United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Wasatch-Cache National Forest

Ogden Ranger District
507 25th Street, Suite 103
Ogden, Utah 84401
(801)625-5112

File Code: 1950
Date: June 24, 2002

Greetings:

Enclosed for your review is the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Cache Aspen/Mountain Brush Treatments Project. This Decision Notice documents the Wasatch-Cache Forest Supervisor, Tom Tidwell's, decision to select alternative #3 as described in the Cache Aspen/Mountain Brush Treatments Environmental Assessment issued in June 2002 with modifications. The selected alternative would treat up to 20,000 acres of aspen/mountain brush communities on the Logan and Ogden Districts of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest; and implement necessary mitigation measures to protect threatened, endangered and sensitive species, minimize erosion, and to protect other resources.

The Cache Aspen/Mountain Brush Treatments Environmental Assessment is available on the Wasatch-Cache National Forest web page (www.fs.fed.us/wcnf), or hard copies may be obtained at the Ogden and Logan Ranger District offices and also at the Wasatch-Cache National Forest Supervisor's Office in Salt Lake.

For further information about this decision or the Environmental Assessment, contact Steve Blatt, Project Leader, 507 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; FAX (801) 625-5914; email sblatt@fs.fed.us, or by phone at (801) 625-5112.

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Chip Sibbernsen

CHIP SIBBERNSEN
District Ranger

Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for the

Cache Aspen/Mountain Brush Treatments

USDA Forest Service, Region 4
Wasatch-Cache National Forest
Ogden/Logan Ranger Districts
Box Elder, Cache, Rich, and Weber Counties

Decision Summary

This Decision Notice documents my decision to select alternative #3, as described in the Cache Aspen/Mountain Brush Treatments Environmental Assessment issued in June 2002 with modifications. The selected alternative would treat up to 20,000 acres of aspen/mountain brush communities on the Logan and Ogden Ranger Districts of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest; and implement necessary mitigation measures to protect threatened, endangered and sensitive species, minimize erosion, and to protect other resources.

Background

In 1996, an effort began to address the condition of our aspen and mountain brush areas and propose treatment of these areas in order to return them to a properly functioning condition. Some treatments were approved through previous environmental analysis and decisions and most of these treatments have been implemented, but a larger analysis and strategy was needed. Originally the analysis effort was to be completed several years earlier, but delays occurred for a variety of reasons. The analysis advanced this past year with the development of a pre-decisional environmental assessment (EA) issued on May 29, 2001. This pre-decisional EA was made available to the public for 50 days for review and comment. The decision described in this Decision Notice was made following a thorough review of the EA and the public comments. After review of the analysis and public comments, modifications were made to alternative #3 to address resource/public concerns.

Purpose and Need

Many of the aspen/mountain brush communities on the Wasatch-Cache National Forest are approaching late seral stages due to a lack of natural disturbance (USDA 1998). These mature and decadent stands predominate the landscape, while vigorous stands are increasingly rare. Aspen occurs as both seral and climax components of these ecosystems. Seral means that through succession it will eventually be replaced by more dominant species, such as sub-alpine fir. Climax species are the dominant species - ones that can reproduce successfully under shaded conditions and are not replaced by more dominant species. These seral communities are critical in

maintaining biodiversity and sustainability of the forest. However, the balance within the aspen/mountain brush areas has shifted outside of the range of natural variability. Years of fire suppression and past livestock grazing practices have created conditions that are inconsistent with the normal successional trends in forest ecosystems. Therefore, there is a need to restore these communities to a properly functioning condition with a mix of successional stages across the landscape.

