



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Wasatch-Cache
National
Forest

125 South State Street
Federal Building, Suite 823
Salt Lake City, Utah 84138
(801) 524-3900

File Code: 1950-3

Date: December 11, 2003

Dear Wasatch-Cache Stakeholder

Enclosed is a copy of the Bear Hodges II Timber Sale Draft Environmental Impact Statement for your review and comment. A scoping letter was sent out last June for this project that included the Forest's proposed action. Comments were received from the public and government agencies regarding the proposed action. Those comments and other information have been considered in this document that creates a new alternative to the original proposal and analyzes potential environmental effects. The Forest Service's preferred alternative is Alternative 2. The DEIS can also be accessed on our website at: www.fs.fed.us/r4/wcnf/projects.

The purpose of this comment period is to provide you an opportunity to comment before I make a decision. Those who provide substantive comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations.

The opportunity to comment ends 45 days following the date of publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the DEIS in the Federal Register. The publication date in the Federal Register is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

There are several formats in which to submit comments. Written comments can be submitted to:

Wasatch-Cache National Forest
8226 Federal Building
125 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84138
ATTN: Bear Hodges II

The office business hours at the Federal Building for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-wasatch-cache@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Oral comments can be provided to Tom Scott, at Ogden Ranger District, (801) 625-5404.



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Summary

Introduction

This summary presents an overview of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared for the Bear Hodges II Timber Sale. The information includes the issues brought forward in the analysis and a summary of the effects of the three alternatives.

The Wasatch-Cache National Forest (WCNF) proposes to harvest about 5600 CCF of mature spruce from about 700 acres in the Bear Hodges area of the Logan Ranger District using silvicultural practices consistent with direction set forth in the Revised Forest Plan and other applicable laws and regulations.

The proposal includes thinning of spruce stands intended to 1) perpetuate this portion of the Utah State University T.W. Daniel Experimental Forest, and 2) conduct research on the measurement and manipulation of forest stand structure through testing and demonstrating different silvicultural methods.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Forest Service proposed action is to perpetuate a spruce-fir forest in the project area and over several decades achieve a balanced range of age/size classes and to provide for continual recruitment of new individuals into each age class. It is intended that risk to the spruce stands from spruce beetle epidemics be reduced. Landscape structure and landscape patterns of spruce-fir forest would trend toward revised forest plan desired future conditions.

The need for vegetation management treatments has been identified over the last decade as the Logan Ranger District and Utah State University have examined and evaluated forest conditions in the Bear Hodges area. The structure of the spruce-fir forest in the Bear Hodges II project area is old and dense and susceptible to a spruce beetle epidemic. Such an epidemic could cause extensive and unacceptable mortality to the highly valued mature portions of these stands. These values include wildlife habitat, forest products, forest scenery, and the inherent character of this mature forest.

Decisions to be Made

The Forest Service will decide whether or not to harvest timber in the Bear Hodges II project area. The decision could involve the proposed action or any of the other alternatives in their entirety, or could include specific portions of the proposed action or any alternative.

The decision will be made by the Forest Supervisor of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest and will be documented in a Record of Decision, subject to public review and appeal.

Issues

The following are the issues identified through internal (Forest Service) and external (public) scoping.

Water and Soils

- What are the effects to water quantity, water quality, and wetland areas from timber harvest activities?
- What are the effects to soil productivity from timber harvest activities?

Vegetation

- What effect might the proposed vegetation treatments have on the current spruce beetle infestation?
- How would alternative treatments change the forest's susceptibility to spruce beetle outbreaks in the short and long term?
- What effect might the proposed vegetation treatments have on the distribution of mature and old age classes?
- What effect might the proposed vegetation treatments have on the patterns of the forest mosaic?
- What effect might the proposed vegetation treatments have on the amount and distribution of noxious weeds?

Wildlife

- What effect will the project have on terrestrial wildlife, including avian species?
- What effect will the project have on connectivity and the regional wildlife corridor described in the revised Forest Plan?
- What effect will the project have on threatened and endangered, sensitive, management indicator species (MIS) and their habitats?
- What effect will changes to road density have on wildlife?

Aquatic and Semi Aquatic Species

- How will the project affect overall aquatic biodiversity?
- How will the project affect Bonneville cutthroat trout populations and habitats?
- How will the project affect amphibians?

Recreation and Scenery

- How will the proposed vegetation treatments affect the recreation experience and opportunities?
- How will the project affect the landscape character (scenery) in the project area?

- How will unauthorized OHV use be deterred on new roads and timber harvest openings in the project area?

Livestock Grazing

- How would livestock grazing under the proposed action or any of the alternatives affect regeneration of spruce in harvested areas?

