

***Currant Summit Fuels Reduction***  
Decision Memo

Ely Ranger District  
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
USDA – Forest Service  
Nye County, Nevada

**Decision**

I have decided to complete a prescribed burn on 3700 acres of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest land in T11N, R59E, all or portions of sections 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, and 36; T11N, R60E, all or portions of sections 19, 20, 29, 30, 31, and 32. See attached map. We will burn using aerial and/or hand ignition to treat about 3,000 acres of pinyon/juniper woodlands and 700 acres of previously chained shrub and grass/forb vegetation.

The treatments will create a diversity of age classes and structures to reduce the risk of large wildfires. The burn will create a mosaic pattern with numerous openings averaging 50 to 200 acres scattered across the landscape, providing increased vegetative diversity. Some openings may be larger and could exceed 200 acres; however, most will remain smaller. To remove encroaching juniper in the chained area, the burn will cover the entire area to stimulate regeneration of grasses and forbs. From the first ignition, we expect to complete the burn within two weeks. Burning could occur in any season of the year as long as the weather and fuel moisture conditions are within our burn prescription.

Some additional actions we will take during the burn:

- The burn will not extend to State Highway 6, as originally proposed. The north edge of the burn unit lies about one-half mile south of the highway to avoid smoking up the route, and creating a road closure. In addition, we will monitor State Highway 6 for smoke impacts. If needed, we will sign the highway for smoke hazards.
- We will place temperature sensors on archeological sites during burning.
- We will protect the combustible site; it lies outside the burn area.
- We will protect range improvements such as fences and water developments, and replace any range structures damaged during prescribed burning.
- We will rest the area from livestock grazing for at least two full growing seasons following prescribed burning operations to allow for vegetation re-growth and noxious weed monitoring.
- We will avoid the area near the Currant Seeding water well, where we have a small patch of cheatgrass.
- We will not actively ignite the bitterbrush area that is at the north end of the project.
- Natural barriers will be used to minimize the construction of handlines.

**Purpose and Need for Action**

The area has the potential for large, possibly catastrophic wildfire. By burning fuels under controlled conditions, we will reduce that potential. The burn will also increase vegetative diversity and create a mosaic of age classes and structures. This mosaic will decrease the chance for an insect/disease infestation by thinning out the trees, and reducing competition for water and nutrients. The burn will improve pinyon/juniper habitats for wildlife species that depend upon these habitats.

Wildfire is more unpredictable and precarious than prescribed fire. By introducing fire under controlled conditions, we can limit the burn to those periods that have appropriate temperature, relative humidity, and wind thresholds to meet our burn goals. The burn plan describing our burn conditions is located in the project file.

### **Public Involvement**

- On July 9, 2004, we sent 59 scoping letters describing the proposal. Five of the six responses supported the action. The Nevada Dept. of Wildlife expressed concerns about burning the previously chained area, because it will regenerate with grasses and forbs. However, because of extensive juniper encroachment since the last chaining in the 1970's, the present vegetation is predominantly juniper with a grass/forb understory. With the spotty, or mosaic burn we are planning, there will be a ready seed source of sagebrush remaining in the transition zone between the pinyon/juniper woodlands and the chained area. We hope to eliminate the juniper encroachment, and present a more conducive environment for sagebrush seedlings.
- At the August 5, 2004 Tri-County meeting, Nye County Commissioners express concern over the possible closure of Hwy. 6 due to smoke. As a result, we have pulled the south boundary of the burn farther north to avoid smoking out the highway.
- On October 4, 2005, we mailed 180 Request for Comment letters describing the proposal and included language on "eligible to appeal" direction under 36 CFR 215 regulations. As a result, we received comments and concerns from the Sierra Club and Western Watershed Project. We reviewed both letters thoroughly, but did not adjust the project design or burn plan.

### **Tribal Consultation**

On July 6, 2004, the team leader met with representatives of the Ely Shoshone Tribe. On October 12, 2004, the team leader met with a representative of the Duckwater Shoshone Tribe. This spring, the team leader received a message from the Duckwater Shoshone tribe representative concerned that the proposal would burn pinyon trees in a pinenut gathering area for the elders. After additional discussions, the team leader and the Duckwater tribe representative looked at the project on the ground on August 29. During that visit, the team leader and the tribal representative resolved the tribe's issues. On November 10, 2005 a project representative met with the Yomba Tribal Council and presented this project. They expressed no concerns.

### **Extraordinary Circumstances**

I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this proposal, as defined by NEPA. I have made this determination based on an interdisciplinary analysis. Below is the summary of findings relative to the seven extraordinary circumstances defined at FSH 1909.15 (30.3)(2).

#### **1. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.**

The District Hydrologist determined we do not need to complete watershed management measures. There are no stream channels, wetlands, or floodplains in the project area.

#### **2. Threatened, endangered, proposed and sensitive species, and their critical habitat.**

The District Biologist concluded that there are no adverse impacts to these species or their habitat.

**3. Congressionally-designated areas such as a wilderness, wilderness study area, or National Recreation Area.**

The project is not in a Congressionally-designated area.

**4. Inventoried Roadless Areas.**

The project is located within the Wihoytes #15-22 Inventoried Roadless Area but this action will not have an adverse effect on the wilderness characteristics.

**5. Research Natural Areas.**

The project is not in a Research Natural Area.

**6. American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.**

The project leader consulted with the Ely Shoshone and Duckwater Tribes; there are no known religious or cultural sites on the project.

**7. Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas.**

A Forest archeologist completed a cultural resource survey of the area, and has consulted with the Nevada SHPO determining compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Based on our commitment to monitor fire effects with temperature sensors, SHPO concluded that the project has no adverse effect.

**Finding of no Significant Effect to the Environment**

In addition to the above, I have incorporated consideration of other elements in my determination that there are no adverse effects to extraordinary circumstances, as defined by NEPA, nor other significant effects associated with this project. I have considered the potential for cumulative effects, as directed in the June 24, 2005 CEQ Memorandum. I have concluded that without notable individual effects from the proposal, and in the absence of current or proposed similar projects in this area, there are no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to the environment. My conclusion is based on the scale and duration of activity, the minimal visual and environmental change expected, information gathered during public scoping, and the low risk of environmental impact.

**Categorical Exclusion**

The Chief of the Forest Service has identified specific actions that may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, if there are no adverse impacts to extraordinary circumstances. I find that this proposal qualifies under Chapter 30 of the Forest Service Handbook, 1909.15, Category 10, "Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing, not to exceed 1,000 acres."

**Findings Required by other Laws**

This project complies with all laws and Executive Orders affecting National Forest management, including the National Forest Management Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the American Antiquities Act. There will be no adverse effects on health, human safety, consumers, minorities, civil rights, American Indian rights, or women. There are no known effects to the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. This action is unlikely to increase noxious and invasive plants due to the limited amount of surface fuels.

This decision is consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Humboldt National Forest of August 1986, and with the goals and objectives for fire on pages IV-48-50.

### **Implementation Date**

We expect to start this project shortly after the appeal review period.

### **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunity**

We provided a thirty-day comment period from October 4, 2005 to November 10, 2005 to allow those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Officer. This comment period was provided pursuant to the September 16, 2005, order issued by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. This project is eligible to appeal under direction of 36 CFR 215 regulations.

### **Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this contact Carol Carlock, Fuels Specialist, at the Ely Ranger District, 825 Avenue E, Ely, NV 89301 or by phone at (775) 289-3031.

/s/ Patricia N. Irwin  
District Ranger

March 7, 2006

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