Specific areas were examined/surveyed for their biological diversity relating to: habitat for game species (e.g. deer, moose, elk), nongame species, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species; mortality and regeneration in the stands; and age class and species diversity (field survey datasheets located within the project planning record). Treatment areas were selected based on conditions described by Campbell and Bartos (2001). They were also selected based on aerial photography analysis, on the ground vegetation surveys, and by consulting specialists, in order to select units with little to no resource concerns (e.g. soils). These units are also dispersed across the landscape to mimic natural fire patterns. It was found that the majority of the communities are approaching late successional stages due to a lack of natural disturbances such as wildfire, windthrow, or insects and disease. This translates into a loss of wildlife habitat for species that prefer earlier successional stages, and lower carrying capacities for numerous species. In addition, the potential for catastrophic wildfire or outbreaks of insects and disease increases because of the increasing fuel loads and altered species composition created by years of fire suppression/exclusion. This project will provide disturbance under controlled conditions, protect soil and water resources from conditions caused by catastrophic fire such as severely burned soils, loss of large amounts of ground cover that may result in accelerated erosion and increased sedimentation. Therefore, without fire or use of other methods: the aspen vegetation communities will slowly diminish by conifer encroachment and eventually be replaced by conifer stands; and mountain brush communities will lack age and structure diversity, uncharacteristic of historical conditions. The locations of the proposed treatment areas can be found on the attached alternative maps. Primary two vegetation types, aspen and mountain brush are addressed within the EA, with the emphasis and majority of the proposed treatment being within the aspen vegetation type.

The vegetation types analyzed in this EA are experiencing trends away from properly functioning condition (PFC). The definition of PFC is "ecosystems at any temporal or spatial scale are in properly functioning condition when they are dynamic and resilient to perturbations to structure, composition, and processes of the biological or physical components." Throughout this analysis, the Properly Functioning Condition (PFC) Assessment (Amundson, et.al. 1996), Detailed Assessment of Properly Functioning Condition (Ogden and Logan Ranger Districts) (Frank undated), Draft Sub-Regional Assessments of Properly Functioning Condition for Areas Encompassing the National Forests in Northern Utah (USDA 1997), Properly Functioning Condition Assessments (USDA 1998), are referenced. Complete descriptions of PFC conditions can be found within these documents.

The assessments portray aspen at high risk with a considerable amount of loss over time of the aspen cover type. On the Wasatch-Cache NF, the percentage of current aspen cover type is estimated to be about 34 percent of the historical amount. The reasons for the high risk rating are:

- The majority of all aspen is in the mature and old age classes.
- Substantial conifer encroachment has occurred.
- Shrub and herbaceous layers are deteriorating or absent.
- Fire regimes are well outside the historical ranges.
- Patterns (connectivity, shape, size, distribution) are much reduced, being replaced by conifer communities. Fire currently has little influence on the distribution of structural classes and patterns across the landscape.

Currently for the mountain brush communities, there is an abundance of single age classes (primarily old classes) and a lack of structural diversity. Fire intervals have been altered by suppression/exclusion. To move toward PFC in the mountain brush type, this type should consist of multiple layers of vegetation with alternating vertical dominance and have a disturbance (insect, disease, and fire) interval of 20-40 year.

Decision

My decision is to select alternative #3, with modifications. The selected alternative would treat up to 20,000 acres (approximately 4,000 acres/year) of aspen/mountain brush communities on the Logan and Ogden Ranger Districts over the next five to ten years through either prescribed fire and/or mechanical treatment. Prescribed fire would be the primary treatment method though mechanical treatments would be used when fire isn't the preferred option (e.g. adjacent to private property, adjacent to streams, or other sensitive areas). ***Mechanical treatment*** is split into two types: Handcutting with the use of chainsaws and those areas treated by the use of heavy equipment (chaining, push-over, crushing, cutting, and chopping). Handcutting will be used in instances where pre-treatment is necessary to provide fuel to ignite and carry a fire or when in a sensitive area where burning is not an option. Handcutting could occur within any of the units, but total project hand cutting will not exceed 500 acres. Mechanical treatment using heavy equipment will not occur in inventoried roadless areas, within the eligible wild and scenic river corridors, within riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs), or on slopes which exceed 30 percent slope. Mechanical treatment using heavy equipment will be used in instances where fuel to ignite and carry a fire does not exist or in a sensitive area where burning is not an option. Use of mechanical treatment (i.e. heavy equipment) will not exceed 500 acres of treatment. ***Prescribed fire*** will be implemented by two methods: ignition by hand ignition (drip torches and fuses) or by helicopter. When implementing a prescribed burn, on the ground activities will include the creation of handline in some instances where defendable lines (road, trail, or natural openings like meadows) are not present. Use of heavy equipment to create lines (cat-lines) will only be used in areas where the defense of a line adjacent to private land cannot be accomplished by a handline or where holding a handline may be difficult. Use of cat-lines is not a common practice on the Wasatch-Cache National Forest and will be used rarely if at all. No cat-lines will be used in

inventoried roadless areas, riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs), or within the eligible wild and scenic river corridors.