Roads

- For this issue a roads analysis was done (Appendix A) and a new alternative to the proposed action (Alternative 3) was developed.

Issues Dismissed

Issues related to the following listed topics were identified by the ID Team as not within the scope of analysis, not pertinent to the development of a reasonable range of alternatives, and not necessary for the evaluation of environmental effects:

Heritage Resources
Plant Species at Risk
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Elk Winter Range
Inventoried Roadless Areas
Travel Management

Summary of Alternatives

	Alternative 1 (No Action)	Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)	Alternative 3 (No Road Construction)
RESEARCH UNITS	None	6 units totaling 139 acres	6 units totaling 139 acres
COMMERCIAL THINNING UNITS	None	6 units totaling 562 acres	6 units totaling 302 acres
ROADS	No new roads	2.3 miles of new construction, which will be gated, seeded and closed to public use; 1.5 miles of temporary road. Temp roads restored to original contour and slashed to prevent access after use.	No new road construction. Reopened approximately 2500 feet of old Sinks Road. Segment will be reclaimed after use.
ACRES OF SPRUCE REGENERATION (1/4 AC OPENINGS)	None	113 small groups (1/4 ac. in size), totaling 28.25 acres	60 small groups (1/4 ac. in size), totaling 15 acres
NOXIOUS WEEDS TREATMENT	About 50 acres sprayed each year	About 50 acres sprayed each year as needed	About 50 acres sprayed each year as needed

Summary of Effects

In general, Alternative 1 is the no action alternative, which will maintain existing conditions in the Bear Hodges area, and T.W. Daniel Experimental Forest without harvesting spruce stands. Alternative 2 is the Forest Service' proposed action that is designed to apply a variety of harvest techniques to about 700 acres and produce approximately 5600 CCF (3100MBF) of timber. Alternative 3 responds to the public concerns related to new road construction. With this alternative, harvesting would be limited to those areas that can be reached from existing roads and approximately 3501 CCF (1938 MBF) of timber would be harvested from 441 acres.

The effects of the Alternatives are described in more detail in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Chapter 1 Purpose and Need

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the environmental review process, introduces the proposed action and the purpose and need it addresses, specifies the decisions to be made regarding the proposal, describes the scoping process and issues, and lists permits and consultations which may be required to implement the proposal.

Subsequent chapters in the document describe the alternatives (Chapter 2), provide information on the current condition of potentially affected resources (Chapter 3), identify environmental consequences of the alternatives (Chapter 4), list the preparers of this environmental impact statement (EIS) (Chapter 5), and document consultation and coordination with other organizations (Chapter 6). A glossary and references section is also provided.

Because the proposed action has the potential to significantly affect the human environment, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), requires that an EIS be prepared to assess and disclose the environmental effects of the proposal and alternatives to it.

Function of the EIS

The primary purpose of an EIS is disclosure of the environmental effects of implementing a proposed action or any of the alternatives. The EIS is not a decision document. The Forest Service decision associated with this analysis will be documented in a separate Record of Decision (ROD) signed by the Forest Supervisor. Decisions to be made in consideration of this environmental analysis are described later in this chapter. In particular, the EIS is intended to:

- Document the development and evaluation of the proposed action and alternatives as the basis for a Forest Service decision.
- Provide the site-specific environmental analysis of the activities encompassed by the range of alternatives.
- Describe, analyze, and disclose the biological, physical, and socioeconomic impacts associated with implementing each of the alternatives.
- Identify the long-term, direct, and indirect effects of the alternatives (40 CFR 1508.8).
- Disclose the effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions that interact in a cumulative fashion with the direct and indirect impacts (40 CFR 1508.7).
- Indicate possible mitigating measures that may be used to avoid, minimize, eliminate, or reduce adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.20).

- Provide a comprehensible, reliable, and informative document for interested public agencies, groups, and individuals.

1.2 Proposed Action

The Forest Service (FS) proposes to harvest approximately 5600 CCF (3.1 million board feet) of timber from about 701 acres of National Forest land in and adjacent to the T.W. Daniel Experimental Forest on the Logan Ranger District (Figure 1.2.1). The 2500-acre Daniel Forest is located in the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah about 10 miles south of the Utah-Idaho border, in the upper reaches of Little Bear and West Hodges drainages. The Forest encompasses Sections 15, 16, 21, and 22 of T. 13 N., R. 4 E. Project activities are also proposed in the northern halves of Sections 27 and 28 in the same township. The T.W. Daniel Experimental Forest was established in 1936 when Utah State University purchased a section of land from the State Land Board (Section 16) and was granted a special use permit from the USDA Forest Service on three contiguous sections (Sections 15, 21, and 22).

