

September 3, 2008

EXEMPTION AREA WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE PROJECT

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

The South Dakota Field Office is addressing hazardous fuels buildup in the wildland-urban interface in the Exemption Area near Lead and Deadwood in southwestern South Dakota.

ISSUES:

The Exemption Area, in the northern Black Hills in South Dakota, consists of 22,530 acres that were exempted from the Black Hills National Forest due to the complex mineral survey and public land configuration. The BLM administers federal lands (5,220 acres) within the Exemption Area. The rest of the area is private land.

Within the Exemption Area of the Black Hills are several “communities at risk” including Lead, Deadwood, Central City, Pluma, and Englewood, as well as numerous rural subdivisions. There are 2,675 acres of BLM-administered forested lands within half a mile of these communities.

In 2003, the Wildland-Urban Interface Plan was completed. Implementation began by treating the Fire Containment Zones – treatment buffers along existing roads or trails that would provide safe access for fire crews – and decreasing standing dead trees in the Grizzly Gulch fire area within half a mile of Deadwood.

Commercial and non-commercial treatments will continue throughout this area to decrease the fuel loading. An additional issue is increased mountain pine beetle infestations related to the close proximity of the Exemption Area to the Beaver Park area on the Black Hills National Forest.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

Pre-commercial and commercial timber removal began in 2005 around the community of Englewood. This project uses a stewardship contract to remove the commercial timber, followed up by the removal of products other than logs and slash.

Since 2005, we have used mechanical treatments on 1,785 acres within this wildland-urban interface area. In FY07, 90 acres near the Deer Mountain ski area and associated residences were treated using a stewardship contract; this included some biomass removal for ethanol production. Areas between Englewood and Lead are being marked for stewardship contracting from FY2008 through FY2010.

The first round of treatments in each unit of the Exemption Area should be completed by the end of 2010 with follow-up treatments of prescribed fire and other non-commercial means the following years. The first round of burning is planned for the spring of 2009 in an area adjacent to Lead where the timber was harvested in 2002.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

The planning process as well as the implementation is a collaborative effort among the BLM, Forest Service, South Dakota Division of Forestry, South Dakota Division of Wildland Fire Suppression, Lead and Deadwood city fire departments, Lawrence County Fire Board, and private landowners.

CONTACTS:

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