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Forest Service
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Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Fillmore Field Office
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File Code: 1900
Date: June 24, 2003

Dear Interested Public Land User,

On August 22, 2002, President Bush announced the Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) for Wildfire Prevention and Stronger Communities. The **Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project** is one of the demonstration projects for the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. This initiative calls for administrative improvements to ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency and better results in projects that reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires and restore forest health. More information about the Healthy Forest Initiative can be viewed at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/HFI.shtml>.

Proposed Action

The Fillmore Field Office Manager and the Fillmore District Ranger are proposing to reduce hazardous fuels on approximately 14,329 acres along the west side of the Pahvant Mountain Range, in the vicinity of Scipio, Holden, Fillmore and Meadow, Utah. The purpose of the proposed action is to change fire behavior conditions near these communities to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically intense and severe wildfire and secondary effects, such as flooding, to these communities and the environment while providing for firefighter safety.

Sagebrush-grasslands, pinyon-juniper, and Gambel oak would be treated in seven treatment units, ranging from approximately 490 to 4,929 acres in size. Approximately 40-80 percent of the vegetation would be removed in each treatment unit. Treatment methods include cutting vegetation by hand; piling or scattering cut vegetation; burning cut vegetation by hand or helicopter; and broadcast burning by hand or helicopter. Broadcast burning would be applied to create a patchwork burn pattern of burned and unburned vegetation; for example, 40-80 percent of the vegetation would be burned, leaving 20-60 percent unburned. Treatments would begin in 2003 and are anticipated to be completed by 2008.

Background

The communities of the Pahvant Front, including Scipio, Holden, Fillmore and Meadow are within a wildland urban interface, the highest priority for treatment as identified in the National Fire Plan (www.fireplan.gov). The National Fire Plan is an interagency effort between the Forest Service, the Department of the Interior and the National Association of State Foresters to manage impacts of wildland fire on communities. This is a long-term effort of working collaboratively on the issues of hazardous fuels reduction, fire fighting, rehabilitation and restoration, community assistance and accountability.

The Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project falls under the hazardous fuels reduction program of the National Fire Plan. The hazardous fuels program provides direction to reduce the impacts of unwanted wildland fires on communities, natural resources, and cultural resources. Past disruptions of natural fire cycles, as well as other management practices, have resulted in wildfires of increasing intensity and severity. Treatment of hazardous fuels would help reduce the impacts of wildfires on communities and restore health to fire-adapted ecosystems.

The BLM Fillmore Field Office began analyzing fuels reduction activities along the Pahvant Front in 1991. Several Environmental Assessments (EA) were completed including the Holden Springs EA (1991), Section 31 EA (1996), Frampton Heights EA (1996), and Meadow Creek EA (1998). These EAs

and associated Decision Records analyzed and approved fuels reduction involving cutting, but not prescribed burning. The Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project EA discloses the effects of prescribed burning vegetation already cut, or planned for cutting, as described in these BLM EAs.

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

We have completed the Environmental Assessment (EA) and proposed Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project, Healthy Forest Initiative – Fuels Reduction 2003 project. The EA, FONSI and associated environmental analysis documents can be viewed on the project website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/rifc/pahvant/pahvant.htm>.

This EA looks quite different from the traditional Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service approach. The effects analysis in the EA is focused on supporting our determination that there would be no significant impacts resulting from the proposed action. While in the past we have included more details of the environmental analysis in the EA, the Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project EA is focused more on supporting the FONSI, which meets the requirements of our laws and regulations¹.

Providing Comments

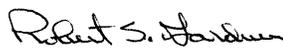
The public is invited to comment on our proposed action. Only those who submit timely and substantive comments will be accepted as appellants. Substantive comments are those within the scope of, are specific to, and have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and include supporting reasons that the Responsible Officials should consider in reaching a decision. Each individual, or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or otherwise verify identity in order to attain appeal eligibility. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project. Comments should include the information required pursuant to 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3), as published in the Federal Register on June 4, 2003.

