

DECISION MEMO
Diagonal/Electric Sagebrush Improvement Project

USDA Forest Service
Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest
Spanish Fork Ranger District
Tooele County, Utah

I. DECISION

A. Description of Decision

My decision is to proceed with the Diagonal/Electric Sagebrush Improvement Project in cooperation with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) and Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD). The treatments will take place in Tooele County, Utah T9S R6W Sections 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14, SLM. Total treatment area is approximately 950 acres within a 2,500 acre area. A Dixie Harrow or other similar implement will be used to create openings in the sagebrush in a mosaic pattern (see attached map). All created openings will be seeded with native grasses and some introduced forbs. Implementation will most likely occur in the fall of 2008 depending on the availability of funding, equipment and personnel.

B. Purpose of the Decision

To maintain and improve grass and forb species composition and diversity, age class distribution of sagebrush and to reduce hazardous fuels (move towards condition class 1) in the Diagonal/Electric Area.

C. Need for Decision

Sage-steppe and sage grouse habitat in the Vernon area is becoming increasingly degraded. Naturally occurring vegetative mosaics within the landscape have diminished due to human cultural practices and climatic conditions. The majority of the proposed area is a continuous sagebrush population consisting of a single age class (old and decadent). The understory component (grasses and forbs) of the habitat is also lacking.

Sage grouse populations in the area have decreased from their historical numbers. Sage grouse have been petitioned to be listed as an endangered species. The Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to list the species because of plans for habitat enhancement projects by working groups and government agencies. Members of the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group feel this would be an excellent project to help sage grouse in this area. The proposed project lies within one of the UPCD conservation focus areas. Sagebrush canopy cover is continuous with very few openings which could only be used by sage

grouse for winter habitat. There is a need for more nesting and brood-rearing habitat. There is also a lack of forbs in the understory. Forbs are a major component of the sage grouse diet.

The Landscape Natural Fire Regime Group is III- infrequent, mixed & surface (less than 75% of the dominant overstory vegetation replaced). The Fire Regime Condition Class is 2- Moderate. Fire regimes have been moderately altered from their natural (historical) range. Risk of losing key ecosystem components is moderate. Fire frequencies have departed from natural frequencies by one or more return intervals (either increased or decreased). These results in moderate changes to one or more of the following: fire size, intensity and severity, and landscape patterns. Vegetation and fuel attributes have been moderately altered from their natural (historical) range. There is potential for Wildland Urban Interface fires as homes are located within one mile of the proposed project area.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or listed in 36 CFR 220.6 (d) or (e), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion

This project fits within the category listed in 36 CFR 220.6 (e) (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. Examples include but are not limited to:

- i. Girdling trees to create snags.
- ii. Thinning or brush control to improve growth or to reduce fire hazard including the opening of an existing road to a dense timber stand.
- iii. Prescribed burning to control understory hardwoods in stands of southern pine.
- iv. Prescribed burning to reduce natural fuel build-up and improve plant vigor.

This project clearly improves wildlife habitat by improving plant vigor, and reduces hazardous fuels by breaking up the continuity of the sagebrush. No herbicides will be used and no road construction will occur.

B. Extraordinary Circumstances

The federal regulations at 36 CFR 220.6 (b) list the following resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS:

1. 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 Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat.

As required by NEPA, potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation (File Record). No effects are expected to occur to listed species or their habitats.

2. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 requires federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains.

There are floodplains within the project area. The treatment will utilize a 50 foot buffer on both sides of the stream corridor where it crosses the project area. State of Utah Best Management Practices, and Forest Plan standards will be utilized. It has been determined that the project will not adversely affect these flood plains.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 requires federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands.

There are no wetlands within the project area.

Municipal Watersheds: This project is not located within a municipal watershed.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas:

This project is not located in or near Wilderness or within a wilderness study area or National Recreation Area.

4. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness area:

This project is not located within any inventoried roadless area or areas recommended in the Uinta Forest Plan for wilderness.

