



File Code: 1950-1

Date: April 27, 2007

Greetings,

You are invited to review and comment on this proposal, the South Bend Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, to reduce hazardous fuels on Forest Service lands south of Bend, Oregon adjacent to the China Hat Road and Deschutes River Woods areas. For your comments to be most helpful, please respond by May 21, 2007

The Bend – Ft. Rock Ranger District has been engaging in a variety of public involvement and collaborative opportunities to address fuels reduction activities. Activities are proposed within the Greater Bend Community Wildfire Protection Plan (GBCWPP) area south of Bend, Oregon. Presentations, public meetings, and contacts have been made with and to the Deschutes Provincial Advisory Committee, Community Wildfire Protection Plan planners at the county and state level, homeowners' associations, environmental groups, interested publics and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to gain concerns and comments on the proposal. Consideration of these comments has resulted in the development of the proposed action to reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface south of Bend. The project area is approximately 8,811 acres in size and is within the Scenic Views and Deer Habitat Management Areas for the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Approximately 3,048 acres within the project area are proposed for treatment to reduce hazardous fuels.

### **Healthy Forests Restoration Act**

The project is being planned under the direction given in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, an act authorized by Congress to expedite fuel reduction activities on federal lands. Under this act, at-risk communities, such as Bend, are to prepare Community Wildfire Protection Plans to identify priorities for treatment on both public and private lands. Bend has completed the "Greater Bend Community Wildfire Protection Plan" (GBCWPP). Copies of the plan are available at <http://egov.oregon.gov/ODF/FIRE/GreaterBendCWPP.pdf>. This plan was a collaborative effort by major stakeholders, including federal agencies, which outlines the priorities, strategies and action plans for fuels reduction treatments within the greater Bend wildland urban interface, including public lands adjacent to private lands. The plan addresses special areas of concern and makes recommendations for creating defensible spaces for communities at risk. In particular, the GBCWPP places priority for treatments on lands within and adjacent to the subdivisions south and southwest of Bend. The overall goal of the plan is to treat areas that are in Condition Class 2 or 3. Condition classes are used to characterize vegetation to identify the amount of departure from the natural fire cycle. In Condition Classes 2 or 3, at least one, but usually multiple, fire cycles has been missed and fuels have accumulated beyond levels associated with fire dependent ecosystems which can contribute to uncharacteristic wildfire. The activities and areas proposed for treatment in the South Bend Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project are consistent with the direction within the GBCWPP. .



### **Current Condition**

The majority of the forested stands within the project area were previously harvested and clear-cut in the early 1900s when the land was owned by the Shevlin-Hixon and Brooks-Scanlon logging companies. The lands came under federal ownership in the 1940s and 1950s after all the volume had been removed from the land. The majority of the areas proposed for treatment are second growth ponderosa pine stands with average diameters of 12 inches or smaller and an average age of 75 years. Most stands have been commercially or precommercially thinned in the last 20 years. Trees have increased in growth rates and are now approaching canopy closure levels that can contribute to sustainable crown fires during certain weather conditions. Understories consist of a continuous coverage of shrubs, including bitterbrush and manzanita, along with seedlings and saplings that contribute to surface and ladder fuel loadings that are well above desirable levels. There are no streams or other surface water sources within or adjacent to the project area.

### **Purpose and Need**

The need for the reduction of fuels is arising because of the high level of fuel loadings adjacent to subdivisions and the current conditions that contribute to likelihood of a large fire that could not be controlled in a short time period. There have been several wildfires in this area south of Deschutes River Woods and east of Highway 97 necessitating the need to reduce fuels for the protection of both public and private land values and infrastructure. The intent of the proposed treatments is to reduce the fuel continuity thereby reducing the rate of spread and intensity of a wildfire should one start. In addition, it would be expected that fire suppression efforts would be more successful under conditions where fuels are reduced from current levels.

### **Proposed Action**

The Bend - Ft. Rock Ranger District is proposing to reduce forest surface, ladder and aerial fuels within 1 ½ miles of the Forest boundary south of Bend, Oregon and east and west of Highway 97. In most units, multiple treatments are proposed to reduce existing fuels. Treatments along private land boundaries would receive priority for implementation.

