

Decision Notice  
& Finding of No Significant Impact  
**Greer Wildland Urban Interface  
Fuels Reduction**

**USDA Forest Service**  
**Springerville Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest**  
**Apache County, State**  
T6N R27 E, T 7N R27E & 28E, T8N R27E & 28 E, GSRBM

## **Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

### **Background**

The Greer Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area was originally identified in the year 2000. The Greer Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in 2004. Analysis for the project was initiated in January of 2004 by Springerville District Ranger, John A. MacIvor to meet direction described in the Federal Wildland Fire Policy of 1995, the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan 2001 & 2002, the A/S Land Management Plan and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003.

The purpose and need for this project is to reduce the fire hazard potential in and around the communities of Greer and South Fork. The intent is to increase the likelihood that fire behavior will result in flame lengths less than 4 feet and minimize crown fire potential. The intent is to create a condition that provides for homeowner and firefighter safety while allowing for direct attack and a high probability of success.

The environmental assessment (EA) documents the analysis of the No Action Alternative, and the Proposed Action to meet this need.

### **Decision**

Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 - the Proposed Action. This decision includes a Project Specific Forest Plan Amendment which I have determined to be non-significant. Details of the amendment are included in the EA, process record and on pages 7-9 of this document.

Implementation of this decision includes the following:

- 1) Thin trees less than 16" dbh on approximately 17271 acres of the analysis area to lower tree densities and reduce ladder fuels. Trees > 16" dbh will be retained on these treatment acres. Thin trees less than 9" dbh on approximately 2358 acres to lower tree densities and reduce ladder fuels. Trees > 9" dbh will be retained on these treatment acres.
- 2) Treat all activity slash on the above treatment areas. As much as possible, slash will be treated by removal from the site, chipping or other mechanical means to reduce the need to burn activity slash piles. Existing fuels will be treated as an additional measure to lower fire hazard potential.
- 3) Broadcast burning will be planned in treated areas following thinning.
- 4) Trees encroaching established meadows will be removed and broadcast burning of grasslands will be planned.
- 5) The proposed action will result in commercial and noncommercial thinnings. Any products generated from the treatments that have commercial value will be used to offset the cost of the non-commercial treatments.
- 6) All currently closed roads opened for treatments will be closed after use. No new roads will be constructed for the treatments; only existing roads will be used.
- 7) Designated old growth will be managed on approximately 4463 acres, which is approximately 20% of the forested acres on the analysis area. Noncommercial and intermediate thinning, along with slash treatments, and broadcast burning will be performed in designated old growth stands. Some old growth stands will be deferred from treatment to meet MSO nest site and restricted habitat requirements.

This Decision also includes the Detailed Treatments and Mitigation Measures as described in the environmental assessment and shown on the following pages.

Detailed treatments are summarized in Exhibits 1 and 2 below. Exhibit 1 displays the proposed treatments within ½ mile of the private land boundaries. Exhibit 2 displays the proposed treatments beyond ½ mile of the private land boundaries. Refer to the attached maps for the locations of these treatments.

**Exhibit 1: Treatments Within ½ Mile of Private Land**

Treatment	Acres	Vegetation	Slash
1 Slopes <35%	2,212	Target BA for conifers is 40-60. Conifers greater than 16” dbh will not be cut. Conifers 5”-16” dbh will be thinned.* In areas less than 40 BA, conifers between 1.5’ tall and 4.9” dbh will be retained and spaced 15’-20’ from existing trees.	All logs >3.9” dib from the thinning will be removed from the project area. On slopes <25% all created slash will be mechanically treated (chipped, etc.) Existing fuels will be machine piled and burned. Aspen ≤16” damaged from the piling operation will be removed. On the 25-35% slopes all created slash will be hand piled along with existing fuels and burned.
2 Slopes >35% & inaccessible areas	2,433	Same as Treatment 1.	All created slash ≤16” in diameter will be hand piled along with existing fuels and burned. All created slash from PP >4” in diameter will be bucked into 14” lengths prior to piling as a bark beetle control measure.
<b>Total</b>	4645		

