

**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Forest Service

**Intermountain
Region**

**Salmon-Challis
National Forest**

Yankee Fork
Ranger District

Custer County, Idaho



**Decision Notice and
Finding of No Significant Impact**

**Northeast Stanley Interface
Fuels Reduction Project**

July 15, 2005

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DECISION NOTICE

Decision Summary

This Decision Notice documents my choice for a course of action for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project. I have decided to select and approve implementation of Alternative 2 as described in the project Environmental Assessment (EA) completed in March 2005, but with some changes that resulted from resolution of objections received from the public about the project. The selected alternative, with changes, includes a combination of mechanical treatments, hand treatments and prescribed burning to reduce forest fuels and the risk of wildland fire occurrence on approximately 1,151 acres of the Yankee Fork Ranger District near Stanley, Idaho. The project also includes retaining current types of public access in the project area following activities.

The Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project is located approximately 0.6 miles north of Lower Stanley. Project activities do not involve the nearby Loon Creek Inventoried Roadless Areas.

Background

The Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project is designed under the requirements of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) and in response to the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and focuses primarily on reducing hazardous fuels brought about by both a long-term fire suppression policy and a recent mountain pine beetle outbreak adjacent to Stanley, Idaho. The abundant, insect-caused tree mortality within the project area has greatly elevated the chance for severe wildfire potentially impacting this “at-risk” community as well as other surrounding lands. Stanley is listed in the Federal Register, Vol. 66, No.3, January 4, 2001, as a community in the vicinity of Federal Lands that is at high risk from wildfire. The project proposal concurrently addresses identified hazards and vulnerabilities described in the Custer County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan. The County Plan was developed in 2004 by collaboration between Custer County citizens, federal, state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector.

In November 2003, the Yankee Fork Ranger District developed a treatment proposal for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction area and initiated scoping and public comment on the project. The scoping process the District used included a community meeting in Stanley in June, 2004, and two additional published requests to the public for comments in September and December of 2004. Issues identified in this process were used to analyze the proposed action and no action alternatives, and to disclose the environmental effects in the Project EA issued in March 2005. The EA was made available to the public for a 30 day review and objection process pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218 Subpart A.

Objections to the Proposed Action were received from the Idaho Conservation League (ICL) and jointly from The Ecology Center, Inc.(EC) and Alliance for the Wild Rockies (AWR). I contacted these groups and extended an invitation to a field tour of the project area on June 1, 2005 for the purpose of discussing their objections and finding possible resolution to their concerns. The ICL responded to my invitation and together

we negotiated several changes to proposed road access and fuels reduction treatment prescriptions that were mutually agreeable. With ICL’s issues resolved, their objection was set aside without further administrative review by Forest Supervisor William A. Wood, the Reviewing Officer, pursuant to 36 CFR 218.8 (7)(b). The changes to the Proposed Action agreed to with ICL are highlighted below in my decision.

EC and AWR did not participate in the project field tour nor subsequent discussions of their concerns about the project. The Reviewing Officer concluded his review of the project objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218 without direction for any other modifications to the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project. I have been instructed by the Reviewing Officer to develop an updated Project Map, and a determination if changes are needed in the EA based on some of the objection assertions by these groups. I have addressed these instruction items in subsequent parts of this Decision Notice.

Decision

Activities

The selected alternative will salvage dead and dying trees by mechanical treatments on 347 acres, cut, pile and burn understory ladder fuels on 93 acres, and reduce pockets of fuel using prescribed fire on 711 acres. The salvage work will be governed by a timber sale contract to remove about 2,975 ccf (1,496 mbf) of dead trees having stems at least 7-inch diameter measured at 4.5 feet above ground level.

