

**Categorical Exclusion Determination and Decision Record**  
**FUEL HAZARD REDUCTION IN THE WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE**  
**Sykes Creek Fuels**

**DOI-BLM-OR-M050-2009-0016-CX**

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**Description of Proposed Action**

The Butte Falls Resource Area of the Medford District BLM (Bureau of Land Management) proposes to reduce the vertical continuity of hazardous fuels (ladder fuels), which allows fire to carry from the surface fuels into the crowns of trees and shrubs, while retaining diverse species composition. All work would be completed manually by understory thinning, handpiling and burning, or chipping or removing slash with follow-up underburning for maintaining treatment areas.

The objective is to decrease the likelihood of high intensity fire behavior which can potentially damage natural resources, private land, and homes, and threaten the safety of individuals and firefighters. The project would lessen the potential damage from a wildfire initiated within or adjacent to the project areas, and would increase tactical opportunities for firefighters to limit fire spread and damage to residential homes during a wildfire event. This action would begin in fiscal year 2009.

**Understory Thinning**

Thinning the understory vegetation would reduce the vertical continuity or the ladder fuel component which contributes to the initiation of higher intensity fires and the movement of a surface fire up into the crowns of overstory canopy. Vegetation proposed to be removed includes noncommercial (less than 8 inches diameter at breast height [dbh]) conifer trees, hardwoods, and shrubs.

Understory vegetation thinning would be accomplished manually. All conifers and hardwoods greater than 8 inches dbh would be reserved. Sugar pine, silk tassel, ninebark, hazel, mountain mahogany, and riparian species (e.g., maple, alder, willow, ash, and yew wood) would be reserved.

**Proposed treatment prescription:**

1. Cut conifers and hardwoods more than 1 foot tall and less than 8 inches dbh, to a 25-foot by 25-foot spacing.
2. Cut shrub species more than 1 foot tall and less than 12 inches in diameter at 1 foot above ground level, to 45-foot by 45-foot spacing.
3. Prune 6- to 14-inch dbh conifers up to 10 feet above ground level.
4. Handpile and Pile Burn - Slashed material 1 to 8 inches in diameter and greater than 2 feet in length would be hand piled, covered, and burned. Burning would be conducted after significant precipitation has occurred to limit creeping between piles and to

minimize the potential of escape and damage to residual stands. Hand pile burning would start after October 15 and continue to April 1.

5. Maintenance Thinning and Underburning - Maintenance thinning by hand or fire would occur 5 to 8 years following the initial treatments. Treatment could include cutting hardwood and shrub species sprouts greater than 18 inches high and less than 2 inches in diameter to the 2 most dominate stems. Follow-up underburning would occur in the spring or fall.

**Location of Proposed Action**

The project area is located on BLM-administered lands, approximately 167 acres of timber and brushlands adjacent to National Fire Plan projects on private land currently being treated to reduce hazardous fuels (See Table 1 for locations). The project would occur in the Evans Creek fifth field watershed.

**Table 1: Project Location and Acres**

Unit Number	Legal	Acres
Sykes Creek 1-1	T35S R4W Sec. 1	121
Sykes Creek 25-1	T34S R4W Sec. 25	46

This work has been coordinated with private land owners and the Seven Basins Watershed Council. This project is a collaborative effort between Medford BLM, Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), and residents of Sykes Creek Road in an effort to improve community awareness of wildfire issues and to reduce fire and safety risks to individuals, local communities, and wildland firefighters.

**Plan Conformance Review**

The Bureau of Land Management did not scope this proposal and the public was not involved in its development. This proposal is consistent with policy directed by the following:

- *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revision of the Resource Management Plans of the Western Oregon Bureau of Land Management and Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan for Medford District* (EIS, 2008 and ROD/RMP, 2008);
- *Record of Decision To Remove the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines from the Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plans Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (USDI 2007); and
- *Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan Environmental Assessment* (1998) and tiered to the *Final-Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program Environmental Impact Statement* (EIS, 1985).

