



**United States Department of the Interior**  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Wyoming State Office  
P.O. Box 1828  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82003-1828



In Reply Refer To:  
5000 (930) P  
9214

December 14, 2007

Instruction Memorandum No. WY-2008-013  
Expires 9/30/2009

To: Field Managers  
Attn: Zone Foresters and Zone FMOs  
From: Associate State Director  
Subject: Wyoming Forestry Direction

**Program Area:** Public Domain Forestry

**Purpose:** This Instruction Memorandum (IM) re-issues WY IM 2006-045 with some modifications. Modifications from the original are highlighted in bold, italicized font. This IM establishes direction for the Wyoming Bureau of Land Management (BLM) public domain forestry program. The IM integrates current Departmental and Bureau direction with ecological objectives for the management of forested lands. The desired future outcome is to have a fully integrated forestry and fuels program addressing forest health and fuels management on a landscape basis with a concentration on restoration of forests and woodlands on BLM lands throughout the state.

**Background:** The importance of Wyoming BLM public domain forests cannot be overstated. Many of these forests are “transitional” forests between the sagebrush/grass steppe and higher elevation forests. These forests serve as:

- Critical wildlife habitat
- Are important habitat links and migration corridors
- Serve as forest expansion zones
- Are significant socio-economic contributors to the local communities

The forestry program is a long standing program. The fuels program in its current form was initiated in 2000 as an outgrowth of the fires that year and the development of the National Fire Plan. These two programs continued to function independently until national direction established fuels funded forester positions in 2003. Since then the Bureau direction has evolved to emphasize combining these programs under a single program of work with similar objectives. There are four primary objectives that are shared between the programs:

1. Reducing fuels around communities to lessen the potential for a catastrophic wildfire to impact these communities.
2. Salvaging dead and dying timber, focusing on areas with hazardous fuels, considering wildlife habitats, watershed health and forest management concerns.
3. Restoring the forest landscape to its pre-suppression structure, composition, function, and

processes as resilient fire adapted ecosystems where possible.

4. Providing economic activities for local communities.

These objectives are compatible and by working in concert, efficiencies can be gained. More areas in critical need can be treated to accomplish the goals of both programs. These emphasis items are supported by the goals of the 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan:

1. Improve Prevention and Suppression
2. Reduce Hazardous Fuels
3. Restore Fire Adapted Ecosystems
4. Promote Community Assistance

These goals are directly related to forestry and fuels. The 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plans detail the roles and responsibilities for the Bureau and partners to accomplish the goals.

**Policy/Action:** The forestry program will be driven primarily by ecological objectives while promoting economic and social benefit. The ultimate goal is to restore, as much as feasible, the pre-suppression forest and woodland structure, composition, function, and processes on lands managed by the Wyoming BLM to maximize the ecosystem's resilience to the natural disturbance regimes. Full ecological restoration will not be achieved if the projects and approaches undertaken do not restore the natural fire regime.

In order to do this, the existing forest structure should be utilized. Restoration efforts must utilize existing forest structure. Maximizing the use of existing forest structure can restore historic forest structure conditions more rapidly than trying to immediately replicate pre-suppression tree positions. The underlying processes of natural tree regeneration and mortality need to be accounted for in restoration design.

The restoration of the forests and woodlands also require re-establishing the forest understory of herbaceous plants, shrubs, snags, and dead and down materials. The forest understory is critical in wildlife habitat, tree re-generation patterns, biodiversity, and watershed function. All of these are critical elements in the ecosystem and are critical elements in proper soil microorganism functions.

Old and large trees should be preserved while maintaining the structural diversity and resilience of the forest/woodland stands. These old trees, especially those established pre-suppression, are important forest components and are critical to the functionality of ecosystem. Emphasis needs to be placed on managing the forests and woodlands to preserve the largest and oldest trees on a landscape basis and focusing treatments on the high numbers of small diameter young trees. Spatial variability within the landscape includes not only the retention of old growth trees, but also the appropriate age class distributions of all trees. Trees exhibiting old growth morphology should generally be kept regardless of size or form to provide visual and genetic diversity, unless:

1. They are contributing to an insect or disease outbreak,
2. Their removal is needed to meet the restoration goals of reducing basal area *to reference conditions from Fire Regime and Condition Class (FRCC)*, or
3. To insure the proper mix of different age cohorts within the stand.

