



File Code: 1950

Date: November 13, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

I am seeking public comments about the proposed East Fork – Pole Creek Vegetation Treatment project on the Kemmerer Ranger District of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. This project would salvage harvest bug killed trees from no more than 250 acres in the East Fork Hams Fork drainage and improve wildlife habitat through prescribed burning approximately 3000 acres of aspen and conifer/aspen stands in the adjacent Pole Creek drainage on the Kemmerer Ranger District (see attached map).

East Fork Salvage would include harvesting dead and dying trees using cable and tractor yarding systems. Trees infected with dwarf mistletoe may also be harvested where present in some of the harvest units. No new permanent road construction is planned. Less than ½ mile of temporary road may be needed to access units. Existing roads may need clearing, minor surface preparation and/or ditch maintenance. Slash will be treated using one or combination of the following treatments: machine piling then burn piles, or lop and scatter slash then jackpot burning concentrations of slash.

Pole Creek Prescribed Burn would include burning approximately ½ of the acreage within a 6550 acre project area. Additional acreage would be burned concurrently on the adjacent BLM lands just south of the project area. The objective of the burn is to improve ageclass diversity and acreage of aspen habitat for wildlife.

These projects are being designed to be consistent with the Bridger-Teton Forest Plan. An interdisciplinary team is reviewing the proposals and will provide me recommendations to address any biological, physical, or social concerns.

As provided for by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), I believe this project will meet a category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in either an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of the categories. The Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30) specific categories are 31.2.13, “Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction”; 31.2.14, “Commercial and non-commercial sanitation harvest of trees to control insects or disease not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction, including removal of infested/infected trees and adjacent live uninfested/uninfected trees as determined necessary to control the spread of insects or disease”; and 31.2.6, “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction”.



Your Comments: I would like to hear from you. I am interested in any specific information you believe I should consider about this proposal; particularly any extraordinary effects you think the project may have on people or the environment and reasonable mitigations you think might help limit those effects. I will use your specific comments to:

- improve the proposed project,
- determine whether there are extraordinary circumstances that would preclude me from categorically excluding the project from documentation in an EA or EIS and,
- help decide whether or not to authorize the project.

I plan to complete the environmental review and make my decision by early April. This comment period provides those interested in or affected by these projects an opportunity to make their concerns known. It is being provided pursuant to the July 2 and September 16, 2005, orders issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. Those who provide timely comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations. A copy of this description of the proposed action is also available at www.fs.fed.us/r4/btnf/projects. Additional information regarding this project can be obtained from the Kemmerer Ranger District office.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of the legal notice of the opportunity to comment in the Casper Star-Tribune. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. You should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Please address comments as, Attention: East Fork – Pole Creek Vegetation Treatment.

Comments must be submitted to: Tracy Hollingshead, Kemmerer Ranger District, 308 Highway 189 North, Kemmerer WY, 83101, 307-877-4415, fax: 307-828-5135.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-bridger-teton-kemmerer@fs.fed.us. Comments must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6. Only those who submit timely will be eligible to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tracy M. Hollingshead
TRACY M. HOLLINGSHEAD
Kemmerer District Ranger

Enclosures

Proposed Action

East Fork – Pole Creek Vegetation Treatment

The Kemmerer Ranger District is proposing to remove dead and dying insect and disease infested trees, and prescribe burn conifer-encroached aspen in the Hams Fork River drainage as part of a proposed vegetative treatment and wildlife habitat improvement project.

The project area is located in Township 25 North, Range 117 West, Sections 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14; Township 25 ½ North, Range 117 West; Township 26 North, Range 117 West, Sections 33, 34, and 35; Township 25 North, Range 116 West, Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18; approximately 40 miles north of Kemmerer, Wyoming (see attached map). The vegetation within the proposed salvage/sanitation treatment area is composed primarily of Lodgepole Pine, with a minor mixing of Sub-Alpine Fir and Aspen. The prescribed burn would occur primarily in mixed stands of conifer encroaching aspen, sage-grass meadows, and spruce-fir.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is to salvage sawtimber and provide wood products for local economic benefits on up to 250 acres and to improve wildlife habitat by prescribed burning approximately half the acreage within a 6550 acre area in the Pole Creek drainage on National Forest lands.