The proposed action is in conformance with the direction given for the management of public lands in the Medford District by the Oregon and California Lands Act of 1937, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, Endangered Species Act of 1973, Clean Water Act of 1987, Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 (as amended 1986 and 1996), Clean Air Act of 1990 (as amended), and Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

This proposal is consistent with management direction in the Medford District Resource Management Plan that directs the BLM to “Apply fuels treatment to stands of any age in order to reduce the fuel hazards. Fuel treatments will include such activities as tree cutting and removal, brush cutting, pruning, reducing crown bulk density (except in Deferred Timber Management Area), treating of activity fuels, biomass removal, and prescribed burning” (USDI 2008, p. 46).

### **Project Design Features (PDF)**

Project Design Features are included in this project to reduce potential impacts to natural resources and to ensure the proposed vegetation and fuel reduction treatments are consistent with resource management objectives.

### **Riparian Management Area**

- To ensure existing shade levels along streams are maintained, vegetation treatment will not occur within 60 feet of fish-bearing and perennial streams and within 35 feet of intermittent streams.
- Hand piles will not be placed or burned within 60 feet of fish-bearing and perennial streams and within 35 feet of intermittent streams. Piles will not be placed in channel bottoms.
- Fuels will not be treated within inner gorge slopes 35 percent or greater along all streams.
- Allow low intensity underburns to back into riparian management areas; however, no ignition will occur within riparian management areas.
- Limit firelines inside riparian management areas. Construct firelines by hand.

### **Wildlife and Botanical**

- Special status species wildlife sites will be buffered according to the management recommendations for that species in effect at the time of treatment. Buffer size and strategy will be dependent on site-specific conditions, proposed treatments and species involved. Fuels treatment could take place within these buffers if the species or specific habitat characteristics are not adversely impacted.
- Special status plant sites will be buffered according to management recommendations for that species in effect at the time of treatment. Buffer sizes will be dependent on site-specific conditions, proposed treatments, and species involved. With the approval of the resource area botanist, understory burning may occur through some vascular plant sites during plant dormancy.

### **Cultural Resources**

- Site-specific protection and mitigating measures will be implemented to preserve the integrity of all existing and discovered cultural and national historic sites and will be completed in consultation with a BLM cultural specialist.

## Vegetation/Fuel Treatment

- Motorized vehicles and equipment must stay on existing roads and trails.
- Maintain and refuel equipment (e.g., drip torches, chainsaws) a minimum of 100 feet from waterbodies, floodplains, and wetlands. Portable pumps can be refueled on-site within a spill containment system.

## Manual Treatments

- Leave approximately 10 percent of each unit untreated. This will include untreated riparian buffers and special status plant and wildlife buffers.

## Prescribed Burning

- All prescribed burn units would have an approved prescribed fire plan prior to ignition and in compliance with *Prescribed Fire Handbook H-9214-1* (IM No. OF&A 2002-027). The prescribed burn plan would contain measurable objectives, a predetermined prescription, and contingency plan to be implemented in the event of an escape.
- To prevent fire escapes and to minimize damage to residual vegetation/trees, burning conditions will be monitored closely.
- Prescribed burning will comply with Oregon Department of Forestry's Smoke Management Plan. Smoke emission control could also include conducting mop-up as soon as possible after ignition is complete, and covering hand piles to permit burning during the rainy season.

## Categorical Exclusion Determination

This proposed action qualifies as a categorical exclusion as provided in United States Department of the Interior Departmental Manual 516 DM 11.9, D(10) which allows for the following:

*Vegetation management activities, such as seeding, planting, invasive plant removal, installation of erosion control devices (e.g., mats/straw/chips), and mechanical treatments, such as crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, mowing, and prescribed fire when the activity is necessary for the management of vegetation on public lands. Such activities:*

- a. Shall not exceed 4,500 acres per prescribed fire project and 1,000 acres for other vegetation management projects;*
- b. Shall not be conducted in Wilderness areas or Wilderness Study Areas;*
- c. Shall not include the use of herbicides, pesticides, biological treatments or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure;*
- d. May include temporary roads which are defined as roads authorized by contract, permit, lease, other written authorization, or emergency operation not intended to be part of the BLM transportation system and not necessary for long-term resource management.*