**\*In some areas the target BA will be exceeded due to the number of existing trees greater than 16” dbh.**

Definition of abbreviations – see Glossary

BA = basal area  
dbh = diameter breast height  
dib = diameter inside the bark

MC = mixed conifer  
PP = ponderosa pine  
SF = spruce/fir

PAC = protected activity center  
PFA = post fledgling family area

**Exhibit 2: Treatments Beyond 1/2 mile of Private Land**

Treatment	Acres	Vegetation	Slash
1 PP & MC on slopes <35%	9420	Target BA for conifers is 40-60. Conifers greater than 16" dbh will not be cut. Conifers 5"-16" dbh will be thinned.* In areas less than 40 BA, conifers between 1.5' tall and 4.9" dbh will be retained and spaced 15'-20' from existing trees. Where feasible 2-4 acre openings will be established in accordance with Goshawk guidelines.	All logs >3.9" dib from the thinning will be removed from the project area. On slopes <25% all created slash will be mechanically treated (chipped, etc.) Existing fuels will be machine piled and burned. Aspen ≤16" damaged from the piling operation will be removed. On the 25-35% slopes all created slash will be hand piled along with existing fuels and burned.
2 SF <35%	993	Target BA for conifers is 60-80. Conifers greater than 16" dbh will not be cut. Conifers 5"-16" dbh will be thinned.* In areas less than 60 BA, conifers between 1.5' tall and 4.9" dbh will be retained and spaced 15'-20' from existing trees. Where feasible 1 acre openings will be established in accordance with Goshawk guidelines.	Same as for Treatment 1.
3 PAC <35% & Hay Timber Sale Settlement Order Stands	685	Remove conifers <9" dbh and >1.5' tall.	Same as for Treatment 1 except that no aspen >8.9" dbh will be removed.
4 PAC & MC >35%	1608	Remove conifers <9" dbh and >1.5' tall.	All created slash will be hand piled along with existing fuels and burned. All created slash from PP >4" in diameter will be bucked into 14" lengths prior to piling for bark beetle control measures.
5 PFA <35%	1081	Target BA for conifers is 80. Conifers greater than 16" dbh will not be cut. Conifers 5"-16" dbh will be thinned.* In areas less than 80 BA, conifers between 1.5' tall and 4.9" dbh will be retained and spaced 15'-20' from existing trees.	Same as for Treatment 1.

<b>Exhibit 2 (continued): Treatments Beyond 1/2 mile of Private Land</b>			
6 PFA >35%	233	Same as for Treatment 5 for PP and SF stands (168 ac). MC stands (65 ac) will follow Treatment 4.	All created slash <12” in diameter will be hand piled along with existing fuels and burned. Created slash >12” in diameter will be piled or bucked into short lengths. All created slash from PP >4” in diameter will be bucked into 14” lengths prior to piling for bark beetle control measures.
7 PP & SF >35%	964	<p>Target BA for PP is 40-60. Conifers greater than 16” dbh will not be cut. Conifers 5”-16” dbh will be thinned.* In areas less than 40 BA, conifers between 1.5’ tall and 4.9” dbh will be retained and spaced 15’-20’ from existing trees. Where feasible 2-4 acre openings will be established in accordance with Goshawk guidelines.</p> <p>Target BA for SF is 60-80. Conifers greater than 16” dbh will not be cut. Conifers 5”-16” dbh will be thinned.* In areas less than 60 BA, conifers between 1.5’ tall and 4.9” dbh will be retained and spaced 15’-20’ from existing trees. Where feasible 1 acre openings will be established in accordance with Goshawk guidelines.</p>	Same as for Treatment 6.
<b>Total</b>	<b>14984</b>		

**\*In some areas the target BA will be exceeded due to the number of existing trees greater than 16” dbh.**

Definition of abbreviations – see Glossary

BA = basal area

dbh = diameter breast height

dib = diameter inside the bark

MC = mixed conifer

PP = ponderosa pine

SF = spruce/fir

PAC = protected activity center

PFA = post fledgling family area

The opportunity to enhance habitat for the Northern Goshawk will be incorporated ½ mile beyond private land where it is not in conflict with the fuels reduction objective.

### Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures to minimize resource impacts will be implemented with the treatments in Alternative 2 (the proposed action).

- **Best Management Practices:** Best Management Practices (BMPs), as developed by the Greer WUI Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team), the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Hydrologist, and Forest Soil Scientist, will be followed to mitigate ground disturbing activities. BMPs are included as Appendix B. of the EA.
- **Protection of Heritage Resources:** All archeological sites will be marked in an inconspicuous fashion, avoided by mechanized equipment, and closely monitored. Should additional sites be discovered during project implementation, all work in that locale shall be halted and the Forest Archeologist will be notified. All known sites will be protected pursuant to FSM 2361.1(2) and FSM R-3 2362.21(2) until testing or additional information is available to allow for a formal determination of eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places.
- **Snag Retention and Recruitment:** Beyond ½ mile of private land, snags will be managed to meet or exceed the Forest plan standards of 2 snags per acre. Beyond ½ mile, recruitment from the large diameter overstory will be used to exceed the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines of snags per acre, so the average number of snags per acre will, over time, meet or exceed the minimum requirement of snags per acre over the landscape.
- **Timing Restrictions in Mexican Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers (PAC):** Treatments beyond ½ mile of private land within known Mexican Spotted Owl PAC's (East Fork Little Colorado River (EFLCR) PAC, West Fork Little Colorado River (WFLCR) PAC, Greer PAC, Badger PAC, Hall Creek, Hay PAC, and South Fork Little Colorado River (SFLCR) PAC) will not occur during the breeding season (March 1-August 31). Treatments within ½ mile of private land may occur within the breeding season in accordance with the Biological Opinion (BO) for Wildland Urban Interface Fuel Treatment, USDA Forest Service, Southwestern Region into the proposal (Consultation Number, R2/ES CL 04-005).
- **Timing Restrictions in Goshawk Nesting Areas and PFAs:** In treatment areas beyond ½ mile of private land, no management activities will occur in active goshawk nesting areas or Post-fledging Family Areas during the nesting season (March 1- September 30). Treatments in potential or suitable goshawk habitat will only occur after Goshawk surveys are completed. Management activities may occur within active nesting areas or PFAs during the nesting season.
- **Protection of known turkey roosts:** No harvest of commercial trees will occur in known turkey roost clumps.
- **Wildlife cover around tanks:** An untreated area 66 feet wide will be deferred from thinning, harvesting or broadcast burning around all existing water tanks within the project to provide for wildlife habitat.

