



File Code: 1950

Date: March 28, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest is proposing to harvest insect infested and dead trees on the Kamas Ranger District. The following information describes the project, which is called the Murdock Salvage and Thinning. This letter is to inform you of the project proposal and solicit your input to our planning process.

Background: The area being proposed for treatment (see the attached Map 1) is located south of Broadhead Meadows, west of the 1980 Murdock/ Broadhead wildfire and north of the access road (#137) to the Murdock Basin area. The legal description is Township 2 South, Range 9 East, Sections 16, 17, 20, and 21, Salt Lake Meridian, in Wasatch County, Utah.

The area is heavily used year round by forest visitors for its dispersed camping, ATV riding, fishing, hunting and snowmobiling opportunities. It is adjacent to Utah State Highway 150 - the Mirror Lake Scenic Byway.

The stands of lodgepole pine are the result of a series of events that occurred in the mid 1930's. A blowdown event was followed by a salvage sale, and portions of that were burned following the sale. The stands then regenerated naturally to high densities. There has been some pre-commercial thinning in the past. Most of that was approximately 50 yrs ago. These dense stands are now experiencing high mortality from infestation by the mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*).

Purpose and Need: Recent field visits and stand exams indicate that the populations of mountain pine beetle are building rapidly, as they are in the rest of the watershed. Active centers of up to several acres with recent mortality were noted both in the field and on the 2007 annual Forest Health Protection Aerial Detection Survey Map. There are also many smaller pockets and individual infested trees across the area. There is a need to keep pine beetle infestations at an endemic level.

The purpose of the thinning is to remove dead and beetle infested trees, reduce average stand density, and improve the spacing between trees in order to create conditions less favorable for future pine beetle populations. Thinning is desirable to maintain the forested characteristic of the area for the dispersed recreation opportunities it provides.

Management Direction: The area is within management prescriptions 4.4 (Dispersed Motorized), and 2.5 (Scenic Byway). Both allow for timber harvest to protect and maintain their outstanding scenic quality (2.5) and restore ecosystem function (4.4). While large scale stand replacement events are a natural occurrence in this vegetation type, this is not a desired future condition for this heavily used and scenic area. The Wasatch-Cache Forest plan desired future



condition includes (p. 4-8) the statement that “Spruce and pine beetle infestations are kept to an endemic level through the use of a variety of management tools including timber harvest, prescribed fire and wildland fire use.”

Proposed Action: Use a commercial timber sale on approximately 240 acres to remove dead and infested trees (salvage), and thin adjacent live trees where remaining density exceeds 80 square feet per acre of basal area to create an environment less susceptible to future beetle populations and begin to provide for some age class diversity. Heavily infested centers once harvested, would provide for openings that would regenerate naturally to young lodgepole pine. In all stands, at least 30 dead snags per 10 acres would be left to provide for wildlife needs. Criteria for down woody debris as specified in the forest plan on page 4-42 would also be met or exceeded.

No new system roads would be constructed. Some maintenance such as spot gravel and / or grading would be needed to facilitate removal of the timber. Less than ½ mile of temporary road would need to be constructed. This would be obliterated, re-contoured and re-vegetated following its use.

Decision To Be Made: Julie King, District Ranger on the Heber-Kamas Ranger District will be the official responsible for making the decision whether or not to implement the proposed action. This project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. It appears to meet the intent of Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, section 31.2, Category (14), which includes “Commercial and non-commercial sanitation harvest of trees to control insects or disease not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction, including removal of infested/infected trees and adjacent live uninfested/uninfected trees as determined necessary to control the spread of insects or disease.” Implementation is tentatively scheduled to begin in the fall of 2008.

Comments: This comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on a proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. Anyone providing comments or otherwise expressing interest in the proposed action by the close of the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215.6 will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations. The comment period is being held concurrently with the scoping period.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Salt Lake Tribune. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

Written Comments should be directed to:

District Ranger
Heber-Kamas Ranger District
ATTN: Murdock Salvage and Thinning
P.O. Box 68
Kamas, UT 84036

Comments may be faxed to (435) 783-2981. The office business hours at the Kamas District Office (50 East Center St., Kamas, UT) for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Oral comments may be provided to Julie King or Jim Gibson at the Kamas Ranger District office during normal business hours via telephone (435) 783-4338 or in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-wasatch-cache-kamas@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Your comments are needed and appreciated either in person, by phone, by mail or by e-mail. Issues or concerns you think need to be addressed should be included. Specific questions regarding the proposal should be directed to Jim Gibson, at (435) 783-8716.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest.

Sincerely,

/S/ JULIE K KING

JULIE K. KING
District Ranger