

Decision Memo

SILVER CREEK

VEGETATION PROJECT



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

Introduction

The Silver Creek project is located in T48 N, R 8 E, Sections 19 & T48N, R7E, Sections 23, 24, 25, & 26. Elevation ranges from 9,000 to 10,000 feet.

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

The project is located in the Land and Resource Management Plan Management Area 2B (Provide opportunity for outdoor recreation in roaded natural & rural setting). The Silver Creek sub-division borders the southern boundary of the project.

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 Silver 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 484 acres. Treatment types and acres are listed below.

Silver Creek Vegetation Treatment Project**Summary of Treatment Types**

Treatment Type	Proposed Action (Approximate Acres)
Prescribed Fire	249 acres
Mechanical Treatments	
<i>Salvage, Thinning & Prescribed Fire</i>	(108 acres) 180 acres
<i>Fuel Break Treatments</i>	55 acres
Total Acres (National Forest lands)	484 acres
Project Area-Total Acreage	484 acres
National Forest System Lands	

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 484 acres. 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 Silver 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 36 CFR 220.6 (e) (6): 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.

36 CFR 220.6 (e) (6) 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 36 CFR 220.6 (e) (6). 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 Silver Creek area was mentioned in the Mountain Mail Newspaper in Salida, CO as a potential area for fuels reduction treatments. On March 22, 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 this vegetation 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 15, 2007 to about 93 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 scoping 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	
2B-Rural and roaded-natural recreation opportunities.	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

District Ranger
Salida Ranger District
San Isabel National Forest

8/7/2008

Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Appendix A: Silver Creek Forest Health and Hazardous Fuels Treatment Project**Treatment Options: Description of the Treatment Prescriptions****Prescribed Fire only (approximately 249 acres):**

The objective of prescribed fire is to reduce hazardous fuel accumulation, promote regeneration (grass, forbs, shrubs, and trees) and reintroduce fire into fire-dependent ecosystems. The prescribed fire units will be delineated using natural fuel breaks, roads, handline, and wetline; mechanical thinning may be completed prior to ignition to improve holding features. Aerial ignition (ping-pong ball, helitorch), hand ignition (drip torches, fusees) and/or all terrain vehicle (ATV) ignition may be used.

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 (i.e. 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.

Prescribed fire will be used to improve the health of the rangeland and improve the forage. The desired result will be a mosaic pattern in the meadows and shrub land of approximately 50 to 75% of the vegetation burned.

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 180 acres included- 108 acres estimated to be treated (60%)):

Ponderosa pine: 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 ponderosa pine. Feed trees, nest trees and clumps around trees used by Abert's squirrels will be retained.

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

The desired result will be less than 40% canopy closure. The basal area will be an average of 50 square feet over the treatment area. Existing regeneration needed for desired stocking levels will be protected where practical.

Mixed conifer-Ponderosa pine & Douglas-fir mix: Dead stands of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir 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 try and maintain the residual mature stand. Remaining healthy stands may be thinned to reduce stand density and improve forest health. Methods of removal include but are not limited to chainsaws, harvesters, skidders, dozers and log trucks.

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 section on prescribed fire for more details.

The desired result will be less than 40% canopy closure. The BA will be an average of 60 square feet over the treatment area. Treatments will also be designed to encourage aspen regeneration. Existing conifer regeneration needed for desired stocking levels will be protected where practical.

Due to terrain features, varying slope conditions, and operability of equipment, of the 180 acres proposed to receive treatment, approximately 60 percent (108 acres) of the area will be treated.

Fuel Break Treatments (approximately 55 acres): 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 approximately 1.3 miles of existing system roads that are planned for use. No system roads in the Project Area would be decommissioned after the project is complete. New temporary roads (approx. 0.4 miles) would be constructed to access treatment areas. Temporary roads would be permanently closed and rehabilitated as needed; to be determined by soils specialist or hydrologist. These routes will be closed as soon as possible after completion of the project.

Silver Creek Forest Health and Hazardous Fuels Treatment Project**Summary of Treatment Types**

Treatment Type	Proposed Action (Approximate Acres)
Prescribed Fire	255
Mechanical Treatments	
<i>Salvage, Thinning & Prescribed Fire</i>	180
<i>Fuel Break Treatments</i>	49
Total Acres (National Forest lands)	484
Project Area-Total Acreage	484

Silver Creek Forest Health and Hazardous Fuels Treatment Project**Treatment Summary by Cover Type**

Treatment by Cover Types	Proposed Action (Approximate Acres)
Prescribed Fire	255
<i>Douglas fir</i>	27
<i>Grass</i>	48
<i>Pinyon/Juniper</i>	49
<i>Ponderosa pine</i>	103
<i>True Mountain Mohogany</i>	28
Mechanical Treatments	
<i>Salvage, Thinning & Prescribed Fire</i>	180
<i>Douglas fir</i>	45
<i>Ponderosa pine</i>	135
<i>Fuelbreaks</i>	49
<i>Ponderosa pine</i>	38
<i>True Mountain Mohogany</i>	11
Total Acres (National Forest lands)	484

