**DECISION RECORD**
**for the**
**Tin Can Hill Vegetation Treatments**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER: DOI-BLM-MT-L060-2010-0035-EA**

**Background**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing to treat 4065 acres with prescribed fire and mechanical methods, over the course of several years, in order to reduce fuel loadings while maintaining or improving the fire regime condition class within the project area. Prescribed fire operations would be conducted under specific conditions which result in low to moderate fire intensity and leave behind a mosaic of burned and unburned areas. Small trees and those encroaching on open areas will be reduced while minimizing the risk to the mature overstory.

**Rationale**

The proposed action will improve forest/rangeland health by reducing conifer encroachment of open rangelands, decreasing stand density of ponderosa pine, reducing overall fuel loadings, and improving vegetation production and diversity. The decision to allow the proposed action does not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation and is in conformance with the Judith Resource Area Resource Management Plan approved in September 1994, and the Musselshell Breaks Watershed Plan approved in August 2005.

**Decision**

It is my decision to approve the proposed action to treat 4065 acres, with prescribed fire and mechanical methods over the course of several years, as described in the environmental assessment for the Tin Can Hill Vegetation Treatment, subject to the following design criteria:

Cultural Resources: Any known cultural resources would be avoided during project implementation. Protective measures, including but not limited to black/wet lining, hand removal of vegetation, etc. will be completed around the known cultural sites.

Grazing Administration and Livestock Grazing: Post-fire grazing treatments: Prescribed fire treatments within the River Ranch Allotment would receive two growing seasons of annual deferment within the Van Hemp Pasture. The Tin Can Hill and Raundall Pastures would alternate early and mid-season use while grazing would be delayed in the project area (Van Hemp Pasture) until September 1 of each year for 2011 and 2012, or two consecutive years after the project is implemented.

Noxious Weeds: The project area will be surveyed pre and post burn for noxious weeds. The BLM will work with the permittee, initiating a cooperative weed control agreement if necessary. Through the agreement, the BLM would provide weed inventories, maps, herbicide and/or biological control agents, and control recommendations. The permittee would provide equipment and labor to implement weed control measures.

Wildlife: Prescribed burning during the late spring is cause for some concern due to the potential for short term negative effects on nesting birds, big game parturition and emerging vegetation. The exact date each year when plants and animals are potentially most vulnerable to negative consequences as the result of a prescribed fire is somewhat variable and may be affected by such variables as below normal temperatures, resulting in a late spring which can delay the onset of vegetative growth, nesting behavior, etc. After May 15 no prescribed burning will occur without the documented concurrence of the field office wildlife biologist and assigned rangeland management specialist.

Soils: The Water Quality BMPs for Montana Forests (MSU Extension, 2001) would be implemented during grinding activities to reduce the amount of soil disturbances, the potential for prolonged compaction and erosion, and long-term effects to soil quality.

All project associated operations shall not be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support equipment/vehicles. If such equipment/vehicles create ruts in excess of 3 inches deep, operations must cease as the soil will be deemed too wet to adequately support equipment/vehicles

Limit prescribed burning of all areas to ensure low to low end moderate severity. Suggested prescription conditions that would promote low to moderate severity include:

Implement burning at a time of year when litter, duff, and soil moisture conditions are favorable for minimizing the loss of litter and duff and excess soil heating.

Mulch thickness shall be no greater than 7.5 cm in areas where prescribed fire will be implemented after grinding. Also, prescriptions for masticated (grinded) fuels should emphasize burning when soils are near saturation (Busse et al. 2005).

Leave 5 to 10 tons per acre of downed coarse woody greater than 4 inches in diameter following slash reduction on all treatment areas to help re-establish soil productivity (Graham et al. 1994).

Air Quality: If smoke dispersal is inadequate burning will be halted if at all possible. No burning will occur without approval from the Smoke Monitoring Unit of the Montana / Idaho state air shed group.

Lewistown Field Manager

04/02/2011
Date

Area Manager, Northeast Land Office
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

04/02/2011
Date