Table 1. Fuels Reduction Treatments by Unit

Unit	Acres	Prescribed Treatments
A	273	Utilize low to moderate intensity prescribed fire under predetermined and highly predictable conditions to burn 40-70 percent of unit. Restrict all operations between May 15 and June 30. Develop burn plan outlining acceptable and permissible fuel and weather conditions, firing, patterns, intensity levels and safety parameters needed to meet management objectives. Implement all RHCA design criteria; up to 30% RHCA allowed to burn from backing fire. Burn in mosaic pattern and reduce pockets of debris. Utilize roads, trails, topographic features, natural openings to contain fire. Limit handline construction to critical control locations. Avoid allowing fire to burn to Kelly Creek trail. Prohibit FS ORV use on Kelly Creek trail during prescribed burning activities. Pre-treat fireline by removing seedlings and saplings along edges. Utilize hand and/or aerial ignition techniques during spring or fall. Following ignition, utilize holding crews and fire engines to control fire behavior, allowing fire to burn out within predetermined boundaries. Limit hand mop-up activities. Assign patrol personnel to monitor fires until each burn is declared out or until adequate moisture is received to eliminate any chance of accidental re-ignition.
B C D	157 124 116	Same as for unit A. In unit B avoid constructing handline across placer ditches.
1 2 3 4 6a 7 10	39 32 83 99 24 54 16	Utilize crawler tractor and/or rubber tire skidder to yard felled snags and dying trees where slopes are less than or equal to 35 percent. Restrict all operations between May 15 and June 30. Evaluate suitability of allowing short-distance skidding on steeper slopes when/if discovered during unit layout. Implement all RHCA design criteria. Avoid areas with wet soils or evidence of subsurface water (willow, aspen). Designate landings and skid trails to move felled trees to landing sites; scarify and waterbar immediately after harvest. Limit skid trails to 10% of area. Ditch crossings in Units 3,4,7,10 will be designated by archeologist. Directionally fall trees away from ditches. Unit 3 boundary will be set back at least 100 ft. from any known archeological structures and be approved prior to finalization. No hauling operations

		between December 1 and April 30 or when roads (653, 40031) aren't firm. Restrict hauling to Hwy 21 down Stanley Creek Road #653, and no hauling on weekends, holidays. Place warning signs on the open sections of Kelly Creek Road (#40031) to warn public of logging activities and traffic. Utilize brush-blade attachment to pile pre-existing and activity-generated slash. Limit pile diameter to 30 foot and burn piles after sale closure. Leave unmerchantable materials at landings for personal use fuelwood gathering. Leave 10-14 tons/acre of debris on-site for wildlife habitat and nutrient recycling; leave material on skid trails and in ephemeral draws. Maintain ground cover and slash on benches. Reseed skid trails with state certified 100% noxious weed seed free native grass seed mixture. If the sale administrator determines that heavily used skid trails have compacted soils, trails will need to be ripped before seeding to reduce soil compaction. If necessary, a soil scientist will be consulted to determine the need for ripping. Prior to leaving site in the fall, install water bars if temporary road is left open over winter and spring runoff season. Limit blading of existing roads to the minimum needed for log hauling, including rock and cut slough removal. Blading will not be on entire road surface; existing vegetation on the road will be retained wherever possible. Rip and seed roads at a time of year suitable for seedling establishment, preferably in fall prior to snowfall. Install water bars on road surface at the time of ripping. Reconstruct ditch crossings. Require harvest equipment to be cleaned of all mud, dirt, seeds or other plant parts from all off-road equipment. Inspection of cleaning by a Forest Service official must be made prior to moving into the project area. Cleaning must occur off National Forest lands.
5	51	Hand fell, pile and burn understory ladder fuels. Restrict all operations between May 15 and June 30. Burn piles during fall. Implement all RHCA design criteria; up to 30% RHCA allowed to burn from backing fire.
12 13	66 17	Treat the upper half of units (42 acres) by hand felling, bucking and piling the dead and dying lodgepole pine, and ladder fuel trees with a diameter (DBH) of 4 inches or less. Piles will be burned in the fall of the year when weather parameters are within prescription to meet objectives. Following treatment to the upper half of these units, the lower half (41 acres) will be broadcast burned under a cool prescription to carry fire along the surface. Utilize a low intensity, fall underburn, as noted in unit A, to reduce dead and down fuels and to remove 60 to 80 percent of 0 to 4-inch diameter ladder fuels to achieve management objectives.
Roads	N/A	Construct 0.9 miles of temporary road into unit 7. Move the beginning of the temporary road further away from the seep along road #40139, up hill approximately 50 feet. Slash will be windrowed along the toe of the fill slope approximately for the first 200 feet. Upon completion of salvaging activities, the temporary access road through this unit will be obliterated, consisting of ripping and seeding with native species of vegetation for its entire length. Close and recontour the temporary road for the first 200 feet, more or less, so that the temporary road prism is not visible when standing at its intersection with road #40139. Restrict all operations between May 15 and June 30. Designate 0.6 miles of unclassified road (U111322K) as classified road and open to access unit 10 by removing earthen berms and drainage ditches, by removing tree encroachment and reshaping road. After completion of yarding activities, designate this road as Level 1 and have Contractor block its entrance again to prevent its use. Obliterate 0.5 miles of unclassified road (U111315P) into unit 3. Recondition and maintain 9.2 miles of existing roads by reshaping, removing ruts, reestablishing drainages, cleaning out culverts and brushing shoulders to remove tree encroachment. Reconstruct road 40139 by reshaping for 0.8 miles and by replacing one culvert. Refer to specifications and exact locations contained in roads analysis report located in project files.
Post-Harvest Activities	N/A	After completion of yarding activities, lop damaged trees in mechanical treatment units. Restrict all operations between May 15 and June 30. Conduct underburn noted above in units 12 & 13. Utilize weed treatments and attempt to eradicate noxious weeds from project area. Include these post-harvest activities and associated data tracking in a Sale Area Improvement Plan for implementation following sale closure.