By treating the proposed areas, we will achieve the following:

- move toward Properly Functioning Condition
- improve wildlife habitat conditions
- regenerate aspen/mountain brush communities
- decrease the potential for catastrophic fires
- restore fire's role into the communities
- create a balance (mosaic) of successional stages
- reduce vegetative susceptibility to insects and disease

After careful review of the Environmental Assessment, Biological Evaluation/Assessment, public comments, and consultation with District Rangers and resource specialists, it is my decision to select the alternative that best addresses the issues of vegetation and wildlife by treating aspen and mountain brush at a higher level and moves the ecosystem closer to properly functioning condition, while meeting the needs of our forest users (livestock permitees and recreationists), protects/enhances wildlife, fish and plant species, proportionately distributes treatment units across the landscape (thus mimicking natural wildfire conditions), and meets air and water quality standards.

This decision is best depicted in Alternative #3 as described in the Cache Aspen/Mountain Brush Treatments Environmental Assessment issued in June 2002 with modifications. The project will begin in 2002 and continue for next ten years or until the accomplishment of 20,000 acres of treatment. The modification to alternative 3 is that prescribed burning or mechanical treatment would not occur during the spring.

Monitoring and Mitigation

Included in the design of the alternatives are the standards and guidelines listed in Chapter IV of the Forest Plan. These measures have been successfully used on past projects to ensure quality in the implementation of the project, reduce the effect of an activity on another resource, and to verify if the technique used provided the anticipated results. For alternative 2 and 3, the following mitigation measures apply (mechanical treatment with heavy equipment does not apply to alternative 2).

A mitigation measure, as it concerns ***visual impacts***, is to use as many natural firebreaks as possible to help eliminate the need for constructed lines associated with the burning activities.

Mitigation measures that would be incorporated to minimize impacts to ***forest users*** (e.g. dispersed recreation) and to aid in the projects success are:

- recreation staff will be part of the burn plan development and review to minimize impacts to the forest user,
- where possible, backburn into dispersed sites in order to maintain the screening between the travelway and the campsite,
- if a dispersed site is burned over, the site will be allowed to re-vegetate (protected at least for two months during the growing season) and the site will be temporarily closed and posted with "no camping" signs,
- sites needed for staging will be used in this order (parking areas, class 5, then class 4) and developed facility use will only be approved by the District Ranger,
- staging areas will be kept clean during and after treatment activities and these sites will be reseeded after use,
- existing signs will be protected and were practicable field crews will remove man-made structures before treatment,
- fire lines and access paths will be closed to eliminate off-road vehicle use,
- users will be provided notice of impending treatment areas through signing or radio broadcasts,
- should access and ground conditions permit, personal use fuelwood opportunities will be assessed,
- for safety purposes, temporary road restrictions/closures will occur during actual ignition.
- The timing of the treatments at Righthand Fork and Tony Grove is recommended to occur during the spring or fall to reduce affects during the summer months.

Treatment areas will be rested from ***livestock grazing*** one year prior to burning and will not be allowed in treatment units until aspen sprouts in those stands that were treated have leaders reaching 5-6 feet in height and a density of greater than 2,500 sprouts per acre when 3 feet tall (goal is to achieve approximately 400 well-formed stems per acre when they reach 13 feet tall) "Aspen: Ecology and Management in the Western United States"(USDA Forest Service 1985). Campbell (2001) noted that aspen sprouts are often eaten by ungulates (elk, deer, cattle, and/or sheep), following fire, and that livestock grazing should not be allowed until leaders are 5 to 6 feet tall. This may take as little as one growing season or as long as 5-6 years depending on site conditions, but usually occurs within 2-3 years. The areas will be monitored to determine if these time frames are appropriate –e.g. an area may have enough fine fuels to support ignition and fire, therefore the one year of rest prior to burning would not be needed. In addition, fencing (primarily electrical) when necessary, will be installed around burned areas to reduce grazing impacts.

