

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

ELKHORN PROJECT

USDA Forest Service
Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland
Canyon Lakes Ranger District
Larimer County, Colorado

BACKGROUND AND NEED

The Canyon Lakes Ranger District of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests has analyzed the effects of implementing a suite of projects within the Elkhorn project area. The proposed action includes vegetation management treatments, broadcast prescribed burning, watershed improvement projects and modifications to the road network. The Elkhorn project area is approximately 22,293 acres in total consisting of 20,800 NFS acres and the remainder state and private ownership. The project area is defined by the Cache la Poudre River and Highway 14 to the south, the Manhattan Road (CR 69) to the east, the Deadman Road to the north and a portion of FSR 517 to the west. It is adjacent to the communities of Crystal Lakes, Red Feather Lakes, Manhattan and the Upper Poudre Canyon.

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared disclosing the expected environmental impacts of the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) and the Proposed Action (Alternative 2).

The purpose and need for the Elkhorn project are as follows:

- Reduce hazardous fuels on National Forest System (NFS) lands that could contribute to the increased spread and intensity of wildfire. Current fuels conditions, including dead trees killed by MPB, can contribute to uncharacteristically severe wildfire behavior that could threaten improvements on private property and affect natural resources on NFS land. Action is needed to restore these stands to stocking levels and species composition that more closely resemble typical conditions.
- Maintain and improve forest health in stands affected by the current mountain pine beetle (MPB) epidemic. Past uses in the Elkhorn project area, including heavy recreational use and timber extraction activities, and current and future predicted impacts including the MPB epidemic necessitate management to address forest health in order to move the area toward desired conditions.
- Provide timber products for beneficial uses and local economies.
- Improve watershed and fisheries conditions. Watershed and fisheries health in the project area have been degraded by high road density, heavy recreational use including OHVs and dispersed camping, and legacy impacts from past mining and timber management. Because watersheds within the project area contribute to many downstream uses, there is a need to remediate these degraded sites.
- Enhance bighorn sheep habitat. The absence of naturally-occurring wildfire in recent decades has compromised bighorn sheep habitat quality by allowing vegetation to become denser than is optimal for this species. Bighorn sheep prefer open habitat in order to detect predators (e.g. mountain lion, coyote), and the presence of dense shrubs and trees reduce sight distances. Additionally, encroaching shrub and tree growth can concentrate sheep into smaller areas, which is thought to increase disease problems.

- Provide for long-term recreational opportunities in the Christmas tree sale area. The FSR 171 road network is highly visited by residents of surrounding communities and the Front Range. The demand for Christmas trees coupled with the backcountry experience of selecting one's own tree is growing. There is a need to perform forest management activities that will yield young trees suitable for Christmas trees in future years.
- Manage the transportation system for the project area. Because of escalating maintenance costs for forest roads and road network affects to resources, there was a need to conduct a route-by-route analysis of all National Forest System roads (NFSR) and unauthorized routes within the Elkhorn project area. This analysis recommended the transportation system needed for public access and forest management, as well as identifies unnecessary road segments.

DECISION

After a thorough review of the effects analysis completed in the EA and consideration of public input, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 with several modifications. This alternative will be carried out with the project design features listed in the EA on pages 26 through 36. These design features were recommended by the interdisciplinary team of resource specialists and were based on evaluation of site-specific conditions within the project area and scoping comments received by the public. These measures are intended to minimize resource impacts and are based on professional and agency experience and monitoring of projects similar to the Elkhorn Project.

This alternative fully meets the purpose and need for action for the project as described above and detailed in the EA. The treatments included in this decision are (1) approximately 2,767 acres of vegetation management treatments for the purpose of reducing fuels, improving forest health, and providing of future Christmas trees and economic forest products; (2) a broadcast prescribed burn over approximately 2,191 acres to increase the effectiveness of fuels reduction efforts on private land, to reduce the potential for destructive wildfires that may affect values at risk, and to improve bighorn sheep habitat; (3) a number of watershed improvement projects for the purpose of addressing degraded watershed conditions within the project area and (4) modifications to the road network within the project area including decommissioning of segments of current Forest System roads, totaling 2.56 miles, conversion of two segments of road, totaling 5.19 miles, maintenance level 1, decommissioning of nearly 22 miles of unauthorized routes and approximately 0.26 miles of new system road construction to enhance the public Christmas tree program.

