



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Humboldt-Toiyabe
National Forest

May 2008

**NOTICE OF
PROPOSED ACTION/
REQUEST FOR COMMENTS**

**WHITE PINE SAGEBRUSH
RESTORATION PROJECT**

**ELY RANGER DISTRICT
WHITE PINE COUNTY, NEVADA**

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COMMENTS WELCOME

The Ely Ranger District welcomes your comments on the White Pine Sagebrush Restoration Project. The purpose of this comment period is to provide additional opportunity for public participation prior to a decision by the Responsible Official (Ely District Ranger). In addition, submission of comments during this period is required to establish appeal eligibility. We will accept written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action for thirty calendar days following the publication of the Notice of Proposed Action in the Ely Times. For detailed information on how to provide comments, please refer to *Comment Process* section of this document.

SUMMARY

The Ely Ranger District proposes to use mechanical thinning, brush mowing, and prescribed fire to improve wildlife habitat, encourage native plants to establish and out-compete invasive species, and reduce the likelihood of large scale, high severity wildfire. This project will occur on 11,800 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands within White Pine County, Nevada. See attached map.

LOCATION

The White Pine Sagebrush Restoration Project is located on the east side of the White Pine range, between Currant Summit and the White River, approximately 38 miles southwest of Ely, Nevada. Nevada State Highway 6 crosses the south end of the project area. The legal description is T 11N, R 59E sections 1-3 and 12; T 11N, R 60E sections 5-8 and 17-18; T 12N, R 59E sections 34-36, and T 12N R 60E sections 6-9, 16-20, and 28-33, White Pine County.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Need for Action:

Pinyon-juniper expansion in the project area has increased tree density at the expense of understory shrub and grass health. Healthy sagebrush communities are essential for many wildlife species, including sagegrouse and mule deer. A declining understory relies increasingly on residual seed sources for regeneration. However if these seed sources are not viable, the area may be prone to cheatgrass invasion. Not only does a declining understory threaten native plant perpetuation, but it also reduces the likelihood of the area burning under moderate conditions. The denser tree canopy resulting from pinyon-juniper expansion will primarily burn during extreme conditions when the likelihood of large scale, high severity wildfires is high.

Allowing pinyon-juniper expansion to continue unchecked will further deteriorate existing sagebrush and grass communities, degrade wildlife habitat, and increase the risk of large scale, high severity wildfires and subsequent cheatgrass invasion.

Purpose of the Action:

The purpose of our action is to reduce the expansion of pinyon-juniper into sagebrush-grass communities within the project area. Our action would:

- Improve wildlife habitat
- Promote native plant establishment

- Reduce the likelihood of large scale, high severity wildfires
- Reduce the likelihood of cheatgrass invasion.

THE PROPOSED ACTION

We propose to restore sagebrush communities on 11,800 acres of National Forest System lands in the White River Valley and the White Pine Range over the next three years. We would accomplish this in partnership with the Eastern Nevada Landscape Collation (ENLC) and Great Basin Institute (GBI).

We would treat 40-70% (5,000-8,300 acres) of the project area using prescribed fire, brush mowing, and other mechanical thinning of shrubs and trees. Treatment patterns would produce mosaic openings in the pinyon-juniper. Seeding native grasses may be necessary in some places.

Mechanical treatments would occur on slopes under 30%. Fire ignition would occur in pinyon-juniper woodlands and we would use a variety of ignition devices.

We would use existing roads and we would not use pesticides or herbicides.

ISSUES

Preliminary issues relevant to the White Pine Sagebrush Restoration Project include:

- Effects on prehistoric and historic sites
- Potentially increasing invasive plants and noxious weeds

ANALYSIS/DOCUMENTATION

Preliminary analysis suggests that the Proposed Action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA).

- The Proposed Action is within FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Category 31.2 [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”.
- Resources of concern are either not present in the area, or would likely not be significantly impacted by proposed activities:
 - No federally listed threatened or endangered species occupy or have potential habitat in the project area. Forest Service sensitive species that occupy or have potential habitat include the greater sagegrouse, northern goshawk, and pygmy rabbit. Wildlife surveys are scheduled prior to completion of this documentation.
 - No municipal watersheds are within or near the project area. No perennial streams exist. Wetlands are limited to several springs.
 - No designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, or research natural areas are located within the project area. All or portions of five inventoried roadless areas are located within the project area.
 - No American Indian religious or cultural sites are known in the project area
 - A cultural resources survey is scheduled prior to completion of this documentation.

COMMENT PROCESS

We will accept written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action for thirty calendar days following the publication of this notice in the *Ely Times*. The publication date in the newspaper of record 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. Regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to the Responsible Official: District Ranger, Ely Ranger District: 825 Avenue E, Ely, NV 89301, or fax: (775) 289-2132. The telephone number is (775) 289-3031. Office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00am to 4:30pm, 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), Acrobat (.pdf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-humboldt-ely@fs.fed.us. Comments must have an identifiable name attached, or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Comments must be received by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the information identified in 36 CFR 215, including:

- Name and address,
- Title of the Proposed Action;
- Specific comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the Proposed Action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision,
- Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility,
- For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
- Individual members of organizations must submit their own comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, will be available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

