

DECISION MEMO

Dry Canyon Watershed Restoration

USDA – Forest Service
Uinta National Forest
Pleasant Grove Ranger District
Utah County, Utah

1. INTRODUCTION

The Uinta National Forest is initiating implementation of a watershed restoration and trail improvement project in the Dry Canyon area of the Pleasant Grove Ranger District, Uinta National Forest. The project area contains about 330 acres and is located about two miles east of the city of Lindon, Utah.

The Bonneville Shoreline Trail passes through this area. A separate proposal is being analyzed that would identify one or more sections of these user-created roads/trails to be retained and improved as a part of this Trail. Those identified for inclusion as part of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail would not be rehabilitated as part of these watershed restoration activities.

The proposed project area is comprised of two separate parcels of land. *Parcel I* encompasses about 200 acres acquired by the Uinta National Forest on March 31, 2003, from Trust for Public Land. This parcel, known as the Canberra-Dry Canyon Acquisition, provides access to Dry Canyon, Mt. Timpanogos Wilderness Area, other general forest areas of the Uinta National Forest, and Timpanogos State Wildlife Management area (Utah State Division of Wildlife Resources). Prior to the property coming into Forest Service ownership, off-highway vehicle use created trails that are impacting vegetation and causing erosion.

Parcel II is located directly north and adjacent to *Parcel I*, and totals about 130 acres. This parcel was impacted by the Big Baldy Fires in 1987 and much of the area was closed to motorized access following that incident. In 1988 and 1989, the dozer lines established during fire suppression efforts were waterbarred and seeded in an effort to protect and restore the watershed. Wooden post-and-pole fencing was installed to restrict motorized access, and the area was signed as *Closed to Motorized Activities*.

In the following years, as the population increased in Utah County, the public began migrating from the only road open to OHV use to adjacent areas. These activities resulted in development and expansion of user-created roads/trails throughout the project area, effectively reopening previously closed dozer lines within the Baldy Fire area. As a result, the area is crisscrossed with two-track roads/trails created by this unauthorized motorized activity.

The project area lies in critical big game winter range (2003 Forest Plan, p. E-1 and E-2). The 2003 Forest Plan designates the area as being within the following classifications:

- 3.2 Management Prescription, Watershed Emphasis
- Semi-primitive non-motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

- Retention Classification for visual quality/scenery management objectives.

2. PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed project involves restoration of about 13 miles of unclassified two-track roads/trails. The project location is about two miles east of Lindon, Utah, in portions of Sections 26, 35 and 36, Township 5 South, Range 2 East, Salt Lake Base Meridian, and totals about 330 acres. Activities associated with this proposal include:

1. Scarifying and recontouring non-system trail/road surfaces to prepare a suitable seedbed for seeding and establishing native vegetation (native grasses and forbs) on disturbed sites to break up compacted soils, slow water run-off and reduce off-site soil deposition. It is anticipated that one to three miles of the estimated 13 miles of unclassified roads/trails would be obliterated annually, until the project is completed. Annual restoration activities would be dependant on the available funding for this project, or if other funding sources become available.
2. Creating drainage berms and ditches to divert runoff from the erosive non-system roads/trails, thereby reducing the impact of water-created soil erosion.
3. Barricading unauthorized motorized entry points within the project area where access onto National Forest System lands from adjacent private land currently contributes to impacts within the project area. A combination of barrier rock and post-and-pole fencing would be utilized to prevent unauthorized motorized (OHV) activities.
4. Posting signs stating the treatment area is closed to unauthorized motorized use in order to limit site disturbance, soil erosion, enhance vegetation establishment. Closure will also facilitate improving big game winter range conditions in this area.
5. Because Lindon City has culinary water collection, transmission and storage facilities within and adjacent to the project area, *authorized* motorized access would be permitted; however, access would be limited to one designated route.

3. PURPOSE AND NEED

The *Purpose* of the proposed action is to address the *Impacts* as identified above. The *Need* for the proposed action is:

1. To meet the desired future condition of maintaining a healthy, productive watershed, thereby reducing detrimental losses in soil productivity from compaction caused by OHV use and accelerated soil erosion originating on the disturbed land within the Dry Canyon Watershed Restoration Project area.
2. To limit the effects of unmanaged off-road/off trail motorized recreational vehicle use.
3. To improve wildlife habitat quality and effectiveness in coordination with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

4. To help meet the scenery management objectives for this area (Retention as per the 2003 Forest Plan), resulting in a more natural-appearing landscape.

4. SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVMENT

The Pleasant Grove Ranger District initiated scoping for this proposal by issuing a scoping letter on April 12, 2004, that was sent to 84 known interested parties. The proposed project was also listed in the Uinta National Forest's "*Schedule of Proposed Actions*", Winter 2003-2004, Spring and Summer 2004 editions. News releases and a legal notice for the project were also printed in the *Provo Daily Herald* (April 15 and April 18, 2004, respectfully). In response to these solicitations, the Forest received seven written comments. The project was also internally scoped by an interdisciplinary team. Based upon the public comments and interdisciplinary team review, the following issues were identified:

1. What NEPA actions, if any, are required for rehabilitation of the unclassified, illegal two-track roads/trails?

As noted in the following section of this document, the proposed action fits category 31.2, #6, and no extraordinary circumstances would occur from implementation of this project. Therefore, this project is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental analysis or environmental impact statement.

2. What effects, if any, might there be on cultural resources in the area from implementation of the proposed action?

No cultural resources have been located during surveys of the project area. Consequently, there will be no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to cultural resources as a result of implementation of this project.

3. Continued motorized use within this area is inconsistent with the 2003 Forest Plan direction. The 2003 Forest Plan classifies the area within which the project area lies as being in a semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunity spectrum. "The Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class is closed to motorized use including over-the-snow vehicles." (2003 Forest Plan, Page 3-35, ROS-2)

Management of activities within this area will be conducted consistent with the 2003 Forest Plan regarding opportunities for motorized versus non-motorized activities.

4. Unmanaged off-road/off-trail OHV use is impacting the visual quality along the Wasatch Front. The Visual Quality Objective for the project area is partial retention. Within areas to be managed for partial retention, Forest Plan direction states, "Management activities remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Management activities should repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the characteristic landscape; . . ." (2003 Forest Plan, Glossary - 33). What effects, if any, would there be on the area's visual resources as a result of implementation of the proposed action?

Implementation of this project should facilitate meeting the scenery management objectives for this area, which as per the 2003 Forest Plan, is Retention. Changes to Dry

Canyon landscape should substantially reduce the obvious human-alterations/impacts, and result in a more natural appearing landscape. The proposed action includes use of natural materials (rocks and buck and pole fences) for restricting access. These materials are more compatible with the visual quality objective of retention than some alternative materials. Following recontouring and revegetation with native species, the treated areas will have a more natural appearance and not be evident to the casual forest visitor. A landscape architect has been consulted in the design of the proposed action.

5. “. . . foothill access between battle creek (sic) and dry creek canyon (sic) would be helpful to many people who engage in hiking, hunting, . . . “

Access between these two canyons is currently provided by the Curley Springs trail. The rehabilitated unclassified road/trails and Bonneville Shoreline Trail may still be used by individuals engaging in non-motorized activities.

6. Project activities should occur outside of the breeding and nesting period for all migratory birds. “Project activities should avoid sensitive seasons for wildlife species, such as fawning. The FS should use best management practices for activities in or near streams and wetlands in order to reduce erosion and sedimentation.”

No adverse impacts on birds are anticipated and the project is consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Project activities will be timed to avoid sensitive seasons for wildlife species. A primary objective of the project is to meet the desired future condition of maintaining a healthy, productive watershed, and restore wildlife habitat condition. A wildlife biologist, ecologist, soil scientist and hydrologist were involved in the development of the proposed action.

7. “. . . the project should be evaluated with regard to the potential for increased spread of invasive species and best management practices should be used to avoid and/or control invasive plant species.”

The 2003 Uinta National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan specifies direction designed to address minimizing the potential for noxious weed and invasive plant establishment or expansion. (2003 Forest Plan, pg 2-7, Sub-goal-2-17; pg. 3-14, Fire-6; pg 3-15, Weeds-2; pg 3-16, Weeds-7, -9, and-15) This direction will guide management activities associated with this project. This includes use of certified weed-free seed, and washing vehicles used in the project to prevent introduction/transport of seed of noxious weeds into the area. The proposed action will reduce the acreage of land disturbed and therefore, highly susceptible to invasion by undesirable plant species. The proposed action will also reduce the miles of road and trail being used by vehicles, and this will reduce the potential for introduction of noxious weeds via vehicles into the area.