The proposed action will be implemented as described below. Modifications or clarifications to the proposed action are underlined to indicate a change to the proposed action from that presented in the EA.

Vegetation Management

Within the Elkhorn project area, approximately 4,957 of vegetation treatment will be implemented designed to improve forest health, reduce hazardous fuels, provide for future Christmas trees and provide economic forest products. The mechanical treatment prescriptions include the following: thinning, clearcut, patch clearcut, group selection, overstory removal, salvage, selective harvest and two stage group shelterwood (see Appendix A in the EA for a description of these treatments).

Several minor modifications were made to the vegetation treatment units previously described in the EA:

The boundary of Unit 23, located to the northwest of Bellaire Lake, was adjusted away from the lake to address visual resources concerns. This resulted in a 32 acre unit instead of the originally proposed 35 acre unit. Additionally, the prescriptions for units 21 and 59 were listed incorrectly. Unit 21 will be treated with a clearcut with reserves prescription rather than a low thin/salvage and Unit 59 will be treated with a low thin/salvage

rather than a clearcut with reserves prescription. The boundary of Unit 22 was changed to eliminate 4 acres of Management Area 1.3 (backcountry recreation emphasis).

The implementation of Elkhorn mechanical treatments will be accomplished by private contractors and/or Forest Service employees. Generally, the option of using mechanized equipment or hand crews with chainsaws to complete the treatments will be considered. However, some areas, such as units in steep or rocky terrain, will be limited to treatment by hand crews only. Where mechanized equipment is used, forest products will most likely be removed in the form of logs, chips or firewood. Firewood may be removed from the hand treatment units.

The cut material (referred to as slash) will primarily be piled and burned at a later date when snow cover or moisture conditions inhibit fire spread. A portion of the area could be thinned with mechanized equipment. If this occurs, the slash could be chipped or masticated and spread on the ground at a specified depth or piled and burned. The method of slash treatment will be determined by the amount of material cut, its proximity to private land and other improvements, and topographical features such as slope and aspect. In some areas, existing dead and down material (sound material and eight inches in diameter or less) will also be treated in a similar manner.

Proposed vegetation treatments in the Christmas tree area will be phased over multiple years in order to stagger production of young trees.

The adequacy of roads for use by logging equipment and product removal used to access treatment units will be addressed prior to project implementation. Unauthorized or temporary ways or roads used by contractors for vegetation management purposes will be decommissioned by the contractor.

Knutson-Vandenberg (CWKV) funds may be collected from timber sale contracts as vegetation treatments are implemented. A list of activities that may be financed using CWKV funds can be found in the Silviculture specialist report.

For some treatments to occur, access across private land will be necessary. As treatments for these units are scheduled, negotiations with private landowners on the type of access needed will be made on a case by case basis.

Table 1. Vegetation treatment units, Elkhorn Project

Unit #	Proposed Treatment	Treatment Method	Slash Treatment	Acres
1	Broadcast Burn	Hand constructed fire-line, ignition with drip torches and/or helicopter	A	2,191
2	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	60
3	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	76
4	CC with reserves	Hand/Mechanical	A	52
5	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	27
6	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	23
7	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	15
8	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	19