A mitigation measure, as it concerns ***inventoried roadless areas***, is that mechanical treatment would be limited to handcutting within inventoried roadless areas. Handlines that are created within inventoried roadless areas will be reclaimed to blend into the natural surroundings and to prevent usage as a trail or pathway.

The impacts to ***air quality*** from prescribed fire emissions may be mitigated using several techniques, including reduction, dilution, and avoidance.

- Use techniques to reduce emissions by burning when less fuel is available to burn, for example, when a portion of the fuel is very moist, such as in the spring. Or, the firing

technique of mass ignition can be used to create a large amount of heat that quickly burns off the smaller fuels, and leaves the larger fuels that otherwise would burn longer and create more emissions. Also, once the firing of a unit is complete, crews may "mop-up" the burn (physically extinguish all fire), so the smoldering phase of the fire is limited.

- Strive to burn on a day with more unstable atmospheric conditions, when smoke will easily rise to mixing height (the height when visible mixing with the atmosphere occurs), and be transported away by upper level winds.
- Attempt to avoid burning during periods of heavy public use, such as holidays or weekends.

Measures to minimize impacts to ***soil/water quality*** resources are:

- implement burning in areas identified as having high erosion potential, such that they will experience, on the average, light burn intensities,
- implement burning in areas with shallow soils over bedrock such that they will experience, on the average, moderate burn intensities,
- implement burning in areas without any special soils/fish/watershed concerns such that they will experience, at the most, moderate to severe burn intensities with no more than 10% of the area being severely burned.
- implement burning in areas with land stability concerns only after visual assessment and recommendation by a soil scientist
- Delicate soil sites should only be exposed to fires of a low enough intensity that the negative effects to the soil would be avoided. Burning prescriptions on some of these sites will be very restrictive - perhaps so restrictive that ideal burning conditions may rarely occur. These would include overly steep areas, those with southerly exposures, highly erodable soils, and mountain brush types with heavy fuel loadings. Where two or more of these characteristics combine on a particular site (for example - heavy fuel loads in a mountain brush type on a south facing, overly steep slope), a more restrictive prescription would be appropriate.
- In areas where the burn prescription would have to be extremely restrictive, mechanical treatments will be considered. Mechanical treatments involving the use if wheeled or tracked heavy equipment will be scheduled to occur during the normal dry season or on frozen soils to minimize soil compaction.
- Best management practices will be implemented to protect soil and water such as erosion control measures (e.g. silt fencing, straw bales, seeding). Erosion control needs will be assessed by a soil scientist and hydrologist immediately after treatment.

Additional areas to those already examined will be surveyed and some areas re-surveyed prior to treatment to minimize impacts to ***wildlife and threatened, endangered, or sensitive species.*** These surveys are on-going since the presence of a TES species could change prior to project implementation. If TES species are located during these surveys, a wildlife biologist will be consulted and appropriate measures taken to protect the species using currently available scientific recommendations. Standards and guidelines developed within the Utah Northern Goshawk Project will be utilized for known goshawk nests and any nests located in the future.

Cultural Resource surveys will be conducted in project areas that are determined to have a *high*

potential for the presence of cultural resources. In addition, those areas where ground disturbing activities, such as mechanical treatment or fire line construction, are planned will also receive cultural resource surveys to avoid or reduce impacts to archaeological sites that might be present. These surveys will be conducted prior to project implementation each year and results will be shared with the State Historic Preservation Office and tribal organizations.

To protect ***fish species, amphibians, and aquatic macro-invertebrates and water quality***, Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA) as described in the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) were established. The RHCA would generally be an area of no disturbance. If a burn may back into (slowly creep) the RHCA, a fish biologist will be consulted to determine if suppression efforts need to be conducted. Bases, camps, staging areas, helispots, and other centers for incident activities will be located outside of the RHCA. Additionally, chemical retardant, foam, or other fire retardants will not be used within 300 feet of any waterway. The RHCA's were established based on water features. The RHCA vary in widths, and are based on the following categories:

Category 1. Fish-Bearing Stream: 300 feet on both sides of the stream channel.

