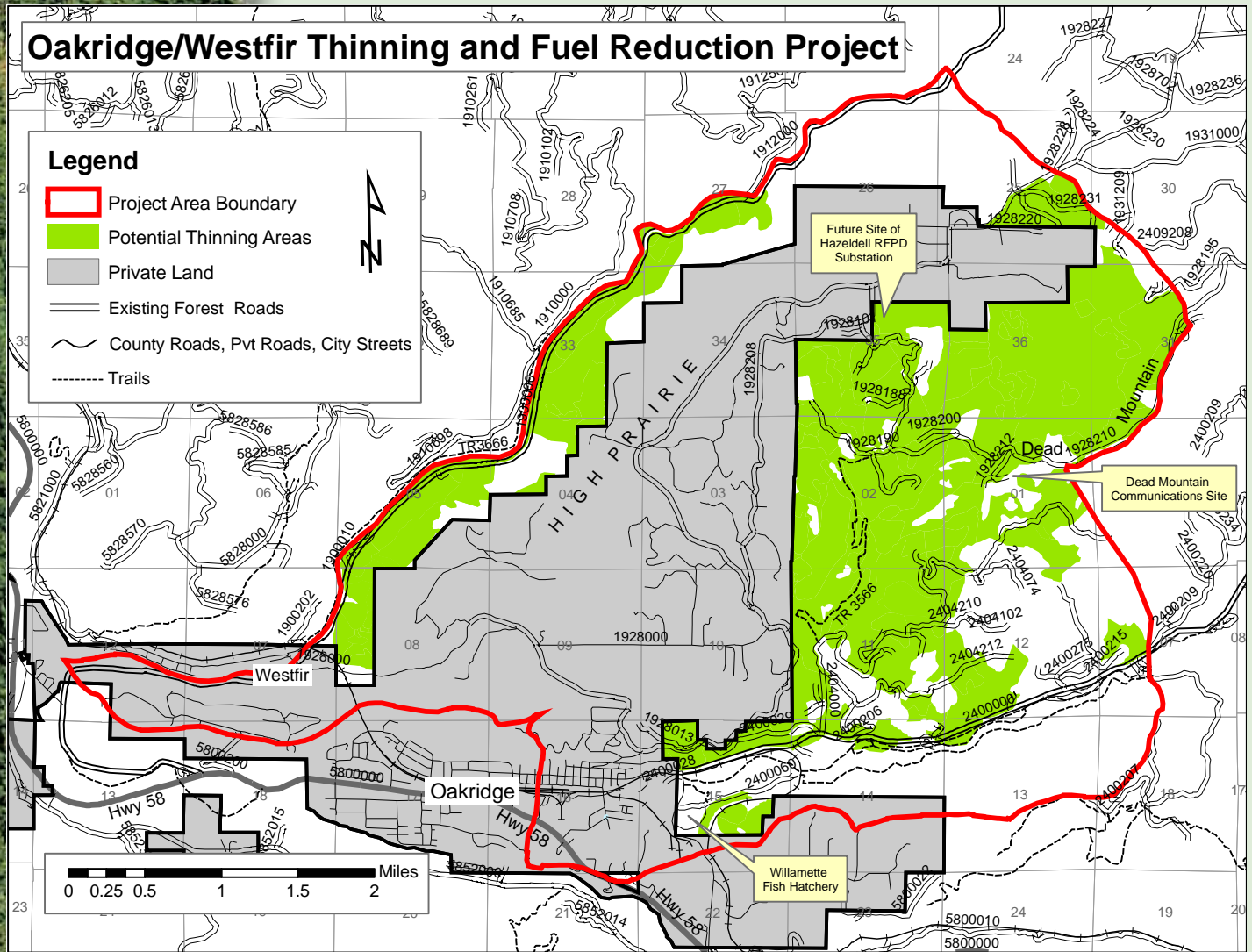


Oakridge/Westfir

Thinning & Fuel Reduction Project



OAKRIDGE/WESTFIR THINNING AND FUEL REDUCTION PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to reduce fire risk to the communities of Oakridge and Westfir, and the High Prairie area, the Middle Fork Ranger District is proposing a thinning and fuel reduction project. The proposed treatment areas are on National Forest lands that lie north of Oakridge and Westfir and east of High Prairie (see map). This proposal on federally-managed land complements the implementation plan for the upper Highway 58 portion of the Lane County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) being developed by federal, state, county and local fire protection offices. The CWPP will assist land owners in reducing fire risk on private lands. Future projects will address fire risk on other National Forest lands surrounding Oakridge and Westfir.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT

- The main purpose of this project is to reduce long-term fire risk to the communities of Oakridge and Westfir and the High Prairie area.
- The proposed thinning treatments would help protect the private and public radio transmitter site on Dead Mountain, the future site of the Hazeldell Rural Fire Protection District substation, and the Willamette Fish Hatchery from wildfires.
- Habitat restoration in ponderosa pine/Oregon white oak stands and meadows; thus creating a less fire-prone condition

Most timber stands in the project area either originated from the 1910 Dead Mountain Fire (Flat Creek and Dead Mountain area) or from logging that occurred in the 1920's and 1930's (North Fork of the Middle Fork Willamette River area). Most of these stands are now made up of densely stocked Douglas-fir and other species ranging in age from 80 to 120 years. In most of the project area, tops of trees are touching, or close to touching each other, thus increasing the risk of large, wind-driven crown fires.