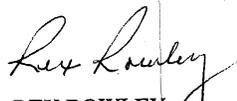
Please send written comments to: Robert S. Gardner, District Ranger, Fillmore Ranger District, 90 South Main, P.O. Box 265, Fillmore, UT 84701; Phone: (435) 743-5721. Fax: (435) 743-4113. Comments may also be delivered to the above address during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday, excluding federal holidays.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of the EA and FONSI sent to you, please contact Diane Freeman, Team Leader, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT 84701 or call (435) 896-9233. The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following publication of the legal notice in the *Richfield Reaper*.

We appreciate your interest and participation in the proposed project thus far and look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,


ROBERT S. GARDNER
District Ranger
Fillmore Ranger District


REX ROWLEY
Field Manager
Fillmore Field Office

¹ For information on the core elements of the EA process, see the President's Council On Environmental Quality memo under the Healthy Forest Initiative:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/guidanceforenvironmental_assessmentsofforest_healthprojects_memo.pdf



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
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Environmental Assessment

Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project Healthy Forest Initiative-Fuels Reduction 2003

Fillmore Field Office
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&
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Fishlake National Forest



United States
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Mature pinyon-juniper and mountain brush adjacent to a residence in the wildland urban interface zone

For Information Contact: Diane Freeman, Team Leader
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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The proposed action evaluated by this Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment (EA) is to cut and burn approximately 14,329 acres of hazardous fuels along the west side of the Pahvant Mountain Range (Pahvant Front). The proposed treatment units are located east of Interstate 15, between Fillmore and Richfield, and extending from Scipio to Meadow, Utah (see map on pg. 5).

The documents cited in this EA and additional project documentation, including resource specialist reports and more detailed analyses of project-area resources, can be obtained from the Richfield Interagency Fire Center webpage at: www.fs.fed.us/r4/rifc/pahvant/pahvant, and in the project planning record located at the Fishlake National Forest Supervisor's Office in Richfield, Utah and the BLM Fillmore Field Office in Fillmore, Utah.

This assessment is consistent with the National Forest Management Act and tiers to the Final Environmental Impact Statements for the BLM House Range RMP (1987), BLM Warm Springs RMP (1986) and Fishlake Forest Plan (1986), as amended. Specifically, this proposal is consistent with the BLM House Range RMP (Chapter 2, pages 13-94), the BLM Warm Springs RMP (Chapter 2, pages 9-62), and the Fishlake Forest Plan Management Direction (Chapter IV, pages IV-1 to IV-160). The proposed action is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act and National Historic Preservation Act.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL

This section summarizes the existing and desired conditions in the project area, which lead to the purpose of and need for the proposed project.

Existing Condition

A complete discussion of the existing condition and history of events leading up to the project proposal is contained in the Fire and Fuels Specialist Report (FFSR, Chappell, 2003). This Existing Condition discussion is summarized from the FFSR, and appropriate citations to page numbers are included for ease in referencing.

The project analysis area is located along the west side of the Pahvant Mountain Range (Pahvant Front), east of Interstate 15, between Fillmore and Richfield, and extending from Scipio to Meadow, Utah (see Figure 1, pg. 5). The Pahvant Front contains various vegetation types including pinyon-juniper, sagebrush/grass/forb, and Gambel oak vegetation types. Historically, fire played a regular disturbance role in these types (FFSR, pg. 6). A fire suppression activity over the last 150 years has resulted in plant communities that are now taller and denser overall, with more tons of fuel per acre available to burn (ibid.). This is particularly evident in areas that have changed from mixed grass and sagebrush to pinyon-juniper and Gambel oak (ibid.). If fires were allowed to burn as they did historically, today we could expect a mosaic of various vegetation types and fuel loads. Instead, there exists a heavy, continuous fuel loading that presents an increased risk of a wildfire rapidly spreading once ignited (ibid., pg.12).

