



File Code: 1950

Date: August 22, 2006

Dear Interested Parties:

The Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District, of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests (Forest), requests your input on the proposed **Seedhouse Fuel Reduction Project**. The Forest is proposing a series of prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce hazardous fuels (decreasing the potential for large, intense fires) and improve vegetative health on National Forest System (NFS) lands. Enclosed is a project area map, a description of the project area, the purpose and need for the project, a description of the proposed action, and design criteria.

Discussion

Public Meeting

The proposed action has been modified and design criteria have been added based on public and Forest Service specialists input. At the request of the community, a public meeting is now scheduled for September 7, 2006 (see the second to last paragraph for more information).

Access

Please let us know if you are interested in allowing access through your property to the units identified on the attached map. A permit is developed between the landowner and the Forest Service outlining the terms of the access.

Roadless Areas

This project will be conducted in Inventoried Roadless Areas and the Scenic River Corridor to maintain the characteristics that make these locations eligible for potential future designations. No roads will be built during this project. Few, if any, fire control lines will be built in the Inventoried Roadless Areas. No heavy equipment will be used in the Inventoried Roadless Areas.

Aesthetics

The Prescribed Burn units will appear blackened for a short period of time after the prescribed burns, but will green up and look healthier over time. In Defensible Space units the some trees and lower tree limbs will be removed, leaving the forest with a more open understory.

Livestock Grazing

Livestock grazing is permitted in the area of the project, though the allotment has been vacant for several years. Livestock grazing may be reintroduced in the future. Using livestock to reduce fuels can be successful in certain situations. The target species for the proposed burns are oak brush and sage, so livestock grazing is not effective at this stage. Livestock grazing will be considered as a fuels management technique after the initial fuels management work.

Aerial Spraying

The Forest Service is not authorized to aerial spray.



Adjacent Landowners

The defensible space treatments will work in conjunction with similar efforts occurring on adjacent private lands and within the permitted Summer Home Group. These treatments are meant to compliment or lead by example with FIREWISE type solutions to defensible space issues.

Beetle-Infested Trees

This project is not focused on the beetle infestation. It is focused on fuel reduction to minimize the potential for large, high-intensity fires in the area. Other projects, such as the timber sales planned for the area, are focused on controlling the beetle infestation. During this project, beetle-infested and other weakened trees will be removed in the defensible space units to reduce fuels. Trees of all available ages will remain within the defensible space units.

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning is done in small manageable patches within the larger units identified on the attached map. Firefighters encircle the burns to make sure that no fire escapes the target area. For example, when burning on a slope, the burn is started at the top of the slope. Small strips are burned horizontally across the slope. The further down the hill the work proceeds the larger the burned area is above the fire, adding additional protection against fire spreading. The fires are low-intensity, highly-controlled, small ground fires.

Season of Burning

Most prescribed burning is expected to be done in the spring when snow remains to prevent the spread of fire. Some prescribed burning is done in the fall under the right circumstances to ensure fuel reduction is accomplished. Opportunities to burn in a year are very limited based on many variables, including weather.

Noxious Weeds

Known areas of noxious weeds, especially cheat grass, will be treated before and after prescribed burning. Reseeding with native species will be done as appropriate in disturbed areas to minimize soil erosion and weed growth. Disturbed areas will be monitored for at least twice during the five years after project implementation to identify the need for additional weed treatments.

Slash Treatments

Some slash (woody debris remaining after logging) will be left after the removal of trees to help protect soil from erosion and to provide habitat for wildlife. The goal of modifying the slash treatment for the timber sales is to reduce excess slash that could potentially fuel a fire. Large slash piles on landings will be burned, but the ground will be rehabilitated to prevent erosion and ensure forest growth.

Decision

Jamie Kingsbury, the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District Ranger, will be the deciding official for this project. Decisions will be made as to the size and extent of the identified actions, or any changes to those actions that may surface through the analysis process.

Public Participation

The Forest has made a preliminary assessment that this proposal falls within a category of actions listed in the Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and there are no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude use of the category (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2 (10)). The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on a proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. This comment period is being provided pursuant to the July 2, 2005, order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. Those who provide timely comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Steamboat Pilot. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period.

Written comments should be addressed to: Jamie Kingsbury, District Ranger, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, 925 Weiss Drive, Steamboat Springs, Colorado 80287. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The fax number is 970-870-2284.

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone 970-879-1870 or in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-routt-hahns-peak-bears-ears@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3).

A field trip to the project area and a public open house meeting are scheduled for **September 7, 2006**. The field trip will depart from Steamboat Lake State Park in Clark, Colorado at 1:00 p.m. returning by 4:00 p.m. The public meeting is between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. at the Steamboat Lake State Park Conference Room. The field trip and meeting will provide opportunities to see and discuss the project.

Implementation

If no significant issues are identified by the public or Forest Service specialists, the Forest Service proposes to begin implementing this project in the fall of 2006 and is expected to occur in the spring and/or fall for several years.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

/s/ Joanne Sanfilippo, Acting for
JAMIE KINGSBURY
District Ranger

Enclosure: Map and Descriptions