infestations of spruce beetle.

The age, diameter, and density of many of the proposed stands, coupled with the presence of epidemic mountain pine beetle populations within and surrounding the AA, indicate that conditions are favorable for continued losses of lodgepole pine to mountain pine beetle. Older, large diameter lodgepole pine stands at the Prospector project elevations are considered at moderate to high risk of losses with populations of mountain pine beetle present in the area. Similarly, high lodgepole pine stand density, also characteristic of stands in the project area, is associated with more severe losses during a mountain pine beetle epidemic.

Stands with basal areas above 120 square feet per acre in lodgepole and above 150 square feet per acre in spruce have shown increased risk from bark beetle attack with the largest diameter trees being killed first and mortality continuing down in size as the beetle activity increases. Many of the stands proposed for treatment in the Prospector project are above the critical basal areas in both spruce and lodgepole dominated stands. Studies by Amman show that in latitudes of 39, 40 and 41 degrees North at elevations of 9,000 feet and below that a high risk of mountain pine beetle mortality > 50% is expected with high beetle populations. The Prospector project is located at the

40 and 41 degree latitude break and most of the area is at or below the 9,000 foot elevation associated with the high risk of mortality from mountain pine beetles.

The proposed Prospector project has many stands overstocked with mature and overmature trees that are beetle infested, dead and dying, diseased(mistletoe) and with poor form characteristics and in need of tree density reduction treatments.

Purpose & Need

There is a need to maintain and improve aspen stand health and a need to treat overstocked timber stands to improve growth and vigor of stands. There is a need to reduce current and expected beetle mortality in conifers.

There is a need to work with state and private partners that have developed Community Wildlife Protection Plans (CWPP) to reduce current and future fuel hazards associated with mature beetle susceptible forests.

There is a need to provide merchantable timber products for sale and to salvage and remove dead trees from forested lands classified as being suitable, to keep them in production and positively contributing to the Forest's future Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ).

There is a need to rehabilitate resource damaged areas associated with unmanaged travel and dispersed recreation sites.

There is a need to develop a local seed source in seed zone 214.

There is a need to retain visual quality, screening, and safety around recreation sites and trailheads by removing beetle infested and high hazard trees.

There is a need to develop a vegetation management plan for the Hahns Peak Campground due to increased beetle mortality and hazard trees.

The purpose of the Prospector proposal is to implement forest management techniques that will improve forest health conditions, reduce fuel hazards, provide forest products, improve unmanaged travel related resource damage associated with dispersed camping, develop a local seed source for native vegetation, and remove beetle infested and high hazard trees within the analysis area.

Proposed Action

The HPBE Ranger District proposes to treat approximately 1532 acres of mature and overmature forested stands in the analysis area where the emphasis is to improve forest health conditions, reduce hazard fuels, and provide forest products. The proposed action includes hazard fuel vegetation management on approximately 381 acres. This would include a fuel break (approximately 37 acres), and aspen maintenance and ladder fuel treatments (approximately 344 acres). The timber harvest would include selective harvest of approximately 773 acres, overstory removal on approximately 41 acres, and clearcuts of approximately 104 acres. Aspen regeneration treatments would occur on up to approximately 234 acres. An existing gravel pit off of National Forest Service Road (NFSR) 486 and adjacent to unit 4 in the analysis area would provide native

“pit run” material for road surfaces if needed.

The Prospector Timber Sale and Fuels Reduction project will use an adaptive management approach in treating the proposed stands by using a primary treatment where bark beetles are not evident or likely to affect a stand and an alternate treatment if bark beetles are evident and likely to affect a proposed treatment stand.

Primary and alternate silvicultural treatments have been developed for the proposed stands in the Prospector Timber Sale and Fuels Reduction Project. The beetle activity in and around the proposed unit will determine which treatment would be used. The tables below list acreages with all stands treated with the primary treatment and all stands treated with an alternate treatment. Alternate treatments would not be used unless bark beetle activity is moderate to high in or around the proposed stand area.

Units 1 (24.05 acres) and 25 (49.22 acres) are adjacent to each other while unit 2 (25.23 acres) and unit 1 are separated by a narrow drainage and stringer of aspen. These three lodgepole pine dominated stands are heavily infested with mountain pine beetle and are all located in 5.13 management area – Forest Products; the management best suited for these stands would be a regeneration harvest (clearcut). This proposed even-aged regeneration treatment would create an opening greater than 40 acres, which would require approval from the Regional Forester after a 60-day public review.

