



**File Code:** 1950/2430/5150  
**Date:** May 14, 2008

Dear Friend of the Ashley,

I am seeking your comments on the proposed North Flank Vegetation Management Project. This project proposes to utilize commercial salvage, thinning and harvesting techniques, tree cutting without salvage or harvest, and fire to achieve project objectives. The project would occur within the Flaming Gorge Ranger District of the Ashley National Forest (refer to attached map). The general location of the project area is Township 2 North, Range 17, 18 and 19 East (northern portions), Salt Lake Meridian. The project area is located within both Summit and Daggett Counties, Utah. The objectives for this project are listed below (all of the acreage figures are approximate):

1. To capture the value of dead trees killed by Douglas fir beetles on 1,296 acres through commercial salvage (Treatment Areas 1 and 3...refer to map). Salvage is expected to consist of the removal of individual or small patches of dead or dying trees. A portion of these acres, 524 acres within the Cow Hollow area (Treatment Area 3), would also be commercially thinned to promote the health and vigor of residual trees through density management.
2. Restore and maintain aspen within 510 acres.
  - 98 acres (Treatment Area 2) would have merchantable conifers (primarily Douglas fir) removed through commercial harvest to increase aspen. Non-merchantable trees may also be cut and piled for burning.
  - 412 acres (Treatment Area 4) of existing aspen stands with various levels of conifer encroachment would have the conifers cut. These areas would not have any commercial product removal since they lie within an inventoried roadless area.
3. To promote species composition and age class diversity within 4,100 acres (Treatment Area 5) of Douglas fir dominated stands through the reintroduction of fire. A substantial increase in aspen is expected following the reintroduction of fire since aspen is currently a remnant component of these stands.

The specific actions that are planned to be implemented are as follows:

#### **Treatment Area 1 (Salvage Area)**

- Dead and dying trees would be salvaged using commercial salvage techniques.
- One section of new temporary road would be constructed (up to ½ mile). Upon project completion this road would be obliterated.



- Existing roads and road closures would be returned to pre-salvage conditions following salvage completion.

#### **Treatment Area 2 (Aspen Restoration Area, salvage/harvest with fire)**

- Merchantable trees would be salvaged or harvested.
- Non-merchantable trees may also be cut and piled for burning.
- Excess slash would be piled and burned.

#### **Treatment Area 3 (Salvage and Stand Improvement Area)**

- Dead and dying trees would be salvaged using commercial salvage techniques.
- Commercial thinning activities would be implemented which would include density management and stand improvement cutting.

#### **Treatment Area 4 (Aspen Maintenance Areas)**

- Conifers would be cut by hand, no harvest or salvage
- Conifer snags would be left in place.

#### **Treatment Area 5 (Aspen Restoration Areas, fire only)**

- Prescribed fire would be used to promote species composition and age class diversity. Fire would be aurally applied to dead and dying Douglas fir patches and/or specific larger areas to achieve a mosaic of species diversity (primarily an increase in aspen) and age classes. A range of fire prescriptions would be used that would result in stand replacement fires (high intensity) and/or understory burning (low intensity).

The remaining slash, snags, downed logs and coarse woody debris in all treatment areas would meet Forest Plan Amendment requirements for goshawks. Excessive slash would be broadcast burned, or piled and burned in Treatment Areas 1, 3 and 4. No other temporary road construction is planned other than the ½ mile indicated in Treatment Area 1.

The implementation of this project may begin in 2009 and would continue until project objectives were met.

#### **Purpose and Need**

Insects (primarily the Douglas fir beetle) have caused, and are continuing to cause, pockets of Douglas fir mortality within the North Flank project area creating an opportunity for the commercial salvage of these trees. The North Flank area is part of the 33,100 acres of the Ashley National Forest that experienced DF beetle mortality in 2005. On the Flaming Gorge Ranger District the total acreage affected increased by 10% (with fewer trees affected) in 2006. Tree mortality increased significantly (87%) from 2006 to 2007. This has created an opportunity for salvage. While most of the North Flank Area has experienced beetle mortality, only those 1,296 acres that were previously harvested and that lie outside any inventoried roadless area are being proposed for salvage.

Existing Douglas-fir stands within Treatment Area 3 (Cow Hollow area...part of the 1,296 acres noted above) are stands with low to moderate, but on-going beetle mortality. These stands generally have even-aged structures and high stand densities that reduce their health and vigor. They are, and will continue to be more susceptible to insect and disease mortality.

Over time seral aspen within the North Flank project area has been displaced by, and is continuing to be displaced by conifers, primarily Douglas fir. This is indicated by the presence of remnant aspen stands within all treatment areas. This is most visible within Treatment Area 2. This is also indicated by previous aspen and browse responses following commercial timber harvests in the early 1980s, the 1980 Lodgepole Creek Wildfire and the 1987 Sols Canyon prescribed burn.

Additionally, existing aspen stands show various levels of conifer encroachment, from just a few conifers here and there to numerous maturing conifers with substantial conifer regeneration. In these aspen stands conifers will be the dominant species within several decades without any disturbance or a reduction of conifers.

Since aspen is a desirable species that provides substantial ecological and human benefits, the maintenance of existing aspen stands, and the reestablishment of remnant or seral aspen stands is desirable.

Historically, fire would have helped maintain aspen within the forested areas of the project area that are now dominated by Douglas fir. Season long smoldering fires would have consumed large amounts of ground fuels, with intermittent group torching of standing trees. This intermittent torching would have created small openings promoting aspen regeneration if aspen clones were present, and a younger age class of conifer regeneration. Occasionally these fires would have resulted in stand replacement fires similar to the Lodgepole Creek wildfire in 1980 which was a stand replacement fire of 91 acres resulting in a substantial aspen and browse response (this fire was suppressed by the Forest Service). Other than the Lodgepole Creek wildfire and the Sols Canyon prescribed burn in 1987 (33 acres) there have not been any substantial fires within the project area for an estimated 150-200 years. The lack of any other substantial fires within the project area over the last century may coincide with Forest Service fire suppression efforts.

Consequently, this project has four purposes:

1. Provide an opportunity for commercial salvage,
2. Improve growth and structure of existing DF stands within the Cow Hollow area to promote tree health and vigor,
3. Promote and maintain aspen, and
4. Promote age class and species composition diversity through the reintroduction of fire.

### **Request for Comment and Legal Notice of Proposed Action**

You are invited to comment at this time. Comments that are specific to and include supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision are most helpful.

Send your written comments to: Jeff Schramm, District Ranger, Flaming Gorge Ranger District, P.O. Box 279, Manila, Utah 84046. Jeff Schramm is the Responsible Official for this project. He can also be reached at (435) 781-5263. Comments may also be hand delivered to the Flaming Gorge Ranger District, 25 W. Hwy. 43, Manila, Utah, during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic comments should be sent to [comments-intermtn-ashley@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-ashley@fs.fed.us). It would be most useful to receive your electronic comments in Microsoft word (\*.doc) or rich text format (\*.rtf). Those using electronic means

may submit a scanned signature. Otherwise, another means of verifying the identity of the individual or organizational representative may be necessary for electronically submitted comments or comments received by phone. This is pursuant to 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3)(B). The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the newspaper of record which is the Vernal Express. Only those who submit timely comments will be accepted as appellants. Comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project.

For further information concerning this proposal, please contact Ross Catron by phone at (435) 781-5268. Thank you for your interest and participation in the management of the Ashley National Forest.

Sincerely,

*/s/ JEFF E. SCHRAMM*

District Ranger

Attachment: Map