Over the last ten years there have been numerous, large, high severity wildfires along the Pahvant Front. An average of 31 lightning-caused fires occur in this area each year (ibid., pp. 12-13). In 1996, the Adelaide wildfire burned approximately 15,000 acres near Kanosh, which later resulted in flooding to farmlands and damage to hay crops. A bridge, fisheries structures and fences were also damaged on National Forest System lands. In August 2000, the Swain wildfire burned about 7,700 acres along the Pahvant Front. The wildfire threatened several structures in the area. In the summers of 2000 and 2001 heavy thunderstorms resulted in flood damage to residences in Holden. A Forest Service road and campground were also damaged.

Vegetation is expected to continue growing more dense, thereby accumulating more dead fuels. When wildfire occurs it would likely produce high severity, potentially damaging fires. Such fires would burn all vegetation, resulting in unprotected soils and watersheds. Fire starts would likely continue to occur at the average rate of 30 per year. It is expected that some of the lightning fires would escape initial attack and grow to very large sizes. Fires would burn with more intensity, longer flame lengths and higher severity than would have been typical 10 years ago. The result would be uncharacteristically intense and severe fires. Resistance to fire control would increase, while the ability to provide for public and firefighter safety and structure protection would continue to decrease. (ibid., pp. 16-17)

The steep canyons and dense fuels adjacent to the communities of Scipio, Holden, Fillmore and Meadow have the potential to burn hot enough to prevent safe and effective deployment of suppression resources for the protection of individual homes, communities and watershed values (ibid., pp. 16-17; Hydrology Report, pp. 36-37). There would be increased probability of flood events as a result of loss of vegetation and adverse effects to soils (Soil Resource Management Report, pg. 28).

Desired Condition

The proposed action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Warm Springs Resource Management Plan (RMP, 1987), House Range RMP (1987), and the Fishlake National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, 1986), as amended by the Utah Fire Amendment (USDA, 2000). The proposed action is designed to meet goals, objectives and guidelines and helps move the project area towards desired conditions described in those plans. Pertinent goals and objectives include, "Reduce human and ecological losses, complement resource management objectives, and sustain productivity of biological systems through fire management" (RMP pg. 61, 93), and "Ecosystems are restored and maintained, consistent with land uses and historic fire regimes, through wildland fire use and prescribed fire" (Utah Fire Amendment pg. A-40).

The specific desired conditions related to this proposal are that fuel height and fuel loading are at a level that, if ignited by wildfire, would result in flame lengths and fireline intensity that would allow for safer initial attack and less risk to firefighters, and less potential for large, high severity wildfires. There would also be a reduced potential of damage to communities and resources from wildfire and flooding. Firefighters can safely attack up to a four-foot flame length with handtools. Fireline intensity at four-foot flame lengths is about 100 British thermal units per foot

per second (Btu/ft/sec). Fire engines can safely attack fires with flame lengths up to eight feet. Eight-foot flames produce about 500 Btu/ft/sec. (FFSR, pp. 17-18)

Purpose and Need for Action

The general concern for the Scipio, Holden, Fillmore and Meadow communities is a high risk of high severity wildfire, and public and firefighter safety. The purpose of this proposed action is to change the fire behavior conditions near these communities to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically intense and severe wildfire and secondary effects, such as flooding to these communities and the environment, while providing for firefighter safety. The BLM and Forest Service are proposing to change fire behavior by reducing vegetation fuels because vegetation is the only one of the three (weather and topography being the other two) factors influencing fire behavior that we can change. Reduced flame lengths and fireline intensity, along with their associated fuel conditions, support public and firefighter safety (FFSR pp. 17-18). The specific fuel condition and fire behavior needs surrounding these communities are: 1) shorter fuel heights, 2) decreased fuel loads, 3) decreased flame length, and 4) decreased fireline intensity. The comparison of existing and desired fuel conditions and fire behavior in the table below shows there is a need for change.

Table 1. Existing and Desired Conditions for Fuels and Fire Behavior.