Aspen stands or portions of stands with mature and overmature trees would be regenerated by felling the aspen and leaving them on site to provide shade and shelter for the regenerating suckers. If sufficient trees of sawtimber size are available and accessible a commercial removal is another option that may be utilized.

The Prospector Trail traverses the area from east to west through the middle of the proposed analysis area. The trail is a motorized trail and runs through four proposed silvicultural treatment stands and three proposed fuel treatment stands. One stand that the trail bisects is a lodgepole dominated stand that is heavily infested with mountain pine beetle and is proposed to be clearcut. This trail could potentially be closed seasonally or during harvesting activities.

Hahns Peak Lake Campground is located in the proposed project area with treatments prescribed in and around the upper campground loop. Selective harvest treatments would be used to remove dead, dying, and beetle infested hazard trees, while preserving as much as possible the recreational setting of the area. The campground is planned to be closed for maintenance and development in 2008 and if not treated during this time period could be closed periodically to treat the vegetation. The campground is adjacent to Hahns Peak Lake and is heavily used by campers, fisherman, and other outdoor enthusiasts.

The Prospector project is in the wildland urban interface associated with the North Routt Wildfire Protection Plan. Columbine Colorado and home development in the general area are located directly east of the proposed project area. Fuel treatments adjacent to this area are geared at providing fuel breaks and reducing hazard fuels in and around the interface area.

Prospector Proposed Vegetation Management Activities:

Table 1: Primary Treatments

Prescriptions	Units	Acres
Silvicultural Treatments		
Sanitation/Salvage	7	246
Commercial Thin	10	229
Overstory Removal	2	41
Clearcut	1	*104
Shelterwood Prep Cut	3	139
Shelterwood Seed Cut	6	159
Totals	29	918
Hazard Fuel Treatments		
Aspen Regeneration Cut	6	234
Fuel Break	1	37
Aspen Maintenance	9	343
Totals	16	614

Prospector Proposed Vegetation Management Activities: Beetle Scenario

Table 2: Alternate treatments if all stands have moderate to high beetle activity

Prescriptions	Units	Acres
Silvicultural Treatments		
Sanitation/Salvage	7	246
Overstory Removal	11	339
Clearcut	11	*333
Totals	29	918
Hazard Fuel Treatments		
Aspen Regeneration Cut	6	234
Fuel Break	1	37
Aspen Maintenance	9	343
Totals	16	614

**One created opening greater than 40 acres, 60 day public review required.*

Silvicultural Treatments

Silvicultural prescriptions of clearcut, overstory removal, and selective harvest are the treatments proposed for the Prospector project. Selective harvest treatments may include commercial thinning, shelterwood cuts, and sanitation/salvage prescriptions.

Silvicultural prescriptions are determined by species composition, health, vigor, and the desired

stand development. Commercial thinning and sanitation/salvage are intermediate harvest methods that could be used on some stands in the Prospector project to enhance production while improving the health and vigor of the stands. Typical silvicultural intermediate harvest treatments remove a percentage of a stand depending on the stands tree density and health, and typically prescribed in stands with a low percentage of beetle infestation. Stands treated with intermediate harvests with moderate to high beetle infestations would likely have the remaining trees infested by beetles in time. Instead of treating stands that have beetles or are at risk from beetles with an intermediate silvicultural treatment and possibly losing the entire remaining stand an alternative treatment would be prescribed that would regenerate the stand and reduce hazardous fuel buildup.

Most treatments would be applied within mature stands that are overstocked where numerous trees are susceptible or already infested with bark beetles and have reduced growth and vigor due to the stands high tree density. Each treatment would remove dead or beetle-infested timber, reduce the density of susceptible stands, and develop forest stands that are less vulnerable to future beetle attack and decrease excessive ground and ladder fuels produced by dying trees.

Aspen regeneration treatments would target older decadent and dying aspen with poor regeneration occurring to stimulate regeneration and improve health and vigor. In stands where these conditions exist all or portions of the stands would have all stems severed (clearcut) to promote a new aspen stand.

