



**Scoping Document  
and Opportunity for  
Comment**

**Dairy Ridge  
Sagebrush  
Treatment Project**

USDA Forest Service  
Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National  
Forest  
Ogden Ranger District  
Rich County, Utah

**Comments Due: 30 days from  
the date of the legal notice  
published in the Ogden  
Standard Examiner**

**The Purpose of this Scoping Document**

This document is to inform you that the Ogden Ranger District is initiating an environmental analysis that will likely be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, as provided at 36 CFR Part 220.6. In general, a categorical exclusion of a proposed action may be used when there are no effects to resource conditions resulting in extraordinary circumstances and the proposal fits one of the listed categories. The Dairy Ridge Sagebrush Treatment Project most likely fits into Category 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). The public scoping period is being held concurrently with a 30 day formal notice and comment period. We welcome your comments, concerns, and suggestions regarding this proposal.

**What is being proposed?**

The preliminary proposed action is to use a combination of prescribed fire and ‘mechanical’ treatments to treat about 600 acres of mountain big sagebrush communities in the northeastern portion of the Ogden District, within a 5 year timeframe beginning in the fall of 2009. The term ‘mechanical’ refers to ground based treatment methods for affecting existing shrub sized vegetation. The term includes, but is not limited to, the use of tractor pulled implements such as a Dixie harrow or ripping chains, and the use of tractor or trackhoe mounted rotary mulching implements such as a Franklin brush hog. Treatments will be timed to occur only after neo-tropical bird species such as the Brewers Sparrow have completed nesting behavior, estimated to be after August 15. Treatment will be predominately ‘mechanical’, however the use of prescribed fire is an alternative possibility where mountain big sagebrush dominates in areas large enough to treat economically, where spiked sagebrush is either absent or not expected to rapidly re-occupy a fire treated site, and where fire effects would not threaten critical utility transmission infrastructure. Spiked sagebrush is known to rapidly re-occupy areas following prescribed fire treatments; to retain the desirable effects of the treatments for as long as possible, ‘mechanical’ treatments will be used where spiked sagebrush dominates the vegetation community.

The project area lies primarily in the Monte Cristo area and generally astride the Dairy Ridge Road (FR069) between the Sugar Pine and Wheeler Creek drainages (see attached map), and consists of four potential treatment units. Due to concerns associated with existing sagebrush composition and the proximity of a critical interstate power transmission corridor, Units 1 and 2 will receive only mechanical treatment. Remaining units will receive burning or a combination of burning/mechanical treatments. The area outside the unit boundaries, but within the larger outer boundary, displays an 897-acre contingency area within which we do not intend to actively ignite as part of a prescribed fire treatment. However, due to the indeterminate nature of fire, if portions do burn inadvertently, the fire effects will be considered in this analysis. Areas outside the contingency area (referred to as the MMA on the attached map) are not planned for prescribed fire in this project, either actively or passively. The following displays the unit acres and treatment types for the four units (also see attached map).

Unit	Acres	Treatment Type
1	87	Mechanical
2	226	Mechanical
3	147	Mechanical/burn
4	57	Mechanical/burn

## Why are we proposing this project?

The absence of frequent fire, combined with livestock and wildlife browsing in the Dairy Ridge Sagebrush Treatment Project area, has contributed to a decadent situation within the sagebrush communities in the Dairy Ridge area. These communities are skewed toward older age classes and have a dense canopy cover which inhibits the growth of grass and forb species that are valuable for preventing erosion and providing forage for wildlife and livestock. Wildfires have historically occurred in sagebrush communities every 20 to 50 years and provided a mosaic of age classes and canopy cover. With the exception of approximately 200 acres of light prescribed burning in nearby aspen stands during the early part of this decade, fires have not occurred on Dairy Ridge for many years. This has contributed to a deteriorated condition that is inconsistent with the normal successional trends in these sagebrush communities.

The condition of the project landscape can be characterized as:

- A majority of the sagebrush cover type is classified as mature or old age
- Mature/old age sagebrush forms continuous canopy coverage
- Forb and herbaceous layers are deteriorating or absent
- Fire regimes are outside the historical range

Generally, the deteriorating wildlife habitat is linked to declining biodiversity. For example, the decadent sagebrush canopy encourages the Brewer's Sparrow and discourages the Sage Sparrow. Both species are listed as Utah Partners in Flight (PIF) and Birds of Conservation Concern (USFWS). Restoration of habitat that encourages both species would comply with Executive Order 13186 of January, 2001 which was issued on the Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds. It specifies the need to avoid or minimize any adverse impacts on migratory birds and addresses the need to restore and enhance the habitat of migratory birds.

As a result, there is a need to restore and sustain a mosaic of structure and age to the sagebrush community and the incidental aspen stringers found within the analysis area to meet the following objectives:

- Restoration and maintenance of the structural mosaic of age-class diversity among sagebrush communities and any incidental aspen within the landscape
- Increase diversity of habitat
- Decreased potential for very high intensity wildfires with undesirable effects, such as destruction of wildlife and their habitat
- Rejuvenation and restoration of herbaceous vegetation to improve ground cover for the protection of soil and water quality from excessive runoff and erosion, and to increase the diversity of habitat and supported wildlife species

## Preliminary Issues

1. Effects to water quality, soil, and fisheries resources. Some of the proposed treatment methods could cause a short term increase in the extent of bare soil in the treatment areas and a potential sediment impact on the adjacent water features.
2. Potential effects on livestock management (including rest periods), before, during and after the proposed treatments, as the area lies within an existing cattle allotment and will need to be 'rested' to provide for successful treatments and revegetation.
3. Potential effects on hunters and dispersed camping associated with fall prescribed fire treatments.
4. The Monte Cristo area that contains the proposed treatments is a popular area for recreational off road vehicle use. Any sort of vegetation treatment that reduces shrub densities will tend to make the treated areas more attractive to off road travel, and could result in the creation of

illegal travel routes. Access into the areas by tracked or wheeled treatment equipment could also create openings and routes that are easily accessed by off road vehicles.

5. Dense and over mature sagebrush/grass communities represent important habitat for several species of sparrows, including the species of concern Brewers Sparrow. Treatments proposed to reduce the extent of dense and over mature sagebrush have the potential to reduce the habitat for this species.

### **What is the Decision to be made?**

The decision to be made is whether or not to conduct the proposed prescribed burn and mechanical treatment in the Dairy Ridge vicinity and if so under what circumstances.

### **Who will make the Decision?**

The District Ranger, Chip Sibbernsen, is the official responsible for making the decision. The decision would within a 5 year timeframe beginning in the fall of 2009.

### **How can I comment?**

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.

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 Ogden Standard Examiner. 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.

Written comments may be submitted to Ogden Ranger District, 507 25<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 103, Ogden, Utah 84401, fax number 801-625-5914. The office business hours for hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Oral comments may be provided at the Ogden Ranger District office during normal business hours via telephone (801) 625-5112 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, rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-wasatch-cache-ogden@fs.fed.us.

Chip Sibbernsen  
District Ranger

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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