8. “I believe closing the trails to motorized vehicles is a heavy handed solution to the problem of riders/drivers making their own unauthorized trails. . . why not open it up to legal use but encourage responsible use through education and volunteer enforcement?”

The 2003 Forest Plan made various motorized and non-motorized land allocations across the Forest. These allocations provide a diversity and balance of recreation opportunities, while protecting natural resources on the Forest. About 80% of the Forest

was allocated to prescriptions allowing use such as suggested (i.e. motorized use on designated routes), and the remaining 20% of the Forest was assigned allocations providing for non-motorized use (Forest Plan FEIS, Executive Summary, p. 29). The project area lies within an area the 2003 Forest Plan allocated to be managed for Semi-primitive non-motorized activities. Opening the area to motorized vehicles would not be consistent with the Plan, and identified purpose and need for this project. To effect such an action would require an amendment to the Forest Plan, and is outside the scope of the proposed action.

9. “. . . the analysis . . . should be informed by a consideration of the direct and indirect effects to: secure big game winter range, view shed management, sensitive native plants and endemic plants, MIS, FS Sensitive, Threatened and Endangered species, their habitat and prey, Soils, Slope stability, Water quality.”

The proposed project will have no impacts on any threatened or endangered plant or wildlife species or their habitats, or on any of the Uinta National Forest identified Management Indicator Species. There are no known threatened or endangered plants or wildlife species within the proposed project area. The Biological Assessment and Evaluation determined that the proposed project will have no impact on the habitats for these species. No adverse impacts on birds are anticipated and the project is consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Project activities will be timed to avoid sensitive seasons for wildlife species.

Implementation of this project should facilitate meeting the scenery management objectives for this area, which as per the 2003 Forest Plan, is Retention. Changes to Dry Canyon landscape should not be evident to the casual forest visitor and will be restored to a more natural-appearing condition. A landscape architect has been consulted in the design of the restoration plan.

An objective of the project is to meet the desired future condition of maintaining a healthy, productive watershed. The project will improve wildlife habitat and vegetation conditions, reduce erosion and detrimentally compacted soils, and improve watershed condition.

10. We encourage the Forest to use native seed mixes that have no exotic or noxious seed components.

The 2003 Forest Plan direction states that native seed should be used in reclamation activities as appropriate and should be free of noxious weeds and other undesirable species. (Forest Plan pg 2-12, Sub-goal-2-45; pg 3-15, Weeds-2) This direction will be applied.

11. Eliminate unauthorized OHV and ATV access to the project area for success of watershed stabilization and soil restoration efforts.

Installation of access barriers should be effective in keeping the majority of motorized users out of the area. We will continue to be diligent in our patrol and enforcement activities.

12. Stabilize soils, re-vegetate, and increase soil productivity functions on hillslopes within the project area watershed.

Techniques to be utilized in the restoration of this area should facilitate affecting these results.

5. CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THIS PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 states that “a proposed action may be categorically excluded from documentation...only if the proposed action” ... “is within a category listed in section 31.1b or 31.2; and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action.” (FSH 1909.15, section 30.3 (l)) The proposed action is specifically listed as one of the Forest Service Chief’s categories for categorical exclusion (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 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 (Service level D, FSH 7709.56)”

The proposed action fits this category as improvement in the quality and effectiveness of critical big game winter range is one of the specifically identified purpose/needs for the proposed action.

FSH 1909.15, Section 30.3 (WO Interim 1909.15-2002-2) lists the following as ‘extraordinary circumstances’:

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – The proposed project will have no impacts on any threatened or endangered plant or wildlife species or their habitats, or on any of the Uinta National Forest identified Management Indicator Species. There are no known threatened or endangered plants or wildlife species within the proposed project area. The Biological Assessment and Evaluation determined that the proposed project will have no impact on the habitats for these species.
- b. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The proposed restoration project will have no adverse impact on municipal watersheds. A purpose of the project is to improve watershed conditions. The project area does not reside in, and will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on, any water bodies, floodplains, or wetlands.
- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – The project area does not reside in, and the project will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on, any congressionally designated areas.
- d. Inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) – The project area is not located within an IRA. The project will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any inventoried roadless areas.