Category 2 –Permanently Flowing Non-Fish-Bearing Streams: 150 feet on both sides of the stream channel.

Category 3 – Ponds, Lakes, Reservoirs, and Wetlands Greater than 1 Acre: 150 feet from the water or wetland edge.

Category 4 – Seasonally Flowing or Intermittent Streams, Wetlands Less than 1 Acre, Landslides, and Landslide-Prone Areas: For Priority Watersheds 100 feet on both sides of the stream channel. Non-Priority Watersheds 50 feet on both sides of the stream channel or wetland edge.

Monitoring: Extensive pre-treatment vegetation monitoring has occurred within the project area both for treatment area selection and for pre-treatment and post-treatment comparisons along with a variety of resource (e.g. wildlife, fish, and cultural resources) inventory information (This information is contained within the project planning record). Effectiveness of the prescribed fires would be measured through a series of pre and post burn evaluations as well as monitoring the actual ignition and fire behavior. The evaluation of fire effects and behavior would not only determine if objectives are being met, but would aid in adaptive management as the project continues.

Ten percent of the areas would be monitored during and after the treatment (some of these items will not be monitored in all years, for example the amount of fuel consumed). The following items will be measured:

- number of aspen saplings per acre and height (monitoring to occur 1, 3, and 7 years after the treatment)
- mortality of overstory stems (monitoring immediately after the treatment)
- survival/damage of root systems (monitoring immediately after the treatment)
- removal of brush overstory (monitoring immediately after or within 1 year of the treatment)

- amount of fuel consumed (monitoring immediately after or within 1 year of the treatment)
- changes in species composition (monitoring to occur 1, 3, and 7 years after the treatment)
- regeneration of browse species (monitoring to occur 1, 3, and 7 years after the treatment)
- smoke dispersal (monitoring at the time of the burn)
- cost/acre (monitoring at the time of the treatment)
- erosion (monitoring within 1 year and 3 years after treatment)
- livestock/big game browsing effects (monitoring to occur 1, 3, and 7 years after the treatment)
- management indicator species at new and currently established routes (every 3-4 years from previous survey)

All monitoring results will be documented and maintained within the project record.

Monitoring will evaluate implementation (techniques and application) and effectiveness (were goals and objectives met in an environmentally sound way). Both successful implementation and effectiveness as well as recommendations for needed changes in management direction and/or practices will be documented. The intent of the monitoring is to learn from this project which practices and indicators are feasible and successful on the ground.

The Wasatch-Cache National Forest will pursue the development of a long-term monitoring project /research project involving scientists from the Rocky Mountain Research Station and from local Universities.

Rationale For the Decision

There is a need to address forest health concerns and to restore properly functioning ecosystems due to past wildfire suppression and past livestock grazing practices. Restoring the integrity and diversity of this ecosystem can be accomplished through the implementation of this project. The aspen/mountain brush communities are a critical part of forest ecosystems and they need to be managed for the long-term. The subsequent benefits of implementation will be: greater biodiversity, improved wildlife habitat conditions, a better balance of successional stages across the landscape, regenerated vegetation communities, and possibly a decreased potential of large soil damaging wildfires.

Several comments were received in response to this project; a summary of comments and responses are located in appendix F of the EA. I will address two concerns here in additional detail.

The one modification to alternative three is not to utilize prescribe burning or mechanical treatment in the spring. This is done to minimize impacts to wildlife (primarily neotropical birds) and threatened or sensitive plants, which may be affected by spring burning. Also, within the aspen vegetation type in the local area, there is only a very small opportunity for successful implementation of a prescribed burn during the spring.

Numerous comments expressed concern regarding livestock impacts to the environment and to the regeneration of aspen post-treatment. Some of the livestock concerns expressed

are outside of this project's scope of analysis. These concerns (e.g. number of livestock approved for an allotment) are addressed within allotment management plans (AMPs) and Annual Operating Plans not within an EA for treatment of aspen/mountain brush. The Wasatch-Cache National Forest is moving toward revising AMPs and will address these concerns through the NEPA process at that time.

