

Decision Record
North Huckleberry Pile Burn
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Spokane District
Border Field Office
1103 North Fancher Road
Spokane Valley, WA 99212

Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Border Field Office prepared the North Huckleberry Pile Burn Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-OR-135-2014-0001-EA) to consider whether to treat slash piles and reduce fuel loading in an area of Stevens County approximately 10 air miles southwest of Chewelah, WA. The BLM conducted four forest health projects that generated slash; this slash increased the amount of fuel loading within the Carr's Corner, Lane Mountain, Red Marble, and Red Quarry project areas. The purpose of these projects was to improve stand health, reduce stocking levels, reduce fuel ladders, and reduce the potential for stand replacement fire. The slash was piled at approximately 83 landings. Carr's Corner understory thinning hand piles are scattered throughout that project area. Piles range in size from 5 to 7 feet in diameter for hand piles and 25 to 40 feet in diameter for landing piles. There are 4 landing piles in the Lane Mountain project area and 25-30 piles in each of the remaining sale areas. In addition, there are 2,695-3,080 hand piles (7-8 piles per acre) on 385 acres within the Carr's Corner sale area. The total area occupied by piles is approximately 5 acres (2.4 acres landing piles, 2.6 acres hand piles). Typically, slash piles occur on relatively flat ground (0-20 percent slope). The project is located in T. 31 N., R. 39 E, Willamette Meridian (see attached project maps)

Decision

I have decided to implement Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) as described on pages 3-4 of the North Huckleberry Pile Burn EA; hereinafter referred to as the selected alternative. My decision is based on site-specific analysis in the EA, the supporting project record, as well as the management direction contained in the 1987 Spokane District Resource Management Plan (RMP) as amended. The North Huckleberry Pile Burn Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) indicates that the selected action has been analyzed and would not result in any significant environmental effects. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required and will not be prepared.

My decision includes use prescribed fire to treat 882 acres of activity fuels (i.e. slash). Prescribed fire would be used to consume landing and hand piles to reduce fuel loading throughout the Carr's Corner, Lane Mountain, Red Marble, and Red Quarry project areas. Hand and landing piles would be ignited between October 1 and May 1 when fire would allow for 75-100 percent consumption of biomass.



The following environmental protection measures (see project design features on pp. 2-3 of the EA) would be implemented prior to and during treatment activities to avoid or reduce potential impacts to resources as a result of the selected alternatives. The following measures are fundamental components of the selected alternative.

Fuels Management

- Burn plans would address burning objectives and operational concerns, identify mitigation measures necessary to protect site-specific resource values, and describe notification procedures for local area residents.
- Pile burning would be accomplished consistent with the recommendations and requirements of the Washington Smoke Management Plan.
- Hand and landing piles would be burned between October 1 and May 1 when fire would allow for 75-100 percent consumption of biomass.
- All piles would be monitored to assure there are no escaped fire incidents. An Archaeologist would determine if there are piles which need to be retained to preserve cultural features. Piles to be retained would be flagged.
- Prescribed fire would be contained within approximately 15 feet of each pile.

Cultural Resources

- An assessment of cultural site localities in relation to the pile locations was field reviewed in October 2014. Potentially impacted cultural resource sites were flagged and excluded from burn areas and buffers were established between piles where needed to protect cultural sites.
- If archaeological sites are encountered during project implementation, the disturbing activity will be halted, the authorized BLM official will be contacted, and the resource protected until a BLM archaeologist has assessed the historic significance of the resource.

Vegetation/Special Status Plants

- All known special status plant species occurrences have been avoided during the thinning and piling phases of this project (BLM 2007).
- If any Special Status Plant species are found prior to or during implementation and agency botanist would be contacted and appropriate mitigation measures such as buffering or avoiding the site would be established.

Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plants

- All hand piles and landing piles would be visually monitored within 6 months post-fire to assess the degree of soil disturbance and the presence of noxious weeds and invasive plants. Based on monitoring, if needed weed infestations in the burn areas may be treated with mechanical, chemical, or biological methods to achieve plant community objectives.

Recreation / Visual Resources

- Public will be notified through outreach and signage prior to any prescribed fire activity occurring on this project.

Rationale for the Decision

I have reviewed the information provided in the EA and project record. The selected alternative is consistent with the Spokane Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (RMP/ROD) (1987) as amended. The RMP (p. 22) indicates that slash will be removed where it poses a potential fire hazard and that the preferred method of disposing of slash will be with the use of prescribed fire. The RMP Amendment (1992) specifies that Forest Management, Wildlife Habitat, Recreation, and Livestock Grazing are programs of emphasis in the Northeast management area.

The selected alternative would best fulfill the purpose and need of the project. The selected alternative would help to reduce the heavy fuel loading in the project area. By treating these piles, the BLM is helping to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire in the project area.

Public Involvement

The BLM solicited public comments on this EA. The EA was also posted on the internet on August 3, 2015. No comments were received.

Administrative Appeal

My decision is issued under the authority of 43 CFR 5003. Because this is a wildland fire management decision pursuant to 43 CFR 5003, my decision is effective immediately and implementation can occur immediately.

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4. Any party that feels they are adversely affected by this decision has 30 days from the date this decision is made available to file an appeal. Any notice of appeal must be sent to:

Border Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management
1103 N. Fancher Rd.
Spokane, WA 99212

Filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of this decision. If you wish to file a petition for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision (see 43 CFR 4.21) during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted.

4. Whether or not the public interest favors granting the stay.

A copy of your notice of appeal and any petition for stay must also be sent to:

Regional Solicitor Pacific Northwest Region
U.S. Department of the Interior
805 SW Broadway, Suite 600
Portland, OR 97205

You may include a statement of reasons when you file the notice of appeal with the Border Field Manager and Regional Solicitor, or you may file the statement of reasons within 30 days after you file the appeal. If you file the statement of reasons separately, you must also send it to:

U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Hearings and Appeal, Interior Board of Land Appeals
801 N. Quincy Street, MS 300-QC
Arlington, VA 22203

/s/Lindsey Babcock

9/30/2105

Lindsey Babcock
Field Manager

Date