#### Non-commercial treatments

Non-commercial fuel treatments include mechanical shrub treatment, prescribed underburning, precommercial thinning and pruning. These treatments would occur on approximately 2,465 acres.

Mechanical shrub treatment (MST), also known as mowing, focuses on reducing ground and ladder fuels such as shrubs and small trees. In addition to shrubs and small trees, prescribed under burning (UBN) focuses on reducing forest litter, needles, and small limbs. Units identified for underburning were designed to use existing fuel breaks, such as roads and lava flows to reduce the need for the construction of hand fire lines. No machine fire lines would be constructed but there may be some constructed hand fire lines. In areas proposed for mowing and or underburning, 30 percent of each unit would remain in an untreated condition following treatment.

Small diameter tree densities (less than 8 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh)) would be reduced through the use of precommercial thinning (SPC) to a spacing of 16 to 22 feet between leave trees (approximately 90 to 170 trees per acre). This would result in a reduction of ladder fuels and create space between tree crowns to reduce the likelihood of crown fires being maintained during a wildfire event. There is the potential that the resulting slash could be removed as biomass. Otherwise slash would be hand piled and burned or scattered (HPLS) in areas of low fuel loadings. Pruning (GPR) of lower limbs is proposed in some stands to increase the distance between surface and crown fuels.

### Commercial Treatments

In stands with larger diameter trees, such as 8 to 21 inches dbh, commercial thinning (HTH) would occur to reduce crown densities on approximately 583 acres. Stands would be thinned to approximately 60 to 90 trees per acre, focusing on removing the smaller diameter trees and leaving the larger and healthier trees. Residual tree density would vary, depending on local site conditions. Where openings occur naturally in the stand or where trees are unhealthy, fewer trees would be retained. In areas where more healthy trees are available, more trees would be left. The resulting stand would have both gaps and clumps of trees promoting stand diversity. No trees over 21 inches in diameter would be cut and removed. No commercial harvest is proposed in stands considered late successional or old growth. All harvesting would be done with ground based systems, likely using mechanical harvesters and rubber tired skidders on a designated skid trail system. Harvested trees would be whole tree yarded or yarded with tops attached (WTY) to the landing to minimize the amounts of slash left in the stand. Most stands would be treated with additional slash disposal treatments such as underburning or hand piling of slash. In one unit, grapple piling with a machine (MP) would be necessary because of the high levels of slash expected to result from the commercial and precommercial thinning operation. The removal of merchantable material would result in approximately 1.0 MMBF of timber being harvested.

See Table 1 attached for the unit listing of the proposed treatment units and the Project Map for their locations.

### **Connected Actions**

No permanent roads would be constructed with this project. Approximately 1.6 miles of temporary road would be necessary to access units 113, 119 and 411 for commercial harvest. These roads would be closed and subsoiled following harvest and associated activities.

One stand (unit 411) south of Deschutes River Woods and west of the railroad tracks is proposed for commercial thinning, however, the location of the haul route remains to be determined. It would be expected that the logs would be hauled across the railroad tracks and then to Highway 97. Other log hauling would occur on Forest Service roads to Highway 97 and on China Hat road to Highway 97.

Because the intent of the fuel reduction activities is to reduce stand densities to reduce surface, ladder and crown fuels, site distances within treated stands would increase. This increase in site distances could lead to increased disturbance to big game, especially in the deer winter range (Deer Habitat Management Area). In order to decrease the impacts to big game, roads identified

through the roads analysis process as being excess to administrative needs, would be closed or decommissioned. Approximately 5.9 miles of roads would be closed and approximately 3.3 miles of road would be decommissioned.

Mitigations have been identified include but are not limited to:

- Retaining 10 percent of each commercial harvest unit in an untreated condition,
- Retaining 30 percent of each mechanical mowing and underburning unit in an untreated condition, in units where commercial harvest, mowing and underburning occur together, overlap would occur for the untreated areas so no more than 30 percent would be left in an untreated condition for the unit as a whole.
- Retaining all existing ponderosa pine snags unless they present a hazard to treatment operations,
- Burning during conditions that provide protection to existing ponderosa pine logs on the ground,

### **Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Plan Direction**

While the project is being planned under the direction given in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, the project is also being planned to be consistent with the current planning direction in the Deschutes National Forest LRMP. The following is the management area direction for the project area.

