



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service

Humboldt-Toiyabe  
National Forest

April 2007

## **NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT**

### **SAVORY PRESCRIBED FIRE PROJECT**

**AUSTIN RANGER DISTRICT  
NYE COUNTY, NEVADA**

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## COMMENTS WELCOME

The Austin Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on the Savory Prescribed Fire.

This project was originally analyzed as part of a Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) published by the Battle Mountain Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM): *Seven Mile Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, Phase II Nye County, NV, August 2006 (NV-064-EA-06-017)*. The EA was mailed to interested parties in September 2006. It addresses potential fuel reduction on 37,600 acres of BLM Public Lands and 31,700 acres of National Forest System lands. The EA is available for review at the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor's Office. A Forest Service Decision(s) on the "Seven Mile" proposal will be issued, pending BLM finalization of the "7 Mile" EA, completion of Forest Service heritage resource inventories and determination of effect, and concurrence from the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer. That Decision(s) will now exclude the Savory project area.

In the interim, to accommodate timely research by the Rocky Mountain Research Station, the Forest Service proposes to expedite the 5,642-acre Savory project. The District has made a preliminary determination that the proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA). The action is consistent with FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30, 31.2(6): "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".

The Forest is now seeking public comments specific to the proposed Savory Fuels Reduction Project. The purpose of this comment period is to provide additional opportunity for public participation prior to a decision by the Responsible Official (Austin District Ranger). In addition, submission of comments during this period is required to establish appeal eligibility. Written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the 36 CFR Notice of Proposed Action in the Battle Mountain Bugle. For detailed information on how to provide comments, please refer to the "Comment Process" section of this document.

## SUMMARY

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Austin Ranger District, proposes to use prescribed fire to reduce hazardous fuels and improve wildlife habitat on 5,642 acres of National Forest System lands (NFS) within Nye County, Nevada. Forest Service treatments are proposed for implementation in fall, 2007. Approximately 30-70% of the NFS acreage would be burned, creating a mosaic pattern of 5-500 acres openings within the pinyon-juniper woodland.

## LOCATION

The Savory Prescribed Fire Project Area lies in the Monitor Range, south of Savory Mountain, near Little Savory Creek and Savory Creek, within the National Forest Boundary in Townships 13 ½ and 14 North, Range 49 and 50 East (Map 1). The project area is approximately 35 miles east and 35

miles south of Austin, in Nye County, Nevada. Elevations range from approximately 7,200 ft to 9,400 ft.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

Fuel loading within the Savory Project Area ranges from 2 to 35 tons per acre. The mean fire return intervals have shifted from >50 years to <10 years. The expansion of pinyon/juniper has significantly altered the fire regimes. This shift in fire regimes from relatively frequent low to mixed severity fire (10-50 years mean fire return interval) to more infrequent high severity fire (>50 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;

## **THE PROPOSED ACTION**

Savory Prescribed Fire proposes to apply prescribed fire on National Forest System (NFS) lands within a 5,642 acre project area. Approximately 30-70% of these lands (3,823-1,639 acres) would be burned, using aerial or hand-ignition during the fall. The burn pattern would produce mosaic openings of 5-500 acres in pinyon-juniper woodlands.

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

Fire ignition would occur in pinyon-juniper woodlands. No active lighting would occur in riparian corridors or stands of mountain mahogany, mountain big sagebrush, low sagebrush, or aspen. The preferred fire behavior would be crown fires intense enough to burn tree canopies. Crown fires would 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

The Project is currently scheduled for implementation in fall, 2007, assuming that fuel and weather conditions are within the prescribed burn prescription (to be detailed in a Burn Plan), burning resources, and budget are available. Should the burn not be completed as scheduled, it would be rescheduled for the next suitable burning window.

## **MITIGATION MEASURES**

Mitigation measures are proposed to avoid or minimize negative effects to resources surrounding and within the project area. Specific measures include:

### Noxious Weeds

- Implement noxious weed assessment prevention measures.

- Wash all vehicles entering/leaving the project area within a designated vehicle washing staging area

#### Air Quality

- Follow standard operating procedures of the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) for smoke management.
- If residual smoke affects communities or highways, implement mitigation measures, including:
  - Reduce the number of acres burned per day.
  - Adjust the ignition timing and/or duration.
  - Move to areas that are in alignment with the wind.
  - Wait for favorable atmospheric conditions.

#### Rare Plants

- Do not actively ignite within rock outcrops, or low or big sagebrush habitats.
- Burn when ground fuels are moist, resulting in low intensity fires on the ground that will not cause excessive heating of the soil.

