

Scoping Notice

Proposal to Conduct the Trout Creek Prescribed Fire Treatment

Project Summary

The Bureau of Land Management Worland Field Office is proposing to treat approximately 450 acres of mountain big sagebrush with prescribed fire in an area 35 miles south of Ten Sleep, Wyoming in Township 41 N, R 88 W (parts of sections 19,20,29, and 20 See Vicinity Map).

The burn unit is 2300 acres of mixed BLM and private lands (Map C). The Washakie/Natrona County border runs through the middle of the proposed project area. The county line is also the boundary between the Casper BLM and Worland BLM administered lands. About 900 acres of Mountain Big Sagebrush occurs within the 2300 acre pasture. Of the 900 acres of burnable sagebrush, about 50% or 450 acres would be burned. About 50% or 450 acres would be left untreated to leave a mosaic of burned and unburned vegetation.

In the event the fire cannot be easily contained within the burn unit, the fire would be allowed to burn to natural barriers and roads

This prescribed fire would be conducted by the BLM in cooperation with the Orchard Ranch, LTD.

The project would take place in the spring and fall of 2007 unless weather and fuel conditions cause a delay. The objectives of this project are to, 1) reduce fuels that could contribute to increased wildfire severity, 2) increase the structural and age class diversity of sagebrush, and 3) increase production and cover of grasses and forbs and to, 4) change the vegetative community so that it more closely reflects an ecosystem with a fire return interval of 35 to 100 years. Following treatment, the area would be deferred from livestock grazing for two growing seasons.

Issues

Mountain big sagebrush is the dominant brush species on rangeland sites in the area. In June of 2007 the Worland BLM range and fire management staff and Orchard Ranch LTD, evaluated sagebrush stands in the proposed treatment area. The team found that the majority of sagebrush stands in the area were older, even-aged stands (Figure 1). The production of grasses and forbs beneath the heavy sagebrush canopy appeared to be below potential for the site.

Recent wildfire history in the Nowater Creek drainage indicates the proposed treatment area is likely to experience a large, hot season wildfire if not treated. This scenario often favors cheat grass expansion. Cool season prescribed burning in a mosaic pattern will help maintain the vigor of perennial grasses, reduce fuel load and continuity, and reduce the likelihood of a large, stand replacing wildfire.

The Washakie County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (February, 2005), page 3-1, recommends prescribed burning sagebrush in this area to remove decadent fuels and maintain healthy vigorous plants.



Figure 1. A relatively dense, even-age stand of Mountain Big Sagebrush in the Trout Creek drainage. Summer wildfires in this vegetation type tend to result in large acreages of grassland with little remaining sagebrush. Cool season prescribed burning in a mosaic pattern will help maintain the vigor of perennial grasses, reduce fuel load and continuity, and reduce the likelihood of a large, stand replacing wildfire.

Please contact Jim Wolf of the Worland Field Office at 307.347.5136 or worland_wymail@blm.gov if you have concerns about the project or would like to participate in its planning.