#### Deer Habitat MA-7

The majority of the project area is within the Deer Habitat management area which provides an emphasis for big game winter range habitat (6,245 acres) and is located east of Highway 97. The goal of the management area is to provide optimum habitat conditions for wintering deer considering the inherent productivity of the land. Ideally, cover and forage areas should be in close proximity for optimum use by big game with cover making up 40 percent of the land area. Thermal cover is currently below LRMP standard and guideline level (30 percent thermal cover) within and surrounding the project area because of wildfires within the last 10 years. The project has been designed to maintain current levels of thermal cover by either avoiding thermal cover or removing smaller diameter trees that contribute to ladder fuels while maintaining canopy closure necessary for thermal cover. Hiding cover is currently above minimum levels.

#### Scenic Views MA-9

The remainder of the project area (2,566 acres) is within the Scenic Views Management Area which directs an emphasis to provide high quality scenery that is representative of the natural character of Central Oregon. Landscapes along travel routes and use areas, such as Highway 97 would be managed to maintain or enhance their appearance. The desired condition in ponderosa pine is to achieve and maintain visual diversity through variations in stand densities and size classes. Large, old-growth pine will remain an important constituent, with trees achieving 30 inches in diameter or larger and having deeply furrowed, yellow-bark characteristics. Treatment in the visual corridors is meant to decrease crown densities which will have a secondary benefit of increasing growth so that large diameter trees are more prevalent in the corridor in the future.

## **Public Involvement**

As part of the development of this proposal under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, it is important to consider public comments early in the development of the project. I value your concerns and welcome your suggestions to improve or adjust our current proposal. If you have comments and concerns or if you support the project, please mail your comments to Phil Cruz, District Ranger, Bend – Ft. Rock Ranger District at 1230 NE 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, A-262, Bend, OR 97701. You may also send your comments in an e-mail message to [comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us) with “South Bend Scoping” in the subject line. Comments can be received throughout the process but in order for the comments to be most helpful, please respond by May 21, 2007. Please do not hesitate to call Gery Ferguson, project leader, at 541-383-5538 or myself at 541-383-4760 if you have any questions or need clarification regarding the project.

Sincerely,

/s/ Phil Cruz  
PHIL CRUZ  
District Ranger

Attachments  
Table 1 – Unit listing  
Map

Table 1 – South Bend Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Treatments

unit number	mgmt. area	acres	harvest treatment	post harvest slash trt.	precommercial veg. treat	post precommercial treat.	nat. fuels	nat. fuels - 2	stand treatment
107	SV3	10			SPC	HPLS	MST		
110	SV1/SV3	66			SPC	HPLS	MST		GPR
113	SV1/SV3	61	HTH	WTY	SPC	MP	MST		
114	SV1/SV3	47			SPC	HPLS	MST		
115	SV1	65			SPC	HPLS	MST		
116	SV1	28					MST		
119	DHB	70	HTH	WTY					
120	DHB	36	HTH	WTY					
131	SV1	37			SPC	HPLS	MST		GPR
132	DHB	94			SPC	HPLS	MST	UBN	
133	DHB	63					MST	UBN	
134	DHB	231					MST	UBN	
135	DHB	110					MST	UBN	
136	DHB	213					MST	UBN	
137	DHB	239					MST	UBN	
138	DHB	113					MST	UBN	
139	DHB	224					MST	UBN	
141	DHB	262					MST	UBN	
153	DHB	44						UBN	
221	SV3	16			SPC	HPLS	MST		
222	SV3	61					MST		
251	DHB/SV1	38					MST	UBN	
252	DHB/SV1	34						UBN	
254	DHB	49			SPC	HPLS	MST	UBN	GPR
255	DHB	99						UBN	
411	SV3	75	HTH	WTY	SPC	HPLS		UBN	
412	SV3/SV1	25	HTH	WTY	SPC	HPLS	MST		
430	SV1	100	HTH	WTY	SPC	HPLS	MST	UBN	
446	DHB	121	HTH	WTY			MST	UBN	
447	SV1	95	HTH	WTY			MST	UBN	
452	SV1	36					MST		
453	SV1	151					MST		
454	SV1	100			SPC	HPLS	MST		
455	SV1	35			SPC	HPLS	MST		
		<b>3048</b>							