Unit #	Proposed Treatment	Treatment Method	Slash Treatment	Acres
9	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	15
10	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	34
11	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	21
12	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	40
13	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	79
14	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	35
15	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	21
16	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	69
17	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	15
18	Over-story Removal	Mechanical	A	15
19	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	14
20	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	32
21	<u>CC with reserves</u>	Hand/Mechanical	A	83
22	CC with reserves	Hand/Mechanical	A	<u>12</u>
23	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	<u>32</u>
24	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	103
25	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	106
26	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	301
27	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	133
28	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	15
29	Low thin - salvage	Hand	A	21
30	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	26
31	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	23
32	Selective Harvest	Mechanical	A	29
33	CC w/reserves	Mechanical	B	52
34	CC w/reserves	Mechanical	B	31
35	CC with reserves (Contingent on OG condition at time of implementation)	Mechanical	B	28
36	CC with reserves	Mechanical	B	73
37	CC with reserves	Mechanical	B	21
38	CC with reserves	Mechanical	B	34
39	CC with reserves	Mechanical	B	25
40	Selective Harvest	Mechanical	B	60
41	Selective Harvest	Mechanical	B	17
42	CC with reserves	Mechanical	B	96
43	Group Selection (Contingent on OG condition at time of	Mechanical	B	39

Unit #	Proposed Treatment	Treatment Method	Slash Treatment	Acres
	<i>implementation)</i>			
44	Two Stage Group Shelterwood	Mechanical	B	18
45	Two Stage Group Shelterwood	Mechanical	B	53
46	Group Selection	Mechanical	A	177
47	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	23
48	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	27
49	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	55
50	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	13
51	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	18
52	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	30
53	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	10
54	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	7
55	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	7
56	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	21
57	CC with reserves	Mechanical	A	71
58	Low thin - salvage	Mechanical	A	41
59	<u>Low thin - salvage</u>	Mechanical	A	74
60	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	10
61	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	16
62	Low thin - salvage	Hand/Mechanical	A	4
63	Selective Harvest	Mechanical	B	11
64	Selective Harvest	Mechanical	B	16
65	Selective Harvest	Mechanical	B	10
66	Selective Harvest	Mechanical	B	15
67	Group Selection	Mechanical	B	14
Total Acres Proposed for Treatment				4,957

Slash Treatments: Slash Treatment A: Whole tree logging required and/or piling within the unit or landing allowed, Slash Treatment B: Whole tree logging allowed or lop and scatter

In addition, approximately 2,191 acres are planned for prescribed broadcast burning designed to reduce the potential for destructive wildfires that may affect values at risk, improve bighorn sheep habitat, and enhance ecosystem health by reintroducing fire into the landscape.

The primary target areas for burning will be shrub and open forest on the south-facing slopes rising from Highway 14 to the ridgeline and some open slopes in the Sevenmile Creek drainage. Burning in more dense forest areas will open up the forest canopy and help to move stands to stocking levels and species composition that more closely resemble desired conditions. Broadcast prescribed fire will reduce fuels hazard primarily by consuming excess ground fuels, understory vegetation, smaller trees and some weakened or dead overstory

trees. Dense lodgepole pine or mixed conifer forest will not be actively ignited. It is estimated that approximately half of the burn area will be actively burned during implementation.

Broadcast prescribed burning will improve visual sight distances for bighorn sheep by reducing densities of conifers (ponderosa pine, Rocky Mtn juniper, and Douglas-fir) and shrubs (mountain-mahogany, sagebrush, bitterbrush); improve sheep forage habitat quality through increased grass and forb growth post-burn, and improve browse quality from regenerating shrub growth. The burn will also similarly benefit elk and mule deer habitat. The south-facing slopes above the Poudre Canyon Highway in this area have been identified by Colorado Parks and Wildlife for prescribed burning specifically to maintain and improve bighorn sheep habitat.

Pre-treatment of fuels will occur within and adjacent to the broadcast burn unit boundary, where necessary, to reduce fire behavior close to the fireline. For safety and logistical purposes, an area surrounding the proposed primary burn area has been identified. This secondary burn area is located adjacent to the primary burn area using predefined boundaries. Within this area, fire would be actively suppressed but not deemed a wildfire.