I too am concerned about having successful regeneration of aspen after treatment. We (USFS and partners) go to great effort and cost to improve forest conditions for which we want to achieve our desired outcome (e.g. health aspen stands). Monitoring of similar projects has shown successful implementation and produced successful results (Red Banks, Rock Creek, and Boulder Mountain project monitoring reports/files). The following provisions for livestock will reduce impacts of grazing on treated areas and allow for successful regeneration of aspen. Permittees with treatments scheduled in their allotments will be required to keep livestock out of the those areas for one season before treatment to allow a buildup of fine fuels if prescribed fire will be used. These areas will be examined to determine if an area has enough fine fuels to support ignition and fire, therefore the one year of rest prior to burning may not be needed. Treatment areas will be rested from livestock grazing after burning or mechanical treatment and will not be allowed in treatment units until aspen sprouts in those stands have leaders reaching 5-6 feet in height. Campbell (2001) noted that aspen sprouts are often eaten by ungulates (elk, deer, cattle, and/or sheep), following fire, and that livestock grazing should not be allowed until leaders are 5 to 6 feet tall. This may take as little as one growing season or as long as 5-6 years depending on site conditions, but usually occurs within 2-3 years. (e.g. an area may not adequately regenerate therefore continuation of rest would be necessary). Keeping livestock out of treatment areas will require increased herding efforts, nonuse of a pasture or unit, trailing and bedding in new areas, and regular monitoring of livestock. In addition, fencing (primarily electrical) will be installed when necessary around burned areas to reduce grazing impacts. Within sheep allotments, effective sheep herding will reduce or eliminate livestock grazing impacts.

Lastly, financial partnerships have been developed with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Mule Deer Foundation, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. This project is one of many nationwide efforts by public land management agencies, in cooperation with other organizations, to address the needs of these ecosystems.

Public Involvement and Comment on the Environmental Assessment

A scoping document was mailed and/or made available to interested publics on March 18, 1996. In addition, there were media field trips on August 12 and 13, 1996, newspaper articles, open houses on September 11 and 12, 1996, personal visits by Forest Service personnel with interested publics. Also, a project update letter was mailed to interested publics. This project has also been listed in the Wasatch-Cache NEPA Quarterly since April 1996. A summary of the responses can be found in the project file.

A total of 128 individuals or agencies received the Cache-Aspen Pre-decisional EA while an additional 247 received a letter briefly describing the project. The comment period ended on

July 23, 2001. This pre-decisional EA was made available to the public for 50 days for review and comment. We received 10 mailed responses and comments. Responses to the comments is included as an appendix to the EA.

Also a Cache Aspen/Mountain Brush Treatment Project station was setup at the Forest Plan Revision meetings at Logan and Ogden, Utah.

Finally, two field trips occurred with Dr. John Carter of Western Watersheds Project, Inc. on August 20th and October 5th to discuss his groups concerns and provide a better understanding of the aspen/mountain brush community types.

Alternatives Considered

Three alternatives were analyzed in the Environmental Assessment. Alternatives other than the decision along with the reasons I did not select them are described below.

ALTERNATIVE ONE

No Action. Under this alternative, there would be no additional aspen treatment beyond those prescribed burning projects already approved through other NEPA efforts. Under this alternative, environmental consequences will still occur because the existing environment is not static. Stands will continue to mature with a loss of young seral stages, stand diversity, and the aspen vegetation type. Diversity in stand age and structure would continue to be lost, thus most species dependent on early successional stages would continue at lower than historic levels. The probability of catastrophic fire is likely to be highest in this alternative, since the action alternatives would create a patchwork of potential firebreaks.

ALTERNATIVE TWO

Alternative 2 was developed to address the issues of air quality, visual quality, forest users, range and inventoried roadless area values by treating aspen and moutain brush at a reduced level while moving the forest toward properly functioning condition but at a reduced amount. Prescribed burns would occur at moderate intensity levels (appx. 1000-2,000 ac/yr.) Mechanical treatment with heavy equipment would not occur, handcutting with the use of chainsaws will occur. The treatments would occur in concentrated locations during the spring, summer, and fall. Treatment up to 8,000 acres. This alternative would treat the aspen vegetation type at a reduced level but not at historical levels. Diversity in stand age and structure would increase thus habitat for most species dependent on early successional stages would increase.