- **Disposal of activity slash:** All slash generated within ½ mile of private land boundaries will be chipped, piled or removed within one year of treatment if possible. Slash piles next to private land will be burned when conditions are appropriate to allow for safe disposal of slash.
- **Smoke Mitigation:** The Forest Service (FS) will monitor smoke produced during pile burns or broadcast burns. The FS will establish a baseline Parts per Million (PPM) value and then monitor the smoke produced during the burns. Burning will operate within Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) guidelines regarding smoke management.
- **Additional Smoke and Fire Control Mitigation:** Broadcast burning blocks will be laid out using existing roads or skid trails and Forest Service implemented handline or draglines when deemed necessary. Control features (i.e. existing roads or created fireline) will be used to control the amount of burning done each day. Smoke will be present during the fall and winter season when the population of Greer is at its lowest. Timing mitigation will reduce the majority of the smoke impact to the entire community. Greer and South Fork residents will be alerted when the burning will be started and the expected duration. Hand piles and machine piles will be burned in the winter with snow on the ground. Ideally, slash piles will be burned 1 year after treatment allowing the fuels to dry and the burns to achieve substantial consumption of slash.
- **Buffers / Timing Restriction for Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (SWWF):** There will be no treatment within a ½ mile buffer of suitable habitat for the SWWF between May 1 and September 15. There will also be at least a 75' buffer on Benny Creek that has SWWF potential habitat. In places where the 75' buffer does not extend out of the riparian area, the buffer will be larger. The buffer adjacent to potential habitat will be at the slope break or where it is appropriate to protect habitat.
- **Trails:** All trails will be protected and maintained to their present standard. All stumps within 100' of the trail will be no more than 4" high and the cut edge will face away from the trail for visual quality. No slash or wood chips will be left on the trails, and thinning contractors will not drive or skid trees along the trails.
- **Campgrounds:** Thinning prescriptions within the campgrounds will address fire hazard reduction, forest health and hazard tree reduction while maintaining shade trees and vegetative screening for campsites. Within 200 feet of exterior campsites thinning will allow more trees to remain to provide a screening affect between individual campsites and roadways. Beyond 200' of exterior campsites, more intense thinning will occur as the distance from campsites increases. Slash will be removed from the campgrounds and /or chipped and spread no more than 4" thick and 100' from all campsites. Stumps will be cut flat and no more than 2" from the ground for safety. All thinning will take place when campgrounds are closed for the season.
- **Government Springs Day Use Area:** In the Government Springs Day Use area, thinning in the Blocks immediately adjacent to the area will not occur between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends to reduce user conflict. All stumps within 100' of the road will have the cut edge facing away from the road for visual quality

- **Streamside buffers:**
  - A. The Little Colorado River (LCR), WFLCR, EFLCR, and SFLCR will have a buffer of approximately 300 feet where no ground disturbing mechanical treatments are planned.
  - B. The LCR, WFLCR, EFLCR, and SFLCR will have a buffer of approximately 150 feet where no pile burning or broadcast burning will occur.
  - C. Benny Creek, Hall Creek, Rosey Creek, and Fish Creek will have a buffer of approximately 75 feet where no ground disturbing mechanical treatments, pile burning, or broadcast burnings are planned. Also all intermittent drainages with defined channels, spring sources and lentic habitats will have a buffer of approximately 50 feet where no ground disturbing mechanical treatments, pile burning, or broadcast burnings are planned. A no burn buffer of approximately 50 feet will be applied to all ephemeral drainages with defined channels.

Note: Although riparian buffers are planned as described above, deviations from described buffers may occur during project implementation. In some cases, natural geographic features provide better resource protection than set distances for buffer locations. Therefore, as site specific project layout occurs, professional judgment will be used in locating the exact boundaries of the buffers. Limited areas within the designated buffers may be proposed for thinning, slash treatment and burning in order to meet project objectives, subject to District Ranger approval.

- **Timing Restriction for Peregrine Falcon:** There is a Peregrine eyrie site beyond ½ mile of private land within the proposed project area. The eyrie site is within the South Fork Spotted Owl Protected Activity Center (010604). The PAC will have a timing restriction where no treatments will occur from March 1- August 31, so the peregrine nest, if active, will be protected by the MSO timing restriction. If new eyrie sites are found beyond ½ mile of private land, the treatments will be modified as provided for in the current Forest Plan guidelines for the Peregrine. If peregrines are in the territory before May 15 there will be no management activities within ½ mile of the eyrie between March 1- August 15 (breeding season).
- **Mitigation Measures to protect Threatened, Endangered or Protected (TEP) Species:** To minimize the impacts of treatment activities on TEP species and their habitat, Mitigation Measures have been developed. The Forest Service has incorporated the Mandatory Impact Mitigation Measures (MIMMs) from the Biological Opinion (BO) for Wildland Urban Interface Fuel Treatment, USDA Forest Service, Southwestern Region into the proposal (Consultation Number, R2/ES CL 04-005).
- **Roads:** No permanent or temporary roads will be constructed.
- **Skid Trails:** All skid trails and off road vehicle trails resulting from the proposed action will be obliterated and restored.
- **Creek Crossings:** There will be no creek crossings in perennial or intermittent streams except where established road crossings exist.
- **Riparian Areas:** In areas with streams, there will be no vehicle or heavy equipment (including tracked vehicles) use in riparian areas.

