



File Code: 1950

Date: April 27, 2009

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Lookout Mountain Ranger District is proposing to use prescribed fire to re-introduce fire disturbance in the Lookout Mountain area. Lookout Mountain represents a special place for many local residents and visitors. The area provides opportunities for quality big game hunting and non-motorized recreation. Lookout Mountain also provides quality habitat for several species, including elk, pileated woodpecker and goshawk.

Forest vegetation and fuel conditions within the Lookout Mountain area have changed over the course of several decades due to fire exclusion. Due to the absence of fire disturbance, forest stands have developed denser tree canopies both horizontally and vertically and include more late seral species than would have occurred under historic fire regimes. Surface fuel loading has also increased on the forest floor. The proposed prescribed fire project is intended to move forest vegetation and fuels toward conditions that provide sustainability, resilience to natural disturbance and habitat diversity.

The Lookout Mountain Prescribed Fire project encompasses about 22,700 acres. The project area is in Townships 14 and 15 South, Ranges 19 and 20 East, Willamette Meridian. Please refer to the enclosed map for the project location.

The elevation of the project area ranges from the top of Lookout Mountain at about 6,800 feet elevation to Ochoco Creek at about 4,000 feet elevation. Vegetation is variable dependant upon elevation and aspect; dense stands of mixed conifer are common, and ponderosa pine, open meadows and non-vegetated rocky areas are also present. The southern portion of the project area has been harvested, thinned, piled and underburned. A major part of the project area includes the Lookout Mountain Management Area, which is designated for roadless management in the Ochoco National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Approximately 58% of the existing late and old structure forest within the Lookout Mountain Area is characterized as high hazard, where the potential exists for a stand-replacement wildfire event. Careful application of prescribed fire would improve the health and sustainability of the forest vegetation and habitat within the area.

Objectives of the Lookout Mountain Prescribed Fire Project include:

- Maintain and enhance late and old structure by reducing fuel and vegetation conditions that support damaging wildfire behavior.



- Move forest vegetation and fuels toward conditions representative of historic fire disturbance.
- Lessen the intensity of wildfires by reducing accumulations of surface and ladder fuels (surface fuels include forest debris, such as fallen tree limbs, litter and vegetation on the ground surface; ladder fuels are the vegetation that allow fire to travel from the forest floor to the crowns of trees, and can include brush and small trees such as seedlings and saplings).
- Maintain forest health by reducing the density of forest vegetation.

The proposed treatment is to begin the application of prescribed fire in the fall of 2009, to reduce surface and ladder fuels. Full implementation would take several years to complete. No road construction would be done. Improvements within the area, including trails, fences and other structures, would be protected. Prescribed fire would be applied in a mosaic pattern with an estimated 40 – 60% of the area actually burned. This would retain the vegetation diversity existing within the area. The project includes establishing control lines by small tree thinning, limbing and hand piling up to 300 feet from Roads 42 and 4215 and along the Forest boundary on the west side of the project area. Potential issues that are being considered include the effects of prescribed fire on wildlife habitat, late and old forest structure, recreation and water quality.

At this time I believe that the proposed activities could be excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement and could be implemented as a categorical exclusion under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 31.2 (6). Category 6 authorizes timber stand improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides and do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction. Preliminary analysis indicates there would be no extraordinary circumstances arising from the implementation of this proposed action.

I am inviting your comments on this proposal. Your comments will be used to help determine if implementation of these proposed activities is appropriate or if alternate activities should be considered. Your comments would be most useful if received on or before May 28, 2009. Your comments can be mailed to the address listed below or sent via e-mail to: *comments-pacificnorthwest-ochoco@fs.fed.us*.

For further information please contact Dave Owens or Jeff Bell at 3160 NE Third Street, Prineville, OR 97754 or via telephone at (541) 416-6500.

Sincerely,

/s/William R. Queen
WILLIAM R. QUEEN
District Ranger