	Existing Level	Desired Level
Fuel Height (feet)	3-20	<2
Fuel Load (tons per acre)	3-30	<5
Flame Length (feet)	10-45	<8
Fireline Intensity (Btu/ft/sec)	190-24,000	<500

Ranges are based on actual figures for sagebrush/grass/forb, Gambel oak/mountain brush, and pinyon-juniper vegetation types (see Fire and Fuels Specialist Report, contained in the project planning record)

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Proposed Action

The Fillmore Field Office Manager and the Fillmore District Ranger are proposing to treat approximately 14,329 acres of hazardous fuel accumulations along the Pahvant Front. The proposed action is to reduce hazardous fuels by reducing fuel height and fuel loads within the project area. Treatments would occur in seven treatment units, ranging from approximately 490 to 4,929 acres in size. Vegetation to be treated includes sagebrush-grasslands, pinyon-juniper, and Gambel oak. Detailed treatment unit maps, treatment unit acreages, vegetation types and primary treatment methods are displayed in Appendix A.

Approximately 40-80 percent of the vegetation would be removed in each treatment unit. Treatment methods include cutting vegetation by hand; piling or scattering cut vegetation; burning cut vegetation by hand or helicopter; and broadcast burning by hand or helicopter. Broadcast burning would be applied to create a patchwork burn pattern of burned and unburned

vegetation; for example, 40-80 percent of the vegetation would be burned, leaving 20-60 percent unburned. Treatments involving broadcast burning would occur mainly during spring and fall months. Cutting could occur any time of year. Treatments would begin in 2003 and are anticipated to be completed by 2008.

Project Design Specifications

As part of the proposed action, the following design specifications would be implemented in order to ease potential impacts to resource conditions:

1. Where necessary, handlines would be constructed along the perimeters of treatment units in order to contain prescribed fire within the Wild Goose, Pioneer, Horse Hollow and Meadow treatment units. Handline is typically created by clearing up to a ten-foot path in overhead fuels, and up to a one-foot wide line scraped to bare mineral soil. Approximately 0.12-0.84 mile of handline would be created in each of these four units.
2. Firelines would be water barred frequently to prevent erosion as part of fireline Best Management Practices (Hydrology Report, pg. 34).
3. Low- to moderate-intensity prescribed fire would be used in order to promote the creation of a patchwork pattern of burned and unburned vegetation, and to protect soil resources.
4. For prescribed burns in the Grabalt, Horse Hollow and Meadow treatment units, the soil moisture content would be at least 12-15% water by weight, in order to protect the fragile nature of the soils (Soil Resource Management Report, pg. 29).
5. Treatment of the Holden Springs unit would be deferred until 2005 in order to avoid future potential for flooding to the community of Holden, which could occur as a result of cumulative effects from the Swain's wildfire. This would allow for further rehabilitation and revegetation of the steep mountainsides of upper Maple Hollow within the Swain's wildfire area (Soil Resource Management Report, pg. 33 and Hydrology Report, pg. 33).