- **Burning Plans:** Burn plans must be developed and designed to minimize high intensity fires and the possibility of escape.
- **Livestock Grazing:** Where livestock grazing occurs in areas that have been burned, the District will determine when grazing can be resumed.
- **Downed woody material / snags:** Large, downed woody materials (12” diameter or greater) and snags will be retained in riparian areas.
- **Re-seeding of grasses:** Native perennial species or annual rye grass seeds will be used where re-seeding of grasses and herbaceous vegetation occurs after ground disturbing activities. Sterile non-native species or non-seeding methods, such as weed-free straw, may be necessary for sites where annual rye grass persists.

Implementation of Alternative 2 will reduce the fire hazard potential in and around the communities of Greer and South Fork. In addition, this Decision will increase the likelihood that fire behavior will result in flame lengths less than 4 feet and minimize crown fire potential. The Decision will provide for homeowner and firefighter safety while allowing for direct attack and a high probability of success. This is supported by the results of Fire and Fuels Extension of the Forest Vegetation Simulator modeling as described in the analysis of effects disclosed in the EA.

This alternative meets requirements under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and 36 CFR 218.

### **Other Alternatives Considered**

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the No Action Alternative. A comparison of the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action can be found in the EA on pages [15-24].

#### Alternative 1

No Action - Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. Reduction in fire hazard potential through vegetative treatment would not occur with selection of Alternative 1, No Action.

### **Public Involvement**

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in 2004. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment in a scoping report dated March 18, 2004. The scoping report was sent to 244 parties. A public meeting was held in Greer on April 17, 2004. On April 22, 2004 a letter was sent to all on the mailing list, informing interested parties that the project is being planned under the authority of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and is subject to the “Objection Process” (36 CFR 218) instead of the “Appeal Process” (36 CFR 218). Forest Service Representatives from the IDTeam were involved in meetings sanctioned by Apache County for development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, as part of the collaborative process. On July 22, 2004 a field trip to previous treatment areas in the vicinity of Greer and other areas to the north was conducted. Attendees included representatives from Arizona Sustainable Forest Partnerships, Center For Biological Diversity, Nature Conservancy, Northern Arizona University, Northland Pioneer College, Greer Coalition, Inc., Apache County, Town of Eagar, White Mountain Independent newspaper, a consulting Forester, local woods products contractors, and other interested persons. Public notification of the opportunity to object was published in the White Mountain Independent on October 8, 2004.

Using the comments from the public and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team determined that there are no significant issues regarding the effects of the proposed action.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The determination is based upon the following findings documented in the EA and the Process Record.

**A. CONTEXT** - This project is a site-specific action that does not have international, national, region-wide or statewide importance environmentally. The intended decision is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the A-SNFs.

### **A. INTENSITY**

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. Impacts from this project are both beneficial and adverse. Fire hazard potential would be reduced near the communities of Greer and South Fork. Benefits are considered short term. Over the long term, future treatments subsequent to implementation of the proposed action will be needed to maintain the reduced fire hazard potential. Any adverse effects are short term in nature. (EA Chapter 3).
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. While this decision will provide fire suppression forces a higher probability of success when attacking a wildfire near Greer and South Fork, the risk of high intensity fire will remain on many areas of the Forest unless additional treatment efforts to reduce crown fire potential occur.
3. There will be no significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable loss of vegetation production, wildlife habitat, soil productivity, or water quality. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers to be affected. A unique water, the West Fork of the Little Colorado River (WFLCR), classified by Arizona Department of Environmental quality as outstanding state resource water, occurs within the project area. Project specific mitigation measures and Best Management Practices (BMPs) include streamside buffer zones, protection of riparian areas and protection of ephemeral drainages and wet meadows. These mitigation measures and BMPs will provide protection of wetlands and the WFLCR unique water. Also see the finding pertinent to Executive Order # 11990 concerning wetlands on page 10 of this decision. Protection of historic and cultural resources will occur. The project is in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. Vegetation modeling indicates changes to the environment brought about by treatment in Management Area 6-17, (East and West Forks of the Little Colorado River) are transitory. (EA page 64)
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. (EA, Chapter 3).

