

RECREATION

This section will describe the affected environment and disclose the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and the no action alternative, as related to recreation issues identified during scoping on the Lake Fuels Project. There were no significant issues and only one key issue proposed for the recreation resource as identified by the interdisciplinary team from comments received from the public, other government entities, and Forest Service specialists. This issue and indicator established for measuring its impact is as follows:

Issue: Proposed activities may temporarily displace recreation users within the project area, particularly on the roads, trails, and developed dispersed sites in the Miller Flat area.

Indicator: Recreation Visitor Days (RVDs)

Affected Environment

The planning area for the proposed Lake Fuels Project encompasses the headwater drainages of Spring Creek and Lake Canyon, which constitute the upper reaches of the Left Fork of Huntington Creek. Huntington Reservoir, a popular fishery, also lies within the project area boundary. Skyline Drive (NFSR 50150), a popular recreation road during the summer and fall months, forms the project area boundary on the west. Utah State Highway (U-31) borders the project area on the north and east sides. U-31 is a double laned, paved highway connecting the communities Fairview and Huntington, Utah via Huntington Canyon. It is a designated National Scenic Byway (Huntington-Eccles Canyon National Scenic Byway) and is open year round to travel. The southern boundary of the project planning area extends east from Skyline Drive, down the crest of the ridge separating Lake Canyon and Rolfson Canyon, and connecting to Millers Flat road (NFSR 50014) just north of the intersection with the road to Rolfson Reservoir (NFSR 50269).

Because of its year round accessibility, rolling terrain, availability of water resources, variety of recreation opportunities, and outstanding mountain scenery, the Lake Canyon area is a natural setting for outdoor recreation and is one of the most popular areas on the Forest. The area provides a year round assortment of recreation activities ranging from camping, fishing, ATV travel, family reunions, and hiking in the summer; to viewing autumn colors and hunting in the fall; to ice fishing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, kite boarding and other snow play activities in the winter and early spring. Local residents from both Carbon and Emery Counties to the east and Sanpete Valley to the west have a long history of recreation use in the area. There are also many visitors from the urban areas along the Wasatch Front.

Much of the area within the planning boundary for the Lake Fuels project is roadless and/or of roadless character which provides a significant region for semi-primitive outdoor experiences including camping, hiking, hunting, and fishing. Approximately 1680 acres of the Rolfson-Staker designated roadless area lie within the project boundary. There are an additional 2000 acres in the analysis area that are greater than ¼ mile from an existing open road that were not included in the designated roadless area.

The Lake Canyon area receives high recreation use during the summer, fall, winter, and early spring seasons. The highest concentration of recreation activity within the proposed project area is located in the southeast corner of planning area. Approximately 760 acres of the Lake Canyon Recreation Area is contained within the project boundary. The area includes five group sites, 46 family sites, and over 10 miles of OHV trail. The remainder of the analysis area receives moderate recreation use throughout the year in the form of fishing, hunting, hiking, back country skiing, kite boarding and snowmobiling.

There are two ROS (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) classifications pertinent to the project area. Areas along U-31, Miller Flat Road, and South Skyline Drive are classified as Roded Natural Appearing. This designation provides for slightly less isolation from the sights and sounds of humans. The opportunity for a high degree of human interaction with the natural environment and both motorized and non-motorized recreation is provided.

The rest of the project area is classified as Semi-Primitive Motorized. This designation provides some isolation from the sights and sounds of humans. It should also provide the user with a degree of interaction with the natural environment and the ability to use motorized vehicles in the area.

Management Direction

The Manti-La Sal National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) outlines the direction for the management of the various resources for both general Forest-wide consideration and for specific Management Unit Emphasis areas. Figure 1 identifies the Management Emphasis Units located within the Lake Fuels analysis area and total number of acres in each.

