

Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests and
Prineville District, Bureau of Land Management
Office of Communications
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Sisters Area Fuels Reduction Project Decision Notice Signed

SISTERS - On November 19, 2008 Deschutes National Forest Supervisor John Allen signed a Decision Notice to treat 17,573 acres in the Greater Sisters Country Wildland Urban Interface. The purpose of the Sisters Area Fuels Reduction (SAFR) project is to reduce the threat of wildfires to nearby communities and valuable natural resources, facilitate suppression of wildfires, improve forest health, and assist development and maintenance of large Ponderosa pine trees. The project is in the vicinity of Sisters, Oregon and located in the Sisters Ranger District.

The project area has been altered by a long history of fire suppression and timber harvesting. Many areas of second growth Ponderosa pine forests and "Late and Old Structure Forests" (LOSF) are very dense. There is a high risk of losing these forests to insects and wildfire without some level of active management. About 98% of the LOSF in the project area are at risk for bark beetle mortality. Dense stands of trees adjacent to private property and subdivisions make the control of wildfires difficult, compromising public and firefighter health and safety in the event of a fire.

The decision will result in a mosaic of landscape treatments designed to reduce the risk of wildfire to Black Butte Ranch, Tollgate, Crossroads, the City of Sisters and other nearby communities, as well as improve forest health. Treatments will provide defensible space adjacent to subdivisions and other private property and along 26 miles of identified escape and access corridors in the project area. Treatments include a combination of thinning, mowing of brush, and prescribed underburning. Second growth (black bark) Ponderosa pine stands will be thinned in a "gappy, patchy, clumpy" distribution to mimic the natural variability and help them develop into old growth Ponderosa pine stands. Treatments in LOSF will move multi-strata stands to single-strata stands which are typical of the classic open Ponderosa pine forests found historically in the project area. The decision will generate about 12.9 million board feet of wood products, plus 59,000 tons of biomass. About five miles of temporary roads are necessary to access harvest units. These roads will be closed and restored when the project is completed.

The decision is based on the extensive collaboration that took place during the planning process. The District worked closely with the Greater Sisters Country Wildfire Protection Plan steering committee, and also had the support of the City of Sisters.

“This is a critical project for reducing the risk of wildfires in the greater Sisters area wildland urban interface improving long-term forest health and protecting the large Ponderosa pines that residents and visitors value here. I am anxious to get this important work started,” said Bill Anthony, Sisters District Ranger.

“The Sisters Ranger District has worked cooperatively with the City of Sisters over the years in preparing the SAFR project plan. We are pleased this plan has come to fruition. While the Sisters area has experienced several large fires over recent years, the town of Sisters remains vulnerable to a fire coming from the southwest. The SAFR project will substantially reduce the threat of wildfire to Sisters because the proposed treatments are in areas of the forest south and west of the City. This has been a long standing public safety goal for the community,” said Brad Boyd, Mayor of Sisters.

“It is a known fact that our communities in the greater Sisters area continue to be very vulnerable to major wildfire conflagration. The SAFR project is an extremely important piece of our community-wide risk reduction planning and implementation. Your local fire departments are in full support of the SAFR project. Additionally, the project furthers the goals of our Greater Sisters Community Wildfire Protection Plan,” said Taylor Robertson, Sisters – Camp Sherman Fire Chief, City of Sisters.

The decision is subject to a 45-day appeal period which will end on January 10, 2009. Only those members of the public who provided substantive comments during the review of the SAFR Environmental Assessment are eligible to appeal the project. For further information concerning this project please contact Terry Craigg, Team Leader, P.O. Box 249, Sisters, Oregon 97759; Phone (541) 549-7748, FAX (541) 549-7746, tcraigg@fs.fed.us.