5. We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (EA Chapter 3).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, Implementation of a decision to reduce fuels by thinning and slash treatment is not a new type of decision for the Springerville Ranger District or the Forest Service, so it does not establish a precedent. Proposed treatments do not predetermine any future decisions regarding authorization of uses of lands within this planning unit. (EA page 65)
7. Cumulative effects were considered in the environmental assessment (EA, Chapter 3, & Process Record). There will not be a significant cumulative impact from this action individually or in concert with other related actions, past, present, or in the foreseeable future (EA, Chapter 3, & Process Record).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because project implementation will be managed for a “no adverse effect” to heritage resources (see EA pages 58, 59). This project is in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. (EA page 59).
9. There are no foreseeable significant adverse impacts that are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species or their habitat as a result of this decision.(EA page 49 and 50).
10. The actions implemented by this decision do not threaten a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The action conforms to the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for At-Risk Communities of the Apache National Forest in Apache County and is in compliance with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. A project specific amendment to the Forest Plan is required for this action. Rationale for considering this amendment to be Non-Significant is indicated below. The action is consistent with the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan with the addition of the project specific Forest Plan Amendment described in the EA and process record. (EA pages 62-65; Process Record Doc.# 104).

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This project is located in Management Areas 6-01 (Forested Land), 6-02 (Woodland), 6-03 (Riparian), 6-04 (Grassland), 6-11 (Water) and 6-17 (East and West Forks of the Little Colorado River) of the Apache-Sitgreaves Forests Land Management Plan (FLMP).

### A. *Compliance with the Forest Plan / Non-significant Project Specific Amendment*

This proposal requires a site-specific Forest Plan amendment. The site-specific amendment is for the Greer Wildland Urban Interface Project only.

The proposed action is consistent with the standards and guidelines of the FLMP as amended, except as follows:

- Analysis indicates the proposed action will maintain viable populations of existing vertebrate wildlife species within the analysis area. However, existing habitat capability is less than 40% of potential habitat capability for some Management Indicator Species (as specified on page 74 of the Forest Land Management Plan (FLMP)). The HCI model indicates that red squirrel will be below .4 HCI in 20 years with implementation of the proposed action. This decision therefore requires a project-specific amendment to the Forest Plan to allow for this departure from the HCI minimum standard. This departure is warranted to reduce the risk of high intensity fire to the communities.
- Alternative 2 (Proposed Action) departs from management direction of the FLMP as amended in 1996 (USDA 1996, page 91) by not following the “Management Recommendations for the Northern Goshawk in the Southwestern United States” in three ways: 1) Proposed density reductions may not meet the canopy cover requirements specified for Northern Goshawk outside of PFAs, in treatment areas both within and beyond ½ mile of private land. 2) Openings designed for creation of VSS 1 may fall short of the recommended amount due to the 16” diameter cap. 3) VSS 3 falls below the recommended 20% of the area immediately after harvest. This decision therefore requires a project-specific amendment to the Forest Plan to allow for this departure. This departure is warranted in order to reduce the risk of high intensity fire near the communities.
- The proposed action does not meet the Visual Quality Objectives for Foreground Retention areas as specified in the Forest Plan. A site-specific Forest Plan Amendment is needed. The proposed treatments may create a decreased visual quality rating to some people for a period of time. However, with no treatment, a stand replacement fire could occur on larger portions of, or the entire area thus reducing the visual quality and experience for the foreseeable future.
- Portions of the geographic area affected by this decision for Greer WUI are located within Management Area 17, East and West Forks Little Colorado River of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan. This area possesses high quality semi-primitive non-motorized water based recreation opportunities adjacent to the popular community of Greer. Portions of the management area are proposed for treatment under Alternative 2. Proposed treatments conform to the management emphasis for the area which is to provide semi-primitive recreation opportunities while protecting the unique botanical qualities. However, the ASNF Land Management Plan