- e. Research natural areas – The project area does not reside in, and the project will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any research natural areas.
- f. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – Based on site investigations and scoping, the project area is not known to include, and the project will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on, any American Indian religious or cultural sites.
- g. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas – The project area does not reside in, and the project will not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on, any archeological, historic properties or areas, or congressionally designated areas.

6. DECISION

I have decided to approve the proposal to *improve the quality and effectiveness of wildlife habitat (i.e. critical big game winter range) and watershed conditions* by obliterating and restoring vegetation on about 13 miles of unclassified roads/trails located in Sections 26, 35 and 36, Township 5 South, Range 2 East, Salt Lake Base Meridian.

7. REASON FOR MY DECISION

The proposed action will be of limited context and intensity and capable of producing little or no significant environmental effects (**40 CFR 1508.4**) individually or cumulatively on the quality of the human environment; is within a category listed in FSH 1909.15, Section 31 (b); and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action.

Need to prepare an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement:

There are no impacts to ‘extraordinary circumstances’ that require preparation of an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement. The description of projects that may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS may be found in the Federal Register Vol. 69, No. 164/ Tuesday, July 6, 2004/Notices Section 30.3, paragraph 5.

8. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

The Dry Canyon area lies within the Lower Provo Management Area as identified in the 2003 Uinta National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2003 Forest Plan). The proposed project is consistent with Forest-wide and Management Area specific direction. The 2003 Forest Plan states the following:

- Soil, air, and water resources provide for watershed health, public health and safety, long-term soil productivity, and ecosystem sustainability, and meet applicable laws and regulations. (FW-Goal 1 pg 2-1)
- Biologically diverse, sustainable ecosystems maintain or enhance habitats for native flora and fauna, forest and rangeland health, and watershed health. (FW-Goal-2, pg 2-1)

- Scenic quality and desired landscape character are maintained and/or enhanced. (FW-Goal-5, pg 2-1)
- Diverse and suitable recreational opportunities are provided responsive to public demand while maintaining ecosystem health and contributing to social and economic sustainability. (FW-Goal-6, pg 2-1)
- Reclamation activities:
 - a. Stabilize the area,
 - b. Protect the aesthetics of the area,
 - c. Prevent water from off-site sources from impacting the disturbed area,
 - d. Control surface runoff to minimize erosion,
 - e. Trap sediment to enhance establishment of vegetation,
 - f. Restore and stabilize all unnecessary roads,
 - g. Include revegetation seeding or planting of local native species, and, where needed, fertilization and replacement of topsoil on all disturbed areas,
 - h. Provide maintenance of repeat applications where initial treatments do not achieve objectives, and
 - i. Prevent subsequent pollution from the site. (FW-Sub-Goal-2-45, pg 2-12)
- Forest Service activities, including those permitted by the Forest Service, maintain or enhance the long-term productivity and physical, chemical, and biological processes and functions of the soil. (FW-Sub-Goal 1-1, pg 2-2)
- Sufficient vegetation and litter are left on site to prevent soil movement and maintain soil productivity. (FW-Sub-Goal 1-3, pg 2-2)
- Reclamation activities are designed to provide for achieving desired future conditions for the management area(s) involved. (FW-Sub-Goal-2-44, pg 2-12)
- Recreation education and opportunity information is readily available to the public, and provided through a variety of communication methods. (Sub-goal 6-13, pg 2-19)

There are no floodplains or wetlands within the project areas, and none of these areas will be impacted. The project area, once restored and vegetation is established, should reduce overland flow of sediment. The project will be consistent with the Clean Water Act.

There are no threatened, endangered, species within the project sites. A Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment was completed (Hartman 2004), and a determination of “no effect” and “no impact” to threatened, endangered, or sensitive species was made. No adverse impacts on birds are anticipated, and this decision is consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

No cultural resources will be affected by the proposed action. The decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

In accordance with Executive Order 12898, this action will not result in any disproportionate impact to minority or low-income populations.

Implementation of this proposal is consistent with other Federal, State, and local laws for the protection of the environment.

9. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f), this decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

11. CONTACT PERSON

For further information about this decision or project, please contact John Hendrix, Acting Natural Resource Staff, Pleasant Grove District, at 390 North 100 East, Pleasant Grove, Utah 84062, or by phone at (801) 785-3563.

/s/ Pamela J. Gardner
Pamela J. Gardner
District Ranger
Pleasant Grove Ranger District

August 12, 2004
Date