5. Research Natural Areas:

This project is not located within any proposed, candidate or designated Research Natural Area.

6. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites:

There are no known American Indian/Alaska Native religious or cultural sites or traditional plant gathering locations within the area (project record).

7. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas:

One site was identified in the project area, and it will be avoided during project implementation.

For projects that are categorically excluded, there is no need to repeat a detailed analysis of effects to all resources. In promulgating the categories, the Forest Service has concluded that projects that fit those categories do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. Thus, once the analysis establishes that this project has no extraordinary circumstances and fits into a category, the responsible official can reach the conclusion that there will be no significant effects to the environment without further analysis.

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 36 CFR 220.6 (e); and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND SCOPING

An interdisciplinary team (IDT) of Forest Service specialists reviewed this project. Input from this team was incorporated in the design of the proposed action and the specialist reports are contained in the project file. A request for comments was published in the *Provo Daily Herald* on September 26, 2007 and an amended request was published on November 1, 2007; scoping letters were mailed to interested parties and the project was listed in the *Autumn 2007, Winter 2007 and Spring 2008 Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions*. Two letters of

comment were received for this project. Based upon comments received, the project proposal was amended and rescoped (November 1, 2007) to provide for appeal rights. Between scoping and my decision, the category was changed from category 10 to category 6. Public comments substantiated this change (see comment letters on file).

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO THEIR LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below:

Endangered Species Act – See Section II, Item B1 of this document.

National Historic Preservation Act – See Section II, Item B6 of this document.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act – See Section II, Item B6 of this document.

National Environmental Policy Act – This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The documentation of this decision supports compliance with this Act.

National Forest Management Act - This Act requires all projects and activities are consistent with the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This project and decision are consistent with the 2003 Uinta National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and help achieve Forest Plan goals as outlined below:

FW-Goal-2: Biologically diverse, sustainable ecosystems maintain or enhance habitats for native flora and fauna, forest and rangeland health, watershed health, and water quality.

Sub-goal-2-1: The fuel management aspect of the fire management program is emphasized through application of hazard reduction activities.

Sub-goal-2-8: Ecosystem resilience is maintained by providing for a full range of seral stages and age classes (by cover type) that achieve a mosaic of habitat conditions and diversity to meet a variety of desired resource management objectives. Recruitment and sustainability of some early seral species and vegetation communities in the landscape are necessary to maintain ecosystem resilience to perturbations.

Sub-goal-2-4: Priorities to protect property and natural/cultural resources are determined based on relative values to be protected, fire management costs, and risks to human (including firefighter) safety.

FW-Goal-8 Forest infrastructure, including facilities and transportation systems, is safe and responsive to public needs and desires; has minimal adverse effects on ecological processes and ecosystem health, diversity, and productivity; and is in balance with needed management actions.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OF APPEAL

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of this notice in the *Provo Daily Herald*. Appeals must be sent to: Appeal Deciding Officer, Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; or by fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Emailed appeals must be submitted in rich text (rtf) or Word (doc) and must include the project name in the subject line. Appeals may also be hand delivered to the above address, during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of this project may begin no sooner than 5 days following the 45 day appeal period after publication of the notice of the decision.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

