

Savory Prescribed Fire Project
Decision Memo

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

Decision

I have decided to approve the Savory Prescribed Fire project on the Austin Ranger District on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.

The project area is located entirely on National Forest System lands, encompassing 5,642 acres. Approximately 30%-70% of these lands (1,639-3,823 acres) will be burned. The method of burning will be aerial or hand-ignition during the fall. The treatment area is dominated by pinyon/juniper woodlands. The burn pattern will produce a mosaic pattern of openings from 5-500 acres within the pinyon-juniper woodlands.

The project is within the Monitor Mountain Range, south of Savory Mountain, near Little Savory Creek and Savory Creek, within the National Forest Boundary in Townships 13, 13 ½, 14, North, Range 49, and 50 East. The project area is approximately 35 miles east and 35 miles south of Austin, in Nye County, Nevada. Elevations range from 7,200 ft to 9,400 ft.

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 extraordinary circumstances. The proposed action falls within Section 31.2(6) of the Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook (FSH 1909.15), as amended on 07/06/2004: “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.” An example of a project listed within this category is “prescribed burning to reduce natural fuel build-up and improve plant vigor”.

Fire ignition will occur primarily within pinyon-juniper stands. Active ignition will not occur in stands of mountain mahogany, low sagebrush, or aspen.

No fuel breaks will be created. However, some hand cutting of trees may occur in ignition areas, if necessary to carry the fire. Control lines and vehicle travel will generally be limited to existing roads. Hand lines may be constructed to protect cultural resources.

The preferred fire behavior will be a crown fire intense enough to burn tree canopies. Crown fires will be achieved using a helitorch, a gelled-fuel aerial ignition device, attached to a helicopter’s external cargo hook. Burning could be constrained by the use of natural barriers (such as rock out crops), time of day, live fuel moisture variations, and firing patterns.

Fire will only be ignited if fuel and weather conditions are within the prescribed burn prescription (detailed in the Burn Plan). Additional implementation and monitoring measures include:

- To minimize the risk of noxious/invasive weed invasion and spread, prevention measures will be implemented, including pre-washing of vehicles entering the project area. Following treatment, we will monitor the area for a minimum of three years to detect new or spreading weed populations. Implementation of noxious weed control will be consistent with the Forest Noxious Weed Management and Control Program.
- To protect goshawk nests, a ¼ mile buffer will be established around active Goshawk nests, and no fire ignition or other project activity will occur within the buffer.
- To preserve habitat for migratory birds, large cone-bearing pinyon trees will not be targeted for ignition.
- To provide for public safety, the burn area and access will be closed to the public during burning operation.

The project is scheduled for implementation in the fall of 2007. Should the burn not be completed as scheduled, it will be rescheduled for the next suitable burning window.

Purpose and Need for Action

Fuel loading within the Savory Project Area is excessive. Current “Condition Class” is rated at “2-3”: fire has been moderately-significantly altered from historical fire regime ranges, resulting in moderate-high risk of losing key ecosystem components from fire, with moderate-high increases in the size, frequency, intensity, or severity of fires. These conditions vary substantially from desired fuel loading (Condition Class of “1”) within the historical range of pinyon/juniper Fire Regime 1 (low-severity fires with a frequency of 0-35 years).

The primary purposes (objectives) of the Savory Prescribed Fire are to 1) reduce the probability of stand-replacing catastrophic wildland fires, and 2) provide additional wildlife habitat diversity.

The Project is also necessary to accomplish the following:

- Provide for a safer fire suppression environment;
- Reduce the likelihood for loss of life, property, and natural resources due to catastrophic wildland fire
- Improve rangeland health and productivity;

Public Involvement

As part of the larger Seven Mile Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, Phase II, the Savory Prescribed Fire area was previously scoped by the Bureau of Land Management. Letters were mailed to interested parties on November 23, 2004.

The public was also invited to a public meeting in Eureka, Nevada on September 28, 2006.

The Notice of Proposed Action Opportunity to Comment was mailed to interested parties on April 30, 2007. Comments are included in the project record.

Tribal Consultation

Scoping documents and consultation offers were simultaneously mailed to American Indian Tribes, including the Yomba Shoshone Tribe, Duckwater Shoshone Tribe and the Fallon Business Council. The tribes were also invited to a public meeting in Eureka, Nevada on September 28, 2006.

The Forest Service consulted with the Yomba Tribal Council on four separate occasions regarding the proposed “Seven Mile” fuels treatments (March 10, 2005, March 10, 2006, May 12, 2006, and September 8, 2006). The Tribes did not identify any specific concerns.

Extraordinary Circumstances

I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this proposal. My determination is based on an interdisciplinary analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts. Below is a summary of effects upon the seven resource conditions at FSH 1909.15(30.3)(2).

Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

There are no floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds in the project area.
(Hydrology Specialist Report)

Threatened, endangered, proposed and sensitive species and their critical habitat

There are no significant impacts to these species or their habitat.
(Wildlife Specialist Report and Biological Evaluation)

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

The project is not located in or near a congressionally designated wilderness area.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

The project is surrounded by, but not located in, an Inventoried Roadless Area. No effects of substance to wilderness or roadless characteristics are anticipated.
(Inventoried Roadless Area Evaluation)

Research Natural Areas

The project is not located in or near any Research Natural Area.

American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites

The Forest Service consulted with the Yomba Shoshone Tribe and Duckwater Shoshone Tribe: There are no known religious or cultural sites within the project area. No objections were received from any other tribe.

Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas

A cultural resource survey and consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) was completed for compliance with Section 106 of the National Preservation Act of 1966. The SHPO concurs with our determination that this project will have no adverse effect on historic or prehistoric sites with the protection measures outlined in the inventory report. (SHPO, 2007)

The project record supports my conclusion of “no extraordinary circumstances”. The record documents a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information scientific uncertainty, and risk. The record includes all comments submitted by the public during the 30-day Notice of Proposed Action comment period, as well as a description of Forest Service consideration of those comments.

Findings Required by other Laws

This project complies with all laws and Executive Orders affecting National Forest management, including the National Forest Management Act; Endangered Species Act; Clean Air Act; Clean Water Act; American Antiquities Act; Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186; and Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).

This decision is also consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Toiyabe National Forest (1986), including Forest Standards and Guidelines for “Fire and Fuels Management (p.IV:15).

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunity

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Only individuals or organizations who submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest in the project during the comment period may appeal. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of this notice in the Battle Mountain Bugle. This date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Timeframe information from other sources should not be relied on. Incorporation of documents by reference is not allowed. The Appeal Deciding Officer is the Forest Supervisor. Appeals must be sent to: Appeal Deciding Officer, Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; or by fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to: appeals-intermttn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Emailed appeals must be submitted in rich text (rtf), Word (doc) or portable document format (pdf) and must include the project name in the subject line. Appeals may also be hand delivered to the above address, during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Responsible Official

The responsible official for this project is Steven Williams, District Ranger, Austin/Tonopah Ranger Districts, 100 Midas Canyon Road, P.O. Box 130, Austin, Nevada 89310; telephone number (775) 964-2671.

Contact Person

For further information regarding this proposal, please contact Mary Bresee at (775) 964-2671.

/s/ Steven Williams

STEVEN WILLIAMS
District Ranger
Austin/Tonopah Ranger Districts

27 July 2007

DATE