Clearcut treated stands are those that have already reached their full growth potential, are decadent, dying, or infested/infected with insects and/or disease, all of the proposed clearcuts in Prospector are the result of high beetle infestations. This regeneration harvest is completed with one entry and creates open, full sunlight ground conditions for new regeneration and favors the establishment of early successional shade intolerant species such as lodgepole pine and aspen. An overstory removal typically removes an overmature overstory with poor form, that is susceptible to beetle infestations and/or disease while freeing an already established understory from competition. The key to the use of this system is that an existing manageable healthy understory must exist in sufficient numbers to leave a generally stocked stand following logging of the overstory. In Prospector the overstory removals would vary between typical mixed conifer overstory removals and aspen dominated stands with pockets of lodgepole pine overstory that would be targeted for removal to reduce the mountain pine beetle susceptible lodgepole pine. Selective harvesting (shelterwood cuts, salvage, sanitation, and commercial thinning) is designed to enhance growth, quality, vigor, and composition of the stand between regeneration periods. A shelterwood system creates a more protected and shaded environment for the new regeneration and is prescribed for regenerating later seral species such as Engelmann spruce and sub-alpine fir although it is often used in lodgepole pine. A sanitation/salvage removes beetle infested, diseased, dead, and or defective trees to create a healthier stand. This is not done to regenerate the stand but to leave the best trees in the stand as crop trees to continue growing. Commercial thinning is intended to reduce stocking and reallocate growing space to the more superior crop trees. Commercial thinning is generally done in younger lodgepole pine stands where release and further growth can be expected.

The main factor that determines what silvicultural systems are most practical is the dominant or most abundant tree species. The different methods tree species use to naturally reproduce, and the

health or resiliency of area stands. Timber management attempts to simulate or emulate nature to create optimum conditions for timber resiliency, growth, and regeneration. Silvicultural prescriptions describe different methods of timber management or treatments that can be used to produce different end results. Timber management through silvicultural systems is not just concerned with growing trees but with how this management affects and can benefit other Forest uses and resources such as: recreation, wildlife, water, etc. The alternative emphasis or desired future condition determines which silvicultural system is most feasible and subsequently beneficial towards moving the analysis area towards that desired future condition.

The operational characteristics of each treatment differ slightly depending on size, shape, slope and volume of each stand. Trees would typically be felled using a tracked machine, called a feller/buncher, or possibly by people using chainsaws. Bucking and delimiting would most likely be accomplished using a machine (boom delimeter) but could also be done by people using chainsaws. Some form of log-skidding tractor would be used to skid logs to a landing; therefore, native-surface skid trails would wind through each treated stand. Many landing locations would be needed to collect felled trees within the numerous stands where harvests are proposed. The density, pattern and location of skid trails and landings are dependent on unit size, shape, terrain, and timber volume.

Once logging is complete, skid trails and landings may be scarified or otherwise rehabilitated to reduce compaction and erosion. A certified weed-free native grass seed mix may be spread over the former tractor trails, if needed, for erosion control. Lodgepole pine seed may be spread in areas (especially in clearcuts or other regeneration harvest units) where lodgepole pines have low numbers of serotinous cones. Planting of lodgepole pine or other tree species may also occur in treatment units as needed to achieve required tree stocking levels.

With all silvicultural methods used a number of large dead trees (snags) and live trees per acre are required to be reserved for wildlife habitat and to provide a “legacy” of large woody material to the site.

Hazard Fuel Treatments

Hazard fuel treatments would include fuel breaks, ladder fuel treatments, and aspen maintenance. Hazard fuel treatments for Prospector have been designed to be completed by hand crews with little if any mechanized equipment. The fuel break treatment would remove all species of standing dead trees, fallen logs and sound course woody debris to maintain defensible space along the private boundary. This treatment would likely occur over time as conifer species succumb to beetle pressure and mortality affects the stand. Permitted or free use fire wood gathering opportunities would be encouraged and would likely be accomplished by local residences due to the vested interest in removing fuels in the area and probable access issues to other general publics. All treated fuels not removed for personal use would be piled and burned at a later date. All live aspen would be maintained.

The aspen maintenance and ladder fuel treatments would remove conifers that are encroaching into the aspen stands. These conifers would be hand cut and either piled and burned, or lopped and scattered depending on conifer and fuel loading densities. Conifer piling would occur in the more densely treed areas. Large conifers (greater than 9 inch DBH) would be retained as seed sources

and smaller seedling and sapling sized conifers may be retained to provide for a future generation of conifers. It is not the intent to eliminate all conifers within the aspen communities, but to slow succession of conifers to provide the “living fireline” qualities of aspen in specific areas over a longer time period than may currently be expected. Some standing dead (snags) would be removed within the stands if deemed hazardous to the working environment. Aspen trees would generally not be treated, except to promote regeneration.