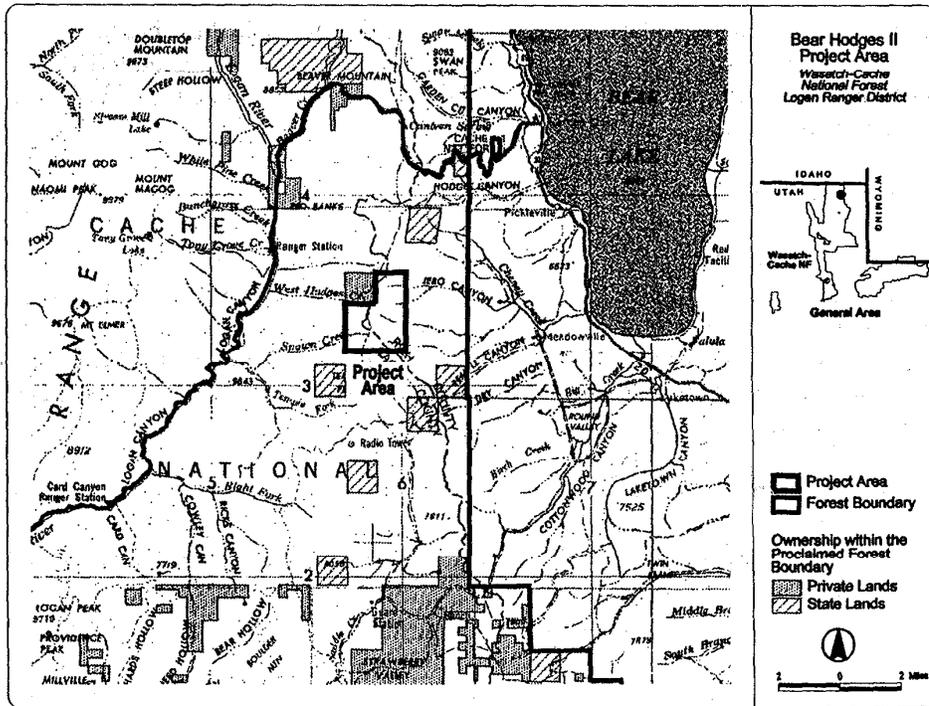


Figure 1.2.1 Bear Hodges II Project Area

In 1999 the Wasatch-Cache produced the Environmental Assessment for the Bear Hodges Analysis Area and made a decision to harvest lodgepole and spruce in the same general area addressed in this DEIS. The 1999 decision was appealed, but the decision was later upheld by the Regional Forester. Following the appeal process the lodgepole

portion of the project was sold in 2000 and harvested in 2001. Litigation then followed regarding the remaining proposed spruce harvest, and in early 2002 the decision to continue with the spruce sale and harvest was withdrawn pending further environmental analysis.

The Bear Hodges II proposed action in June 2003, and this DEIS are steps in the completion of that further environmental analysis. Proposed activities for Bear Hodges II include stand treatments to: (1) perpetuate the spruce component on the Experimental Forest, and (2) conduct research on the measurement and manipulation of forest stand structure through testing and demonstrating different silvicultural methods.

Treatments to perpetuate the spruce component include commercial thinning of existing stands to reduce susceptibility to spruce beetle mortality and regeneration of spruce to increase the younger age classes in the stands.

The proposal for research in silvicultural systems in the spruce-fir forest type involves individual tree removal, small (1/4-acre) patch cuts, and shelterwood harvests with reserves, approximating patterns of natural disturbances and encouraging the regeneration of young spruce. Just over two miles of new road construction are part of the proposal for accessing harvest areas, and over 6 miles of the Sinks Road will be reconditioned as part of the proposal.

The design of the treatments includes identification and protection of northern goshawk nest areas within the project area. No harvest will take place in these goshawk nest areas. A variety of other mitigation and post project monitoring is part of the proposal.

Utah State University would develop a demonstration and education plan, and opportunities will also be explored for interpreting the vegetation treatments for forest visitors where they are visible from open roads, such as the Sinks Road.

If a decision is made to harvest timber, the revised Wasatch-Cache Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service, 2003) will need to be amended. The amendment would change Management Prescription Category (MPC) 2.7, Special Interest Areas and Special Areas that currently does not allow timber harvest. MPC 2.7 would be rewritten to allow timber harvest and road building for the T. W. Daniel Experimental Forest so that these activities can be used to meet the needs and opportunities of this Special Interest Area.

1.3 Purpose and Need

This section identifies the specific rationale behind the proposed action and the sources of guidance for its development. The specific rationale for the proposed action identifies the purpose and need for action. The sources of guidance form the context within which the proposal was developed.