***With the above direction maintain and restore ecological integrity: silvicultural prescriptions need to be adapted. Silvicultural prescriptions in ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and other xeric forest conifer types with low or mixed severity fire regimes should emphasize uneven aged single tree/group selection and patch dynamics. Even aged management silvicultural***

*prescriptions such as clearcutting and seed tree, or two aged systems with seed trees or clearcutting with reserves may be most appropriate in lodgepole pine, aspen, spruce and subalpine fir stands that historically exhibited even aged stand characteristics under pre-suppression forest disturbance patterns. Juniper and limber pine woodlands should be managed using Stand Density Index (SDI) and reference conditions to replicate historic composition.*

Restoring the ecosystem requires both the restoration of process and structure. Natural disturbance processes including wildland fire, droughts, and insect infestations are the natural shapers of forests and woodlands. Fire regimes and stand structure are interrelated. Mechanical treatments alone will not re-establish the natural disturbance regime. In altered stands though, mechanical treatments may well be needed as a precursor to re-establishing the pre-suppression structure and process.

The forests and woodlands managed by the Wyoming BLM must be managed to restore the historic tree species composition and structure. Fire suppression and other management activities have allowed fire sensitive and shade tolerant species to become more prevalent. Landscapes need to be managed for composition, structure, and function that approximate the natural (historic) range of variability, *based on reference conditions*.

**Priorities:** The following forest/woodland systems are the priorities for forestry work in Wyoming BLM.

1. **Forest Health.** Insects and disease have always been part of the natural disturbance regime of the ecosystem. Past management practices, as well as climatic factors, have allowed the insects and disease to expand from an endemic, naturally occurring population and distribution to a more widespread phenomenon. Stands that are significantly impacted by insects and disease need to be aggressively managed. By returning these stands to pre-suppression structure and composition, forest health will be improved and the risk to disease and insect infestations will be reduced to more endemic levels. It must be realized though, that there will always be outbreaks of insect and disease as they are a natural part of the disturbance regime of the forests.
2. **Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).** Reducing fuels in the WUI is a mandated Congressional and Departmental priority. While good silvicultural practices need to be followed as much as possible, the primary emphasis in the WUI is to reduce fuel loadings and change the structure and composition of the forests and woodlands to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to a community.
3. **Old Growth Forests.** The Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) provides the framework for the development in resource Management Plans (RMP) of clear direction to manage old growth stands. Projects in old growth stands must “. . . fully maintain, or contribute toward the restoration of the structure and composition of old growth stands according to pre-suppression old growth conditions characteristic of the forest type, . . .”
4. **Aspen Stands.** Aspen stands provide critical habitat for multiple wildlife species, watershed protection, and visual resource management. Many aspen stands on public lands are in a state of decline and are on the outside ranges of the historic range of variability. They are being encroached on by conifers and at lower elevations by sagebrush. Rejuvenating these stands through conifer harvesting and prescribed fire will not only improve the overall health of the land, but healthy aspen stands also serve as nature’s fuel breaks, reducing the potential for catastrophic fire in the forests and enabling wildland fire to play its role in the ecosystem. Harvesting of mature to over-mature aspen within a pure aspen stand may also be needed to generate you aspen reproduction and preserve clonal health through periodic aspen tree replacement.
5. **Ponderosa Pine.** Past management practices have allowed some of the ponderosa pine stands in Wyoming to become even-aged, overstocked, and prone to disease and stand replacement fires. The commonly accepted southwestern United States model for ponderosa pine does not necessarily apply to ponderosa pine stands in Wyoming. Recent

research in the front range of Colorado suggests a much more varied fire regime ranging from the commonly accepted frequent understory non-lethal fires to a mixed severity fire regime occurring over much longer fire return intervals.

