

Lake Timber Sale
Ferron/Price Ranger District
Manti-La Sal National Forest

Supplement to Landscape Architect Report dated January 23, 2004

This supplement to the 2004 Landscape Architect specialists report addresses changes to the affected environment and subsequent effects of the alternatives on the changed environment.

Affected Environment

Landscape Character

At the time the 2004 report was prepared, not many of the spruce trees in the project area had been affected by the spruce bark beetle. There were pockets of infestation, and according to the report, ". . . Color is reflected in the contrast between the grassy ridges and meadows and the dark green timbered stands of spruce/fir. Where the spruce bark beetle has begun to infest the spruce, small patches of yellow are forming. Texture is found in the fineness of the grassy meadows and bare ridges, and also in the course texture of the spruce/fir stands."

Changed condition: These spruce/fir stands are no longer green, and the patches of yellow have given way to a sea of continuous gray skeletons across the landscape (see photo).

Scenic Attractiveness

In 2004 this component was rated as high.

Changed condition; Since the epidemic of bark beetles killed all the spruce in the area, many publics have expressed concern and disappointment with the Forest for not having taken action sooner to treat the stands and prevent a total loss of spruce stands. This was repeated by publics in their comments received during scoping and during public meetings conducted for forest plan revision during 2004 through 2006. Translated, this could be interpreted as an indicator that the scenic attractiveness is now low.

Scenic Integrity

At the time the report was prepared, scenic integrity was considered ". . . fairly intact for the area . . . Natural effects on the scenic integrity as a natural appearing landscape include the potential transition in change from a live-green forested effect to that of a dead-gray effect, which is happening in nearby timber stands because of the spruce bark beetle infestation."

Changed condition: Scenic integrity has degraded to poor as a result of the loss of vast acres of spruce to the beetle infestation.

Constituent Information

The report states, "Highway 31 is a part of the "Energy Loop" or the Huntington-Eccles National Scenic Byway. . . . The Year 2000 average daily traffic count for Highway 31, near Huntington Reservoir, is 685, according to Utah Department of Transportation."

Changed condition: UDOT information from the 2007 Traffic on Utah Highways data shows traffic count totals between 330 and 495 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) for Highway 31 between Fairview Reservoir and Electric Lake Dam. Review of the 2004 State Highway Traffic Book shows AADT between 305 and 460 for the same area.

National Visitor Use Monitoring data collected by the Manti-LaSal National Forest in 2004 indicated there were between 462,000 and 606,000 visitors (confidence interval of 13.5% of estimated 533,000 total visitors). These totals include visitors on the Moab and Monticello Ranger Districts. If you split the number in half, and divided by the average number of individuals per party size as used in the NVUM (2.8), the total number of vehicles would be between 165,000 and 216,000 vehicles/day. In a year, that breaks down to between 452-593 vehicles/day on the North Zone of the Forest.

Landscape Visibility

No changed condition.

Sensitivity Level

No changed condition.

Visual Quality Objectives

No changed condition.

Environmental Consequences

Discussion of environmental consequences will address direct and indirect effects, and cumulative effects of both the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives.

No Action

The strategy of this alternative is to leave the spruce stands as they are and conduct no fuels reduction/salvage operations. There would be no direct effects to the existing condition of the visual resource from doing nothing with these stands. Indirect effects would vary over time.

As experienced with similar conditions elsewhere on the MLSNF and other national forests in southern Utah, the dead trees would stand for an estimated 30-60 years

before falling over in a jackstraw pattern. The smaller diameter trees that remain would result in a gray/green pattern across the landscape. In approximately 30-60 years the green canopy would replace the dead trees.

The general recreating public's expectations of a scenic forest setting as associated with the scenic byway would not be met until the spruce stands regenerated. However, the partial retention VQO would be maintained.

In the short-term, leaving the stands as they are, the landscape character will remain unchanged. Over time the dead spruce skeletons will eventually rot and fall, altering the appearance of the stands and the overall landscape, with understory vegetation replacing the conifers. The smaller diameter trees that remain would maintain the gray/green pattern across the landscape. In approximately 30-60 years the green canopy would replace the dead trees.

Scenic attractiveness for those who remember green, healthy stands of spruce will not be regained. Individual acceptance of the overall appearance of the area will vary over time. Change is slow, and not easily detected. Natural regeneration will restore the scenic attractiveness of the area for those who remember and want conifer stands. For those individuals born later, who never observed these stands when they were green, the existing reality may or may not be desirable.

Scenic integrity as defined would remain altered. The infestation of bark beetles and the subsequent impact on the conifer stands is a natural occurrence. However, the expanse of dead stands across the landscape does not necessarily represent an impact from endemic levels of bark beetles. The occasional dead spruce or pocket of dead spruce is perceived as being more "natural" than a sea of dead trees. This condition would remain in the long term until the trees rot and fall. As understory vegetation and young trees begin to establish, scenic integrity would again be achieved.

Impacts to constituents from taking no action to treat these stands would vary. People will continue to drive Forest roads for viewing scenery, regardless whether trees are dead. Their perceived enjoyment is likely to continue to be impacted, as evidenced by comments received during forest plan revision scoping activities.

Without treatment, the potential for stand-replacing wildfire to run through these stands is moderate to high, and the potential for recovering spruce stands could be lost for the long-term. Short term impacts would be associated with the burn area and could be more of an impact on visuals than are dead trees because of the potential to burn more than just the spruce stands. Regeneration of grasses, forbs and shrubs following a fire occurrence would be dependant on fire intensity and severity. A high fire intensity and severity could leave the sites black and without vegetation for several years, and susceptible to establishment of invasive and noxious plant species. This would definitely change the character, attractiveness, and integrity. The public would not be very pleased to exchange trees for weeds. A low intensity wildfire would likely stimulate

understory vegetation, including aspen, and accelerate (relatively speaking) natural recovery of the stands.

Proposed Action

The strategy of this alternative is to reduce fuel loading potential in the dead stands of spruce and avoid high intensity wildfire impacts and provide for firefighter safety should a fire occur in the area.

Impacts to the visual components would be similar in context and intensity however, they would occur over a much shorter period of time. Harvest of spruce stands would mimic the eventual loss of standing dead trees to root rot and decay and fall, except the change would occur within a few years, rather than 30-60 years. Spruce stands that are replanted following treatments would recover their integrity as conifer stands in less time.

Harvest activities would produce visual impacts from construction/reconstruction of temporary roads, clearing of log landings and helicopter landing sites. These impacts would be short-term as the majority of roads would be closed and rehabilitated following completion of harvest activities, and the landings would be obscured. Post-harvest prescribed burning to clean up residual slash would be conducted so as to avoid high intensity fire, and should stimulate understory vegetation and aspen sprouting.

In the short term harvest activities would be evident to publics traveling the scenic byway, and progression of the activities will be obvious. Following treatment and access route rehabilitation, as understory vegetation begins to establish, the obvious will become obscure. Eventually the evidence of any treatment activities would no longer be evident to the casual observer. Scenic attractiveness and integrity would be restored in less time than if the stands were left to natural processes.