



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Dear Interested Party:

Thank you for your comments and suggestions concerning the Murphy Complex fires. We received many important comments in the aftermath of these catastrophic fires. The complex burned a total of 593,549 acres and had a perimeter of 295 miles. While responding to new fires remains our highest priority, the Jarbidge Field Office, Twin Falls District, and Idaho State Office are working on several coordinated plans, reports and projects in response to the Murphy Complex fires.

Enclosed are the Decision Record and the Documentation of National Environmental Policy Act Adequacy (DNA) for the Murphy Complex Fire Emergency Stabilization and Burned Area Rehabilitation Plans. Both plans, totaling 80 pages, are available from our Office on request, or on the web at <http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/fo/jarbidge.html>.

We want to ensure the public and our partners understand the different policies, requirements and purposes of each post fire effort. We also want to ensure the valuable suggestions you provide are thoughtfully considered as part of the appropriate post fire effort. This letter and the attached summary table are designed to facilitate your continued involvement as we move forward with post fire management actions.

Our first step was to prepare an Emergency Stabilization Plan. Work on this plan began while the fire was still actively burning. The Field Office Resource Advisors assigned to the fire noted pre-burn vegetation, fire intensity, and fire effects while assisting with fire suppression activities. These field notes were then combined with existing natural resource data and reviewed by an interdisciplinary team of professional resource managers. In the case of the Murphy Complex, the interdisciplinary team included staff from the Idaho Departments of Fish and Game, Lands, and Agriculture. The interdisciplinary team carefully reviewed and incorporated input from permittees and interested publics on proposed treatment areas, seed mixes, watershed protection and the highest priority fence repair and temporary fence construction projects.

The Emergency Stabilization Plan covers the highest priority, emergency work which must be accomplished before winter begins. The same interdisciplinary team that prepared the Emergency Stabilization Plan concurrently prepared a Rehabilitation Plan. The Rehabilitation Plan covers longer term actions such as shrub seeding, interior fence repair, chemical treatments, spring and second-year seeding treatments, as well as weed treatments. The Rehabilitation Plan outlines comprehensive monitoring of post fire effects and treatments including cheat grass incursion, natural recovery and treatment success. The interdisciplinary team carefully considered and incorporated comments and suggestions on these subjects.

The process for preparation of both the Emergency Stabilization Plan and the Rehabilitation Plan are described in the programmatic “Normal Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment, August 2004” which is available on the web at http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/fo/bruneau/nepa_documents/nfrp.html.

Following the completion of Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plans, we will issue modified Grazing Agreements, modified Annual Grazing Plans, or Grazing Decisions for the 37 Allotments affected by the Murphy Complex fires. Generally, these management actions will close burned areas to grazing until monitoring indicates sustainable livestock use can resume.

In response to the diverse and multiple concerns expressed over grazing and fuels management prior to the fires, the Idaho State Director has formed the Murphy Complex Livestock/Fuels Working Group. This Working Group brings together knowledgeable managers and scientists from outside the BLM Twin Falls District to capture observations on the relationships between wildfire and livestock use before winter obscures the evidence. The Working Group has already begun compiling comments and conducting interviews and field investigations. They will produce a report for the State Director by the end of the calendar year.

We have received multiple suggestions and specific proposals for fuels and pre-suppression projects. While these proposals do not fit within the framework for Emergency Stabilization or Rehabilitation planning, they are critical for the protection of human life, private property, and natural resources. Over the winter, we will start National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis of several high priority projects proposed by our partners and publics. These include locations for “green strips,” the use of forage kochia and other fire resistant species in targeted plantings, creation of various types of fuel breaks in strategic locations, chemical vegetation control, mowing, cheat grass oriented restoration, sage-grouse oriented restoration projects, and cooperative projects on adjacent private and state lands. Prior to the Murphy Complex Fires, we intended to complete the District Court Ordered Jarbidge Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement before developing a large number of new fuels and pre-suppression projects. However, given the aftermath of these catastrophic fires, we believe that we must proceed with an immediate and aggressive program of fuels-related projects.

At this time, we still intend to complete the RMP on schedule. The scale and extent of the Murphy Fire must be incorporated into the RMP process, both in the description of the affected environment and in alternative management strategies. The Final RMP and Record of Decision will guide all vegetation and fire-related activities over the long term across the entire Field Office, including a revision of the Twin Falls District Fire Management Plan. Many of the comments we received, as well as the products of the Livestock/Fuels Working Group, will be incorporated into the Jarbidge RMP effort over the winter. It is possible that all of these factors may impact the RMP schedule. We will continue to work closely with the District Court and the parties to the Stipulated Settlement Agreement as we move forward.

All documents associated with these various efforts will be published and made available on the web at: blm.gov/id. We encourage and look forward to your continued involvement and interest.

Sincerely,

Rick Vander Voet
Field Manager

3 Enclosures:

- 1 – Murphy Complex Post Fire Response Table (2 pp)
- 2 – Decision for Murphy ES&R Plans (3 pp)
- 3 – DNA for Murphy ES&R Plans (14 pp)

Murphy Complex Post Fire Response

NAME OF EFFORT	PURPOSE	TIME FRAME	NEPA	TARGET DATE FOR APPROVAL
Emergency Stabilization Plan	Propose actions that are initiated within one year of a fire to stabilize and prevent unacceptable degradation of natural and cultural resources; minimize threats to life or property, and repair/replace/construct improvements necessary to prevent degradation of land or resources.	21 Days from Fire Containment	Documentation of NEPA Adequacy Tiered to Normal Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment	8/28/07 By District Manager
Rehabilitation Plan	Propose actions that take place up to three years after the fire to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management-approved condition, and repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire.	As Soon as Possible Post-fire, but No Later than Mid-September	Documentation of NEPA Adequacy Tiered to Normal Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment	9/04/07 By District Manager
Murphy Complex Livestock/Fuels Workgroup	Produce a report that covers: 1. Observations and recommendations regarding the effects of existing vegetation and livestock management on fire behavior. 2. Recommendations for research on the use of livestock to reduce fuels. 3. Discussions of potential application of findings to other wildfires in other areas.	8/27/07 – 12/31/07	Not Subject to NEPA	Not Applicable

NAME OF EFFORT	PURPOSE	TIME FRAME	NEPA	TARGET DATE FOR APPROVAL
Fuels and Pre-Suppression Projects	Develop projects that reduce hazardous fuels, create fuel breaks, provide protection to high value resources and private property in the Wildland Urban Interface, and create defensible positions for fire suppression activities.	Individual Projects Proposed as part of Annual Work Plan	Usually an Environmental Assessment, Some Projects Are Categorically Excluded	Varies by individual project, usually early in the calendar year, by Field Office Manager
Jarbidge Resource Management Plan	Provide long term direction for coordinated resource management across the entire Field Office.	Four Years Beginning September, 2005	Environmental Impact Statement	September, 2009, by State Director
Twin Falls District Fire Management Plan	Identify resource values and conditions pertaining to wildland fire management. Recommends strategies for fire suppression, non-fire fuels treatment, emergency stabilization and rehabilitation and community assistance/protection.	Current Version Approved September, 2005, Updated Annually	Not Subject to NEPA	Next full scale revision scheduled for Fiscal Year 2010, by State Director