Figure 1 - Forest Plan Management Units

MANAGEMENT UNITS (FOREST PLAN PAGES)	MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS	ACRES
UDM (III-52-54)	Provide high quality dispersed recreation opportunities in areas characteristically receiving moderate to heavy levels of use.	94
RNG (III-64-66)	Production of forage and cover for domestic livestock and wildlife.	3,811
TBR (III-67-68)	Production and use of wood-fiber for a variety of wood products.	1,639
RPN (III-69-73)	Management of riparian areas, and all the components of intersecting ecosystems.	** not mapped - but would include the riparian areas adjacent to Lake Canyon and Spring Creeks
WPE (III-77-79)	Watershed protection and improvement in areas where watershed treatment (i.e., contour trenching and furrowing) have been, or should be, applied, and where other use restrictions are implemented to protect on-site and downstream values from flooding and sedimentation.	56
OTHER	Other ownerships.	-0-

Some of the specific direction from the LRMP for the management of recreation related activities on the Forest and in the project area is as follows:

- **Dispersed Recreation Management**
 - Restrict use and/or rehabilitate dispersed sites where unacceptable environmental damage is occurring (III-18).
 - Manage dispersed recreation activities and use of trails in dispersed areas to not exceed the established PAOT/acre or mile of site or trail capacity (III-18).
- **Undeveloped Motorized Recreation Sites**
 - On site visual quality objective is partial retention or modification (III-53).
 - Inventory dispersed sites as potential developed recreation sites, and as appropriate reclassify as Developed recreation Sites management units when substantial demand exists and based on an orderly development program (III-53).
 - Emphasize semi-primitive nonmotorized, semi-primitive motorized, and roaded natural appearing recreation opportunities (III-53).

- Close specific land areas or travel routes either permanently or seasonally to maintain compatibility with adjacent area management, to prevent resource damage, for economic reasons, to prevent conflicts of use, and provide for user health and safety (III-53).
 - Manage motorized vehicle use (including snowmobiles) on and off Forest Development Roads and Trails (III-53).
 - Provide facilities, as appropriate, including development level one or two campgrounds. Trailheads, local roads, parking lots, and signing may also be provided (III-53).
 - Manage tree stands using commercial or noncommercial methods to maintain or enhance recreation values, visual quality, visitor safety or control insects and disease (III-53).
- **Developed Recreation Sites**
 - Develop appropriate facilities where the present facilities are not meeting the demand and where it meets the highest public net benefit (III-48).
- **Trail System Management**
 - Maintain trails for designated uses and close trails to inappropriate uses (III-42).
 - Provide a range of trail opportunities in coordination with other Federal, State, or local agencies, and private industry both on and off NFS lands (III-42).
 - Construct or reconstruct trails when needed as part of the transportation system (III-42).
- **Transportation System Management**
 - Encourage the development of Forest Development Roads, when constructed or reconstructed for special purposes to meet existing and potential all purpose needs (III-40).
 - Coordinate transportation planning for Forest Development Roads with Forest trails to provide continuity and fulfill Forest transportation needs (III-40).
 - Construct and reconstruct local roads to provide access for specific resource activities such as campgrounds, trailheads, timber sales, range allotments, leases, etc. with the minimum amount of surface disturbance and fitting the road to topography (III-41).
- **Riparian Area Management**
 - Give preferential consideration to riparian area dependent resources in cases of irresolvable resource conflicts (III-31).
 - Limit use (dispersed recreation) where the riparian area is being unacceptably damaged (III-70)
 - Vegetate disturbed soils in sites where adverse impacts would occur according to the following priorities: (1) Aquatic ecosystems (2) Riparian ecosystems (3) areas outside of aquatic and riparian ecosystems (III-71).
 - Minimize surface disturbing activities that alter vegetative cover, result in stream channel instability or loss of channel cross-sectional areas, or reduce water quality (III-71).
 - Locate new roads and trails outside riparian areas unless alternative routes have been reviewed and rejected (III-73).
 - Minimize detrimental disturbance to the riparian unit by construction and maintenance activities. Initiate timely and effective rehabilitation of disturbed sites and restore riparian area so that a vegetative ground cover or suitable substitute protects the soil from erosion and prevents increased sediment yield (III-73).

Environmental Consequences

The following section will disclose the foreseeable environmental consequences of implementing each alternative, including the no action alternative, proposed for the Lake Project as they relate to the key issue; *“Project activities may temporarily displace dispersed recreation users within the project area, particularly*

on the roads, trails and developed dispersed sites in the Miller Flat area.” This will include direct and indirect effects on *Recreation Visitor Days (RVDs)*, of applying the alternatives. In addition the cumulative effects of known past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions will be evaluated. Consistency with Forest Plan direction, standards, and guidelines will be discussed as will identification of any irreversible and irretrievable commitments that would be made through implementation of alternatives.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Currently the estimated number of *Recreation Visitor Days (RVDs)* in Lake Fuels project area is 31,500 per year. This is comprised of approximately 25,000 RVD's during the summer and fall months (May thru October) and 6,500 RVD's during the winter months (November thru April). Additional demand for summer/fall recreation experiences such as those provided in the Lake Canyon Recreation Area will continue to grow each year. This visitation will most likely be absorbed by undeveloped dispersed camping areas further south along the Miller Flat road. Winter use has tended to stabilize over the past few years with the exception of kite boarding which has experienced tremendous growth. This use is taking place in an area known as the Big Drift on the northern edge of the project boundary.