The history of frequent, large, east wind-driven wildfire near Oakridge and Westfir is documented in the table below. Additionally, there have been dozens of smaller fires surrounding Oakridge and Westfir. For example, the 2005 Hatchery Fire burned 2 ½ acres within a few hundred feet of Oakridge city limits, threatening several homes before it was controlled. This fire history highlights the need to address fuel hazard conditions.

Oakridge/Westfir Area Recent Large Fire History

Fire Name	Year	Size (acres)	Cause	Distance/Direction From Oakridge Area Private Land
Dead Mtn.	1967	2,047	Human	<1 mile (E)
Pryor	1981	72	Human	Adjacent to Private Land (E)
Shady Beach	1988	8,900	Human	Adjacent to Private Land (SE)
Warner Cr.	1991	8,800	Human	7 miles (E)
Pryor #2	1992	629	Human	1 mile (E)
Gorge	1998	259	Human	3 miles (N)
Monteith	2000	73	Human	2 miles (E)
Hemlock	2002	136	Human	Adjacent to Private Land (W)
Office Bridge	2002	90	Human	Adjacent to Private Land (W)

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Commercial thinning of 80-120 year old stands on up to 3600 acres on National Forest land. Removing trees through commercial thinning is the most effective action that can be taken for reducing the threat of large, wind-driven crown fires;
- After harvest, remove or reduce remaining down wood, using prescribed fire or mechanical means;
- Creation of fuel breaks;
- Non-commercial treatments on an additional 300-400 acres of National Forest land including underburning, pruning, thinning of trees less than 7 inches in diameter, and pile burning;
- Non-commercial fuels treatments on up to 200 acres on private land within the project area if funds are available and private landowners want to participate, as prioritized by the CWPP;
- Control of invasive plants;
- Road maintenance and culvert replacements;
- Potential construction of short road segments if needed for treatment access;
- Closures of some existing roads will be considered.
- Restoration of pine/oak and meadow habitats

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

The following issues and project design elements are currently under consideration by our planning team. Options for mitigation will be explored.

FIRE/FUELS

Potential for increase in brush and tree seedlings growing in after widely spaced thinning will require underburning in some areas to maintain low fire hazard.

AIR QUALITY

Smoke from prescribed burning and pile burning may affect the ability of the City of Oakridge to meet state or federal standards for air quality. Wind patterns and atmospheric conditions will be taken into account to reduce smoke effects.

WATER QUALITY, SOILS, AND FISHERIES

No new road construction adjacent to streams will limit sediment delivery, thus protecting domestic water supplies, spring Chinook, and potential bull trout habitat.

WILDLIFE

The project will analyze the effects of proposed treatments on wildlife, including listed species such as the northern spotted owl.

RECREATION

Motorists and bicyclists on Aufderheide Drive (FS Rd. 19) may experience delays during logging operations. Flat Creek trail and the North Fork trail will be closed during logging operations. In order to minimize impacts to visitors, harvest will not be allowed on holidays and weekends.

EFFECTS TO LOCAL RESIDENTS (SCENERY AND NOISE):

Local residents, especially those living north of Oakridge City limits may see a decrease in the density of the tree tops on the hillsides visible from their homes. The use of helicopters to yard logs and the presence of log hauling trucks may be noticeable.

INVASIVE PLANTS:

Washing of equipment under-carriages will help prevent the spread of invasive plants. Sites will be prioritized for eradication treatment in conjunction with the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Education and prevention is on-going.



Upper photo: *Second-growth stand on Middle Fork Ranger District before thinning treatment.*

Lower photo: *Adjacent area after commercial thinning to a spacing similar to that proposed for this project.*

TIMELINE

May, 2007- Action Alternative developed
June, 2007 – Public meeting
Summer, 2007 – Field surveys
April, 2008 - Environmental Assessment completed
April/May, 2008 – Objection and Resolution periods
June, 2008 – Decision Notice signed
June, 2008 –Implementation begins

COOPERATIVE APPROACH

This project is planned cooperatively with the City of Oakridge Emergency Services Department, the Hazeldell Rural Fire Protection District, the City of Westfir, and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF).

The proposed project lies entirely within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) boundary as defined in the Lane County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (<http://www.co.lane.or.us/Planning/CWPPtoc.htm>). The Upper Highway 58 Implementation Plan portion of the CWPP is expected to be released in

*Planning team members (left to right)
Todd Camm, Fire Management
Officer, Middle Fork Ranger District;
Gordon Zimmerman, Oakridge
City Administrator; Don Hampton,
Mayor of Oakridge; Jerry Shorey, Fire
Chief, Oakridge Fire Department
and Hazeldell Rural Fire Protection
District (HRFPD); John Milandin,
Chairman, HRFPD help team leader
Eric Ornberg (standing, middle) with
project planning.*



Spring of 2007.

To share your comments.....

Please contact our office if you would like to provide comments, schedule a meeting or a field visit, or consult with one of our planning team members. The environmental assessment (EA) is expected to be finished by April, 2008. Comments are appreciated whenever we receive them, however, for input to be timely we need to receive comments by May 1, 2007. Please address your comments to Middle Fork Ranger Station, 46375 Highway 58, ATTN: Eric Ornberg (Project Team Leader), Westfir,

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