



**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** October 18, 2007

Dear Friend of the Ashley National Forest:

I am seeking your input on a proposal to conduct a post-fire salvage timber harvest from the Pole Mountain area of the Roosevelt-Duchesne Ranger District (the District). This letter provides you with information on the purpose of and need for the project, the proposed action, and the expected level of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and documentation, as well as information on how and where to submit your comments regarding this proposal.

### **Purpose and Need**

The Neola North Fire, which burned approximately 20,377 acres on the Ashley National Forest in June and July of 2007, resulted in a number of areas with high concentrations of fire-caused tree mortality. The purpose of this project is to recover the economic value of fire-killed and dying trees on a 225-acre area that burned on Pole Mountain (see attached map). The trees are mostly lodgepole pine, with some interspersed subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce.

### **Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to harvest those fire-killed and dying trees within the 225-acre project area that are not needed to maintain or improve post-fire ecological functions. Removal would be accomplished through a small timber sale and would occur in 2008 or 2009. An estimated 3000 CCF<sup>1</sup> of timber would be available for harvest. The project site is on fairly flat terrain. No road construction is anticipated at this time, however up to ½ mile of temporary road could be constructed if the need were to arise. Following harvest, approximately 40-80 ft<sup>2</sup> basal area would be retained in those areas that experienced low to moderate fire-caused mortality. In those areas that experienced high fire-caused mortality, the residual basal area may be somewhat less (see map).

A fire-killed tree, as used in this analysis, is defined as any tree that died or is expected to die as a result of the wildland fire. The following criteria apply: 1) 70% or more crown scorch and/or 2) 50% or more basal circumference burned<sup>2</sup>. Dying trees also include any tree not directly killed by the fire but whose death is forthcoming in the near future because it has been windthrown or successfully attacked by bark beetles.

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<sup>1</sup> CCF = 100 cubic feet.

<sup>2</sup> These criteria would not apply to all tree species, but do apply to those in the project area – lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, and Engelmann spruce.



## National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Compliance

A preliminary assessment suggests that this project falls within a category of action listed in the Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2) that is excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Further analysis will be conducted to determine if any extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of the category. At this point we expect that, following analysis, this activity will fall under FSH 1909.15\_31.2, Category 13: *Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than 1/2 mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing. Examples include but are not limited to: a) Harvest of a portion of a stand damaged by a wind or ice event and construction of a short temporary road to access the damaged trees; and b) Harvest of fire-damaged trees.* This is a category that requires a Decision Memo and project record.

Per the October 19, 2005 ruling of the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of California in Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck, this proposed action is subject to notice, comment, and appeal under the 36 CFR 215 rules.

## Public Involvement

We are accepting public comments on this proposal. Comments will be accepted for 30 days following publication (expected on Tuesday, October 23rd) of the legal notice of this proposal in the *Uintah Basin Standard*. This comment period provides those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. It is being provided pursuant to the July 2 and September 16, 2005 orders 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.

Written comments must be submitted to: John R. Kirkaldie, Roosevelt-Duchesne District Ranger, P.O. Box 127, (650 West Highway 40), Roosevelt, UT 84066. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 to 4:30, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must contain "Pole Mountain Post-Fire Salvage" in the subject line and must be submitted in Microsoft Word (.doc), Portable Document Format (.pdf), or Rich Text Format (.rtf) to [jtullis@fs.fed.us](mailto:jtullis@fs.fed.us). If you have any questions about the proposal please contact Jim McRae at 435-781-5123 or myself at 435-781-5203.

Sincerely,

/s/ *Michael T. Elson* for  
JOHN R. KIRKALDIE  
District Ranger