Decision Memo

CREE CREEK

VEGETATION TREATMENT PROJECT

USDA Forest Service
San Isabel National Forest
Salida Ranger District
Salida, Colorado
Chaffee County

Introduction

The Cree Creek project is located in T50N, R7E, Sections 19, 20, 29, 30, 31 & 32; T50 N, R6E, Sections 25 & 36; and T49N, R7E, Section 6. Elevation ranges from 8,600 to 10,500 feet.

Vegetation is a mosaic of lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, aspen, mountain grasslands and shrublands. Mountain pine beetle in the ponderosa pine has caused high levels of mortality; lodgepole pine dwarf mistletoe has been found in isolated pockets in the lodgepole pine. Aspen is present as both a dominate component in somewhat pure stands as well as a minor component of conifer stands. Remnant aspen are found in most of the conifer stands. Lodgepole pine stand structure and conditions vary across the project area based on site conditions and previous treatments that occurred in the area.

The majority of the project is located in the Land and Resource Management Plan Management Area 5B (Big Game Winter Range) with a small portion located in 2B (Roaded Natural), 4D (Aspen Management) and 9B (Increased water yield through vegetation management). The Colorado Trail is located in the northern portion of the project area.

A portion of the project would be completed through the Good Neighbor program administered by the Colorado State Forest Service. The Good Neighbor program would assist with access through private property and work with the private landowner to conduct treatments on private lands.

The intent of this project is to improve forest stand conditions, improve wildlife habitat, reduce the risk of high intensity wildland fire, and restore and maintain healthy, diverse ecosystems to provide improved resilience and sustainability. In addition the project will treat vegetation so that growth and vigor of residual trees are maintained or increased to favor the development of a large tree forest structure. Treating hazardous fuel accumulations will result in a landscape condition closer to the historical fire regime, improve Fire Regime Condition Class Rating and create stand conditions that allow for greater resistance of remaining stands to insect and disease outbreaks.

Proposed Action

The Cree Creek Vegetation Project will use a combination of mechanical fuels reduction and thinning (commercial and non-commercial) and prescribed fire (broadcast and pile) to reduce hazardous fuels. The proposed action will treat approximately 1222 acres. Treatment types and acres are listed below.

Summary of Treatment Types

Treatment Type	Proposed Action (Approximate Acres)
No Treatment (National Forest lands)	**245 acres**
Mechanical Treatments	**591 acres**
Salvage, Thinning & Prescribed Fire (Forest)	38 acres
Thinning, Regeneration Harvest (Forest)	410 acres
Fuel Break Treatments	143 acres
Prescribed Fire Treatments	**536 acres**
Total Acres (National Forest lands)	**1,372 acres**

The proposed action will thin trees and remove dead material throughout the forested treatment units. The trees cut and removed from the thinning efforts will be utilized whenever possible (sawlogs, posts, stays, firewood, etc) or disposed of by burning (broadcast and pile). See Appendix A for a detailed description of the treatment prescriptions for each polygon.

The total analysis area is approximately 1372 acres (National Forest lands). The work will be accomplished by both Forest Service personnel and contractors.

Decision

I have decided to implement the actions listed above in the "Summary of Treatment Types" table and identified in Appendix A of this Decision Memo on the National Forest System lands within the Cree Creek project area.

Design Criteria developed by the Interdisciplinary Team, will be followed to implement the project. A detailed description of the treatments and the associated design criteria are located in Appendix A of the Decision Memo.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action

The environmental analysis concluded that this action falls within a category of actions, which normally do not individually or cumulatively have significant effect on the environment, and, therefore, can be excluded from documentation in an environmental analysis or environmental impact statement. This provision is in FSH 1909.15, Category 31.2 (06): Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction. Originally, this project was scoped under FSH 1909.15, Category 31.2 (10).

Category 31.2 (06) applies in this case because the project area is designed to improve forest stand conditions, improve wildlife habitat along with reducing fuel loadings and addressing

forest health issues within the project area. The project is consistent with all applicable land resource management plans, will not affect wilderness or proposed wilderness, and will not make use of herbicides, except for the treatment of noxious weeds, or result in new permanent infrastructure such as roads. A project or case file is required for actions listed in Category 31.2. The project file will be maintained at the Salida Ranger District, Salida, Colorado.