Continued on page 6

Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project

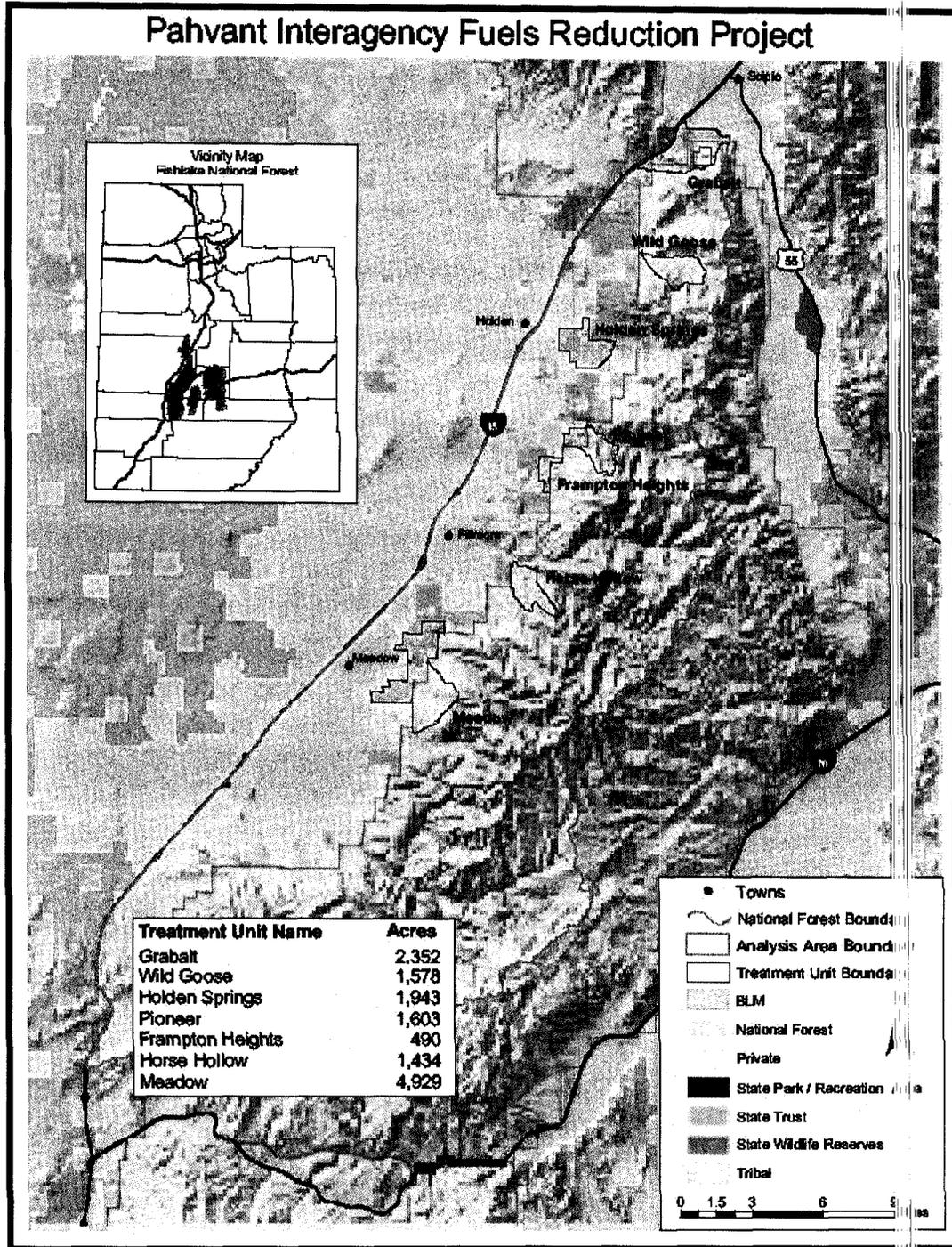


Figure 1. The analysis area, proposed treatment units, and unit acreages.

Project Design Specifications, *continued*

6. Grazing pastures within treatment units would be rested from livestock grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons following a prescribed burn in that unit. Pastures would be rested for an additional season(s), where necessary to allow vegetation to grow and reestablish. The following allotments and units would be affected. BLM: Meadow Spring Allotment; USFS: Wild Goose Allotment – Wild Goose Unit; Pioneer Allotment – Pioneer Unit; Center Fork Chalk Creek Allotment – Horse Hollow Unit; Meadow Creek Allotment – Meadow Creek and Walker Canyon units.
7. Vegetation treatments would not occur within a minimum 100-foot buffer of Pioneer Chalk and Meadow creeks, in order to avoid potential negative affects to riparian resources.
8. An average of two trees per acre would be retained for wildlife habitat in pinyon-juniper targeted for cutting. Trees with cavities that are observed during cutting of pinyon or junipers will be retained for cavity nesting bird species.
9. Several archaeological sites have been identified in the proposed project areas thus far. It is anticipated that additional sites will be located during future surveys. No ground-disturbing activities would be conducted through known archaeological sites that are eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. Eligible sites would be protected by reducing heat intensity and fire duration on sites through the use of firelines or hand thinning of fuels within and around site boundaries. In areas not previously inventoried, an archaeologist would be present to monitor all ground-disturbing activities to ensure there would be no adverse effects to heritage resources.
10. Prescribed burning would only occur under specified conditions for weather, fuel moisture and other factors as specified in the prescribed burn plan, which would provide for safe burning conditions and would reduce the possibility of fire escape.
11. In the event a prescribed fire escapes control, it would be considered a wildfire and would be treated accordingly, including suppression activities and implementation of burn area emergency rehabilitation (BAER) measures, if necessary.
12. Prescribed burn areas would be seeded to promote recovery of ground cover in order to protect soil resources, if determined to be necessary through post-burn monitoring. Seed mixes would be comprised of grass, forbs, or shrubs. Only noxious weed-free seed mixes would be used.