Watershed Improvement Projects

The following watershed improvement projects will be implemented for the purpose of addressing degraded watershed conditions within the project area:

- As part of road decommissioning activities, recontour stream profiles where intercepted by roads. This will be accomplished using heavy equipment to reshape the stream profile and streambanks as well as the installation of rock and log habitat features that mimic naturally occurring stream habitats. Unless unavailable, on-site rock and log materials will be used at these locations and may involve felling trees. Degraded stream crossings will be identified and restored.
- For system roads: The number of stream crossings will be reduced, where possible, and stream banks stabilized in association with removal of stream crossings, and drainage at stream crossings improved (install additional cross drains, and install culverts and armor fords).
- Dispersed campsites that are causing damage to riparian areas will be removed or restored. This work will be accomplished by posting signs, constructing barriers to limit access into sensitive areas, and in some cases, replanting streambanks/wetlands. Unless unavailable, on-site rock and log materials will be used at these locations and may involve felling trees.
- Approximately five miles of Sevenmile Creek will be restored. Type of work will include: construction of pool habitats, installation of log jams to form complex habitats, installation of rock structures for increased holding cover, bank stabilization work, road crossing and drainage improvements. This work will be accomplished using heavy equipment within the stream corridor. Unless unavailable, on-site rock and log materials will be used at these locations and may involve felling trees. Where feasible, portions of the Sevenmile Road may be re-routed around degraded stream and wetland areas.
- Stream restoration work in Elkhorn and South Lone Pine Creeks will be implemented, consisting of approximately one mile in each stream. Type of work will include installation of log structures and restoration of stream habitats damaged by use of unauthorized roads. Where existing roads provide access, this work will be accomplished using heavy equipment. Otherwise, work will be accomplished with hand crews, chainsaws, and pulley-type winches.
- Fish passage through culverts along Manhattan Road (CR162) at Elkhorn, South Lone Pine Creek, Swamp Creek and Seven Mile Creek crossings will be improved.

Transportation Management

A transportation analysis (TA) was prepared during the initial phases of the larger Elkhorn Project and documents a route-by-route analysis of all NFS roads and unauthorized routes within the Elkhorn project area.

The TA recommended the transportation system necessary for public access, motorized recreation and forest management while taking into account the effects of roads on natural resources. Changes to the forest transportation system to meet current and future management objectives are based on an analysis of the physical, biological, social, and economic risks and benefits of every system road.

The following modifications to the travel network within the Elkhorn project area will be implemented (see Table 2 for route-by-route changes):

- Multiple segments of current NFS roads, totaling 2.56 miles (4.8%) will be decommissioned.
- Two segments of road (333.0 and 333A), totaling 5.19 miles are recommended for conversion to maintenance level (ML) 1. These will no longer be open to the public, or used administratively in the near-term. Additionally, signage may need to be placed at the intersections of these roads and the North Lone Pine trail to prohibit motorized trail users from traveling on these roads. ML 1 roads are closed to all travel but not decommissioned. They are placed in storage between intermittent uses. The period of storage must exceed 1 year. Basic custodial maintenance is performed to prevent damage to adjacent resources and to perpetuate the road for future resource management needs. Gates may be erected to prevent motorized travel on these segments of road. Approximately 51 miles of roads in the current system provide benefit and should be considered for regular maintenance to mitigate and prevent resource risk.
- Nearly 22 miles of unauthorized routes are planned to be decommissioned. Unauthorized routes within the project area identified or created in the future may also be decommissioned.
- One new proposed road segment (FSR 171i), totaling approximately 0.26 miles, will be constructed to provide an additional loop in the Christmas tree area. This new road segment will be open seasonally, during the Christmas tree sale that is approximately two weeks in duration.

Those roads identified for decommissioning or maintenance level changes will be coordinated with vegetation treatments. Some roads can be decommissioned immediately after this Decision is final, while others will be utilized for vegetation treatments. In such case, the road status will not be changed until after completion of treatments. In some cases, roads may be decommissioned as part of a timber service contract with the heavy equipment operating in these units.