Summary of Road Types

Road Type	Proposed Action (Approximate Miles)
FDR System Roads within project area (Nat'l Forest)	1.3
Temporary Roads (proposed new, then closed)	0.4
Total	1.7

Silver Creek Forest Health and Hazardous Fuels Treatment Project**Treatment Summary by Polygon Number**

Polygon Number	Cover Type	Common Name	Acres	Treatment
4077	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	5.9	Fuelbreak
4078	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	23.3	Fuelbreak
4080	SMS	True Mountain Mohagany	6.2	Fuelbreak
4082	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	9.2	Fuelbreak
4083	SMS	True Mountain Mohagany	5.0	Fuelbreak
4084	TPJ	Pinyon/Juniper	5.8	Prescribe Burn
3412	GRA	Grass	26.6	Prescribe Burn
3414	TDF	Douglas Fir	26.8	Prescribe Burn
3415	GRA	Grass	21.1	Prescribe Burn
4073	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	34.9	Prescribe Burn
4074	TPJ	Pinyon/Juniper	11.3	Prescribe Burn
4075	SMS	True Mountain Mohagany	9.5	Prescribe Burn
4076	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	7.3	Prescribe Burn
4079	TPJ	Pinyon/Juniper	7.4	Prescribe Burn
4080	SMS	True Mountain Mohagany	11.9	Prescribe Burn
4081	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	18.3	Prescribe Burn
4084	TPJ	Pinyon/Juniper	25.0	Prescribe Burn
4085	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	31.2	Prescribe Burn
4086	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	10.9	Prescribe Burn
4087	SMS	True Mountain Mohagany	7.1	Prescribe Burn
3416	TDF	Douglas Fir	45.2	Salvage/Thin/Prescribe Burn
3417	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	38.7	Salvage/Thin/Prescribe Burn
4076	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	32.1	Salvage/Thin/Prescribe Burn
4077	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	32.2	Salvage/Thin/Prescribe Burn
4078	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	27.2	Salvage/Thin/Prescribe Burn
4082	TPP	Ponderosa Pine	4.2	Salvage/Thin/Prescribe Burn

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 would 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 and protected 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 Coarse Woody Debris (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) which are not counted towards the BA requirements.
 - Create new snags by burn plan design or other means, as necessary to provide for snags of various classes within the treatment areas.
 - 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. Other units untreated for fuel break prescriptions would retain an increased number of snags/CWD/green recruitment trees to make up

18. Nesting/denning sites would be reported to the Wildlife Biologist and appropriate protection measures would be implemented.
19. 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.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. Aspen regeneration will be monitored. If aspen regeneration is found to be adversely impacted by big game or livestock grazing pressure, those units may be fenced to promote regeneration.
23. Access routes would be designated within public firewood areas.
24. Only administrative and permitted access would be allowed on new temporary roads and previously closed roads.
25. 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 as soon as possible after completion of the project treatments.
26. 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**Silver Creek Vegetation Treatment Project****Respondent: Colorado Wild**

Comment 1: The project area appears to be an appropriate location for prescribed fire.

Response: Thank you, Rocky for your comments. Prescribed fire has been incorporated into the project design as outlined in Appendix A of the Decision Memo. The goal of the broadcast burning is to provide diversity within the forest vegetation types of the area. Fire will encourage regeneration of all the species, especially the shrub species valued for wildlife winter range. The polygons identified to be burnt are on south facing slopes. They will most likely be burned in the spring of the year using, as you state, snow on the ridge tops and northern slopes to hold the burn to these sites. In order to minimize costs and line construction, natural clearings, ridgelines and game trails will be used where we can for control features. Every effort will be made to minimize the amount of line construction and ground disturbance on this project for the prescribed fire. In units that will require slash piling for the fuelbreaks, hand piling is the preferred method. This will minimize the intensity and heating of the soils beneath the piles. Also, burning of the piles will be done when there is snow on the ground.

Comment 2: What is the desired vegetation for the site?

Response: There is a variety of vegetation types within the project area. Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir are predominate, with aspen and pinon present throughout the area. Mountain Mahogany, sagebrush and grasses are present on the non-forested sites planned for prescribed fire. The treatments are intended to maintain this diversity and develop stand structure of varying age classes. Leaving the larger diameter and healthier trees is planned in the mechanical treated areas, resulting in a "thinning from below" prescription.

Comment 3: Logging must be implemented carefully. Much of the project area is on steep slopes...

Response: Design criteria have been developed for the project that address any actions that will occur on these steep slopes. Also, measures have been developed for closing and obliteration of temporary roads and skid trails.

Comment 4: The "fuel break" units are probably in a roadless area.

Response: All of the project is north of FDR 201 and outside of any roadless area proposals. The polygons 1813-1826 that you reference are private lands within the Silver Creek sub-division. Polygons 4078, 4080, 4082, & 4083 (Fuelbreaks) border and extend north of FDR 201.

Comment 5: Maintain visual quality.

Response: The project area is located in a 2B Forest Plan Management Area. Silvicultural prescriptions for the treatment activities will be completed and will address the VQO Forest Plan requirements and design criteria for this project.

