

Red Cliff WUI Addition Vegetation Treatments Proposed Action

Proposed Action: The Pinedale Ranger District, Bridger-Teton National Forest is proposing to implement mechanical and prescribed fire treatments on 461 acres adjacent to private in-holdings in the Gypsum Creek Drainage. The treatments will reduce the amount of hazardous fuels and create defensible space in the event of a wildland fire.

This project was first analyzed in the Moose Gypsum Environmental Impact Statement and its project record and then in the Red Cliff Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation Categorical Exclusion. Portions of the project have been successfully treated under the CE decision. The remaining untreated areas were not under contract when the court placed the injunction on using category 10. The necessity for a third environmental analysis is to notify the public of our intent to treat the remaining acres as well as document the analysis of effects for these treatments.

The area is located in Township 38 North, Range 109 West, Sections 12,13, and 24 and Township 38 North, Range 109 West, Sections 7,18, and 19(see attached map).

The proposal utilizes a combination of mechanical treatments and prescribed burns to thin ladder fuels and continuous crown fuels and remove surface fuel concentrations in the treatment units. Following are the details of the proposed action:

- Creation of a fuel modification zone adjacent to private property boundaries.
 - Trees felled and bucked to achieve an average of a 20-30 foot spacing between leave trees.
 - Reduction of ladder fuels; cut all trees less than 7 inches in diameter.
 - Mechanical piling of existing and activity created woody material. Rotten material will not be piled.
 - Burning of piled material.
- Treatments will be completed mechanically by service and timber sale contractors. Machinery such as tractors, excavators, and skidders would be used to remove or pile material in the treatment units.
- Timber Harvest contracts will only be utilized outside Inventoried Roadless Areas and comprise 123 acres of the project area.
- Activities within Inventoried Roadless Areas will be delineated and calculated in subsequent mapping efforts and will be consistent with the January 12, 2001 Roadless Area Conservation final ruling, specifically 36 CFR Part 294.13(b). If any future Roadless Area rulings occur, this Decision will be revisited for consistency.
- No new roads will be constructed; only existing travel routes will be utilized.
- Travel management will be addressed as part of the analysis.
- No vegetation treatments will be allowed within a half mile radius from known active goshawk nests from March 1 to August 15 or until the young have fledged.
- All project contractors will be required to store their food according to the special order addressing food storage and sanitation during project implementation to minimize adverse interaction between bears and humans.
- Introduction of invasive plant species and spread of invasive plant species would be curtailed through equipment cleaning and treatment of infested areas following fuels treatments.

Purpose & Need.

The primary purpose of this project is to reduce hazardous fuels around private property in the Red Cliff area which will create defensible space in the event of a future wildland fire. Fire management is concerned about the potential of an escaped human caused fire in the heavily visited green river corridor to progress rapidly upslope into the Red Cliff area. Current fuels conditions represent large amounts of down fuels, moderate to heavy concentrations of ladder fuels (limbs, immature conifer trees, and various ground fuels that would allow fire to climb into the crowns of the mature conifer trees), and tightly spaced crowns (canopy) of mature conifer trees. There are large amounts of standing dead and dying Lodge Pole Pine. This project will reduce these types of fuels in the areas identified on the attached map.

Specifically, defensible space is achieved by:

- Decreasing crown spacing thereby decreasing potential for extreme fire behavior from sustained crown fire spread.
- Reducing stand density to improve forest resistance to fire, insects and disease.
- Reducing small diameter conifer understory to decrease ladder fuels.
- Reducing natural and activity created slash amounts by mechanical piling and burning.
- Decreasing potential fire behavior which increases the probability for successful fire suppression response.

Red Cliff private property is number two in priority ranking on the Sublette County Communities at Risk. The rankings for the Sublette County Communities at Risk were identified through a collaborative framework as described in “A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan.” The Red Cliff private property is also included as an ‘Interface Area’ in the “Sublette County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.”

Two recent large fires in the vicinity of the proposed project area (Battle Mountain Fire 2006 & Salt Lick Fire 2007) put the area at real risk and re-inforces the need to complete the treatments.

Issues

Preliminary issues that were developed internally for this Red Cliff WUI Addition Vegetation Treatments Project are as follows:

1. Effects to TES plant and animal species
2. Effects to Fisheries
3. Effects to soils
4. Effects to Travel Management