Extraordinary Circumstances and Consistency with Other Laws

I find the proposed action can be categorically excluded because there were no extraordinary circumstances or issues identified by the interdisciplinary team of resource specialists that analyzed this proposal or during public scoping. Extraordinary circumstances considered in my evaluation, but dismissed with reasoning are as follows:

- *Threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat:* A Biological Evaluation for this action has been prepared. No potentially significant impacts to Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species were found.

- *Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:* This project will not take place in a flood plain or in a municipal watershed. The project is anticipated to have minimal to no impacts on wetlands and riparian areas. Identified wetlands and riparian areas will be protected from impacts from the proposed action

- *Congressionally designated areas (such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, etc):* No actions will occur in Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas.

- *Roadless areas (wild and scenic study rivers, etc):* There are no roadless areas located within the analysis area.

- *Research Natural Areas:* There are no Research Natural Areas located within the analysis area.

- *Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas:* Archeologists have reviewed the affected area for Native American religious and cultural sites, archaeological sites and historic properties. Known sites will be protected from impacts from the proposed action.

Public Involvement

Beginning on March 13, 2007, the Cree Creek area was mentioned in the Mountain Mail Newspaper in Salida, CO as a potential area for fuels reduction treatments. On March 27, 2007, a Legal Notice was published in the Mountain Mail discussing the opportunity to comment on and eligibility for appeals of the project.

A proposal for the hazardous fuel reduction project was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on December 31, 2006. A “scoping letter” identifying this proposal and soliciting public comments and participation in the planning process was mailed on March 22, 2007 to about 80 addresses. The list included surrounding property owners, citizen organizations, environmental groups, government agencies, local media, and individuals who had expressed interest in this project. The list of individuals, groups, organizations, and agencies that were notified of the

proposed project and invited to comment on it, may be found in the project file located at the Salida Ranger District Office.

Four responses were received through the scooping process. Issues raised during public involvement included the use of and closure of project created roads, slash piling and burning, mountain pine beetles, range improvement, and wildlife issues. These comments are considered in this decision and the responses to these comments are located in Appendix B.

Findings Required by Other Laws

The proposed action is consistent with the Pike and San Isabel National Forests, Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands Land and Resource Management Plan (1984) as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for the protection of forest resources. The project is also in conformance with Forest Plan management area standards and guidelines for the following Management Areas:

Pike/San Isabel National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan	
5D-Managing forage and cover on Big Game winter ranges.	pp. III – 149 - 153
4D-Aspen Management	pp. III – 144 - 148
9B-Increased Water Yield	pp. III – 216 - 226
2B-Roaded Natural	pp. III – 116 - 124

This proposed action complies with other laws and regulations applicable to actions undertaken on the national forests, including but not limited to the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Executive Order 12898 Environmental Justice, and the Endangered Species Act.

Implementation Date

This project could be implemented as early as 5 days after the end of the 45 day appeal period.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the *Mountain Mail*, published daily in Salida, Colorado. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Sec. 215.13 Who may participate in appeals.

(1) Any person or group who submitted written comment in response to a project draft; or
(2) Provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in a particular proposed action by the close of the comment period specified in Sec. 215.6.

Appeal filing for District Ranger decisions:

USPS, UPS, FedEx/hand-carry

USDA Forest Service, Region 2
Attn: Appeal Deciding Officer
740 Simms St.
Golden, CO 80401-4790

FAX : 303-275-5134
EMAIL: appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us

Appeal Content Requirements

It is an appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the Responsible Official's decision should be reversed. At a minimum, an appeal must include the following (CFR 215.14):

1. Appellant's name and address (CFR 215.1) with telephone number, if available;
2. Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
3. When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant (CFR 215.2) and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
4. The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
5. The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either this part of part 251, subpart C (CFR 215.11d);
6. Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
7. Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
8. Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
9. How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

Notice of appeal that do not meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215.14 will be dismissed.