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Finding of No Significant Impact

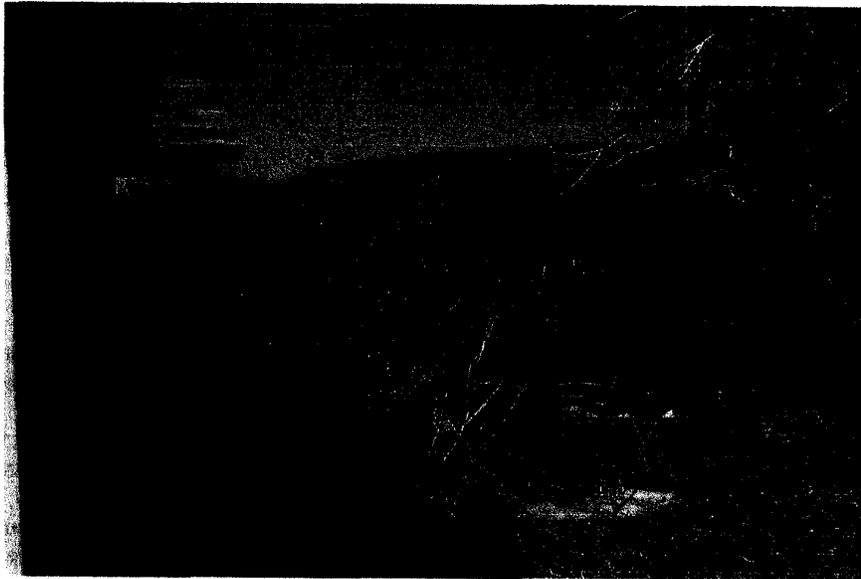
Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project Healthy Forest Initiative-Fuels Reduction 2003

Fillmore Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
&
Fillmore Ranger District
Fishlake National Forest



United States
Department of
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Mature pinyon-juniper and mountain brush adjacent to a residence in the wildland urban interface zone

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The context and setting of this project is localized with implications to the immediate treatment areas only. The people most affected by the treatments would be local residents. This action is also a continuation of fuels projects that have occurred for many years on lands administered by the Fishlake National Forest and BLM Fillmore Field Office. After considering the environmental effects described in the HFI-Fuels Reduction 2003 Environmental Assessment and the entirety of the Project Planning Record, we have determined that these actions would not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

Robert Gardner, Fillmore District Ranger

Date

Rex Rowley, Fillmore Field Office Manager

Date

We base our findings on the following:

- Key:
- AQR = Air Quality Report
 - HR = Hydrology Report
 - BA = Biological Assessment
 - HRPP = Heritage Resource Protection Plan
 - BE = Biological Evaluation
 - SKMR = Soil Resource Management Report
 - FFSR = Fire and Fuels Specialist Report
 - WR = Wildlife Report
 - VR = Vegetation Report

Factors Considered	Intensity (How Much of an Impact)	Reasons the Action is Not Significant
Public Health & Safety	The project would reduce the risk of large, high severity wildland fire on approximately 14,329 acres, which comprises five percent of the Pahvant Front. (See EA page 9 and FFSR pages 17-22)	The project would have positive impacts for the residents and structures of Scipio, Holdrege, Fillmore and Meadow, as well as a positive impact for firefighter safety. These impacts are localized, but not significant given the small percentage of area to be treated.
Unique Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic or cultural resources • Parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands • Wild & Scenic Rivers • Ecologically critical areas 	No parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, Wild & Scenic Rivers, or ecologically critical areas are within the treatment areas; therefore, none would be impacted. There are archeological sites in the project area, but mitigation measures would prevent adverse impacts to resources eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. Approximately 1,135 acres of inventoried roadless areas lie within the project area. A maximum of 0.2 acres would be temporarily affected by the	No significant impact because unique characteristics would not be impacted and there would be no effect to roadless characteristics beyond acceptable ranges for wilderness consideration.