Mitigation

- Inventory and treat new and existing noxious weed areas within and adjacent to the project area prior to ground disturbing activities. Annually monitor and treat for any noxious weeds.

Monitoring

Information gathered before, during and after implementation of activities is used to determine the effectiveness of the project's design and associated mitigation measures. This establishes a feedback mechanism so management can develop and employ an adaptive learning curve. Monitoring is done at recurring intervals as a basis for Forest Plan implementation. Project effectiveness monitoring is done by sampling specific projects at specified time intervals. The activities associated with the selected alternative will include monitoring of the following:

- *Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas:* Implementation monitoring of prescribed burning activities within the RHCAs will be checked by fisheries, fuels, or fire personnel. During prescribed fire ignition a backing fire will be allowed to creep into the RHCA to burn in mosaic pattern up to 30 percent of the established area.
- *Road Obliteration:* The effectiveness of road closure methods, road obliteration and erosion control will be periodically checked by range, recreation, soils, law enforcement, or timber personnel.
- *Soil Compaction:* The effectiveness of prescribed Best Management Practices (BMPs) to rip and seed landing areas, and to redistribute residual slash over skid trails to help prevent erosion will be checked by soils, hydrology, timber, or fisheries personnel.
- *Down Woody Debris:* During sale administration the amount of debris left in the mechanical treatment units needs to meet recommended minimum levels. Accomplishment of this activity will be monitored by timber, fuels, or soils personnel.
- *Conservation of Canada Lynx Habitat:* Coordination between the District Wildlife Biologist and Fire Management Officer during Burn Plan preparation will assure that potential lynx habitat is protected under the standards and guidelines of the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. Particular emphasis will be given to protect denning habitat.
- *Northern Goshawk:* Goshawk surveys for occupied nesting and/or post-fledging habitats were completed in portions of the project area during 1995, 1996, 2003 and 2004. No goshawks were found or are known to be using the project area or immediate vicinity for reproduction.
- *Heritage Resources Provisions:* Treatment boundary locations, skid trail / ditch breach locations, and the rehabilitation of ditches will be monitored by sale administration or heritage resource personnel.
- *Noxious Weeds:* Field surveys conducted during the summer of 2004 resulted in the discovery and treatment of noxious weed location sites within the project area and in nearby, adjacent areas. Sites where soil is newly exposed such as on construction of temporary roads, skid trails, landings, and pile and broadcast burning sites will be surveyed for noxious weed occurrence by timber or range personnel. Any newly discovered noxious weeds will be treated.

The following is a synopsis of the changes to activities, mitigation and monitoring in the Proposed Action evaluated in the EA that will be implemented with this decision:

Changes in the activities in mechanical treatment Unit #7

- Move the beginning of the temporary road further away from the seep along road #40139, up hill approximately 50 feet.
- Slash will be windrowed along the toe of the fill slope approximately for the first 200 feet.
- Upon completion of salvaging activities, the temporary access road through this unit will be ripped and seeded for its entire length.
- Close and recontour the temporary road for the first 200 feet, more or less, so that the temporary road prism is not visible when standing at its intersection with road #40139.

Changes in the activities in mechanical treatment Units #12 & #13

- Eliminate 1.5 miles of temporary road construction planned to access these treatment units.
- Eliminate commercial salvage of dead and dying trees. Treat the upper half of these two units (42 acres) by hand felling, bucking and piling the dead and dying lodgepole pine, and ladder fuel trees with a diameter (DBH) of 4 inches or less. Piles will be burned in the fall of the year when weather parameters are within prescription to meet objectives.
- Following treatment to the upper half of these units, the lower half of Units #12 and #13 (41 acres) will be broadcast burned under a cool prescription to carry fire along the surface.