If no appeal is filed, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 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.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Sam Schroeder, Forester, Salida Ranger District.

Address: Salida Ranger District, 325 West Rainbow Blvd., Salida, Colorado 81201
Phone: (719) 530-3969
Email: sschroeder@fs.fed.us

_____/s/ William A. Schuckert_____ __4/28/2008___

William A. Schuckert Date

District Ranger
Salida Ranger District
San Isabel National Forest

Appendix A

Cree Creek Vegetation Project

Description of the Treatment Prescriptions

No Treatment (approximately 245 acres): *Polygons: 592, 605, 608, 614, 785, 794, 795, 800, 801, 804, 867, 868, 874, 880, 882, 883, 895, 897, 898, 991, 1018, 1022, 1026 & 1059. Portions of polygons 605, 785, 800, 804, & 897, other portions of these polygons are planned to have treatments.*

Actions currently permitted and actions approved on earlier decisions will continue as authorized.

Prescribed Fire Treatments (approximately 536 acres): *Polygons: 527, 528, 593, 594, 595, 596, 598, 599, 607, 797, 805, 870, 879, 884, 885, 886, 887, 891, 892, 893, 894, 900, & 901.*

Prescribed fire will be utilized to re-introduce fire and maintain stands in Fire Regime Condition Class 1. Prescribed fire includes pile burning, broadcast burning or a combination of both. A prescribed fire plan and appropriate smoke permits will be completed and approved prior to burning. The prescribed fire plan will address such items as unit delineation, weather parameters, necessary holding resources, sensitive areas (i.e. power lines, highways, and improvements), public safety, and smoke concerns. Prescribed burning of individual units will likely be completed in 2 to 3 days, with residual smoke lasting 3 to 5 days.

Pile burning will take place in areas where broadcast burning is not desired or where fuels must be reduced prior to broadcast burning (ie. fuel breaks). The average size of hand piles is 6 feet x 6 feet x 6 feet. The average size of mechanical piles is 6 feet x 6 feet x 10 feet. The burning of the piles usually takes place in the winter months.

Preparation work may be needed to ensure the prescribed burn is maintained within the prescription set forth in the prescribed fire plan. Examples of preparation work include the construction of hand lines and the removal of brush. Where available, natural and existing fuel breaks will be used.

Salvage, Thinning, Prescribed Fire (approximately 38 acres): *Polygons: 534, 597, 600, & 897*

Dead stands of ponderosa pine and ponderosa pine trees infected with insect and disease may be harvested and removed from the area. In areas of heavy mountain pine beetle activity, infested trees will be removed and remaining trees may be thinned, if needed, to maintain the residual mature stand. Methods of removal include but are not limited to chainsaws, harvesters, skidders, dozers and log trucks.

Stands of healthy ponderosa pine (stands that have minimal or no insect or disease infestation) may be thinned to reduce overall stand density and improve the health and vigor of the remaining trees. Feed trees, nest trees and clumps around trees used by Abert's squirrels will be retained.

The desired result will be less than 40% canopy closure. The desired basal area (BA) will vary from 40-60 BA/Acre, though some stands will likely be less than 40 BA/Acre due to the

amount of trees killed by mountain pine beetle. Existing regeneration needed for desired stocking levels will be protected where practical.

After harvesting is complete, the slash and hazardous fuels in the area may be reduced through fuelwood gathering and/or prescribed fire. Prescribed fire includes pile burning, broadcast burning or a combination of both. See the description of prescribed fire for more details.

Thinning, Regeneration Harvest (Patch Cuts) & Prescribed Fire (approximately 410 acres): *Polygon: 605, 606, 610, 611, 613, 784, 785, 792, 793, 796, 798, 799, 800, 804, 806, 881.*

Lodgepole pine stands may be harvested using thinning, and patch cuts. Thinning would reduce stocking to varying levels to create a mosaic of stand conditions across the project area. The largest, healthiest, dominant, and most wind-firm trees as well as large snags would be favored for retention in thinning prescriptions. Patch cuts of less than 15 acres would be used in areas of dwarf mistletoe in the lodgepole pine and/or in areas where aspen and/or lodgepole pine could be regenerated. The goal is to regenerate approximately 1/3 of the area, thin 1/3 of the area, and do no treatment on the remaining 1/3 of the area.