Factors Considered	Intensity (How Much of an Impact)	Reasons the Action is Not Significant
	<p>construction of up to 1.63 miles of one-foot wide handline for containment of prescribed fire. (See EA pages 9-10; HR page 41; HRPP pages 10-11, 13-14; Roadless Area Impact Evaluation pp. 4-7)</p>	
<p>Effects likely to be highly controversial?</p>	<p>Based on our review of public comments and the project analysis, we do not find any highly controversial effects to the human environment. There is no scientific controversy over the effects of the proposal. Work with the public and other agencies indicates strong local support for the project. (See EA pages 13-15 and FFSR pages 4-5)</p>	<p>No significant impact because effects are not highly controversial.</p>
<p>Beneficial & Adverse Effects</p>	<p>Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered. (See EA pages 9-13)</p>	<p>Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered when making a determination of significance. While there would be beneficial effects, this action does not rely on those effects to balance potentially significant adverse environmental effects.</p>
<p>Effects highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks</p>	<p>The Fishlake National Forest and BLM Field Offices have successfully completed an average of 8,000 acres of vegetation treatments, including prescribed burning, per year over the last five years. The risks associated with the project are recognized, familiar and acceptable. The analysis is based on our best use of available data on fire behavior and our extensive experience with this type of fuel reduction project. (See FFSR page 22)</p>	<p>No significant impact because in our experience with this type of project, effects are not uncertain and we are not taking unique or unknown risks.</p>
<p>Precedent established for future actions?</p>	<p>This action does not set any precedent for future actions. These types of fuels reduction activities have occurred on the Fishlake National Forest and BLM lands over many years, and an average</p>	<p>No significant impact because no precedent would be established for future actions.</p>

Factors Considered	Intensity (How Much of an Impact)	Reasons the Action is Significant	Not Significant
	of 8,000 acres per year have been treated over the last five years. (See FFSR page 22)		
Cumulatively significant?	Approximately five percent of the Pahvant Front would be treated. Effects are expected to be similar to effects for similar projects. This coupled with project mitigation measures and the small percentage to be treated would result in no significant cumulative impacts. (See EA pages 9-13, cumulative effects sections of AQR, BA, BE, FFSR, HR, HRPP, SRMR, WR, VR)	No significant impact because the project does not represent cumulative adverse impacts when considered in combination with other past actions or reasonably foreseeable future actions.	because the potential impacts when combined with other past actions or reasonably foreseeable future actions.
Loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources (NHPA consistency)	There are archeological sites in the project area, but mitigation measures would prevent loss or destruction of resources eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. (See EA page 10 and HRPP pages 10-11, 13-14)	No significant impact because there would be no loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.	because there would be no loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.
Adversely affect T&E species or habitat? (ESA consistency)	No effect to T&E plants because they do not occur in the project area. May affect, not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle and western yellow-billed cuckoo. No designated critical habitat for T&E species occurs in the project area. (See EA page 11 and BA pages 2-3, 12-13)	No significant impact because there would be no effect to T&E plants and no adverse effects to T&E wildlife.	because there would be no effect to T&E plants and no adverse effects to T&E wildlife.
Consistent with federal, state or local laws for the protection of the environment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Forest Management Act • Clean Water Act • Clean Air Act 	The project meets federal, state and local laws for the protection of the environmental and meets disclosure requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. The proposed action is consistent with the Fishlake Forest Plan, House Range and Warm Springs Resource Management Plans. (See EA pages 9-12; BA pages 2-3, 12-13; BE pages 2-8, 18-22; WR pages 39-55; HR page, 38; AQR page 7)	The proposed action does not threaten a violation of federal, state or local laws.	