Table 2. Summary of Project Activity Changes

	Proposed Action	Decision
Timber Sale Volume	3,500 ccf (1,750 mbf)	2,975 ccf (1,496 mbf)
Temporary Roads	2.4 miles	0.9 miles
Prescribed Treatment (Total Acres)	1,151 acres	1,151 acres
Harvest with mechanical skidding	430 acres	347 acres
Hand felling, piling and burning	51 acres	93 acres
Prescribed burning	670 acres	711 acres

Clarification on boundary location for treatment Unit #3

- Unit 3 boundary will be set back at least 100 ft. from any known archeological structures and be approved prior to finalization.

Marking Guides

Quantitative, descriptive guides to be used by crews marking trees for salvage or fuels reduction removal have been developed to aid in recognition of trees likely to survive mountain pine beetle attack. These guides have been included in the implementation instructions for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project and as part of the project file.

Updated Project Area Map

A revised map is attached to this Decision Notice/FONSI that displays clarifications to road locations, treatment units, project proximity to structures in Lower Stanley and location relative to the Loon Creek Inventoried Roadless Area and Basin Creek Prescribed Burn.

Rationale for the Decision

When the District completed the Basin Creek Watershed Analysis in 1998, insect and disease levels in forested vegetation in the project area were at endemic levels. Extended drought in the West, the long-term effects of fire suppression policies, and the infestation of mountain pine beetle in mountains of Central Idaho in the last 5 years have dramatically changed the condition and health of our local forestlands. Changes in National policy, Forest Service directives and the level of involvement of the public in agency actions and decisions have occurred during this time, which have influenced the course of the environmental analysis and my decision to approve an alternative for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project. These changes and considerations include:

- The President's Healthy Forest Initiative, the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and the National Fire Plan, and Healthy Forest Restoration Act all establish goals for reducing hazardous fuels. Reducing risk to firefighters, communities, municipal watersheds, and forests and rangelands is the goal of these initiatives. The objectives of the project are consistent with these initiatives and provide a sense of urgency for action, considering the recent mountain pine beetle outbreak adjacent to Stanley.
- The Custer County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan (CWPP) identifies hazards and vulnerabilities to the Stanley area, a federally recognized "at-risk" community, in need of mitigation within the wildland/urban interface zone. The Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project directly addresses this necessity and safety concern.
- The Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project complements and supplements the ongoing Basin Creek Prescribed Burn Project located on adjacent Salmon-Challis National Forest administered land to the east and north in the Basin Creek watershed and the Salmon River front downstream of Stanley (See attached revised project area map for location). This prescribed burn project was initiated in the fall of 2002 and designed to treat 12,000 of 17,325 acres for ecosystem diversity and fuels reduction to lessen the severity of wildfires. Together these projects are a significant portion of the Salmon-Challis National Forest contribution to the CWPP for the Stanley area. The beneficial effects of SNRA's Red Tree Project (fuels reduction work in the Stanley Basin) will also be enhanced by the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project.
- Alternative 2 with changes will provide a positive benefit to local economies while addressing a continued decline in forest health and ever increasing natural fuel buildup resulting from insect caused tree mortality in Kelly Creek and Joe's Gulch subwatersheds.
- The changes to the project proposal that resulted from the negotiated settlement of the objection received from the Idaho Conservation League are within the scope of the primary purpose and need established for the project to manage ground fuel and to decrease the current, near-term risk of catastrophic wildland fire (Purpose and Need on page 3 of the EA). No new issues or concerns

needing analysis resulted from the agreement to forego development of 1.5 miles of temporary road and salvage through commercial harvest portions of treatment Units #12 and #13. Environmental effects associated with the changes to the proposed action will likely be less in extent and intensity because of reduced ground disturbing activities and other design criteria. A new analysis of activities and disclosure in a revised EA for public review is not deemed necessary.

My decision to select Alternative 2 with changes is also based on the following criteria accompanied with a discussion of my rationale:

Meeting the Project Objectives

Pages 3-4 of the EA describe the Purpose and Need for the project, the proposed action, and the project objectives. The objectives of the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project are:

- Reduce the potential for wildfire starts
- Manage fuel loadings to acceptable levels for the long-term
- Restore and maintain biological and structural diversity
- Enhance and maintain a desirable recreation experience
- Provide for public safety
- Meet the public's demand for wood products

I find the selected alternative, including the changes I agreed to through resolution of objections from the Idaho Conservation League, meets all of these objectives.