Within polygons with significant aspen, aspen restoration will be emphasized. Treatments would be regeneration patch cuts on 1/3 of the area with removal of encroaching conifers (only trees that have self pruned above the level of providing snowshoe hare cover would be removed) on the remaining area. Do not lop and scatter the slash and tops.

To maintain good cover and foraging habitat for goshawks within the Post-Fledging Family Area (PFA), as well as maintain high quality habitat for red squirrels (lynx secondary prey species), patch cuts would be limited to 2 acres or less in polygons 784, 785, 798, 799, 800, 804, and 806. These openings would be irregular in shape and no greater than 150 feet in width to minimize the amount of red squirrel habitat lost and provide desirable conditions for tree and understory development. In the remaining of polygons (605, 606, 610, 611, 613, 792, 793, 796, 881), patch cuts may be up to 15 acres in size.

After harvesting is complete, the slash and hazardous fuels in the area may be reduced through fuelwood removal and/or prescribed fire. Prescribed fire includes pile burning, broadcast burning or a combination of both. See the description of prescribed fire for more details.

Fuel Break Treatments (approximately 143 acres): *Polygons: 589, 869, 876, 877, 878, 982, 993, 998, 999, 1017, 1019, 1021, 1023, 1024, 1025, 1057, & 1058.*

The objective of this treatment is to create a “filtered” fuel break along the adjacent private lands. Forested stands would be thinned to approximately 30 square feet of basal area per acre for approximately 400 feet from the private land boundary. Natural openings, ridgelines and other fire control features will be utilized where possible in the design and layout of these fuel breaks. After harvesting is complete, the slash and hazardous fuels in the area may be reduced through fuelwood gathering and/or prescribed fire. Prescribed fire includes pile burning, broadcast burning or a combination of both. See the section on prescribed fire for more details.

Road System

Existing county and USFS system roads would be used as much as possible to access the project area. These roads would be maintained as needed for safety and environmental considerations. No new system roads would be constructed in association with the proposed project. Within the project area, there are 7.9 miles of existing system roads. No system roads in the project area would be decommissioned after the project is complete. Existing non-forest system roads would be used to access treatment areas. All non-system and temporary roads would be closed and obliterated once the project is complete.

Cree Creek Vegetation Project

Summary of Treatment Types

Treatment Type	Proposed Action (Approximate Acres)
No Treatment (National Forest lands)	**245 acres**
Mechanical Treatments	**686 acres**
Salvage, Thinning & Prescribed Fire	38 acres
Thinning, Regeneration Harvest	410 acres
Fuel Break Treatments	143 acres
Prescribed Fire Treatments	**536 acres**
Total Acres (National Forest lands)	**1,372 acres**
Project Area-Total Acreage	**1,516 acres**
National Forest System Lands	1,372 Acres
Private lands within project area(Good Neighbor treatment)	144 acres

Cree Creek Vegetation Project

Treatment Summary by Polygon Number

Polygon Number	Acres	Treatment
592	18.4	No Treatment
605	9.8	No Treatment
608	10.6	No Treatment
614	4.9	No Treatment
785	2.2	No Treatment
794	27.5	No Treatment
795	16.5	No Treatment
800	.7	No Treatment
801	9.6	No Treatment
804	6.4	No Treatment
867	15.1	No Treatment
868	8.6	No Treatment
874	5.7	No Treatment
880	21.6	No Treatment
882	6.8	No Treatment