NFS Road 517.A1 is currently displayed incorrectly in the MVUM map and was also incorrectly displayed on the scoping maps. However, the Transportation Analysis Process (TAP) risk/benefit matrix correctly identified this road as “not open to the public” and the scoping documents proposed to maintain the current condition. Current access to this road is administrative only, as there is a gate that prevents travel at the beginning of the road where it intersects with NFS Road 517.0. As part of this decision, 517.A1 will be designated for administrative access only. This change will be purely administrative, as the public does not currently have access to this road.

Table 2. Summary of Elkhorn road system modifications

Road Number	Road Name	Road Length	Recommendation	Length of Road to be Decommissioned	Length of Road to be Converted
Existing NFSR's					
163.0	BELLAIRE LAKE DAYUSE	0.72	Maintain		
163A	BELLAIRE CG LOOP A	0.72	Maintain		
163B	BELLAIRE CG LOOP B	0.24	Maintain		
171.0	MANHATTAN	4.14	Mitigate/Maintain		
171.A	PROHIBITION MOUNTAIN	1.90	Mitigate/Maintain		
171.B		0.75	Maintain		
171.C		1.55	Maintain		
171.D		1.46	Maintain		
171.E		0.28	Decommission	0.28	
171.F		0.27	Decommission	0.27	
171.G		0.18	Maintain		
171.H		0.55	Decommission last segment past dispersed site	0.01	
171.H1		0.07	Maintain		
171.I		0.32	Maintain		
171.J		1.22	Maintain (admin road)		
171.K		0.11	Decommission	0.11	
171.L		1.26	Maintain (public/admin road)		
198.0	ELKHORN	1.88	Maintain		
225.0		5.06	Mitigate/Maintain		
225.1		0.71	Decommission north segment past intersection with 225.2	0.37	
225.2		0.33	Mitigate/Maintain		
267.1		0.39	Maintain		
296.12	ARROWHEAD VISITOR CENTER	0.08	Maintain		

Road Number	Road Name	Road Length	Recommendation	Length of Road to be Decommissioned	Length of Road to be Converted
296.12A-C	ARROWHEAD CABIN LOOP	0.21	Maintain		
300.0	KILLPECKER	1.24	Maintain		
309.0	AMETHYST	1.22	Maintain		
333.0	NORTH BALD MOUNTAIN	2.74	Convert to ML1		<u>2.74</u>
333.A		2.45	Convert to ML1		2.45
501.0		0.55	Maintain/Mitigate		
501.3		0.23	Maintain/Mitigate		
517.0	ELKHORN - BALDY	13.38	Maintain		
517.A		4.44	Decommission past gate	0.46	
517.A1	ROARING ROAD	0.26	Maintain		
517.F		0.23	Maintain except decommission segment west of junction with FSR 198	0.05	
517.G		0.09	Decommission past 300' dispersed site	0.09	
530.0		1.13	Maintain		
530.1		0.33	Maintain first segment and decommission portion of loop to west that does not lead to designated site	0.12	
530.2		0.07	Maintain		
530.3		0.08	Maintain		
D517.0		0.80	Decommission	0.80	
TOTAL MILES (FS & PVT Jurisdiction)		53.64		2.56	5.19

Road Number	Road Name	Road Length	Recommendation	Length of Road to be Decommissioned	Length of Road to be Converted
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Unauthorized Routes

TOTAL		21.88	Decommission all	21.88	
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Proposed New Routes

171.i connector	Christmas Tree Loop	0.26	Construct new segment		
TOTAL		0.26			

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The recently adopted Objection Process (36 CFR 218) is a collaborative approach to decision making which encourages meaningful public participation. Public concerns are addressed before a decision is made. As a means of informing the interested public and gathering specific local input, two open house-style public meetings were held (in Red Feather Lakes on May 22, 2013 and in Fort Collins on May 30, 2013). Approximately 20 people in total attended both meetings, were informed about the proposed action and given an opportunity to ask questions. In addition to the public meetings, individual letters soliciting comments on the Elkhorn project proposal were sent to 173 recipients dated May 6, 2013. This letter was also posted on the Forest's website. Throughout the public scoping and comment period the Forest Service also circulated news releases for the project. From these combined outreach efforts, fourteen letters of comment were received.