Documents Considered in Making the Decision

The following were the primary environmental, analysis and related assessment documents I referenced and considered in my decision:

- Basin Creek Watershed Analysis from 1998,
- Basin Creek Prescribed Burn EA from 2001,
- Resource Technical Reports (Specialist Reports) for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project for the topics of: Soil and Water Resources; Fire, Fuels and Smoke Resources; Wildlife and Plant Resources; Fisheries Resources; Roads Analysis Report; Grazing, Riparian, Noxious Weed Resources; Economic Analysis; Heritage Resources; Recreation Assessment; Roadless and Unroaded Area Assessments; and Forested Vegetation Resources.
- Biological Assessment and Evaluation of Endangered, Threatened, Candidate, and Forest Service Sensitive Plants and Terrestrial Animal Species for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project
- Fisheries Biological Assessment and Evaluation for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project

Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, one other alternative was considered in detail for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project. It is described in Chapter 2, page 11 of the EA. Under HFRA authorities, in order to expedite analyses, proposed projects inside a wildland-urban interface and within 1.5 miles of the boundary of an at-risk community do not require an alternative to the proposed action. However, a no action alternative was included in order to display the effects associated with not implementing the project.

Alternative 1 – No Action

This alternative reflects the existing condition without any new management activities occurring and provides a baseline for comparing the action alternative. In other words, all current, routine and ongoing management activities would continue to occur under this alternative and no additional action would be taken to respond to the purpose of and need for action identified in Chapter 1.

A comparison of the no action and selected alternative can be found in abbreviated form in Table 2 of Chapter 2 of the EA on pages 15-16. A more detailed disclosure of the impacts of both alternatives are documented in Chapter 3 of the EA on pages 17-40.

Public Involvement

Public involvement efforts early in the planning process are described on page 6 of the EA. The project was announced during the 2nd quarter of 2003 *Schedule of Proposed Actions* for the Salmon-Challis National Forest. A legal ad initiating the scoping period was published on November 17, 2003 in *The Challis Messenger* newspaper. The project proposal was mailed to 118 individuals, organizations, and local media. Eight responses were received. In September 2004 a second public mailing using the same mailing list as the initial request, with some additions, took place to disclose further information of the proposed activity. Two responses were received from contacts that had previously commented. Additional announcements for comments were published in the Challis Messenger on September 9, 2004 and again on December 9, 2004. I presented a project overview to the Resource Technical Staff group of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes on May 13, 2004. A public meeting was advertised and held on June 8, 2004 at the Stanley Community Center, in Stanley, Idaho, to provide project area information, present the proposed action, and discuss local concerns and interests that should be addressed in the project analysis. The issues identified during scoping were used to develop significant issues listed above and project design criteria, mitigation measures and monitoring requirements which are described on pages 13-15 of the EA. A list of scoping responders and consulting agencies is included on page 43 of the EA.

The completed EA was mailed to all individuals, organizations, and agencies that provided comments or requested to remain on the mailing list for the project on April 5, 2005. As mentioned previously, two objections were received from environment groups following the 30 day EA review period which resulted in project changes outlined in this Decision Notice/FONSI.

Addressing Public Comment and Significant Issues Raised During Scoping

The selected alternative action addresses issues and concerns raised by the public and the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT). The IDT included individuals with expertise in forestry/silviculture, fire/fuels, soils/hydrology, archaeology, fisheries, wildlife, transportation, recreation and rangeland/riparian resources. All comments

are addressed in a content analysis found in the project file. Significant issues, those issues used to develop project design criteria, and those issues eliminated from further analysis, are described in pages 6-9 of the EA. The significant issues identified for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project are:

Issue #1 – Soil Resource:

There is a risk that implementing the proposed activity or an intense, stand-replacing wildfire would adversely affect soil resources and cause detrimental soil disturbances.

Issue #2 – Water Resource:

There is a risk that implementing the proposed activity would adversely affect water resources by altering the timing and magnitude of flow and increasing sediment delivery to streams.

Issue #3 – Fire - Risk to Life and Property:

There is a risk that, by not implementing the proposed activity, a wildfire could burn to the south and threaten the community of Lower Stanley.

Issue #4 - Wildlife Species and Habitats:

There is a risk that implementing the proposed activity or occurrence of a stand-replacing wildfire would affect Threatened or Endangered (T/E), Region 4 Sensitive (R4) or Management Indicator (MI) wildlife species and their associated habitats.

Issue #5 – Fish Species and Habitats:

There is a risk that implementing the proposed activity would trigger soil movement, and resultant sediment delivery would adversely impact anadromous and non-anadromous fish species and/or their habitats.

I find the selected alternative with changes addresses these significant issues.