883	9.1	No Treatment
895	3.0	No Treatment
897	18.9	No Treatment
898	2.6	No Treatment
991	10.1	No Treatment
1018	16.6	No Treatment
1022	.3	No Treatment
1026	14.9	No Treatment
1059	4.6	No Treatment
589	6.2	Fuelbreak
869	3.8	Fuelbreak
876	5.0	Fuelbreak
877	5.0	Fuelbreak
878	11.1	Fuelbreak
982	21.2	Fuelbreak
993	5.5	Fuelbreak
998	14.3	Fuelbreak
999	4.2	Fuelbreak
1017	4.2	Fuelbreak
1019	17.0	Fuelbreak
1021	.4	Fuelbreak
1023	1.0	Fuelbreak
1024	1.3	Fuelbreak
1025	5.6	Fuelbreak
1057	13.5	Fuelbreak
1058	23.4	Fuelbreak
527	4.9	Rx Fire
528	26.4	Rx Fire
593	51.5	Rx Fire
594	15.1	Rx Fire
595	14.8	Rx Fire
596	219.6	Rx Fire
598	2.8	Rx Fire
599	15.2	Rx Fire
607	20.9	Rx Fire
797	16.4	Rx Fire
805	9.5	Rx Fire
870	15.5	Rx Fire
879	15.0	Rx Fire
884	9.1	Rx Fire
885	10.1	Rx Fire
886	.8	Rx Fire
887	.3	Rx Fire
891	10.8	Rx Fire
892	5.9	Rx Fire
893	14.3	Rx Fire
894	27.0	Rx Fire
900	14.5	Rx Fire
901	15.5	Rx Fire
605	22.4	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
606	11.4	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire

610	36.3	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
611	53.8	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
613	27.2	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
784	18.6	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
785	23.0	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
792	40.8	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
793	18.0	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
796	13.6	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
798	36.7	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
799	25.5	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
800	28.3	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
804	13.8	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
806	20.6	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
881	19.8	Thin, Regen(Patch & Group), RxFire
534	8.5	Salvage, Thin, RXFire
597	8.9	Salvage, Thin, RXFire
600	8.0	Salvage, Thin, RXFire
897	12.1	Salvage, Thin, RXFire

Summary of Road Types

Road Type	Proposed Action (Approximate Miles)
FDR System Roads within project area (Nat'l Forest)	**7.9 miles**
Non-System Roads (existing to be used, then closed)	**1.7 miles**
Temporary Roads (proposed new, then closed)	**0.3 miles**
Private land roads	**1.9 miles**

Design Criteria:

1. Protect current improvements including fences, ditches and aqueduct (Salida Hydro). Improvements would be protected and replaced, if damaged by treatment.
2. If chipping is used as a means of disposal, chips would be distributed so that the chip layer is a maximum of 2 inches in depth; otherwise the chips would be hauled off site.
3. A cultural resource survey would be completed prior to ground disturbing activities.
4. All eligible archeological sites, including a minimum of 30 – 50 foot buffer (depending on slope and fuel loading), would be avoided and protected from damage by equipment traveling in the area and pile burning activities. The Archeologist would determine the buffer and mark the area.
5. The Archeologist would identify areas where prescribed fire is not allowed, to avoid impacts to eligible sites. In areas with eligible sites, the Archeologist would assist in identifying staging areas to avoid impacts to sites.
6. If heavy fuel loads exist on any of the archeological sites for which avoidance is stipulated, then those fuels may be removed with an archeologist present.
7. If artifacts, features, or other indications of previously unrecorded heritage resources are identified in the course of ground-disturbing activities, all work in the vicinity of those materials would cease and the Archaeologist would be notified immediately.
8. Avoid operating mechanical equipment on slopes greater than 40%. Use designated skid trails on slopes between 25 and 40%; a hydrologist or soil scientist along with a sale administer and a road specialist (civil engineer or civil engineer technician) may be part of the team that lays out the designated skid trail routes.
9. A minimum 100-foot buffer on either side of perennial and intermittent streams and ephemeral areas would define the Water Influence Zone (WIZ) as specified in the WCP Handbook (FSH 2509.25, Chapter 10). The WIZ includes the geomorphic floodplain, riparian ecosystem, and inner gorge.
10. Mechanical thinning treatments would not occur inside the WIZ as delineated by a Fisheries Biologist or Hydrologist. If the area has not been delineated, then treatments would occur outside a 100-foot buffer from all perennial and intermittent streams. The 100-foot WIZ also applies to all lakes, ponds, kettles and other forms of standing water. Some activities such as prescribed burning and hand treatments may be allowed in the WIZ, but only after consultation and concurrence with the project Hydrologist or Fishery Biologist.
11. Prescribed burning would be allowed to migrate into the WIZ from adjacent slopes, but would not be encouraged to do so; ignition of prescribed fire would not occur in the WIZ.
12. Heavy equipment and vehicles would be kept out of the WIZ, streams, swales, and lakes, except to cross at designated points, building crossings, conduct restoration work, or if protected by at least 1 foot of packed snow or 2 inches of frozen soil. Before heavy equipment or vehicles would be allowed to cross streams, the project Fishery Biologist or Hydrologist mat be consulted and determine where crossings would occur or be constructed, and to specify any stipulations necessary to minimize negative impacts on aquatic resources. Heavy equipment or vehicles will not be allowed in streams during fish spawning, incubation, and emergence periods.