#### Sensitive Wildlife

- Do not actively ignite fuels within rock outcrops
- Do not actively ignite big or low sagebrush habitats.
- Do not actively ignite mountain mahogany or aspen stands, unless pinyon-juniper has significantly invaded those stands.
- If goshawk nests are active, do not fly helicopters or burn within 1/4 mile of the nests from March 15-August 31. If nests are not active, do not ignite fire within 1/4 mile of nests.

#### Wildlife

- If natural vegetative recovery does not meet recovery objectives on burned acreage, seed with native species.

#### Migratory Birds

- Leave and maintain large, cone-bearing pinyon trees (75 years or older) in patches within the treatment area.
- Maintain open, mature pinyon-juniper woodlands with shrubby understory on moderate, rocky slopes and canyon mouths. Maintain small “pockets” of pinyon-juniper at the head of canyons for breeding habitat.
- Maintain a greater percentage of pinyon trees than juniper trees
- Manage for snags, dead limbs, and dead tops

#### Public Safety

- Publicize the location and dates of implementation and hazards associated with the burn
- Close burn areas and road access (FDR 515, 515A, and 516) to the public during ignition operations.
- Prior to ignition, conduct a thorough reconnaissance of the burn area to insure no Forest users are in the immediate area.

#### Rangelands

- Rest burn areas from livestock grazing for a minimum of 2 years

## MONITORING

Monitoring is proposed to 1) assess the effectiveness of burn implementation (in achieving objectives); 2) identify unintended impacts to resources; and 3) determine success in achieving desired vegetation re-establishment; 4) improve similar future projects.

### Cultural Resources

- Place temperature-sensing devices in various locations throughout the project area prior to project implementation. Evaluate post-burn to determine ground surface and sub-surface temperatures.
- Share site monitoring results with SHPO

### Noxious Weeds

- Perform a 1, 2, and 3 year post-burn weed assessment. Eradicate or minimize weeds, consistent with the Humboldt-Toiyabe Noxious Weed Management and Control Program.

### Migratory Birds

- Conduct post-burn monitoring to identify bird responses to the treatments.

### Sensitive Wildlife

- Conduct a pre and post-burn nesting status check on known goshawk nests if a spring prescription is planned

### Vegetation

#### Consistent with Rocky Mountain Research Station research:

- Monitor re-establishment of the shrub and herbaceous layers. During years one, three, and ten following implementation, analyze species composition, tree height (HT), diameter at breast height (DBH), trees per acre (TPA), canopy cover, fuel loading, and treatment patterns.
- Review the burn prescription and record the effectiveness of the burn plan.

## SCOPING

As part of the larger Seven Mile Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, Phase II, the Savory Prescribed Fire was previously scoped by the BLM. Letters were mailed to interested parties on November 23, 2004. Scoping documents and consultation offers were simultaneously mailed to American Indian Tribes, including the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone, Ely Shoshone, Duckwater Shoshone, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley, and the Yomba Tribes. The tribes were also invited to a public meeting in Eureka, NV 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.

## ISSUES

Issues relevant to the Savory Prescribed Fire are documented in the Preliminary” Seven Mile” EA. They address:

- Analysis required by law, regulation, or policy: air quality; cultural resources; American Indian religious concerns; non-native invasive/noxious weed species; water quality; wetlands; threatened, endangered, candidate, and special status species (including Management Indicator Species); migratory birds; and environmental justice.
- Effects upon vegetative communities

The EA analysis identified no significant impacts associated with proposed prescribed fire fuel treatments. In addition, the Savory Project Area does not include municipal watersheds, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), National Recreation Areas, or Research Natural Areas.

## COMMENT PROCESS

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to the Responsible Official: District Ranger, Austin Ranger District: P.O. Box 130, 100 Midas Canyon Road, Austin, NV 89310, or fax: (775) 964-1451. The telephone number is (775) 964-2671. Office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Acrobat (.pdf), and Word (.doc) to [comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-austin-tonopah@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-austin-tonopah@fs.fed.us). Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Comments must be received by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the information identified in 36 CFR 215, including:

- Name and Address,
- Title of the Proposed Action;
- Specific comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the Proposed Action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision,
- Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility,
- For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
- Individual members of organizations must submit their own comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, will be available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

### **APPEAL ELIGABILITY**

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the Federal Code of Regulations (36 CFR 215).

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, will be available for public inspection, and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

For further information, contact Mary Bresee, Austin/Tonopah Ranger Districts, Central Zone Forester at 775-964-2671.

Attachment: Savory Prescribed Fire Map