Preliminary Issues and Concerns

The Sand Mountain Geographic Area Rapid Assessment completed in 2005 was a broad scale look at all resources across the landscape to assess the existing and desired condition and determine needs and opportunities across the geographic area. The Prospector Timber Sale and Fuels Reduction Project was developed to address concerns and issues identified during the interdisciplinary team meeting with partners and stakeholders (2005). The following are preliminary issues and concerns that were identified.

- Disruption of species habitat.
- Livestock impacts on regenerating stands, especially aspen.
- Spread of undesirable plants or noxious weeds.
- Overmature or decadent aspen stands with conifer encroachment.
- Beetle activity building in mature conifer stands.
- Resource damaged areas associated with unmanaged travel and dispersed recreation sites.
- Proximity to roadless area.
- Potential conflicts with lynx conservation assessment measures in treating overstocked stands.
- Steep slopes.
- Stream/road crossings.
- Scenic impacts from management activities.
- Loss of large trees in campground.

Decision to be made

Jamie Kingsbury, the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District Ranger, will be the deciding official for this project. After the analysis process is completed, a decision will be made that includes the following:

- The selected alternative. The selected alternative could be the Proposed Action as described in this scoping letter, an alternative to the Proposed Action, or a No Action alternative;
- Rationale for the decision; and
- Design criteria, and monitoring requirements necessary for project implementation.

Public Participation

Projects authorized under the HFRA and revised Notice, Comment, and Appeal regulations (36 CFR 215; 36 CFR 218) require different procedures for public participation. The procedures are as follows:

1. There is no appeal period after the decision is signed. Instead, an objection process occurs after the final environmental assessment is released and before the decision approving

- authorized projects under the act.
2. Participation in the objection process is limited to individuals and organizations who have submitted specific written comments related to the proposed authorized project during the opportunity for public comment [Section 105(a)(3), 36 CFR 218.6].
 3. The 30-day comment period will be combined with the scoping period for the most effective timing on the proposed action [36 CFR 215.5(a)(2)]; therefore, **this will be the only opportunity for the public to comment before a decision on this project is issued.**
 4. Comments will be accepted for 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the newspaper of record [§ 215.5(b)(2)(ii) & 215.6(a)(2)], the *Steamboat Pilot*. Comments may be mailed, faxed, or e-mailed, hand-delivered, phoned in, or orally delivered to staff at the office weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., except holidays. Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 30th calendar day following publication of the Legal Notice in the *Steamboat Pilot*. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the address/office (see #8 below) by the close of business on the 30th calendar day following publication of the Legal Notice in the *Steamboat Pilot*. Please submit site-specific comments that can be used to further refine the proposed action.
 5. **The 60 day comment period required when creating an opening greater than 40 acres will start the same day as the 30 day comment period for the proposed project begins and will run an additional 30 days after the project comment period had closed.**
 6. Comments can be submitted on the Web at: comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-routt-hahns-peak-bears-ears@fs.fed.us. When submitting comments on the web, the **SUBJECT LINE** must be “**Prospector**” to ensure proper routing. Written comments should be submitted to: Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, Attn: Jamie Kingsbury, District Ranger, 925 Weiss Drive, Steamboat Springs, Colorado 80487. Telephone Number: (970) 870-2149. Fax Number: (970) 870-2284. When submitting your comments, please include your full name and address.
 7. All future documents and information on the Prospector Environmental Assessment will be posted at www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects under *Environmental Analysis: Forest Health* and you are encouraged to use this site for all of your participation in the analysis. Written comments should be submitted to:
Jamie Kingsbury
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests
925 Weiss Drive
Steamboat Springs, Colorado 80487
Fax Number: (970) 870-2284
Telephone Number: (970) 870-2149
 8. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, 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; however, those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. 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, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

9. Final documents will be made available to the public on the web and in the form of CDs. Very few paper copies will be produced.

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 site-specific comments. The 30-day comment period will begin after the legal notice for the Prospector Timber Sale and Fuels Reduction Project is published in the newspaper of record, the Steamboat Pilot. After receiving your comments, we will identify and analyze the issues raised, finalize a Proposed Action, and if necessary, develop alternatives to the Proposed Action.

Implementation

Plans are to complete the NEPA analysis and make a decision whether or not to implement the proposed action or another alternative during the winter of 2007/2008. If no significant issues are identified by the public or Forest Service specialists, the Forest Service proposes to begin implementing this project in 2008.

