

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR  
North Burnt River Fuel & Forest Health Project**

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) OR\_V050\_2009\_015, dated September 4, 2009. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the proposed action with the project design specifications (minimization measures) identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared.

I have determined the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Baker Resource Management Plan and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (**40 CFR 1508.27**), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

**Context:** The Vale District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Baker Resource Area proposes the treatment of approximately 700 acres of forested BLM-administered lands within the Ebell Creek, Alder Creek, Hill Creek and Deer Creek drainages. The legal description of the project area is as follows: T. 11 S., R. 41 E., Section 7: NW ¼ NE ¼, E ½ NE ¼; Section 8: W ½ SW ¼, SE ¼ SW ¼; Section 11: W ½ NW ¼; Section 14: NW ¼ NW ¼, SE ¼ SW ¼; Section 23: N ½ NE ¼ SE ¼ NE ¼; Section 24: S ½ NW ¼, S ½ NE ¼ and T. 11 S., R. 42 E., Section 17 N ½ SW ¼; Section 18 NE ¼ SE ¼; Section 19 S ½ NW ¼. The project objective is to apply a three-tiered approach (e.g., a combination of Commercial Thinning (CT), Precommercial Thinning (PCT), and Prescribed Burning) to reduce fire fuels and restoring forest health, which includes the reduction of ground, ladder, and crown fuels.

Management within the project area is needed for the following reasons:

- The lack of fire over the past 50-80 years has significantly changed forest structure by creating a dense understory of conifer regeneration, an overstocked canopy of trees, and an abundance of dead/down fuels.
- In some treatment areas, past logging practices removed most of the large, old, early seral, fire tolerant species such as ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas-fir.
- Grand fir is experiencing mortality at an accelerated rate due to a fir-engraver beetle infestation, which exacerbates fuel loading.
- The dense understory (often consisting of later seral/non-fire tolerant conifer species) provides ladder fuels for fires to carry from the ground into the canopy, out-competes naturally occurring grasses, forbs, and shrub species, and increases competition within the overstory.
- Increased competition within the overstory increases the trees susceptibility to insect and disease attack beyond naturally occurring endemic levels, which could lead to increased fuel loading.
- In some stands, dwarf mistletoe exists at epidemic levels in Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine. Additionally, mountain pine beetle activity is increasing with each passing year and may lead to a stand replacing infestation within ponderosa pine stands.
- Improve riparian habitat, specifically aspen retention, within the Ebell Creek drainage.

**Intensity:**

**1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.**

The environmental assessment has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the hazardous fuels and forest health project. On the whole, the project will result in improved vegetative condition and fire resiliency for the project area. Ancillary effects in the manner of overall habitat improvement, increased biodiversity of native plants and animals, and reduced potential for catastrophic fires/ insect and disease outbreaks. A return to favorable ecological conditions is considered as merely improving the quality of the human environment through proactive and preventative fire management, and is not considered a significant effect both in the short or long term.

**2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.**

The current condition class within the project area is Condition Class 3. This condition class indicates that the stands have been significantly altered from their historical conditions and are at risk of stand replacing fires, which would result in loss of key ecosystem components and risk public safety. Implementing the proposed action would reduce the level and extent of the destruction caused by a potential wildfire; therefore, preventing large-scale (e.g., greater than 1000 acres) devastation/damage to vegetative communities, wildlife/wildlife habitat, forest floor (exposure to extreme temperatures, litter and duff removal), soils (hydrophobicity), avoiding risks to human lives/property, and reducing landscape recovery time.

**3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**

The project area is representative of Burnt River Mountains in vegetative condition and ecological functionality. The project area does not contain any historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, or wetlands. The North Burnt River Area is not designated as a Wild and Scenic River and the project area is not considered an ecologically critical area.

In addition, 40 acres of the North Burnt River Project Area occurs in the Hooker Gulch Wilderness Characteristics Inventory Unit (OR-06-014) which has been evaluated using current wilderness characteristic protocols. It was determined that the inventory unit does not possess wilderness characteristics.

**4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

Commercial timber harvests can be controversial; however, this project focuses on thinning densely stocked stands and emphasizing forest health, which would be less controversial. The effects of hazardous fuels reduction are well known and documented and are not highly controversial in that reduced fuels equate to reduced fire severity and better manageability. Overall, the methods of vegetation treatment activities, including fuels reduction, are scientifically accepted methods to employ to meet resource or management objectives and are not considered highly controversial.

**5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

There are no known effects of the proposed action identified in the EA which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. All fuels treatment methods proposed to be employed are accepted standard practices.

**6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**

The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. All future hazardous fuels and forest health projects, if they occur would be subject to the same environmental assessment standards and independent decision making.

**7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.**

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified in the EA. Other fuels reduction and vegetation treatment projects (both private and public) may be proposed within the Burnt River Mountains in the future. These projects seen together with other land disturbing activities in the area would not result in cumulatively significant impacts at the local or watershed scale.

**8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

No districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) were identified in the project area and EA. The proposed action will not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

**9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.**

Surveys for sensitive wildlife species were conducted and no bat maternity colonies or ferruginous hawks were found within the proposed project area. However, northern goshawk nests and activity were found within the proposed project area. There are approximately 26 established calling sites, 5 nests are located on BLM administered lands. In addition, there could be more satellite nest-sites located both on federal and private lands.

The probability for habitat alteration within the project area is currently high, due to forest insect/disease outbreaks and wildfire risk, which could affect the Northern goshawks habitat by reducing canopy cover and changing forest structure. Reducing the potential of insect/disease outbreaks and wildfire through timber management should reduce the probability of long-term (e.g., greater than 10 years) habitat alteration.

In addition, there are no federally listed threatened or endangered plant species known or suspected to occur in the project area. Nor have any Bureau special status plant species been documented within 10 air miles of the project area.

**10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**

The proposed action will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

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**Ted Davis, Field Manager**

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**Date**