The comments received from the public during scoping and responses to those comments can be found in Appendix 1 of the EA.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternatives to the Proposed Action are developed from key issues raised during the public involvement process. Issues identified during scoping included the Christmas tree area, dispersed camping, fuels reduction, transportation and wildlife. Those issues brought forward either did not meet the project purpose and need or could be addressed by the use of project design features and therefore, only the No Action and the Proposed Action alternatives were analyzed. Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail are described in the EA on page 12.

Under the No Action Alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No fuel reduction activities (mechanical and broadcast prescribed burning) to complement efforts on private lands would be implemented to accomplish the project purpose and need. Forest health would not be maintained and improved in stands affected by the current MPB epidemic. Timber products for beneficial uses and local economies would not be provided. Watershed and fisheries conditions would not be improved. Bighorn sheep habitat would not be enhanced through broadcast prescribed burning. Long-term recreational activities in the Christmas tree sale area would not be provided. The project area transportation network would not be managed for public access and forest resource management nor would unnecessary road segments be obliterated. The desired conditions for the Elkhorn area stated in the Forest Plan would not be accomplished for the project area. I did not select Alternative 1 because it does not meet the purpose and need of this project.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, review of public input, and the use of project design features, I have determined that the actions described in Alternative 2 will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. The effects to all resources of implementing Alternative 2 were disclosed in the EA and were determined to be local in context and short term in duration. In addition, implementation of project design features and best management practices as described in the EA on pages 26-36 will further reduce project impacts.

2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. One purpose of this project is to reduce hazardous fuels that could contribute to wildfire behavior that threatens private property and infrastructure. Treating these fuels minimizes the threat from wildfire to the safety of the public and to firefighters. Slash created from these fuel reduction treatments will be piled and burned when moisture conditions are adequate to prevent spread. Initiation of broadcast prescribed fire activities will only occur when weather conditions are favorable to help ensure control. Indicators include higher humidity and lower wind speeds and temperatures that maintain lower fire intensities. Short term impacts to air quality may result from prescribed fire; however, all burning operations will be conducted in compliance with standards prescribed by the Colorado Air Pollution Control Division (EA, pg. 26). The additional activities planned as part of this project including vegetation management, watershed improvement projects and transportation system modification, will not significantly threaten public health and safety.
3. There will be no effect to unique characteristics within the project area that would be significantly affected by treatment activities. The EA did not identify the presence of any park lands, prime farmlands, or ecologically critical areas within the project area. The broadcast prescribed burn will occur within the Green Ridge Roadless Area. Activities associated with implementation of the broadcast burning are consistent with the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule. Prescribed burning is not prohibited by the rule, and tree-cutting necessary for fire line construction would be allowed under §294.42 (c)(5). Tree-cutting, sale, or removal is incidental to the implementation of a management activity not otherwise prohibited by this subpart.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Controversy, in this context, refers to opposing scientific opinions, not public opposition to a project. The treatments planned as part of this project are commonly implemented types of activities on public lands.
5. The Forest Service has considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The analysis of the expected effects on all affected resources is disclosed in the EA. No unknown or unique risks were identified in the EA. The environmental effects and associated risks of the types of treatments analyzed in the EA have been documented in many studies and post treatment monitoring has not disclosed adverse effects.
6. The implementation of this project would not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed action and other alternatives would not be a major departure from the types of activities common to the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests. Additionally, decisions made in regards to activities within this project area would not commit the Forest Service to actions on lands outside this project area.
7. From analysis completed by all resource specialists, the effects of implementing Alternative 2 do not individually, nor when considered with other past, present or reasonably foreseeable future actions near the project area, reach a level of significance (EA, Chapter 3). Treatments will only occur where appropriate, and their impacts will be reduced by project design features. For these reasons, I have determined the cumulative impacts of the project will not have a significant effect.
8. Prior to this project proposal, the majority of the project area had not been surveyed for cultural resources. To date, a total of 705 acres have been inventoried for cultural resources in the