Findings Required by other laws

The Forest Plan has been reviewed and a determination made that this decision is consistent with the Forest Plan. The actions in this project comply fully with the goals of the Forest Plan, the Wasatch Front, Logan Canyon, and Cache Management Area Direction pages IV-220 through

IV-252, IV-290 through IV-313, IV-253 through IV-281 and the Forest-wide standards and guidelines (See Chapter IV of the Wasatch-Cache Land and Resource Management Plan).

Floodplains, wetlands, prime lands, threatened and endangered species, minerals, and cultural resource management implications have been considered and these resources will not be adversely affected.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The selected Alternative #3, with modifications, provides specific, project level, direction for the implementation on the Logan and Ogden Ranger Districts. The alternatives (Chapter 2), affected environment (Chapter 3), and environmental consequences (Chapter 4) are disclosed in the EA. In consideration of the analysis documented in the EA and in light of the reasons set forth below, I find that selection of Alternative #3, with modifications, for the treatment of 20,000 acres of aspen/mountain brush within the project area will not significantly impact the human environment. This determination is based on the following factors:

- ❑ Public health and safety are minimally affected by the selected alternative. The proposed actions in the selected Alternative #3, with modifications, will not significantly affect public health and safety.

- ❑ The selected alternative will not significantly affect any unique characteristics of the geographic area, does not adversely affect anything listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor does it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. The proposed action does not alter the environmental protection afforded such unique lands as is already provided for in the Forest Plan. Specific resource protection and mitigation measures have been included as a part of the selected alternative, and will ensure additional protection of any unique areas or resources. (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4)

- ❑ The effects of the selected alternative on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. This is evident in the letters and comments received during public involvement and are included in the project file.

- ❑ The selected alternative does not establish highly uncertain, unique, or uncertain risks. The best available scientific information and monitoring results have been used to estimate the environmental consequences. No known effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

- ❑ The selected alternative does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration, nor is it related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulative significant impacts. These actions do not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented to meet the goals and objectives of the Wasatch-Cache Land and Resource Management Plan. The EA discloses the projected cumulative effects (Chapter 4) of implementing the

selected alternative. There are no significant cumulative effects between this project and other projects implemented or planned on areas near the project area of this EA.

- ❑ The selected alternative would be limited in geographic application, and would be limited to certain projects and activities. The site-specific actions and effects have been displayed in Chapters 2 and 4, and Appendix A of the EA.

- ❑ The selected alternative would not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act. There are six federally listed species for the Wasatch-Cache National Forest: bald eagle, black-footed ferret, whooping crane, Ute ladies'-tresses, and Maguire primrose, and the Canada lynx. A biological assessment evaluating the impacts to threatened and endangered species found in the project area has been prepared for this project. A copy is located within the project file. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with our determination of "no effect" for the bald eagle, black-footed ferret, whooping crane and Ute ladies'-tresses and has concurred with our finding of "not likely to adversely affect" for the Maguire primrose and Canada lynx.

- ❑ The selected alternative does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Adoption of the selected alternative would not significantly affect the following elements of the human environment, which are specified in statute, regulation, or executive order: Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Farm Lands (prime or unique), floodplains, Native American religious Concerns, Hazardous or Solid Wastes, water quality, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness. The actions do not threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Finding

On the basis of the information and analysis contained in the EA and all the other information available as summarized above, it is my determination that adoption of the proposed action (as reflected in Alternative #3, as modified), does not constitute a major federal action, individually or cumulatively and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

Implementation Date

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7 A written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received in duplicate by the Appeal Reviewing Officer within 45 days from the date of publication of a legal notice of availability for this decision in the Salt Lake Tribune, Salt

Lake City, Utah. The publication date is expected to be in April 2002. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14 and be mailed to:

USDA, Forest Service
Intermountain Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer
324 25th Street
Ogden, Utah 84401

Contact Person

For further information about this project, contact Steve Blatt, 507 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401, phone: 801-625-5112.

Thomas L. Tidwell
Forest Supervisor
Wasatch-Cache National Forest
8236 Federal Building
125 South State Street
Salt Lake City, Utah 84138

6/21/02
Date