For more information concerning the Proposed Action, please contact Brian Waugh at (970) 870-2185, or Andy Cadenhead at (970) 870-2220.

Thank you for caring about your National Forest!

Sincerely,

/s/ Jamie Kingsbury
JAMIE KINGSBURY
District Ranger

Enclosures: Project Area Map with Treatments
Attachment A – Silvicultural Prescriptions

Attachment A

Silvicultural Prescriptions

Clearcut

Clearcutting involves the harvesting of all trees in a designated area. Though the clearcut prescription varies from region to region, in the Central Rockies it is used primarily to regenerate intolerant plant species. Lodgepole pine and aspen are intolerant species--meaning they are intolerant to shade. These tree species have difficulty or do not naturally grow in the shade of other trees. Another use of clearcutting is to remove diseased or insect infested trees.

As mentioned before, timber management attempts to mimic nature to create optimum conditions for timber health, growth, and regeneration. Lodgepole pine and aspen naturally regenerate after some sort of natural disturbance or event creates an opening. Usually wildfire is the natural event that creates these openings. The clearcut prescription mimics fire in that it creates an opening in which lodgepole and aspen can regenerate. Similar to what happens after a wildfire, the serotinous or closed cones that are on the delimbed lodgepole branches from the clearcut trees will be the seed source for the new trees. The heat of the summer sun (about 90 degrees F.) on the clearcut opening is sufficient to open the cones and allow the wind to disperse the seeds.

Aspen, though also an intolerant species reproduces very differently than Lodgepole pine. Aspen regenerate or sprout from the roots of cut aspen or from aspen that are on the perimeter of an opening. Aspen are clones and rarely do they reproduce by producing seed. Eventually without a disturbance (e.g. fire, insects, blow down), the relatively short-lived lodgepole pine and aspen would be replaced by subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce, which are tolerant of the shade from other trees.

Clearcutting would be applied to stands which have either culminated in mean annual increment of growth, have a high infestation of bark beetles or dwarf mistletoe or a low to moderate infestation of dwarf mistletoe but are adjacent to a seedling/sapling stand.

Slash treatments may be by any of the following methods: machine pile and burn, machine trampling or roller chopping. Slash treatment is dependent on the density of the stand and the average crown ratio of the trees.

Under this treatment, all dead and/or beetle infested, merchantable lodgepole pine would be salvaged and/or harvested (100%) in order to reduce the build up of forest fuels and to regenerate a new lodgepole pine and aspen stands. Slash is typically lopped and scattered. Areas of heavy slash are either broadcast burned, piled/burned, and/or scarified to help regenerate the stand.

Commercial Thin

This is an intermediate harvest system intended to culture the existing stand for better individual tree growth. The selected trees (30-50%) are harvested. The amount of trees cut in each unit varies greatly depending on the density and health of the stand. Thinning concentrates the entire productive capacity of the site into the (fewer) remaining trees by decreasing the total number of stems in the treated stand. Typically, a thinning is applied to stands where diseased or insect-infested trees are few and where trees have sufficient vigor to respond to the increased growing space created by the reduction in stems. Many of the largest live trees would be retained while the smaller, less vigorous trees or trees with visible defects are the targets of cutting and removal. Commercial thinning is primarily used on young, merchantable, even-aged stands where there is an overstocking of trees. In lodgepole, this treatment can be used in both stands dominated by small sawtimber and/or pole timber. This treatment involves the harvesting of selected trees that are diseased and/or of poor form. The principle aim of this prescription is to create more growing space for retained trees to produce a healthy future stand that is resistant to insects and disease. In an area with a recreation emphasis this treatment can be used to increase tree longevity in and around campgrounds and picnic grounds or to maintain visual quality objectives along major travel routes. In areas with a timber emphasis, commercial thins can be used to create stands that maximize tree growth--producing a productive timber stand that can be harvested in 20 to 60 years. Slash is typically lopped and scattered.