states “No vegetative management practices are planned in this management area.” Therefore, this decision requires a project-specific amendment to the Forest Plan to allow for treatments within Management Area 17.

I have evaluated the proposed action and have determined that it does not constitute a significant amendment to the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest Plan for the reasons described below:

**Timing.** The timing factor examines at what point over the course of the forest plan period the Plan is amended. Both the age of the underlying documents and the duration of the amendment are relevant considerations. The handbook indicates that the later in the time period, the less significant the change is likely to be. The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Plan (1987) is nearing the end of the first planning period. The proposed management direction will be in place until efforts to revise the Plan are complete (2006-2008) thereby supporting my determination that the proposed changes do not constitute a significant amendment of the Forest Plan. In addition, immediate treatments are needed to help reduce the risk of high intensity fires to provide protection to the communities and forest resources.

**Location and Size.** The key to location and size is context, or “the relationship of the affected area to the overall planning area”, the smaller the area affected, the less likely the change is to be a significant change to the forest plan.

The Greer Wildland Urban Interface area is a small percentage of the total Forest acreage. In addition, vegetation modeling done in conjunction with effects analysis indicates that changes brought about by treatment are transitory. While the treatments proposed in the preferred alternative involve a large area within the analysis area, agency and contract workforce limitations and budget scheduling procedures dictate that implementation will occur in phases over different seasons of several years. This phasing further reduces the cumulative effects of treatment at both the analysis area and larger scales as the recovery response of the first phases of implementation will already be attenuating those impacts by the time subsequent phases are implemented.

**Goals, Objectives, and Outputs.** The goals, objectives, and outputs factor involves the determination of “whether the change alters the long-term relationship between the level of goods and services in the overall planning area” (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, section 5.329(c)).

The proposed treatments would apply only to the Greer Wildland Urban Interface area. The treatments help reduce fuel accumulations to abate fire risk as stated in the existing Forest Plan. No changes in outputs identified in the current Forest Plan resulting from the proposed treatments are expected for the Greer Wildland Urban Interface.

**Management Prescriptions.** The management prescriptions factor involves the determination of:

(1), “*whether the change in a management prescription is only for a specific situation or whether it would apply to future decisions throughout the planning area;*”

Implementation of a decision to reduce fuels by thinning and slash treatment is not a new type of decision for the Springerville Ranger District or the Forest Service, so it does not establish a precedent. Proposed treatments do not predetermine any future decisions regarding authorization of other uses of lands within this planning unit.

*and,*

(2), “*whether or not the change alters the desired future condition of the land and resources or the anticipated goods and services to be produced*” (*Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, section 5.32(d)*).

The “desired” condition of the landscape is not changed through implementation of this amendment. The proposed treatments will reduce fire risk and allow for protection of resources, anticipated goods and services to be produced on the Greer Analysis area. Changes do not, of themselves, change the “desired” condition; they will merely assist in achieving them.

### ***B. Compliance with Other Laws and Regulations***

All proposed silvicultural treatments comply with NFMA requirements regarding land suitability, conservation of soil and water resources, opening sizes, reforestation, and multiple-use activities as certified in the project file.

This decision is in compliance with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. Implementation of the decision will improve protection to the communities of Greer and South Fork from catastrophic wildfire.