Other Concerns Raised and Eliminated from Detailed Study

The following issues were considered and evaluated by the IDT and eliminated from further, detailed study. A brief explanation about why their evaluations were not displayed in detail is found on pages 8-9 of the EA. More information about the topic areas of these concerns is available in the project record and the Resource Technical Reports listed in the next subsection.

Other concerns list: Roads and Public Access; Air Quality and Smoke Management; Spread of Noxious Weeds; Economics-Cost of treatment/roads; Heritage Resources; Visuals and Recreation; Grazing; Old Growth Trees; Inventoried Roadless Area and Unroaded Areas.

Findings Required by Other Laws

National Environmental Policy Act: The EA and Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact document are in compliance with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) for Implementing NEPA.

Clean Water Act, Executive Order 11990 (wetlands) and 11988 (floodplains): This decision is consistent with the Clean Water Act and amendments. There are no anticipated impacts to wetlands and floodplains from project implementation. Application of design criteria for soil and water protection on pages 13-14 of the EA, changes to the proposed action agreed to with ICL in resolution of their project objections, and provisions of the Idaho Forest Practices Act are expected to achieve compliance with the Idaho Water Quality Standards and Wastewater Treatment Requirements. Beneficial uses will be maintained in Upper Basin Creek, Lower Basin Creek and Four Aces subwatersheds (project area) and no impacts will occur downstream to the main stem of the Salmon River (page 26 of EA; page 35 of Soil/Water Resource Technical Report).

Executive Order 12898, “Environmental Justice”: This decision was assessed to determine whether it will disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. No minority or low-income populations were identified during public involvement activities. The decision will not amend or preclude any existing private or treaty rights in the project area.

National Historic Preservation Act: The project area has been surveyed for heritage resources. Based on designed criteria and avoidance mitigation (pages 13-15 of EA) and consultation concurrence on August 6, 2004 from the State Historic Preservation Office, no effects to National Register eligible or listed heritage resources will occur (page 8 of EA; page 7-8 of Heritage Resources Specialist Report)

Clean Air Act: Air quality will not be affected because the activities to comply with provisions of the Montana/Idaho State Airshed Group Operating Guide for the broadcast and slash pile burning to occur (page 8 of EA; page 17 of Fire, Fuels, and Smoke Resources Specialist Report).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act: Neotropical migrant bird habitat is expected to remain viable in the project and subwatershed area with implementation of this decision. Habitat conditions are expected to be impacted minimally because of conservation measures incorporated in design criteria (pages 13-14 of EA). The selected alternative is compliant with Executive Order 13186 (pages 31-32 of Specialist Report for Wildlife, Plants).

Endangered Species Act (ESA): This decision is consistent with the Endangered Species Act. A Fisheries Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project was completed on February 22, 2005 and determined **May Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect** for bull trout, Snake River spring/summer chinook salmon and steelhead trout (also page 40 of EA; page 17 of Specialist Report for Fisheries). A Biological Assessment and Evaluation for Plants and Terrestrial Animal Species was prepared on February 9, 2005 and determined No Effect for the bald eagle, and yellow-billed cuckoo. A determination of **May Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect** was made for Canada lynx and Gray wolf (also page 34 of EA; page 27-28 of Specialist Report for Wildlife, Plants). Under Joint Counterpart ESA Section 7 Consultation Regulations these determinations did not require concurrence from FWS and NOAA Fisheries.

National Forest Management Act: The National Forest Management Act and accompanying regulations require several evaluations and specific findings be documented at the project level:

Forest Management Indicator Species (MIS): Consistent with regulations at 36 CFR 219.19, Alternative 2 was evaluated for potential impacts (direct, indirect and cumulative) to habitats for pileated woodpecker, Columbia spotted frog, and bull trout, management indicator species known to occur in the project area. This evaluation, as documented in Chapter 3 of the EA (pages 35-40),

determined that viable populations of MIS will be maintained in the project (Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction) and analysis area (Basin Creek watershed) (page 31 of Specialist Report for Wildlife, Plants; page 17 of Specialist Report for Fisheries). This determination is consistent with forest-wide trends for populations and habitat conditions for these MIS.

Forest Plan Consistency: The decision to implement Alternative 2 with changes is consistent with the Challis National Forest Plan, its goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines as outlined in the EA on pages 4-5. The project objectives parallel forest-wide direction and direction for management of the Basin Creek Management Area #5 in which the project area is located. This consistency also includes the Forest Travel Plan and PACFISH Amendment (Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon, Washington and Idaho and portions of California) (page 4 of EA).