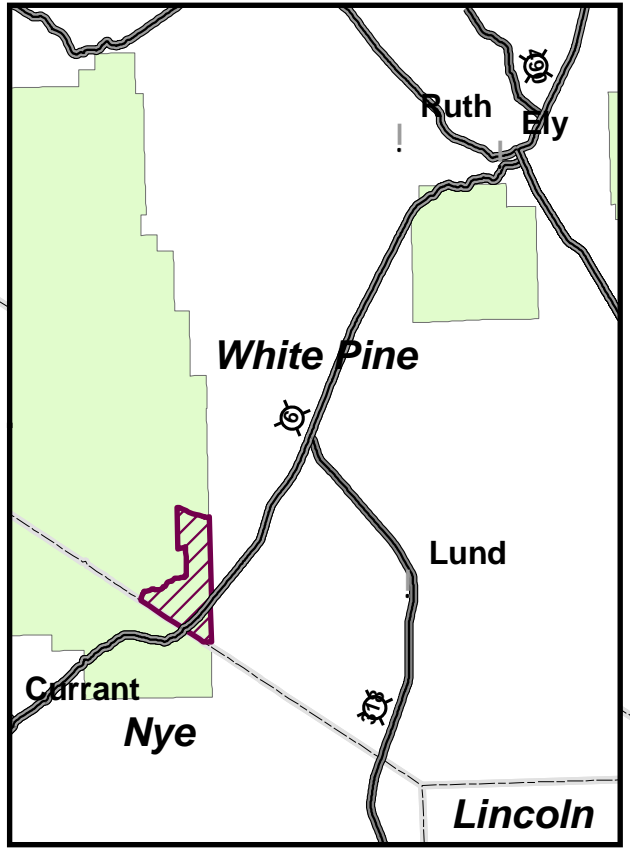
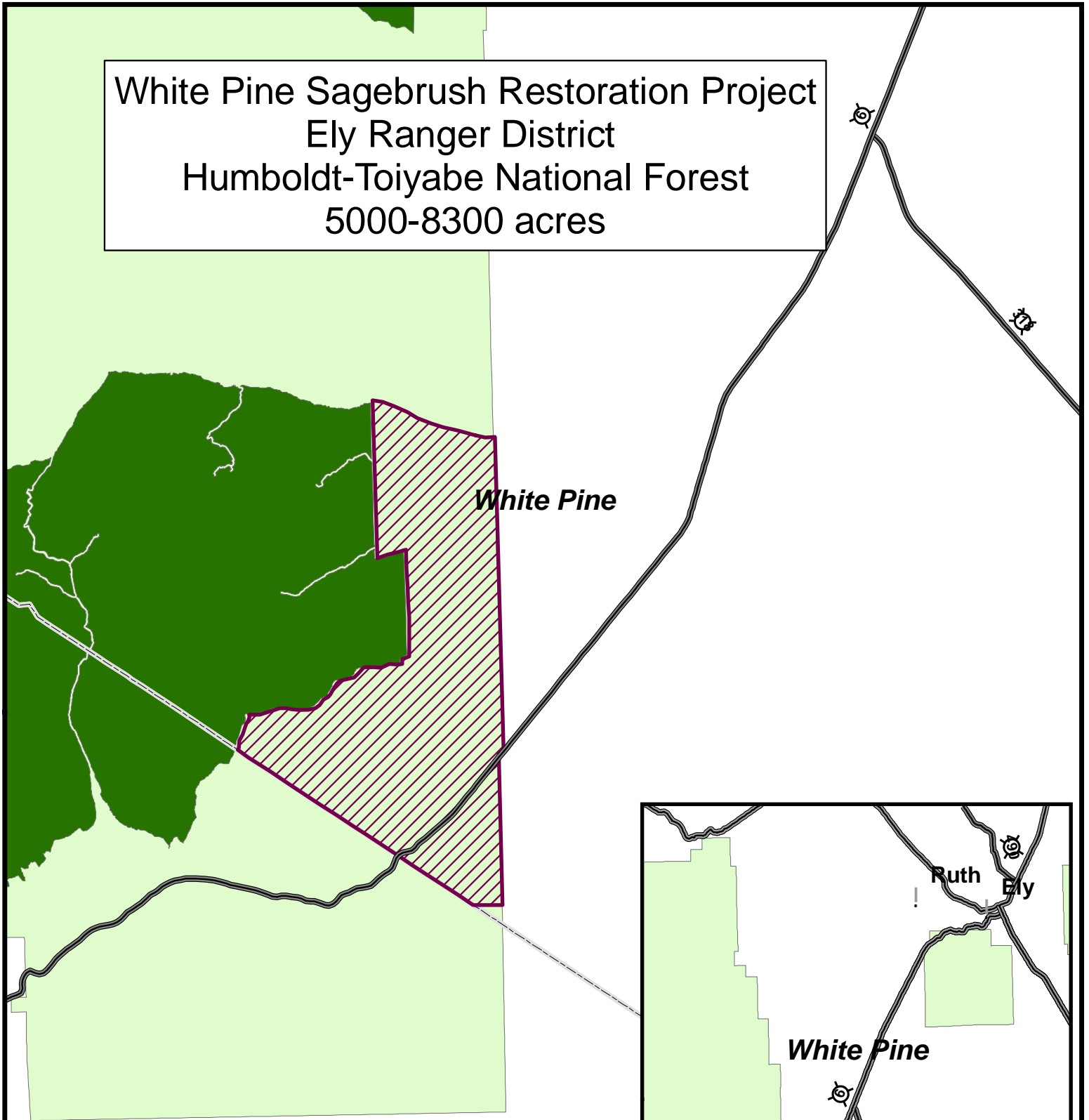
APPEAL ELIGIBILITY

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the Federal Code of Regulations (36 CFR 215).







For further information, contact Martha Williamson, Fuels Specialist, (775) 240-6244.

ATTACHMENT: White Pine Sagebrush Restoration Project map.

White Pine Sagebrush Restoration Project
 Ely Ranger District
 Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
 5000-8300 acres



Legend

-  White Pine Sagebrush Restoration Project Area
-  City
-  Roads
-  County
-  Wilderness
-  Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest