



File Code: 1950-1

Date: September 11, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

The Williams Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest is proposing a variety of vegetation and fuels reduction treatments on 17,337 acres of National Forest land located 3 to 12 miles south of the city of Williams, Arizona (see attached maps). Primary treatments proposed under the McCracken Project include mechanical tree removal and prescribed fire in order to reduce the risk of stand replacement wildland fire, improve the overall health and sustainability of the forest, and protect public and private resources. The following is a summary of the McCracken Project Proposed Action document (September 2008).

The Purpose and Need for Action

High tree densities in the McCracken project area along with associated high fuel loadings lead to the following conditions:

- High potential for loss of forest resources such as wildlife habitat, visual resources, recreational opportunities, and watershed resources due to catastrophic wildfire.
- High risk of loss to surrounding private property and reduced public and firefighter safety from catastrophic wildfire.
- Poor forest health.
- Limited forest diversity for various wildlife that inhabit the area.

There is a need to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically intense wildfires, improve forest health and sustainability, and maintain and improve wildlife habitat quality for different species within the project area. The McCracken Project proposes activities that would meet these needs.

The Proposed Action

The project proposes to reduce forest tree densities and fuel loadings throughout most of the project area through a combination of tree thinning treatments, associated activity slash treatments, and prescribed burning. Tree thinning treatments may be either commercial or noncommercial, or both. Commercial treatments will sell the trees designated for removal and the boles of the trees will be removed from the site, generally with a timber sale. Sale of the trees will generate money for the Forest Service that can be utilized for other resource improvement projects such as forest road improvements and noncommercial thinning of trees.



Vegetative Treatments

Vegetative treatments include those treatments that reduce tree density by felling trees and leaving the remainder of trees at some specified density. In some cases, herbicides applied to individual trees and other tree removal methods such as mulching may be utilized in order to reduce the density of trees. See Vegetation Treatments map for the location of these proposed treatments. The project proposes the following vegetative treatments:

Vegetative Treatments	Acres
Commercial Vegetative Treatments	8,272
Noncommercial Vegetative Treatments	6,990
Total Acres	15,262

The above proposed vegetative treatments would:

- reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires by creating openings and breaks in the forest canopy and by removing many of the small understory trees that contribute to ladder fuels that can move a ground fire into the forest canopy
- improve forest health and resilience by reducing tree density and reducing dwarf mistletoe infection levels to more manageable levels
- improve tree age diversity distribution by releasing and regenerating young trees and increasing the longevity of larger older trees
- increase individual tree growth and crown development
- stimulate grass, forb, and shrub production in the understory by reducing overstory density and creating openings in the forest overstory
- improve vigor and sustainability of aspen stands by removing conifers that are overtopping and competing with aspen, and by protecting aspen regeneration from elk browse

Activity Fuels Treatments

Activity fuels treatments would follow vegetative treatments and are intended to reduce the amount of woody debris created by the felling of trees, as well as treat pre-existing fuels. These treatments would reduce the immediate fire risk and prepare these areas for future prescribed burning in order to meet specified objectives. Several types of treatments would be used to accomplish fuels reduction objectives and may include the following: whole tree yarding; crushing; machine piling; hand piling; pile burning; broadcast burning; and lopping.

Prescribed Fire

A prescribed underburn is proposed for the entire McCracken project area. Approximately 2,075 acres are proposed for underburning only, without vegetative treatments. Both prescribed burning and vegetative treatments are proposed for the remainder of the project area.

Prescribed burning would:

- reduce fuel loadings on the forest floor and reduce fuel ladders by thinning smaller trees
- stimulate the production and improve the distribution of grasses and forbs
- aid in restoring the grass/forb nutrient recycling processes
- reduce the risk of uncontrolled wildfires by effectively treating activity-created slash

Road System

The existing forest road system within McCracken project area provides adequate access for proposed project activities. If commercial sawtimber and roundwood are sold and hauled from the area on log trucks, roads being used to access commercial sites would be maintained and/or improved to reduce erosion problems. Any temporary roads used to access timber would be closed or obliterated after use. Also, any currently closed roads that may need to be re-opened would be closed after implementation. There would be increased log truck traffic on local area roads used to access timber.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures are measures that are taken to minimize potential negative impacts that may occur due to implementation of the proposed action. A number of mitigation measures have been developed for the proposed action and are described in detail in the proposed action document.

If you are interested in reviewing the McCracken Project Proposed Action document in its entirety you can do so in any of the following manners: 1) you can view it online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/kai/>; 2) you can pick up a copy at the Williams Ranger District office, 8:00-4:30 Monday through Friday, excluding holidays; 3) it can be mailed or emailed to you upon request by calling 928-635-5600 or by sending an email to sklogan@fs.fed.us.

Please submit your written or oral comments on this proposal by **Monday, October 20, 2008** to:

Mark Herron, South Kaibab Silviculturist
Williams Ranger District
742 S Clover Rd
Williams, AZ 86046
Email: mherron@fs.fed.us
Telephone: 928-635-5644

All comments, particularly electronic comments, must include the sender's full name and address. Hand-delivered comments can be submitted at the Williams Ranger District office, 8:00-4:30 Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

You are also invited to a public open house on this project scheduled for October 1, 2008 at the Williams Ranger District office between 6:00 and 8:00 PM. Comments related to the McCracken Project will also be accepted at this meeting.

Comments received in response to this solicitation or as a result of the public meeting, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. Only those persons who comment or otherwise express interest in this project will remain on the mailing list and receive a copy of the Environmental Assessment and other correspondence.

Thank you for your interest. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Martie Schramm
MARTIE SCHRAMM
District Ranger