

August 26, 2009

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 (WUI) in the Exemption Area near Lead and Deadwood in northwestern 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 is private land.

Within the Exemption Area 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 removing 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 Exemption Area’s proximity 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 used a stewardship contract to remove the commercial timber, followed by the removal of products other than logs and slash.

Since 2005, we have used mechanical treatments on 2,043 acres and completed 1,431 acres of machine and hand pile burning within this wildland-urban interface area. We have also completed mechanical treatments on an additional 301 acres that were identified as wildland-urban interface areas by the Lawrence County Community Wildfire Protection Plan adopted in 2009.

In FY09, 106 acres adjacent to the Wilderness Estates Subdivision near Englewood was treated using a stewardship contract. An additional 106 acres in FY 2010 will be completed in this same area using stewardship contracting. An area adjacent to the Jay Bird Subdivision is being planned and marked for treatment in 2011. This area was identified as a WUI priority area in the Lawrence County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The first round of treatments in each unit of the Exemption Area should be completed by the end of 2015 with follow-up treatments of prescribed fire and other non-commercial means the following years. The first round of burning is planned for the fall 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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