Elkhorn area. Thirteen cultural resources were recorded within the proposed vegetation units including six isolated find and seven sites. All were assessed as 'not eligible' or 'unevaluated' for the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, Class II sample surveys will be conducted when exact treatment unit boundaries have been determined (EA, pgs. 27-28). If additional sites are found during the survey, they will be evaluated for significance and appropriate site protection measures will be applied in consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office. If previously undiscovered sites are found during implementation, project activities will cease until the site can be evaluated by an archeologist and appropriate site protection measures applied. Based on this information, I have determined the action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

9. As required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), analysis of the project area was completed to determine effects to species and the results of these analyses are summarized in the EA in the wildlife, fisheries and botany sections. Designated critical habitat for both Canada lynx and Preble's mouse, two threatened species, is present within the analysis area. Project design criteria will be implemented to minimize the potential for habitat impacts or the chance of direct impacts to these wildlife species (see EA pg. 34-36). Because of these restrictions, the Forest Service Wildlife Biologist made a determination that this project "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" Preble's meadow jumping mouse and Canada lynx but cause "no effect to critical habitat" for both species. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was consulted with prior to this decision. On June 6, 2014, the FWS issued a Biological Opinion concurring with the Forest Service determination.
10. The activities of this project will not violate applicable federal, state, or local laws enacted for the protection of the environment. The decision to implement Alternative 2 is consistent with the goals and objectives as stated in the 1997 Revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland (Forest Plan). In addition, Alternative 2 meets the requirements of the recently adopted Objection Process (36 CFR 218) (2013), the Clean Air Act (1990), the Clean Water Act (1972), the National Forest Management Act (1976), the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

Irreversible Resource Commitments and Irrecoverable Losses (General) - The physical and biological effects are limited to the project area and/or immediate adjacent areas. There are no known significantly irreversible resource commitments or any significant irretrievable losses of vegetation resources, wildlife habitats, soil productivity, water quality, or other renewable resources.

Environmental Justice - In accordance with Executive Order 12898, I have determined this project will not have a disproportionately adverse health or environmental effect on low income or minority populations (see EA Socio-Economic section).

Effects on Floodplains and Wetlands - There are floodplains and wetlands within the project area. These areas will not experience any significant adverse effects from management activities (see Watershed/Soil/Fisheries section in the EA). The floodplains within the project area will not receive measurable impact by upstream influences. Management activities designed to protect these resources conform to the federal regulations for floodplains (Executive Order 11988) and wetlands (Executive Order 11990).

Objection Process, 36 CFR 218 – The Elkhorn EA was planned under the newly adopted Objection Process (2013) and was made available for a 45-day objection-filing period. The Objection Period for this project ended on May 5, 2014. No objections were received.

Invasive Species Executive Order 13112 of February 3, 1999 - Land actions that disturb the ground have the potential to contribute to the spread of noxious weeds and other non-native plants. The project will incorporate integrated weed management measures under the Forest’s Noxious Weed Management Plan. The analysis conducted in the Environmental Assessment for the Noxious Weed Management Plan determined noxious weed control actions are consistent with laws and regulations applicable to the management of National Forest System lands and resources. Part of the purpose and need of this project is to lower existing fuel loads to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. With the risk of wildfire comes the potential of large-scale spread of invasive species over a greater area. Compared with this potential, the benefits of the project outweigh the potential harm of invasive species (EA, p. xxx).

Implementation Date

Implementation of this decision can occur five business days from the end of the objection-filing period.

Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to appeal as it was planned under the Objection Process (36 CFR 218).

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Nehalem Clark, Environmental Planner, Canyon Lakes Ranger District, 2150 Centre Ave. Bldg E, Fort Collins, CO 80526, (970) 295-6617, or ncclark@fs.fed.us.

/s/ Kevin W. Atchley

June 9, 2010

Kevin W. Atchley
District Ranger
Responsible Official
Canyon Lakes Ranger District

Date

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