Salvage/Sanitation

Under this treatment, 20 to 50 percent of the existing overstory in a stand would be cut and removed. This treatment is an intermediate harvest system that consists of 2 connected actions. *Salvage* is the cutting and removal of dead, dying, currently-infested or deteriorating trees primarily to put the wood to use before it becomes worthless. This method is usually applied to obtain utilization of material that would otherwise be wasted, and consideration of regeneration or desired stocking levels is not given much attention. *Sanitation* is used to harvest insect or disease infested trees before death occurs. The purpose for removing some susceptible trees is to impair beetle spread in the stand by decreasing the availability of suitable brooding habitat. A special emphasis is placed on harvesting mistletoed lodgepole that are adjacent to healthy lodgepole regeneration. The principle aim of this prescription is to create more growing space for retained trees to produce a healthier future stand, while maintaining the existing big tree character. This treatment can also be used to create a more balanced mix of conifer tree species within a stand.

A combination of sanitation/salvage will be applied to stands having a mountain pine beetle moderate to high incidence and generally low to moderate dwarf mistletoe levels. The objective is to open the stand up by removing dead and dying trees and healthy trees in the larger diameter classes. Removing these trees will help lower the basal area (BA) per acre and average tree diameter per acre. Stands with proportionately bigger than small diameter trees are most likely to be infested and suffer greater losses. Large diameter trees (>10") favor high beetle production because on the average they have thicker phloem than that found in smaller diameter trees (Amman 1988).

Slash is typically lopped and scattered. Branches and treetops are left to naturally decompose. In visually sensitive areas, such as along major travel routes, there is the option to "whole tree" skid to a central location and/or hand pile cut trees. The piled slash can then be burned at a later time.

Shelterwood Method

The objective of this method is to create a new even-aged stand through natural regeneration. Enough of the old stand is retained to provide both seed and a sheltered microclimate during the period of regeneration. There are three steps to this method: preparatory cut, seed cut, and removal cut. In many situations only the seed cut and removal cut are essential to successful implementation of the method.

Shelterwood Preparatory Cut

In the preparatory cut (first) treatment of stand regeneration, 25 to 35 percent of existing overstory trees would be felled and removed to promote good seed-bearing qualities in the remaining trees. Along with improving the health of the stand, this step is often prescribed to test wind firmness and not to develop it. It is also often prescribed to avoid the appearance of sudden changes in existing stand conditions. This first entry concentrates on removing trees that are diseased and/or of poor form, leaving the healthiest trees. This treatment would be aimed at forest stands where few pines are infested with beetles. Because trees chosen for cutting are often the larger pines or spruces in the stand (due to their vulnerability to beetle attack), this treatment is designed to reduce stand density and thus reduce the likelihood of future attack by mountain pine beetle or spruce beetle. The emphasis for tree cutting in this treatment is to harvest merchantable timber that would be most susceptible to future mountain pine beetle or spruce beetle attack and to leave trees believed to be the most vigorous or resilient. Slash is typically lopped and scattered.

Shelterwood Seed Cut

The seed cutting (second) treatment of the shelterwood regeneration system is aimed at getting the new crop of trees established by providing growing space while simultaneously maintaining shelter for developing seedlings. A shelterwood seed cut applies to stands which have an established conifer understory. To accomplish this, approximately 40 to 60 percent of the remaining overstory would be felled and removed with this treatment, retaining phenotypically desirable lodgepole pines, spruces and other overstory tree species to act as seed source for new regeneration and to protect seedlings. An emphasis is made on harvesting diseased, infested, and trees of poor form. Additionally, this treatment reduces stand density, thus decreasing the likelihood of attack by mountain pine beetle. Along with improving the resiliency of the stand to insects and disease this treatment provides growing space for new and existing regeneration in the understory. Slash is typically lopped and scattered.

Overstory Removal

The overstory removal prescription involves the harvesting of a stand's overstory. This prescription is used for stands that have a sufficient amount of regeneration or young trees growing up under an overstory of mature trees. Much of the overstory for this prescription are already in decline and have reached their full growth potential. The objective of this prescription is to remove the inhibiting mature overstory trees so that the regenerated understory trees can grow freely. Removing the overstory has the advantages of improving the growth of the residual stand, removing trees susceptible to mountain pine beetle, and reducing the spread of dwarf mistletoe. Slash is typically lopped and scattered.

Aspen Regeneration Cut

In this treatment aspen would be felled to stimulate suckering and new regeneration. Felled trees would be left on the ground. Potential firewood collection areas may be developed in these areas. These treatments would be accomplished with the use of hand crews to fell trees and buck limbs. Along with the condition of the stand its size, shape, location, slope, aspect, and tree density would be considered to determine an acceptable amount of short term fuels left on the ground and still improve the health and vigor of the aspen.