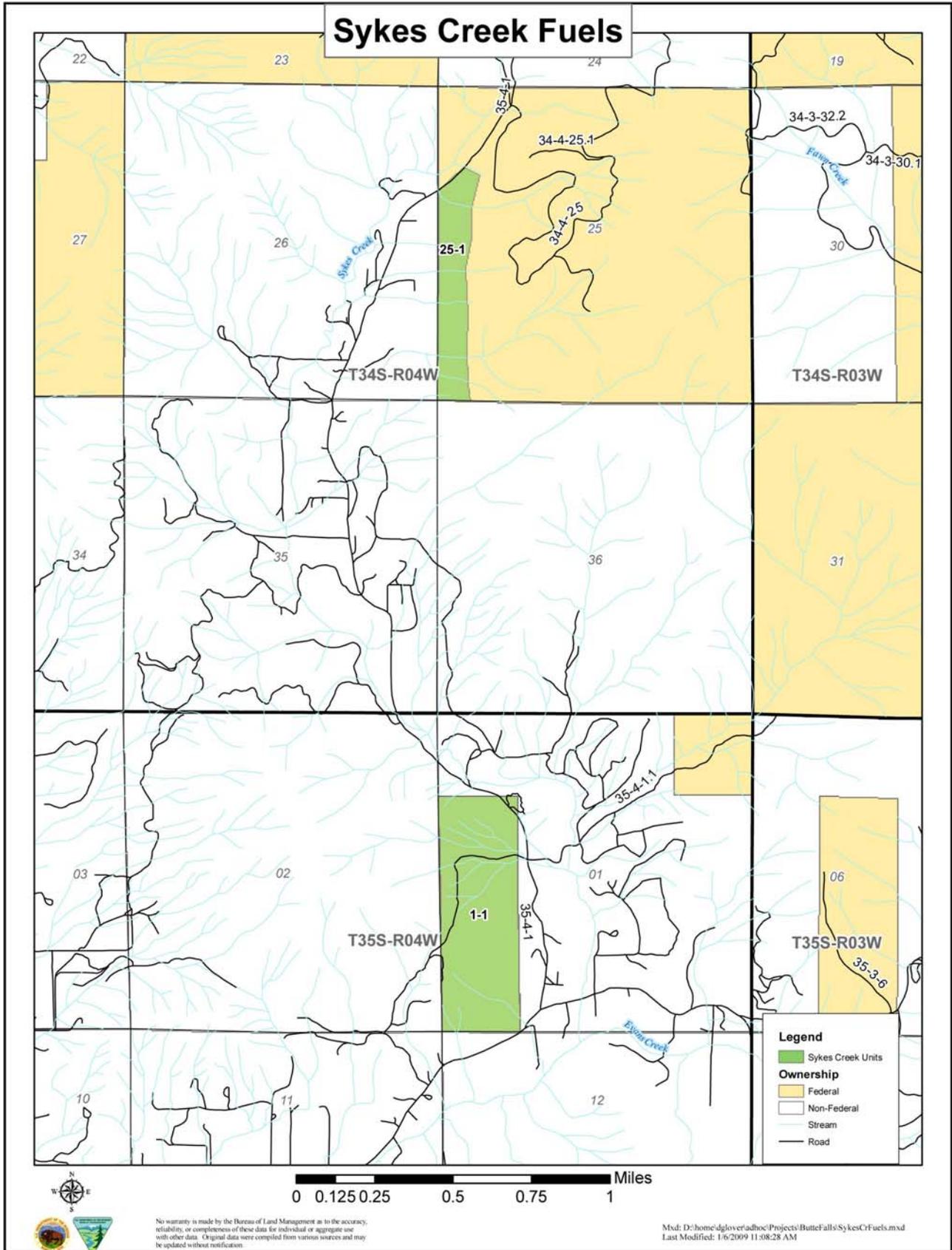
*Temporary roads shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources; and*