My finding of consistency with Forest Plan direction followed a thorough review of the EA and supporting Resource Technical Reports as instructed by the Reviewing Official in response to an objection assertion from EC/AWR. PACFISH riparian conservation areas (RHCA) and riparian management objectives in particular are specifically and adequately addressed in the Fisheries Specialist Report and the Fisheries Biological Assessment and Evaluation.

Vegetation Manipulation: All proposals that involve vegetation manipulation of tree cover for any purpose must comply with the seven requirements found in 36 CFR 219.27 (b). Management practices shall:

- ***Be best suited to the goals stated in the Forest Plan.*** Goals for Management Area #5 are described in the EA on page 5 (Forest Plan pages IV-70 to IV-71, and pages IV-1 to IV-33 for overall goals). Relationships are discussed through Chapters 1 and 3 of the EA. Alternative 2 with changes will manage for improvement to timber stand conditions, maintenance of water quality and soil productivity, allow road access, provide for fuels reduction, and provide for wildlife and fish habitats in coordination with other resources.
- ***Assure that technology and knowledge exists to adequately restock lands within five years after final harvest.*** Lodgepole stands where dead and dying trees will be salvaged are expected to restock through natural regeneration. District regeneration surveys show previously treated stands on the Forest that contains similar tree species and conditions are fully stocked (and in some cases overstocked). In the unlikely event that natural regeneration is unsuccessful or inadequate, artificial regeneration is planned.
- ***Not be chosen primarily because they give the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber (although these factors shall be considered).*** This decision was governed by the opportunity and needs outlined in the project objectives on page 4 of the EA: reduce the potential for wildfire starts, manage fuel loadings to acceptable levels for the long-term, restore and maintain biological and structural diversity, enhance and maintain a desirable recreation experience, provide for public safety, meet the public's demand for wood products. The decision was not driven by dollar or product outputs.
- ***Be chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.*** Stands in the forest have regenerated well after similar vegetation treatments were applied in the past.

Reducing tree stocking and amount of ladder fuels will decrease competitive stress among residual trees, lessen the risk of future mortality from drought, insects and disease, and uncharacteristic wildfires in this stand and adjacent stands.

- ***Be selected to avoid permanent impairment of the site productivity and to ensure conservation of soil and water resources.*** The use of specific mitigation and design features will protect site productivity and ensure conservation of the soil and water resources. This decision fully complies with Regional and Forest Plan standards and guidelines for detrimental soil disturbance, sediment and water quality (EA pages 20-21, 26, 39-40; Soil/ Water Resource Technical Report pages 22, 35).
- ***Provide the desired effects on forest resource yields such as water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, tree regeneration, etc.*** The project meets the purpose and need by reducing fuel loading in the project area. The subsequent reduction in the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires will also have long-term benefits to vegetation, fish and wildlife habitats, water quality, recreational opportunities and other resource values. Vegetation treatments will also enhance the long-term sustainability, resilience and productivity of forest stands.
- ***Be practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total cost of preparation, logging, and administration.*** The project has been field reviewed by members of the IDT, including a presale forester and silviculturist. It is a practical and economically viable (timber will likely sell) action for the objectives outlined for the project. The economic analysis is documented in the EA, page 8, and in the project record under Specialist Report for Economic Analysis.

Monitoring

This decision to implement the selected alternative action includes commitment by the Interdisciplinary Team and Yankee Fork Ranger District to implement all of the monitoring measures included on pages 14-15 of the EA.

Appeal and Implementation

This project was subject to the objection process prior to this decision according to 36 CFR Part 218 Subpart A and is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. (218.3). Implementation of this decision may occur immediately.

The Environmental Assessment, Decision Notice/FONSI, and supporting documents within the Project File are available for inspection during regular business hours at the Challis Ranger District Office, Challis, Idaho.

For further information on this decision, contact Dave Faike at 208-879-4100.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined that this action will not have significant effects on the biological, physical, or human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This determination was made after considering the following factors set forth in 40 CFR 1508.27:

Context

The project area is set in a forest environment in the Kelly Creek and Joe's Gulch subwatersheds of the Yankee Fork Ranger District with primarily limited recreation and domestic livestock grazing use, and past timber harvest and placer mining activities. Expectations are the project will be implemented over a four to five-year period with operations only occurring during months (June to October) of each year when roads are dry and accessible. Local and Idaho residents and some nonresidents who choose to hunt or otherwise recreate in the area will be most affected. The context of this proposal is minimal, with direct implications only for an area of approximately 1200 acres. The Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction project will achieve planned activities within the project area for the foreseeable future.

