

Dear Interested Party:

The Cottonwood Field Office is reinitiating a proposal known as the Whiskey South II Project. The project is a fuels and vegetation management proposal in the Elk City Township.

The purpose of this letter is to initiate informal scoping to determine if additional information or issues have emerged over the last several years since the proposal was placed on hold. Issues that were identified during scoping and project development for the original Whiskey South project or the Whiskey South II proposal in 2005 will be carried forward as part of the administrative record and considered in this environmental analysis.

Formal scoping will be initiated upon publication of the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the Federal Register. Local news releases will be published announcing the formal scoping period.

Project History

The original Whiskey South stewardship project was underway when it was enjoined by the Federal District Court for the district of Idaho pending compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

On April 29, 2005, District magistrate judge Mikel Williams remanded the Whiskey South Environmental Assessment (EA) and placed a permanent injunction on the Whiskey South Stewardship Contract (Case No. CV 04-447-S-MHW) for failure to complete a sufficiently detailed analysis of the cumulative impact. A portion of the Whiskey South restoration work (culvert replacement and some road surfacing), about 27% of road construction, and about 15% of the timber harvest were completed prior to the permanent injunction. The completed work therefore becomes part of the existing situation and will be considered in the development of alternatives and cumulative impacts for the Whiskey South II proposal.

On August 24, 2005, the scoping letter for the Whiskey South II proposal was mailed to known interested groups and individuals. Since that time, circumstances have prevented the Cottonwood Field Office from completing the analysis and the project was placed on hold.

Since completion of the original Whiskey South EA, the Forest Service has implemented its American and Crooked River project, and a completed a Final EIS for its Red Pines project. The BLM is currently in the process of issuing a decision for the Eastside Township Fuels and Vegetation Project (EIS). In addition, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality has adopted Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) standards for the South Fork Clearwater River. This information will be incorporated into the environmental analysis of the Whiskey South II proposal.

Purpose and Need for the Project

The Chief Joseph Management Framework Plan (MFP) provides direction for the management of the project area. The desired future condition for the area was determined from the MFP and the Draft Cottonwood Resource Management Plan. The purpose and need for this project was determined after comparing the desired future condition and the existing condition of the project area. The existing condition was determined using field data. The purpose of the Whiskey South II project is to reduce existing and potential fuel loads to reduce the potential of high-intensity large-scale wildfire, improve the safety and effectiveness of firefighters in fire suppression activities, contribute to the economic and social well being of residents and visitors within proximity to the project area, maintain and improve water quality and fish habitat, and improve wildlife habitat and forage opportunities. The proposed project is located within a Wildland Urban Interface.

Specifically, this project is needed to:

Remove dead and dying trees, which contribute to existing and future fuel loads.

Manage forest stands to meet desired conditions of size class and species distributions by removing dead and live trees.

Reduce the level of ladder fuels and other flammable materials that would produce crown fires.

Reduce the risk of high intensity fires in areas important for public safety or cultural or environmental values.

Maintain existing fire resistant tree species in areas where understory trees are encroaching due to fire exclusion.

Improve quantity and quality of elk winter range by reducing conifer encroachment and stimulating browse species through the application of prescribed fire; and

Improve aquatic resource conditions through various restoration activities such as placing rock on roads adjacent to live water crossings and road decommissioning.

The various proposed treatments are identified on the enclosed map and in the table below. The proposed action is to conduct vegetation management through timber harvest on about 710 acres using cable, tractor and helicopter yarding methods. Slash disposal will be accomplished through piling, burning, or utilization. Pre-commercial thinning (no timber harvest), followed by prescribed burning, would be conducted on about 9 acres. Riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs) adjacent to the South Fork Clearwater River and Crooked River would be treated only by burning; no timber harvest or pre-commercial thinning would occur.

	Proposed Activity–Vegetation/Fuels	Proposed
Acres of Treatment	Tractor Yard/Excavator Pile or Biomass Utilization	321
	Tractor Yard/Burn	22
	Cable Yard/Burn	128
	Cable Yard/Hand Pile	8
	Helicopter Yard/Burn	231
	Precommercial Thin/Burn	9
	Burn Treatment Only	65
	Total Acres Treated	784

Temporary road construction (miles)	2.2
Miles of New Permanent Road	0.4
Proposed Activity–Restoration	Proposed
Miles of decommissioned roads	5.1
Miles of road closure	3.5
Miles of Road Upgrade	4.2

The project would include temporary and new road construction. The new road would be behind a locked gate, and public motorized use would be restricted.

Restoration activities are centered on transportation modifications. Approximately 5.1 miles of existing roads would be decommissioned, and another 3.5 miles would be closed to yearlong travel. Road upgrade, graveling and improving drainage would occur on 4.2 miles of existing road.

Enclosed you will find:

1. Map of the Proposed Project Area; and
2. A Comment form.

Please review the enclosed information and use the comment form to suggest additional information and/or alternatives that may need to be considered during the development of this proposal. The most useful comments will be those pertaining to issues and alternatives relevant to the proposed project area, resources, and the stated purpose and need for the project. Any previously submitted comments that are on record will be considered in this analysis however due to the length of time since the previous scoping periods and change in staffing, we encourage you to resubmit your comments at this time.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Please mail your written comments to our office, or submit comments via email to cynthia_weston@blm.gov. Please put “Whiskey South II” in the subject line. To receive full consideration, comments must be submitted by the end of the formal scoping period, which will be announced in local newspapers and on the BLM website. If you have received this scoping letter a postcard will be sent to notify you of the dates of the formal scoping period. For additional information on the Whiskey South II proposal, please contact Robbin Boyce (208-962-3793) or me (208-962-3245)

Sincerely,

Stephanie Connolly
Field Manager

2 Enclosures

**** COMMENT FORM**

NAME:

ADDRESS:

The following are comments on the Whiskey-South II Proposed Action
(Please attach additional sheets if desired):

Management Opportunities:

Key Issues:

Alternatives to Consider:

Additional Comments:

_____ I have no comment at this time, but please keep my name on your mailing list for this project.

_____ I would like to contribute to alternative formation

_____ I would like to receive a copy of the EA when completed