



File Code: 1950

Date: May 24, 2007

Scoping and Comment Opportunity
Ephraim Valley Aspen Restoration

Dear Concerned Citizen:

The Montpelier Ranger District of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest is proposing a wildlife habitat improvement project designed to regenerate / rejuvenate aspen and mountain brush vegetation in the Ephraim Valley area. Plant succession decreases habitat for wildlife species dependent on early and mid-succession habitats. Prescribed burning and mechanical treatments would be used to mimic a natural disturbance to create an early structural stage in forest and upland vegetation and increase age class diversity. No logging or road building is planned. Implementation is expected in the next five years. This project has been designed to move the area towards the desired future conditions outlined in the Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest (2003) (CNF-RFP). We are seeking your input on this project. Photos and maps of the area are attached below.

The 1,000 acre Ephraim Valley Aspen Restoration project area is located entirely in the Gannet Spring Creek Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) #04111, 16 miles northeast of Montpelier in T10S R46E Sec 29-32; Boise Meridian, Caribou County, Idaho. The CNF-RFP Prescription Areas for this project are 2.7.2 (d) Elk and Deer Winter Range on the north end and the rest of the area is in 6.2 (b,e) Rangeland Vegetation Management. The treatment area is on the ridgeline between White Dugway Creek (to the west) and Spring Creek [Elk Valley Marsh] (on the east) both flow into Crow Creek, a Salt River tributary. Aspen, subalpine fir, Douglas-fir, and lodgepole pine, snowberry, sagebrush, and grass/forbs are the dominant vegetation and cover types. At an elevation of 7,600 – 8,150 feet, the annual precipitation for this area is 33". The project area is portrayed on the attached map.

Many of the aspen stands in the project area are over mature and are being replaced by conifer and some of the mountain brush stands are thick and decadent. The project would focus on regenerating / maintaining aspen and mountain brush communities by changing species composition, age diversity and stand structure. The presence of remnant aspen in conifer stands suggests aspen historically occupied a greater portion of the area. Without treatment, aspen will continue to be replaced by other vegetation types. This succession of aspen to conifer may result in a loss or quality of wildlife habitat. A variety of wildlife species that depend on the patterns and structures historically found in functioning aspen woodlands will be negatively affected by continuing shift to conifer forests. Disturbance to the mountain brush cover type would increase age class diversity and would maintain a diverse sustainable plant community.



Project design details (all acres are approximate):

- Prepare a Burn Plan.
- Use prescribed fire to return aspen and mountain brush to an early seral condition.
- Blacken approximately 50 to 80 percent of the targeted areas in a mosaic pattern.
 - 310 acres of targeted aspen areas are identified on the map below.
 - 100-200 acres of mountain brush. These areas within the project area are not identified on the map below due to their small size.
- Ignite fuels by hand or with a helicopter (Heli-torch) where or when appropriate.
- Do not intentionally burn or actively ignite large sagebrush stands, riparian areas or Aquatic Influence Zones (AIZ), and areas with large/old remnant Douglas-fir or lodgepole pine trees.
- Minimize damage or repair the livestock fence that runs along the ridgeline.
- Use mechanical methods to facilitate the project objectives. Examples of equipment and treatments may include, but are not limited to:
 - Felling trees with chain saws to increase ground fuels needed to carry the fire or reinforce the fire perimeter along the road on the south end of the project area.
 - Using a skid steer masticator (see attached photos) to “mow” approximately 10-20 feet of vegetation on either side of the fence line within the burn units.
- Burn when the conditions are conducive to ensure project objectives are met. This may require burning in the spring, fall, or multiple years.
- Provide for public safety to Forest visitors by placing signs with burning information prior to the anticipated ignition at prominent access points to the project area.
- Monitor aspen and mountain brush regeneration for compliance with management objectives stated in the silvicultural prescription for the project.
- Restrict livestock grazing until the objectives of the treatment are achieved.

30-day Comment Period

If you have any comments, concerns, or ideas to improve the project, please respond in writing, within 30 days of publication in the Idaho State Journal. Send comments to Dennis Duehren at the address above. Or by phone at 208-847-0375 or by e-mail at dduehren@fs.fed.us or comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee-montpelier@fs.fed.us. The office hours are 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. This comment period satisfies the requirements for scoping under NEPA. Comments must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6.

This comment period provides those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. It is being provided pursuant to the July 2 and September 16, 2005, orders issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. Only those who provide timely comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215.

In addition, given the detailed information above, I have made a preliminary assessment that this proposal falls within a category of actions listed in the Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental

Impact Statement (EIS) and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of the category. (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2 – 6).

Sincerely,

/s/ *Dennis Duehren*

DENNIS DUEHREN
Montpelier District Ranger

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The photos attached below can be viewed in color at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/projects/“Ephraim Valley Aspen Restoration Scoping letter”](http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/projects/Ephraim%20Valley%20Aspen%20Restoration%20Scoping%20letter)



Photo above: West side of the project area (in circle) looking east from Snowdrift Mountain.
Photo below: Close up of photo above; north is to the left, and the Elk Valley Road is on top of ridge at far right.



Photo above: East side of the project area (in circle) looking west from Clover Knoll.
North is to the right and the Elk Valley Road is in bottom of draw right of center.

Mechanical treatments could include the use of a Skid Steer with a masticator/mulching attachment:
The attachment head [masticator, forestry mulcher, or forestry cutter] is used to mulch, tear, rip, cut and grind-up trees (up to 12 inch diameter) and brush. It could be used to reduce fuels around the fence and desirable trees.



Photo above: A “skid steer” with attachment head operating in an aspen/conifer stand.

The use of trade or firm names used in this document is for reader information and does not imply endorsement by the USDA of any product or service.

Photo below: Results of the Masticator in the photo above.





Photo above: North (7 acre) Unit with dense conifer and mountain brush on left.



Photo above: Large pockets of conifer on the northwest side of the East (233 acre) Unit. **Photos below:** **Left:** Fence line in East Unit with mature conifers. **Right:** young conifer understory in West (15 acre) Unit.





Photo above: Elk Valley Road and on right is the dense mature conifer on the south edge of South (36 acre) Unit.
Forest Map and Aerial Photo below: Location of project area and treatment units.