13. Use only hand treatments in riparian corridors; use cable or other non-mechanized means to remove products. In addition, use one end suspension methods when feasible.

14. Avoid soil disturbing activities during periods of wet soils. Apply travel restrictions to protect soil and water. Operate heavy equipment for land treatments only when soil moisture is below the plastic limit, or protected by at least one foot of packed snow or two inches of frozen soil. (Note: Soil moisture exceeds the plastic limit if the soil can be rolled into three millimeter threads without breaking or crumbling.)

15. If a unit has previously been mechanically thinned / treated, no salvage treatment would take place after prescribed fire treatments occur.

16. Protect or provide for one Abert's squirrel nest tree clump (0.1 acre of 9 to 22 inch dbh ponderosa pine with a basal area of 180 to 220, if available, and interlocking canopy) per six acres on ponderosa pine (Forest Plan, pg. III – 29). In addition, all ponderosa pine trees showing sign of Abert's squirrel feeding activity would be retained as wildlife trees. This direction would be written into timber prescriptions and the prescribed fire plan. For the prescribed fire, protection measures include avoiding to the extent possible torching of ponderosa pine clumps and Abert's squirrel feed trees.

17. Implementation and effectiveness monitoring would be conducted by an interdisciplinary team. Snag, down woody material, and other stand conditions would be monitored pre and post treatment to ensure desired conditions are achieved. The following snags/down wood guidelines would be followed:

Snags and CWD

In forested areas, maintain greater than or equal to 40 snags/recruitment trees per 5 acre average; retain the largest sizes and numbers available (all stages of development). These should consist of at least 30 snags and/or down logs per 5 acres and 10 recruitment snags (green trees) per 5 acres. Guidelines for snags include:

- Retain all soft snags (class 3, 4, and 5) except for safety hazards (Forest Plan, pg. III – 12) to the greatest extent reasonable and practical.
- Retain hard snags (when they are present) greater than or equal to 12 inches diameter at breast height (dbh) or as large as available.
- If above existing snag levels are not available, provide for green recruitment snag trees sufficient to bring snag/recruitment snag levels up to the above mentioned levels in a well distributed manner of both clumps and individual trees, favoring largest available trees. Trees with defects (e.g. "wolfy" appearance, dead tops, forked tops, cankers, heartrot, knarls, diseases, broken tops and large limbs) would be selected when possible as follows:
    - Provide for the above number of recruitment snags (live trees)
    - Create new snags by burn plan design or other means, as necessary.
    - Protect reserved snags/down logs from fuelwood cutting, mechanical treatment and prescribed fire treatment to the greatest extent reasonable and practical.

- In treatment units designated as fuel breaks, the above snag requirements would not be implemented. Adjacent units or portions of units untreated for fuel break prescriptions would retain an increased number of snags/cwd/green recruitment trees to make up for the acres designated as fuelbreak. These areas would be monitored by the wildlife biologist and fuels specialist to assure that the dead and down component is within acceptable levels for hazardous fuels reduction.

