United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
GRANTS PASS INTERAGENCY OFFICE
2164 NE SPAULDING AVE
GRANTS PASS, OREGON 97526

NORTH APPLEGATE HAZARDOUS FUEL REDUCTION PROJECT

Decision Memorandum on Action and for Application of Departmental Categorical Exclusion
Department Manual 516 DM 2, Appendix 1
CE # OR 117-08-28

I. Purpose and Need for the Action

A. Proposed Action Title / Type: Manual fuel hazard reduction on 440 acres of BLM land approximately one mile east of Murphy, Oregon, which has been designated as a Community at Risk. This project has been initiated by the fuels reduction committee of the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan due to the dense vegetation creating a wildfire risk near residences and businesses in the immediate and general area.

B. Location: Adjacent to North Applegate Road approximately one mile east of Murphy, Oregon.

Township/Range/Section: T37S, R5W, S8 and S17.
Land Use Allocation: AMA, Riparian Reserve.

C. Need / Rationale for the Proposed Action:

Past fire exclusion on these lands has resulted in the increased fuel hazard (high hazard). The purpose of the project is to reduce forest fuels to provide better protection of life and residential property from wildland fire and to reduce the potential risk to adjacent private lands from fire originating on federal lands and to protect federal land from fire started on private property. The goal of the project is to modify fuel models to reduce the rate of spread and fire intensity in the event of a wildfire.

Fuel structure and loading would be altered to moderate potential wildfire behavior and reduce fire severity. National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) fuel model changes characterize this objective:

- In brush fields where vegetation is continuous and at least six feet tall (fuel model 4), reduce brush from 13 tons/acre to approximately four tons/acre and break up fuel continuity (fuel model 5). This would result in conditions which, given a moderate 5 mph summer wind, flame length would decrease from 19 feet to four feet.
- In timbered stands, reduce stand density and litter accumulation (fuel model 9 reduced to a fuel model 8). With the same weather conditions as above, ground fire flame length would decrease from 2.6’ to one foot.
- In timbered stands, reduce stand density and litter accumulation (fuel model 10 reduced to a fuel model 8). With the same weather conditions as above, ground fire flame length would decrease from 4.8 feet to one foot.

D. Description of the Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to manually (i.e., hand tools and chainsaws) treat the forest fuels on approximately 440 acres of BLM land. Small trees and brush would be thinned, and trees would be limbed to reduce ladder fuels. Slash would be hand piled, covered and burned, or removed from the site for firewood or other noncommercial uses. Material cut from this project would be encouraged to be removed due to smoke concerns in the Grants Pass designated air shed.

Low intensity under-burning would be prescribed three to five years after initial treatment to ensure desired fuel models are maintained. Low intensity under burning would consist of cutting approximately 90% of madrone (and some oak) resprouts (one stem on each plant would be retained). The project area would be divided into no more than six burn units with a fire line cut around each unit. Fire lines would be < 18" wide and would be cut using hand tools only. Approximately 70% of the slash that resulted from the initial treatment and from this follow-up treatment would then be burned. Port-Orford cedar does not occur in the project area.

<u>Project Design Features</u>

- Trees and other vegetation cut would be < 8" DBH.
- Residual hardwood would be spaced approximately 14 feet to 30 feet apart. Hardwood sprout clumps would be thinned to the one to three largest stems.
- Vigorous, well formed conifer leave trees would be spaced 14-16 feet apart.
- All single stem madrones > 3" DBH would be retained. Where madrone sprouts occur and all shoots are < 3", retain at least one shoot.
- Leave 15-20% of each treatment area untreated in the form of ¼ acre or larger areas that are well distributed throughout the project area and are at least 100' apart.
- In continuous brush fields that are greater than 20 acres in size, leave at least two untreated "islands" per acre of brush. Islands would be approximately 25'x 25' to 35'x 35' in size and would be spaced approximately 100' apart measured from the outer perimeter.
- Moister microsites (often found on north aspects or in land form depressions) would remain untreated.
- Vegetation would not be cut within 50 feet of perennial or intermittent streams.
- Direct ignition would not occur within 50 feet of stream channels; existing fuel profiles and vegetation densities near streams would be retained as much as possible.
- Hand piling or pile burning would not occur within 50' of stream channels.
- Snags > 12" DBH would be protected unless they need to be removed to build fire line. Felled snags and existing large down wood would be left on site and protected from burning as much as possible. If snags inside the unit present safety hazards, rather than felling them, no fuel reduction within one tree height of the snag would occur. To minimize snag loss during hand pile burning, hand piles would be at least one tree height away from snags. Prior to under burning, fire lines would be established at least one tree height away from designated large relict snags (> 20" DBH).
- Mechanized equipment would be limited to chain saws and ATV's.
- Cultural or historical sites would be buffered and avoided. If any cultural resources are located during project implementation, the activities around the site would stop and an archeologist would be contacted to determine the site's significance.
- Public roads and trails would remain open and unobstructed.
- Survey markers and property corners would be protected.