Intensity

1. **Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse:** Beneficial and adverse impacts of this decision are addressed in Chapter 3, pages 17-40 of the EA. No significant impacts were identified.
2. **The degree to which the selected action affects public health or safety:** Alternative 2 with changes will have a beneficial effect on public health and safety to the community of Lower Stanley and surrounding private land areas. Selective logging operation restrictions and logging traffic signing as described in the project's design features on page 13-14 of the EA will be employed as additional safety features. The selected action is expected to maintain watershed conditions and water quality such that downstream beneficial uses are protected and compliance with state water quality standards is achieved. Reduction of fuels and lower risk conditions for stand-replacing wildfire will help ensure public and firefighter safety.
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas:** No historic or cultural resources will be adversely impacted by the project. There are no park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands or wild and scenic rivers. Adherence to Forest Plan standards and guidelines, including PACFISH (pages 4-5 of the EA), timber sale administration, and management requirements stated in design criteria and mitigation measures (pages 13-14; Appendix C, page 44 of the EA) will ensure that resources, including critical habitat for chinook salmon, steelhead trout, bull trout and Canada lynx will be protected.
4. **The degree to which the effects to the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:** Based on the analysis of environmental consequences of Alternative 2 (Chapter 3, pages 17-40 of the EA), the effects of this project are minimal and therefore not likely to be highly controversial. No highly

controversial issues were raised specific to the proposed action during scoping or the 30 day review and objection period for the EA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: Due to past similar activities on the Salmon-Challis National Forest, the effects on the human environment are well understood. Chapter 3 of the EA discloses the existing condition of the area as well as the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of Alternative 2. Those effects do not indicate uncertain, unique or unknown risks, nor do resource technical reports, Biological Assessments/Evaluations contained in the project record. Monitoring of past activities and projects has confirmed the predicted effects analysis.

6. The degree to which the action may set a precedent for future actions: Implementation of Alternative 2 with changes is within general and specific management area guidelines and direction in the Forest Plan and does not set any unusual or binding precedent for future actions, nor is it directly part of a larger connected action.

7. The degree of cumulative effects on resources: The Affected Environment in Chapter 3 discloses the existing condition including past actions. Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of implementation of alternatives on the affected environment as well as planned and reasonably foreseeable actions are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA. No cumulatively significant effects were noted. Additionally, the Biological Assessments and Evaluations for fish, wildlife and plants conclude that Alternative 2 will have no adverse cumulative effects or impacts upon threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species, nor do resource technical reports in the project record indicate that my decision will result in significant effects to natural resources or the quality of the human environment.

8. The presence of cultural resources that could be affected: The project area has been surveyed for Heritage resources. Based on designed avoidance and mitigation (page 13-15 of EA) and consultation concurrence on August 6, 2004 from the State Historic Preservation Office, no adverse effects to National Register eligible or listed heritage resources will occur.

9. The degree to which endangered, threatened, proposed, or sensitive species will be affected: A Fisheries Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation for the Northeast Stanley Interface Fuels Reduction Project was completed on February 22, 2005 and determined **May Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect** for bull trout, Snake River spring/summer chinook salmon and steelhead trout; a May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but will Not Contribute to a Trend Towards Listing or Cause a Loss of Viability to the Population or Species determination was made for Westslope cutthroat trout, a sensitive species. (also page 40 of EA; page 17 of Specialist Report for Fisheries).

A Biological Assessment and Evaluation for Plants and Terrestrial Animal Species was prepared on February 9, 2005 and determined **No Effect** for the bald eagle, and yellow-billed cuckoo. A determination of **May Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect** was made for Canada lynx and Gray wolf (also page 34 of EA; page 27-28 of Specialist Report for Wildlife, Plants); a No Impact determination was made for 15 species of sensitive plants and 7 species of sensitive wildlife; a May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but will Not Cause a Loss of Viability to the Population or Species determination was made for 7 other species of sensitive wildlife (also page 35 of EA; page 20-21 of Specialist Report for Wildlife, Plants).

Under Joint Counterpart ESA Section 7 Consultation Regulations these determinations did not require concurrence from FWS and NOAA Fisheries.

10. Whether the selected action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: Alternative 2 meets all Federal, State, and local laws and requirements and the Challis Forest Plan standards and guidelines for the protection of the environment, and meets disclosure requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

/s/ Thomas A. Montoya

THOMAS A. MONTOYA
District Ranger
Yankee Fork Ranger District
Salmon-Challis National Forest

Date: July 15, 2005