Alternative 1

Under the No Action alternative there would be no harvest operations, no temporary road construction, no follow-up planting activities, no prescribed burning or any other activities related to the Lake Fuels project. Visitors would not be displaced or restricted from using camping sites, roads, or trails within the area. Therefore, implementation of Alternative 1 would have no direct effect on recreation activities and *Recreation Visitor Days* would remain unchanged (See figure 2 – Direct and Indirect Effects by Alternative).

Indirect effects of the No Action alternative on recreation use in the Lake Fuels project area are those that would naturally evolve over time given no treatment to the forest stands. Beetle infestation has resulted in die-off of a high percentage of spruce in the area. Dead spruce in these stands will be solid and firmly anchored into ground for a while, but as time passes various rots and fungi will work to weaken both the structural strength of the tree stem above the ground as well as the root system holding the tree upright. As this happens trees will become more susceptible to wind throw or breaking off and falling over.

Roads and camping sites in the project area are generally located away from the proposed harvest units. Dead spruce near campsites of the Lake Canyon Recreation Area were harvested in 2006, so there is minimal concern for visitor safety. If additional trees located near campsites die, they would be removed under hazard tree guidelines. The obvious availability of nearby dead spruce may entice some campers, or others familiar with the area to gather campfire fuel or to cut and haul loads of firewood home, resulting in exposure of some visitors to hazard tree conditions. A small increase in RVD's (probably 5% or less) associated with fuel wood harvest may occur. Non-motorized trail #5382 in the project area could be blocked by numerous dead falls, increasing trail maintenance costs (approximately +20%) and resulting in off-trail use (approximately 200 RVD's) as visitors try to avoid down trees.

Alternative 2

Alternative #2 of the Lake Fuels Project proposes to treat approximately 820 acres in the spruce/fir and aspen /fir stands. The planned harvest units are located in the eastern portion of the project planning area. Treatment areas are visible from the Huntington-Eccles Canyon National Scenic Byway and are located in close proximity to the Lake Canyon Recreation Area in the southeast corner of the analysis area.

Under alternative #2 approximately 420 acres are to be harvested using helicopter logging and the remaining 400 acres would be removed using ground based logging systems. While logging operations are in progress the public would be restricted from accessing timber harvest units. Trees harvested in these operations would be hauled out of the project area to U-31 using several classified Forest System Roads (FSR's). From there they would proceed either north or south on U-31 depending on the location of the purchaser's destination mill. Segments of two non-motorized Forest System Trails (FST) would be used to access and haul timber from the sale units. Approximately 0.1 mile of trail #5380 and 0.9 mile of trail #5382 would be temporarily converted to work roads. Logging operations, including log hauling, would not be allowed on weekends and holidays.

Direct effects during the course of logging operations include:

- Use of non-motorized FST #5380 could continue as the trail diverges from the temporary work road in the northern harvest unit after the first 0.1 mile. There should be no displacement of use.
- Recreational use of non-motorized FST #5382 in the southern harvest area would be temporarily curtailed. This use would probably be displaced to non-motorized FST #5381 which would remain open during harvest operations. Use of both trails is light with only an estimated 400 RVD's being displaced from one trail to the other.
- Arapeen trail #17 (FST #5197) is a motorized OHV trail within the Lake Canyon Trail System. This ½ mile OHV trail is also located within the southern harvest unit and would be closed during harvest operations. Lake Canyon OHV trails are the heaviest used motorized trails on the Forest. Since construction in 2004, an average of 4245 riders have used these trails each season. Closure of Arapeen trail #17 would not change overall trail system RVD's, but temporarily concentrate use onto the remaining open mileage. No other OHV trails in the Lake Canyon area would be closed during harvest operations.
- If wintertime operations take place, snowmobile and other winter users of the area would be temporarily displaced to areas further south along the Miller Flat Road. Estimated number of wintertime users displaced is 8380 RVD's.
- Lake Canyon Recreation sites #27 and #28 would be closed during harvest operations for public safety. These two sites lie near the western terminus of NFSR 50359. No other camping sites in the Lake Canyon recreation area would be closed during harvest operations. Approximately 500 RVD's would be displaced from these two sites to other sites in the Lake Canyon Recreation Area or to dispersed campsites further south on the Miller Flat Road.
- Some visitors may temporarily avoid the harvest areas due to noise from logging operations, heavy truck traffic and dust. Estimated number of visitors avoiding the area is 2,000 RVD's.
- With close proximity of harvest operations to U-31, some visitors would be curious about what is taking place and want to observe operations, especially helicopter logging methods. Estimated number of RVD's wanting to view operations is 3,000.
- The current mix of recreation traffic with logging operations traffic would create some delays, incidents of traffic congestion, and potential safety concerns particularly along the Miller Flat Road, at the junction with U-31, and along U-31 as log trucks pass by the entrance to numerous recreation areas. Estimated number of RVD's impacted by logging operations traffic during summer/fall operations is 11,340. Estimated number of RVD's impacted by logging operations during winter operations is 630.