6. **Juniper and Limber Pine Woodlands.** These woodlands have been an important part of the lower elevation ecosystem, providing wildlife habitat and thermal cover as well as watershed protection. However past management practices *in some areas* have allowed these woodlands to expand into the alluvial fans and deeper soils replacing the sagebrush/grass vegetation. Important management objectives for these woodlands are to:
  - a . Restoration to their natural position on the landscape,
  - b . Insure the wildlife cover is adequately maintained,
  - c. *Maintain their productivity*, and
  - d. Provide forest products as possible from these stands

**Planning and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):** There have been several significant changes in the planning processes since 2002. Bureau direction is to use the four processes listed below for all hazardous fuels and forest health projects, unless there are mitigating issues such as the presence of threatened and endangered species.

1. **Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI) Categorical Exclusions:** HFI has given the Bureau authority to use categorical exclusions on mechanical projects of less than 1,000 acres and prescribed fires of less than 4,500 acres if Hazardous Fuels is the primary reason for the proposed action. This direction excludes chemical treatments, lands in wilderness or wilderness study areas, and any project with road construction. This authority may include the sale of vegetative material if the primary purpose is hazardous fuels reduction.
2. **Streamlined Environmental Assessment (EA):** In 2002 the Council on Environmental Quality issued new guidance on the EA process for forest health projects. This streamlines the EA process and limits EA length to 10-15 pages.
3. **Healthy Forest restoration Act (HFRA) EA:** HFRA establishes procedures to be used for the EA/EIS process for projects identified in Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP).
4. ***Categorical Exclusions for Forestry: The new categorical exclusions were published in the Federal Register, Vol. 72, No. 156. The direction for the use of these new categorical exclusions is found in WO Instruction Memo 2007-208.***

Fire Regime and Condition Class will be used as part of the prioritization and project development/justification process for all forestry projects. Congress has mandated that most of our efforts be concentrated in Fire Regimes I, II, and III and Condition Classes 2 and 3.

The Wyden amendments to the Appropriation Legislation of 1977 and 1999 give the forestry and fuels programs the authority to work across ownership boundaries and include private lands within BLM projects.

Stewardship contracting continues to be an emphasis item for the Department and Bureau. Stewardship projects receive high priority in the funding process for both sub-activities. ***The 5900 Forest Ecosystems Health and Recovery Fund (FEHRF) cannot be used to fund stewardship projects.***

No forestry project with a fuels objective will be submitted for funding without coordination and input from the Field Office and/or Zone Fuels Specialists. No fuels project involving forests or woodlands will be submitted without coordination and input from the Zone forester. ***All fuels related projects occurring in the forests or woodlands will include a silvicultural prescription written by the Zone forester.***

**Administrative:** The following administrative guidelines will be adhered to:

1. **Project Number.** All forestry projects will be issued a fuels project number. In cases where forestry and fuels are co-funding a project, the same project number will be used for all aspects of the project.
2. **Program of Work.** Forestry and fuels will have a common program of work. As of this time all forestry projects with a primary or secondary objective for modifying fuels will be entered into the Non-NFP module of National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System (NFPORS). It is the forester's responsibility to insure that forestry projects meeting the above criteria are coordinated with the Field Office fuels specialist for input and reporting requirements. A common out-year (5 year) planning tool for fuels and forestry is still being developed and will be instituted when ready. The same requirements will apply for this planning tool.
3. **Project Data Entry.** Projects submitted for funding from the 1030, 5900 and 9620 sub-activities will continue to be submitted through the BPS system, and entered into NFPORS as appropriate. Fuels projects will continue to be submitted through the Hazardous Fuels Module of NFPORS. *Stewardship projects, no matter what their funding, will use Stewardship Contracting Information Database as the primary reporting tool.*

**Timeframe:** Effective upon issuance

**Budget Impact:** There are no anticipated budget impacts.

**Coordination:** This IM was coordinated with the Zone Foresters, Zone Fire Management Officers, WO-270 (Forestry), FA-600 (Resource and Planning), and WY 931 (Fire and Aviation).

**Contact:** If you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact Bob Means, Wyoming BLM forestry program Manager, at (307) 775-6287.

/s/James K. Murkin