Comment 6: Fight noxious weeds...Surveys and eradications should be continued for at least three years after project completion. While surveying for weeds, locations of rare plants should be noted...

Response: The area has been surveyed for noxious weeds. We will follow the Forest-wide Noxious Weed Plan and schedule treatment in the area as needed. In addition, a complete botanical survey has been completed resulting in a "no effect" determination to any TE&S plant species.

Comment 7: Implement the project in stages if necessary to avoid too great of a short-term loss of winter range.

Response: Implementation of the Silver Creek project will take approximately 1-3 years to complete. Implementation will be staged to minimize impacts to wildlife and other resources. In the mechanical treatment areas, the thinning operations will be completed first, the slash allowed to cure before initiating the prescribed burns under the trees. All of these actions and using the design criteria for the project will minimize the impacts to this winter range.

Respondent: Scanga Ranch

Comment: The Scanga Ranch is in favor of these projects. We are disappointed that range improvement was not listed as one of the needs of these projects. We hope that the slash in the mechanically treated areas will be reduced to a point where cattle can freely move through the treated areas.

Response: Although not identified as a driving issue for this project, the range conditions and forage production are expected to improve from the treatments planned. Thinning of the forest and broadcast burning should increase forage available for both cattle and wildlife. The slash will be lopped and scattered to below 24 inches and then burned, thus minimizing any restrictions for cattle and wildlife movement through the area.

Respondent: Joel D. Ohlsen

We own a cabin and property in the Silver Creek Lakes Estates...We have watched the forest gradually deteriorate over the past several years, particularly affected by the pine beetle infestation, and are pleased to support your plan to help with improving the forest and reducing the fire hazard. We would be delighted to help in any way we can to help you bring about this improvement.

Response: Thank you for your comments and support for this 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. Design Criteria (Appendix A) have been developed for the project that addresses the temporary road closures and seasonal restrictions for your wildlife issues.

Respondent: Mark Kennedy, President of Silver Creek Lake Estates

Comment: ...The Association agrees with the Purpose and Need for the Project. The Association's main concerns relate to the short term and long term impacts of the Proposed Action and whether or not the Proposed Action is the most efficient way to accomplish the stated Purpose while minimizing the risk of negative impact to the Analysis Area and Association property. There are four basic concerns:

Concern 1: Scope of Work. ...concerns arose regarding the necessity of prescribed fire in sections 4073-4075; and 4079-4087. These sections contain a number of healthy trees which the Association fears could be lost in a Prescribed Fire. The Association also has a general concern over the appropriateness of a Prescribed Fire in these sections in light of the significant number of residences and location of Association property relative to the Analysis Area. It seems that other drainages in the vicinity of the Analysis Area have been treated using logging activities rather than prescribed fires. Because of the location of the Association property, the Association believes that the logging activities or other mechanical options might pose less of a danger to Association property.

Response: Mr. Kennedy, it was nice to talk to you on the phone on October 29, 2007 in regards to the Association's concerns on this project. As we discussed on the phone, the prescribed burning will occur during the spring of the year, while there is still snow on the north slopes. This time of year generates less heat and minimizes the mortality to the live trees within the burn unit and gives us much more control of the prescribed fire and it's fire effects. Also, much of the area that borders the sub-division will receive both mechanical and hand treatments of the slash that will minimize damage to the green trees that we want to retain. The Forest Service will also notify you and the Association members well in advance of when the prescribed will occur.

Concern 2: Re-seeding/restoration of temporary road. In relationship to the temporary road, the Association has concerns that the re-seeding/restoration steps will not be adequate to prevent the high number of ATV users to convert the road into a permanent road. It certainly will require more than a mound of dirt to keep motivated ATV users from accessing the road.

Response: We too are concerned about this issue. Design criteria have been established for this project that require all temporary roads and skid trails to be closed and obliterated following their intended use.

Concern 3: Impact on lakes/fishery. A major concern relative to the Prescribed Fire and all Proposed Treatment is the potential impact on the Association's lakes and fishery. A great deal of our property value revolves around the quality of our lakes and fishery. Because the Association's property is both downhill and downstream from the two Prescribed Fire areas, it is our fear that the burn residue will be transported into our lakes resulting in the loss of fish and lake habitat. This would be catastrophic as we have invested significant resources in creating a quality fishery for our members.

Concern 4: Impact on erosion. For the same reasons the Association is concerned about the impact on the lakes and fishery, we are concerned about erosion problems following the removal of trees and other forest vegetation. As the Analysis Area is the South Face of the ridgeline, snow melt occurs rapidly during the winter months and rainfall runs towards Silver Creek year round. This makes maintenance of the fence between the Association property and the Analysis Area, as well as maintenance of our dirt road difficult. The absence of trees and other forest vegetation could intensify this problem.

Response: In an effort to minimize the impacts to the watershed and their water resources, protective measures are required when implementing the mechanical and prescribed fire treatments within the project. Our Forest Hydrologist reviewed this project and developed design criteria that will be used while implementing this project. (see Appendix A)