



File Code: 1950

Date: February 23, 2009

Dear Friend of the Ashley National Forest:

I signed a Decision Memo to implement the Little Elk Summit Fuels Reduction Project on September 22, 2006 under the authority of the Hazardous Fuels Reduction Categorical Exclusion (HFRCE). This categorical exclusion was developed under the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. Since that time we have completed all of the 818 mechanical acres associated with this project as well as some of the originally authorized 3,712 prescribed burn acres (portions of the Young's Spring and Honslinger units have been completed – see Appendix A, *List of Completed and Remaining Actions*, for details).

However, the Little Elk Summit Fuels Reduction Project was enjoined by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California on November 25, 2008. This followed a December 5, 2007 ruling of the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals which declared the HFRCE granted under the President's Healthy Forests Initiative invalid.

Consequently, I am formally withdrawing my decision of September 22, 2006, documented in a Decision Memo, to implement the Little Elk Summit Fuels Reduction Project under the HFRCE.

I am also proposing to now complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) to further analyze and disclose any potential effects of the remainder of the project. The specific action that is proposed is to use prescribed fire to accomplish the following original project objectives:

- 1) Reduce hazardous fuels within the project area, returning portions of the project area back to a desired "Condition Class 1"; and
- 2) Reintroduce fire and its resulting ecological benefits back into the prescribed fire portion of the project area.

At this time we expect that the EA will include an analysis of the proposed action and no action. The proposed action is to utilize prescribed fire in the originally analyzed burn units (see Appendix A for details). Prescribed burning would primarily occur within ponderosa pine stands but may also occur in mixed conifer, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, aspen, and browse or sagebrush areas. Substantial areas of sagebrush and browse would be avoided. Prescribed fire would be used in such a way as to create a mosaic of treated and untreated areas. Different levels of fire intensity within the burned areas would also create a mosaic of vegetative and structural diversity within the project area.

If you would like a copy of the original Decision Memo (or the original scoping letter) please let us know. Individuals and organizations who responded during the previous scoping periods do not need to resubmit comments to have them considered as we prepare an EA.



Additional comments will be accepted for 30 days from the date of publication of a public notice in the *Vernal Express* (anticipated February 25, 2009). This comment period provides those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known as we complete the EA and prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. All who submit comments or otherwise express interest in the project during this comment period, or submitted comments or expressed interest during either of the previous comment periods for this project, will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR 215 regulations. Comments that are specific are most helpful. Written comments must be submitted to: the Flaming Gorge District Ranger, c/o Lesley Tullis at the Vernal Ranger District Office at 355 North Vernal Avenue, Vernal, UT 84078. Electronic comments may be submitted in Word (.doc), Portable Document Format (.pdf), or Rich Text Format (.rtf), with *Little Elk Summit Fuels Reduction* in the subject line, to ltullis@fs.fed.us. To obtain additional information regarding the proposal, please contact Lesley Tullis at 435-781-5137 (same email as above).

Sincerely,

/s/ Jeff Schramm

Jeff Schramm
Flaming Gorge District Ranger

APPENDIX A

Little Elk Summit Fuels Reduction Project

LIST OF COMPLETED AND REMAINING ACTIONS

Ashley National Forest
Flaming Gorge Ranger District

LIST OF COMPLETED ACTIONS

- All 818 mechanical acres (units 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 on 9/22/2006 Decision Memo [DM] map) are complete, including pile burning.
- Young's Spring (a 1,180-acre unit - unit 3) has been lightly burned with a first entry burn to ensure that subsequent burns would not be too hot. This unit needs additional prescribed burning.
- The eastern Honslinger unit (288 acres - unit 4) and everything to the east of the main north-south ridgeline in the western Honslinger unit (approximately 546 acres of the 959-acre unit 5) have been lightly burned with a first entry burn as well. These units need additional prescribed burning.

REMAINING ACTIONS THAT HAVE NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED

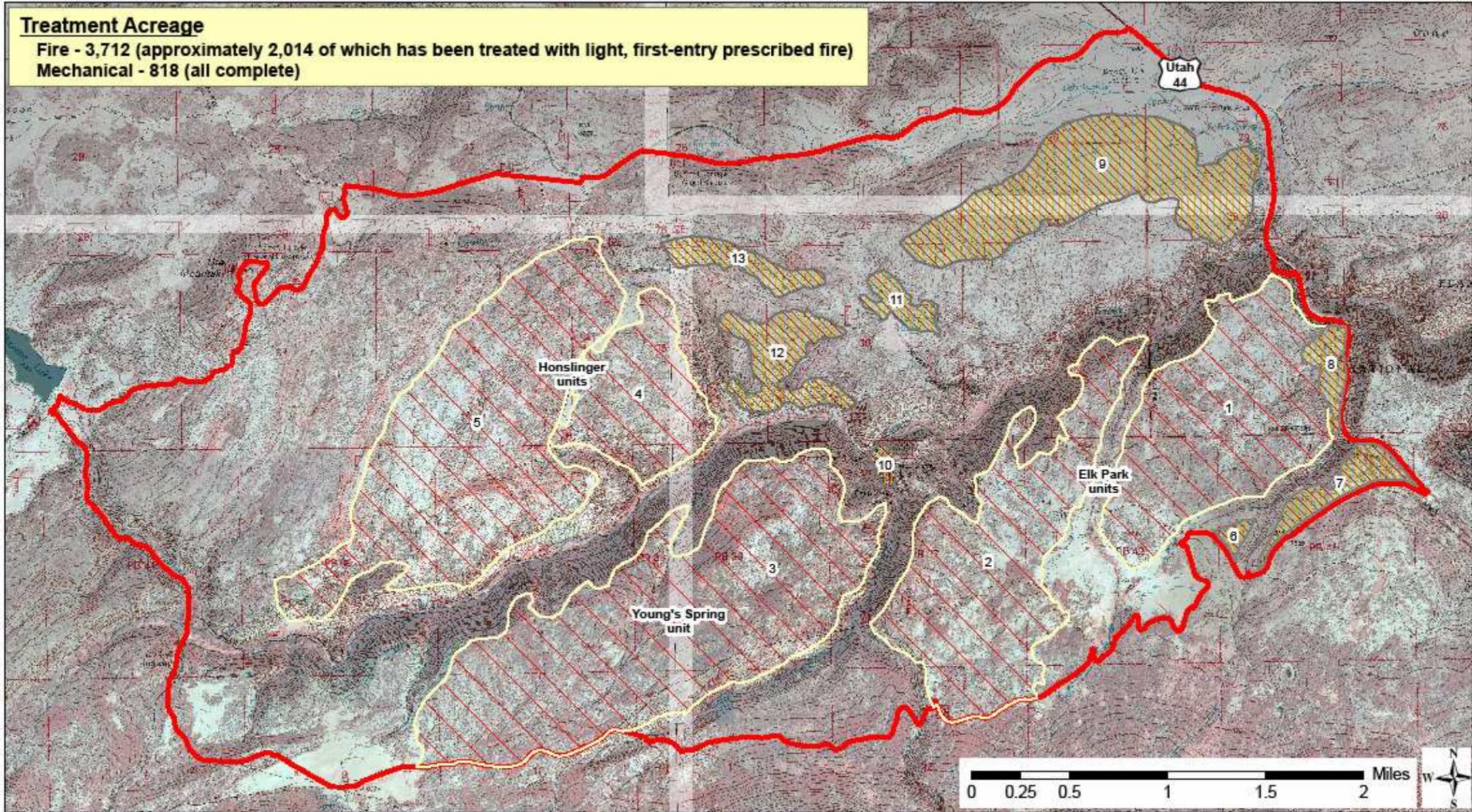
The following will now be the proposed action in the upcoming EA:

- Prescribed burning in the two Elk Park units (unit 1 - 608 acres and unit 2 - 677 acres).
- Prescribed burning everything to the west of the main north-south ridgeline in the western Honslinger unit (approximately 413 acres of the 959-acre unit 5).
- Follow-up prescribed burning throughout the lightly burned areas discussed above - Young's Spring (unit 3) and portions of the Honslinger units (units 4 and 5).

Little Elk Summit Fuels Reduction Project - 2009 Update

Ashley National Forest
Flaming Gorge Ranger District

APPENDIX B



Treatment Acreage
 Fire - 3,712 (approximately 2,014 of which has been treated with light, first-entry prescribed fire)
 Mechanical - 818 (all complete)

Legend

- Project boundary
- Mechanical units - all complete
- Prescribed fire units - partially complete

Project Name: Little Elk Summit Fuels Reduction Project
 Project Location: Township: T1N and T2N Range: R19E and R20E Section(s): Multiple
 State(s): Utah County(s): Daggett Baseline-Meridian: Salt Lake B & M
 Map Projection: UTM Zone 12N, NAD 1983 Nominal Map Scale: 1 : 30,000
 Drawn By: W. Conroy; updated by LT Date Drawn: 2/10/06; updated 2/19/09
 File Location: J:\sfiles\gis\projects\fire\d1\LittleElk\2009_update\little_elk_2_19_09.mxd



Flaming Gorge Ranger District
 Manila, Utah