- e. Shall require the treatment of temporary roads constructed or used so as to permit the reestablishment, by artificial or natural means, or vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover was disturbed by the construction or use of the road, as necessary to minimize erosion from the disturbed area. Such treatment shall be designed to reestablish vegetative cover as soon as practicable, but at least within 10 years after the termination of the contract.*

Before any action described in the list of categorical exclusions may be used, the “extraordinary circumstances,” included in the Code of Federal Register at 43 CFR 46.205(c), must be reviewed for applicability. After review, the BLM determined no extraordinary circumstances exist that would cause the proposed action to have a significant environmental effect. The action will not require additional analysis.

### **Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this project, contact Al Mason, Fuels Management Specialist, at (541) 618-2391.



### NEPA Categorical Exclusion Review

#### Proposed Action:

The BLM proposes to reduce ladder fuels by manual and prescribed fire treatment of understory vegetation including understory thinning, hand piling, chipping, burning, and removal of the resulting slash on 167 acres of BLM land.

The Code of Federal Register at 43 CFR 46.205(c) provides for a review of the following criteria for categorical exclusion to determine if exceptions apply to the proposed action based on actions which may:

- 1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.

Yes  No

Initial QW Remarks:

- 2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.

Yes  No

Initial AK Remarks:

- 3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].

Yes  No

Initial QW Remarks:

- 4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

Yes  No

Initial QW Remarks:

- 5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

Yes  No

Initial QW Remarks:

- 6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.

Yes  No

Initial SLS Remarks:

- 7. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau.

Yes  No

Initial AK Remarks: Cultural Report OR116-09-16

8. *Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.*

Plants  Yes  No

Initial mw Remarks: *no T, E or sensitive plants*

Animals  Yes  No

Initial DR Remarks:

Fish  Yes  No

Initial DZ Remarks:

9. *Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.*

Yes  No

Initial OW Remarks:

10. *Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).*

Yes  No

Initial OW Remarks:

11. *Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).*

Yes  No

Initial A Remarks:

12. *Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or nonnative invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).*

Yes  No

Initial mw Remarks:

**Decision**

It is my decision to allow the manual and prescribed fire treatment of understory vegetation including understory thinning, hand piling, chipping, burning, and removal of the resulting slash on 167 acres of BLM land. This action will reduce the vertical continuity of hazardous fuels (ladder fuels), which allow fire to carry from the surface fuels into the crowns of trees and/or shrubs, while retaining species composition and diversity.

**Decision Rationale**

The proposed action has been reviewed by Butte Falls Resource Area staff and appropriate Project Design Features, as specified above, will be incorporated into the proposal. Based on the attached NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Categorical Exclusion Review, I have determined the proposed action involves no significant impact to the human environment and no further environmental analysis is required.

*Douglas C. Bernier*

Heather A. Bernier  
Field Manager  
Butte Falls Resource Area

*02/11/2009*

Date

**Administrative Remedy**

Notice of the forest management decision to be made on the action described in this categorical exclusion will be posted on the District internet website. The action is subject to protest under 43 CFR section 4.450-2. A decision in response to a protest is subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals under 43 CFR part 4.

**Categorical Exclusion Reviewers:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Initials</b>
Jean Williams	NEPA Coordinator	2-11-09	JW
Marcia Wineteer	Botanist	2-10-09	MW
Dave Roelofs	Wildlife Biologist	1-30-09	DR
Steve Liebhardt	Fisheries Biologist	1/29/09	SL
Shawn Simpson	Hydrologist	1/29/09	SS
Ken VanEtten	Soil Scientist	2/10/09	KBE
Al Mason	Fire/Fuels Specialist	2/11/09	APM
Ann Ramage	District Archaeologist	1-29-09	AR
Doug Stewart	Silviculturist	1-28-09	DS
Trish Lindaman	Outdoor Recreation Planner	1-30-09	TL
Dave Orban	Special Forest Products	2-11-09	DO