- Closure of Arapeen Trail #17 and campsites #27 and #28 will require placement of signage and monitoring to ensure the public does not use the trail or campsites. This would require an increased law enforcement presence of approximately 10%.

Indirect effects following logging operations include:

- Post harvest fuels treatments over 80% of the area will result in a short-term increase in available firewood, but long-term supply will be reduced as this smaller diameter material is removed or decays. Hazards to the public associated with dead and dying trees further removed from the recreation sites would be mitigated. There should be no noticeable change to RVD's .
- Tree harvest would similarly mitigate future deadfall across trails in the project area. Maintenance costs would potentially be lower over time (approximately -20%) with these trees no longer present. Off-trail travel to avoid down trees would seldom be necessary. There should be no effect to RVD's.
- Despite post-harvest design features common to the action alternative such as signage, barrier installation, and lop and scatter methods of slash disposal, some motorized OHV operators may violate travel restrictions and push user created routes into closed harvest units. An increased law enforcement presence (about 30%) would be necessary during summer weekends and the opening weekends of the fall hunts for two years following timber harvest to enforce closed areas. There is no expected effect to RVD's.

Figure 2 – Direct and Indirect Effects by Alternative to Recreation Visitor Days (RVD's):

	Alt – 1 Direct	Alt – 1 Indirect	Alt – 2 Direct	Alt – 2 Indirect
Anticipated Effects:				
Restricted access during logging operations resulting in displacement of trail use	N/C	N/C	400	N/C
Restricted access during logging operations resulting in displacement of winter use	N/C	N/C	8380	N/C
Restricted access during logging operations resulting in campsite closure and displacement	N/C	N/C	500	N/C
Public safety—hazard trees falling in areas away from recreation sites	N/C	More exposure	No access	Less exposure
Fuelwood gathering	N/C	+5%	No access	N/C
Trail maintenance costs associated with deadfall in project area	N/C	+20%	No access	-20%
Off-trail travel due to deadfall	N/C	200	No access	N/C
Other conflicts with logging operations (congestion, noise, dust) resulting in visitor displacement	N/C	N/C	2000	N/C
Curiosity/interest in viewing helicopter operations	N/C	N/C	3000	N/C
Public safety on Forest System roads and U-31	N/C	N/C	11,970	N/C
Law enforcement presence	N/C	N/C	+10%	+30%

Cumulative Effects:

Visitation in the Lake Fuels project area during the summer and fall months is approximately 25,000 RVD's per year. Utah's demographics, coupled with the imminent retirement of millions of baby boomers nationwide all point towards increasing demand for recreation opportunities. The Lake Fuels project area and larger Miller Flat road corridor and South Skyline Drive areas provide ready access off of U-31 to nearby fisheries, reliable winter snows, big-game hunting, camping and trail opportunities. This landscape will undoubtedly receive more recreation attention and use over the foreseeable future, irregardless of the presence or absence of the Lake Fuels project.

The cumulative effect of implementation of this project when added to increasing recreation demand is to inadvertently give this demand a direction. By creating a more open landscape through timber harvest, public demand for additional camping and trail opportunities may well be focused towards the harvest areas. Indirect impacts such as illicit OHV travel and subsequent need for law enforcement are foreseeable. Demand for additional camping sites and motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities (both summer and winter) which take advantage of the post-harvest landscape are probable.

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