There is a need to:

- *Salvage dead and dying timber before it loses much or all of its commercial value.*
- *Respond to publics who have expressed a strong desire to reduce the number of dead and dying trees on the Forest to address visual impacts and fire hazard created by the dead trees.*
- *Regenerate aspen stands for big game habitat.*
- *Regenerate lodgepole pine stands with little or no mistletoe infection.*

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action calls for the use of prescribed fire to treat approximately half the acreage within a 6550 acre area, and treat approximately 250 acres through salvage and sanitation treatments. The project area is listed on the Bridger-Teton Schedule of Proposed Actions as the East Fork – Pole Creek Vegetation Treatment.

The areas proposed for treatment are in Forest Plan Desired Future Condition (DFC) DFC 10. The Forest Plan describes DFC 10 as, “an area managed to allow for some resource development and roads while having no adverse and some beneficial effects on wildlife”. The management emphasis is to provide long-term and short-term habitat to meet the needs of wildlife managed in balance with timber harvest, grazing, and minerals development. All surface-disturbing activities are designed to have no effect or beneficial effects on wildlife.

East Fork Salvage and Sanitation Vegetation Treatment

The Kemmerer Ranger District is proposing commercial timber harvest to remove dead trees and trees that are infested with Mountain Pine Beetles and Dwarf Mistletoe at implementation. The slash resulting from timber harvest will be treated through prescribed fire, consisting of burning of piled slash. This project area is

approximately 250 acres in Township 25 North, Range 117 West, Sections 1, 2, 3, 33, 34, 35; and within Township 25 ½ North, Range 117 West. The specific vegetation treatment will be to remove all dead and dying trees, including those trees which appear green but are infested with Mountain Pine Beetles and/or Dwarf Mistletoe at implementation. No more than 250 acres will be treated. Patches of untreated forest will remain between units as a result of project design. The openings created by removal of dead, dying and infested timber will be placed on the landscape in the best locations to maximize stand diversity, encourage aspen sprouting, and reduce fuel loadings. The Bridger-Teton Forest Plan establishes a maximum created opening size of 40 acres, but makes exceptions for catastrophic events such as wildfire, insect, or disease attack. Slash created by timber harvest will likely be mechanically piled after harvest and burned when cured with snow on the ground.

The salvage/sanitation treatment will involve the use of the existing roads in the area. Temporary roads may be needed to access the treatment area, but will not exceed ½ mile cumulatively. After use, temporary roads will be rehabilitated to pre-treatment conditions and closed to OHV use. Methods may include ripping and seeding with native species, placing slash on top of them, water-barring, and placing barriers in known high-use areas. This project is not within any Inventoried Roadless Area.

KV (Knutson Vanderburgh) funded projects may include stocking surveys and control of invasive species within the sale area.

Pole Creek Prescribed Fire Wildlife Habitat Improvement Treatment

The Kemmerer Ranger District is proposing a prescribed fire to treat vegetation in a mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas over the landscape to improve aspen stands for big game habitat. To obtain our desired vegetation conditions, the following burn objectives have been developed: 1) Improve the age class diversity of sagebrush communities by removing 30-60% of the sagebrush in a mosaic pattern. 2) Improve the diversity of other mountain shrub species such as service berry and snowberry by removing 30-60% of these communities in a mosaic pattern as well. 3) Target and treat as much aspen within the project area as feasible. 4) Target and aerial ignite bug killed conifer encroached aspen. 5) All true conifer stands within the burn unit have a significant bug kill component, and up to 80% of these stands would be allowed to burn. The proposed burn would be scheduled for September of 2010. Historically, natural fires helped maintain the vegetative community structure critical to properly functioning watershed systems. Therefore, prescribed fire is the primary treatment technique proposed.

Site specific burn prescriptions will be prepared to meet the above-listed burn objectives and maximize regeneration of desired plan communities.