18. Seasonal implementation restrictions would be implemented for the southern portion of the project area December 1 through April 15 for big game severe winter range protection. Prescribed burning activities would be acceptable during this time period and would be coordinated with the Wildlife Biologist. Please refer to map for restricted areas.

19. Nesting/denning sites would be reported to the Wildlife Biologist and appropriate protection measures would be implemented.

20. If new site information regarding threatened, endangered, and sensitive species is located during the course of ground disturbing activities, all work in the vicinity of those species would cease and the appropriate specialist would be notified.

21. An activity exclusion area would be marked by the Wildlife Biologist and avoided around known active raptor nests from March 1 through September 30. Surveys would be conducted prior to implementation of treatments to determine site activity.

22. The Wildlife Biologist would work with the silviculturalist to determine treatment specifications for protection and maintenance of goshawk nesting, post-fledging family, and foraging areas within the proposed project area.

23. In red squirrel (pine squirrel) habitat, intact tree retention groups would be centered around existing food caches (middens). These intact tree retention groups would be at a minimum 6 large trees with interlocking canopies up to 2 ½ acres in size depending on quality of habitat.

24. Gates and/or barricades would be installed on temporary roads to restrict use by the public during operations and/or until final road closures occur.

25. In forested areas, a 200-foot buffer would be maintained along 75% or more of each side of FDR 228, 224, & 225 to discourage and minimize off-road vehicles (OHV) use and maintain visual screening for wildlife. Mechanical treatment would not take place in the buffer, but prescribed fire may be allowed; hazard trees may be mechanically removed (Forest Plan, pg. III-32).

26. Aspen regeneration will be monitored. If aspen regeneration is found to be adversely impacted by big game grazing pressure, those units may be fenced to promote regeneration.

27. Access routes would be designated within public firewood areas.

28. Only administrative and permitted access would be allowed on new temporary roads and previously closed roads.

29. Temporary roads used during the project activities would be closed and/or obliterated by ripping and seeding with native species, then signed to inform the public that vegetative restoration is in progress. Road closures would occur within six months after completion of the treatment(s) in that unit.

30. To reduce risk of spreading noxious weeds, coordinate with the Noxious Weed program manager prior to implementation. Heavy equipment would be cleaned and inspected prior to entering the project area. Treatment areas would be monitored pre

and post treatment for noxious weeds. If present, avoid or remove sources of weed seed and propagules to prevent establishment of new weed infestations and spread of existing weeds. Weed locations would be sent to the Noxious Weeds Coordinator and scheduled for treatment.

Appendix B-Response to Comments

Cree Creek Vegetation Project

Respondent: Upper Arkansas Motorized Recreation Coalition

Comment: The individual and organization members of the Upper Arkansas Motorized Recreation Coalition support the above referenced fire mitigation projects to promote improved forest health and for the betterment of multiple use on Public Lands.

Response: Thank you for your comments.

Respondent: Colorado Division of Wildlife

Comment: Although your primary focus on the project is to reduce hazardous fuels and fire threat levels, we commend them as habitat improvements…Our only concern with these projects is in reference to the temporary roads which are designated, as well as any other logging and skidding roads that will develop during the treatments…We recommend that access to these roads be mechanically destroyed after treatment, that closures be signed, and that enforcement of these closures occur.

Response: We agree that a secondary benefit of the project will benefit the wildlife habitat in the area. The majority of the project area has been designated 5B-Winter Range in our Forest Plan. Also, design criteria (Appendix A) have been developed for the project that addresses the temporary road closures and seasonal restrictions for your wildlife issues.

Respondent: Lowry Land & Equipment

Comment: I agree with the proposed project you have planned. We will be cleaning up our property this summer and will have some heavy equipment up that way. If you need some help please let us know. You can have access thru our property when needed.

Response: Thank you for your response and support of the project.

Respondent: Vincent Tucker

Comment: …We approve of your plan and would offer our support to your efforts. Please keep us informed as you move through the process and let us know if there is anything further that we may do to help.

Response: Thank you for our response and support of the project.