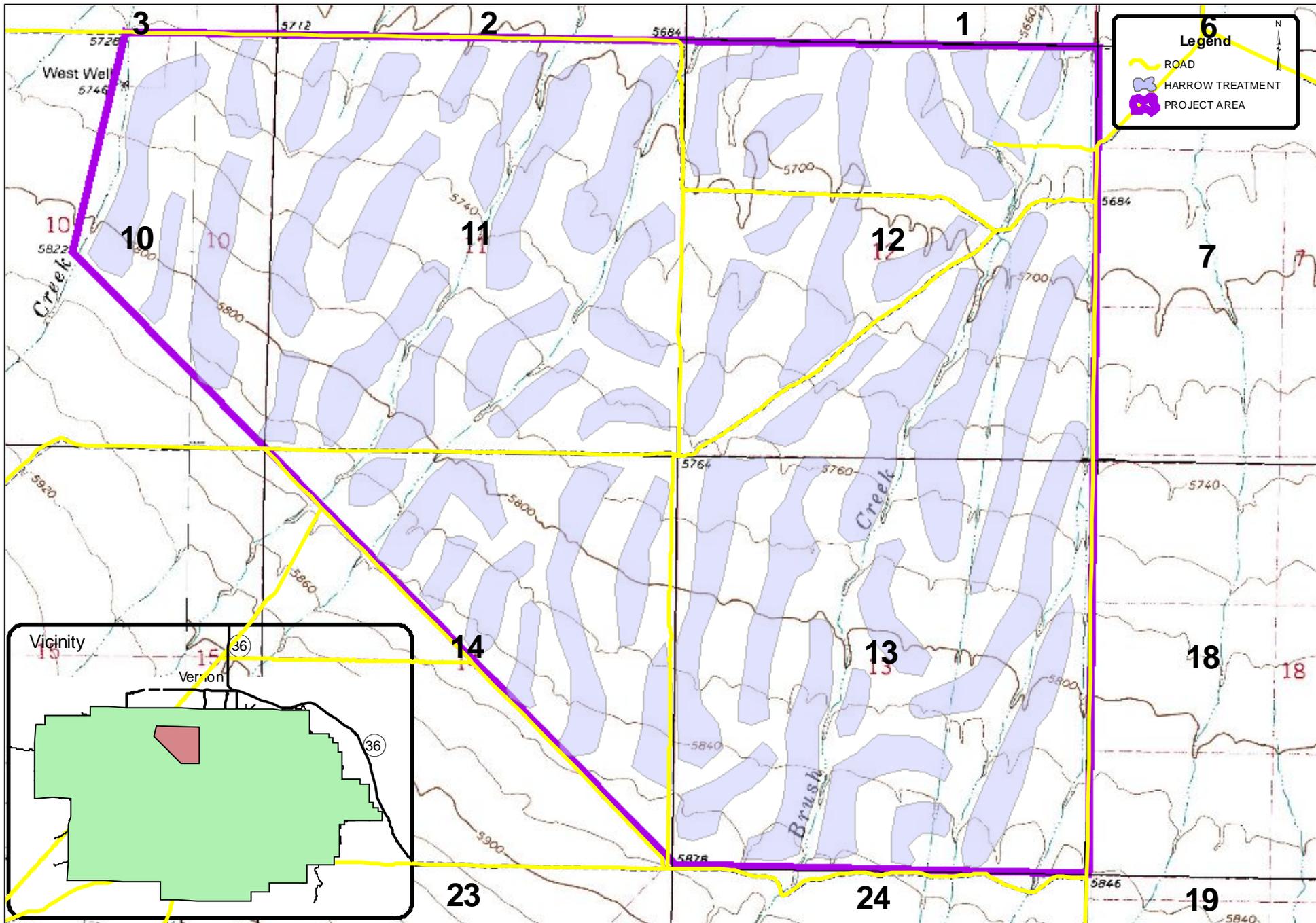
Further information about this decision can be obtained from Lans Stavast (801) 342-5151.

VII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in and environmental impact statement of environmental assessment, as it is within one of the categories identified in 36 CFR 220.6 (e), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the planning record.

/s/Douglas H. Jones
DOUGLAS H. JONES
District Ranger
Spanish Fork Ranger District

August 14, 2009
Date

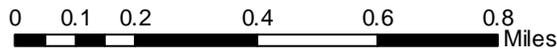


Diagonal/Electric Sagebrush Improvement

Lans Stavast July 17, 2008



United States Department of Agriculture
 Forest Service
 Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest
 Spanish Fork, Utah



Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
 Springville, Utah