This decision is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. Consultation with the USFWS on the effects to TEP species was concluded in 2001. The Regional BAE concluded that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect the Bald Eagle and Jaguar. FWS concurred with this determination. FWS also issued a conference opinion that the proposed project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Chiricahua leopard frog and Mexican gray wolf. Subsequent to the 2001 Conference Opinion for Chiricahua leopard frog, the species was listed as Threatened. The 2004 analysis of effects of the proposed project on Chiricahua leopard frog indicates that the proposed action will not affect the species. It is the biological opinion of the FWS that the implementation of the proposed project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Mexican Spotted Owl and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. These determinations are based on the expected levels of effects associated with implementing the various prescriptions by forest type and the implementation of the “Mandatory Measures to Minimize Effects to TEP Species and Habitat”.

This decision is in compliance with the Clean Water Act. BMPs are in place to protect soil and water quality. (Appendix B. of the EA). The BMPs for the project include implementation and effectiveness monitoring as described in the Monitoring Summary (Appendix C. of the EA).

This decision is in compliance with the Clean Air Act. Smoke from prescribed burning will comply with ADEQ requirements for reporting and accomplishment. Other impacts to air quality from implementation are negligible (EA page 60).

In accordance with Executive Order (E.O.) #11988 – Floodplain Management: The Forest has determined the proposed action will be in compliance with the provisions of this order. Streamside and riparian buffers will be in place and Best Management Practices will be followed.

In accordance with E.O. #11990 – Wetlands: The Forest has determined the proposed action will be in compliance with the provisions of this order since implementation will not result in net destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands, or have potential to directly or indirectly support new construction in wetlands.

In accordance with E.O. # 12898 – Environmental Justice: The proposed action is not expected to cause disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations.

In accordance with E.O. # 12962 – Aquatic Systems Recreational Fisheries: Fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, mammal, plant and insect groups that are dependant on riparian habitats will not experience direct disturbance in the majority of these habitats. Riparian buffers will lessen impacts to ephemeral and intermittent drainages, spring sources and lentic habitats. The effectiveness of the riparian buffer strips will be enhanced with the staging of vegetative treatments and prescribed burns in multiple year phases. Additionally, Best Management Practices will be implemented to minimize soil movement and ground disturbance during treatments. Short term impacts associated with increased sediment or fire derived organic loading will be minimized by the retention of riparian filter strips. Over the long-term, the fuel reduction treatments should be beneficial to all riparian dependant species as water retention within the basin is increased and the chances for catastrophic fires are decreased. With the removal of overstocked trees within the watershed, long term benefits to the species will occur. Higher stream base flows should result as more water becomes available for stream recharge as a consequence of less surface and sub-surface moisture being utilized by dense conifer stands. Recreational activity is expected to be maintained or increase with implementation of this decision.

In accordance with E.O. #13186 – Protection of Migratory Birds: The effects of the proposal on migratory birds were considered in the analysis. No significant effects will occur to range-wide populations of migratory bird species because the proposed action will only minimally affect the suitability of migratory bird habitat and will not result in intentional take. Unintentional take may occur in the project area to some migratory bird species but will not be detrimental to the range-wide population of the species.

In accordance with E.O. Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation: Local participation occurred during the development of the Apache County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, a project-specific public meeting in Greer and other public involvement as described in the EA. Cooperation also occurred with the Department of the Interior, United States Fish and Wildlife Service as described in the EA and Process Record.

In accordance with E.O. #13175 - Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments: Consultation with Indian Tribal Governments occurred and the project is in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act.

**Implementation Date**

Implementation of the decision may occur immediately.

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is not subject to administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218.

**Contact**

For additional information concerning this decision contact Bruce A. Buttrey, Integrated Resource Specialist, Springerville Ranger District, P.O. Box 760, Springerville, AZ 85938, or by telephone at 928-333-6271,

/s/ Elaine Zieroth  
Elaine Zieroth  
Forest Supervisor  
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

11/22/04  
Date

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