- Bureau special status plant sites would be buffered from treatment.

II. PLAN CONFORMANCE

The proposed action is in conformance with the following land use plans;
(1) *Final EIS and Record of Decision for the Medford District Resource Management Plan* (RMP) (June 1995)
(2) *Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (February 1994)
(3) *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (NFP)(April 13, 1994)
(4) *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (March 2000), and the *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (January 2001)
(5) *Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment* (April 1998)
(6) *Record of Decision and Resource Plan Amendment for Management of Port-Orford-Cedar in southwest Oregon, Coos Bay, Medford, and Roseburg Districts* (May 2004).

III. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act

The proposed action qualifies as a categorically excluded action under the following Department of the Interior categorical exclusion: (Department Manual 516 DM 11.9):

D. Rangeland Management

(10) 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, of 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.

The proposed action has been reviewed to determine if extraordinary circumstances exist that would require further environmental analysis and documentation (516 DM 2, Appendix 2). None have been identified (see attached).

6/24/08
NEPA Reviewer / Date

Tim Gonzales 6-24-08
Preparer / Date

IV. Persons and Agencies Consulted

This project has been designed in conjunction and cooperation with members of the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan. Key partners associated with this project were Josephine County, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Illinois Valley Community Development Organization (IVCDO), Applegate Valley Fire Department, Illinois Valley Fire Department, Resource Innovations at University of Oregon, and Rural Metro Fire Department.

V. Implementation Date

This project will be implemented immediately as outlined below and as consistent with Oregon Department of Forestry fire closures.

VI. Decision and Rationale

It is my decision to implement the North Applegate Hazardous Fuel Reduction project, as described.

I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan. No further environmental analysis is required.

Abbie Jossie
Field Manager
Grants Pass Resource Area

6-24-08
Date

VII. Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

Administrative remedies may be available to persons who believe that they will be adversely affected by this decision. Persons wishing to seek administrative recourse must do so in accordance with BLM regulations and the procedures and requirements of 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies and 43 CFR Subtitle A, Part 4, Subpart E, both as modified by the Federal Register Notice on June 5, 2003 (Vol. 68, No. 108).

This wildfire management decision is issued under 43 CFR Part 5003.1 and will be effective immediately following the completion of a 15 day public review period. The BLM has made the determination that vegetation, soil, or other resources on the public lands are at substantial risk of wildfire due to drought, fuels accumulation, or other reasons, or are at immediate risk of erosion or other damage due to wildfire. The BLM has determined that the hazardous fuel buildup in the project area and the consequent substantial risk of wildfire to nearby residents call for expeditious implementation of this decision to facilitate the preparation of hazardous fuel reduction work (43 CFR § 5003.1(b)). Not withstanding the provisions of 43 CFR 4.21(a)(1), filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR Part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of the decision. The Interior Board of Land Appeals will, however, decide an appeal within 60 days after all pleadings have been filed, and within 180 days after the appeal is filed (43 CFR § 4.416). Any contest of this decision should state specifically which portion or element of the decision is being protested and cite the applicable CFR regulations.

VII. Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Tim Gonzales, project leader, at (541) 471-6643.

NEPA COMPLIANCE
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW
CE #OR117-08-28
NORTH APPLEGATE HAZARDOUS FUEL REDUCTION PROJECT

The Department of the Interior Manual 516 2.3A (3) requires the review of the following "extraordinary circumstances" (516 DM 2 Appendix 2) to determine if an otherwise categorically excluded action would require additional analysis and environmental documentation.

1) *Have significant impacts on public health or safety.*

( )Yes (**X**) No

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 (**X**) No

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

( )Yes (**X**) No

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

( )Yes (**X**) No

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

( )Yes (**X**) No

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

( )Yes (**X**) No

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

( )Yes (**X**) No

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.*

( )Yes (**X**) No Remarks: No significant impacts to ESA listed species have been identified

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

( )Yes (**X**) No Remarks: There is no indication that the project will violate any such law.

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

( )Yes (**X**) No Remarks: There is no indication that there will be a disproportionate impact on low income or minority populations.

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 (**X**) No Remarks: There is no indication that the project will limit access or have any impact on sacred or ceremonial sites.

12) *Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native 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 (**X**) No

Reviewer(s):

Tim Gonzales — 6-19-08
Fire Mitigation Specialist

6/20/08
Botanist

Lisa Bre — 6/23/08
Cultural Resources

Fisheries Biologist 6/19/08

Wildlife Biologist 6/23/08

Soils/Hydrology 6/19/08

POC Coordinator 6/19/08

Forester 6/19/08