Sanborn Park-Western Power Line
Wildland Urban Interface Project

Introduction

We are seeking comments on the proposal to conduct hazardous fuels reduction and commercial and pre-commercial thinning in ponderosa pine and pine-oak stands on the Norwood Ranger District of the Uncompahgre National Forest. The objective of the proposal is to reduce wildfire risk to the community and residents of Sanborn Park, Colorado and along the electrical transmission lines in the area. The Norwood Ranger District is proposing to use the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) authorities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments regarding this proposal should be received by September 19, 2008 following public notice in the Telluride Daily Planet. Please refer to the Public Involvement section for additional information about submitting comments.

Document Organization

This Scoping Notice is organized into three parts. The first part is the Scoping Notice narrative detailing the proposed action. The other two parts are the Project Map Series with views of the project location and treatment areas, and the accompanying diagram of electrical transmission line clearance requirements to assist the reader in understanding vegetation maintenance standards in the wire zone–border zone area of the transmission line.

Background

The proposed hazardous fuels and vegetation treatments are located near the small community of Sanborn Park, CO, the San Miguel Power Association Inc. (San Miguel) 7.2 kV power line that serves Sanborn Park and along the Western Area Power Administration (Western) 345 kV and 230 kV high voltage transmission lines that transit National Forest System lands on the south end of the Uncompahgre Plateau. These hazardous fuels treatments will be placed around the perimeter of the community of Sanborn Park and along the Western transmission lines. The overall objective of this project is to reduce the potential for crown fires, reduce fireline intensities to improve fire suppression capabilities, and improve the ability of forested stands and landscapes to survive and recover from wildfire in the Sanborn Park-Western Power Line Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) project area.

The Sanborn Park community and the Western transmission lines are designated as WUI for the purposes of planning and treating hazardous fuels that could threaten lives and property in this area during a wildfire event. The Sanborn Park community was identified as WUI in the Federal Register notice of January 4, 2001 (66 FR 753), Communities at Risk. Sanborn Park, the San Miguel transmission line and, the Western transmission lines were further identified by the Forest Service (FS), National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit (MIFMU), the GMUG NF Accelerated Watershed-Vegetation Management Plan (USFS R2 AWRP, January 2004), and the Proposed

Land Management Plan (GMUG NF, March 2007 Draft) as designated WUI. The project meets the criteria for authorized hazardous fuels reduction projects under the HFRA.

The community of Sanborn Park, the San Miguel power line that serves the area residences and the Western 345 kV and 230 kV high voltage electrical transmission lines are located in a landscape assessment area known as the Ironhorse Analysis Area (IAA). The IAA is a 65,000 acre landscape of ponderosa pine, pine-oak, aspen, piñon-juniper woodland, open parks and sagebrush rangeland located at the southern tip of the Uncompahgre Plateau approximately six miles east of Norwood, Colorado (see Vicinity and Analysis Area Map #1). The majority of the land ownership in the IAA is National Forest System (NFS) land with some BLM lands on the western edge of the IAA along the canyon rim above the San Miguel River. Private land is located in the small community of Sanborn Park, within several scattered in-holdings, and private land along the eastern boundary of the assessment area.

The Forest Service, in cooperation with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the Uncompahgre Plateau Project, the Public Lands Partnership and the Western Area Power Administration completed a Vegetation Management Strategy for the IAA in April of 2006. The Ironhorse Analysis Area Vegetation Management Strategy (IAA VMS) can be found on the UP Project website at http://www.upproject.org/, *Landscape-Level Planning*, and *Ironhorse*.

This proposal begins to take key findings and recommendations of the Ironhorse Vegetation Management Strategy into the NEPA process. A key IAA finding related to wildland fire risk was; *"Based on 33 years of fire history, the Uncompahgre Plateau Geographic Area (GA) has a relatively low risk of fire occurrences (when ranked nationally). However, the Uncompahgre Plateau has the highest risk of any Geographic Area on the GMUG NF. And, the Norwood Ranger District has the highest risk of fire occurrence on the Uncompahgre Plateau. The largest number of fire starts and large fire activity on the Uncompahgre Plateau are concentrated in the Southwest Quadrant of the Plateau on the Norwood RD."*

In 2005, the western side of the IAA experienced the 572 acre Craig Draw fire. The Craig Draw fire occurred primarily in piñon-juniper woodland and transitioned into ponderosa pine. The fire burned 470 acres of BLM land along the rim of the San Miguel River Canyon and was driven by wind onto the adjacent NFS lands where it burned an additional 112 acres. This was the largest wildfire in the GMUG NF-BLM-NPS Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit in 2005 and cost an estimated $1.1 million dollars to suppress.

This proposal principally focuses on the IAA recommendation that *"Well designed and implemented fuel modifications are recommended for reducing the wildland fire risk adjacent to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), power lines and, in habitats and stands that are identified as high risk and high value."*

Future projects to implement the findings and recommendations of the IAA-Vegetation Management Strategy are envisioned, including landscape level ponderosa pine restoration, ponderosa pine plantation thinning, wildlife habitat improvement and fuels reduction treatments, as commitments of personnel and funding become available.

Purpose and Need

There is a need to reduce potential wildfire hazard to the WUI area containing the residences of Sanborn Park, CO and the San Miguel power line that serves the residences. There is also a need to meet national energy reliability standards along the Western 345 kV and 230 kV high voltage transmission lines that transit the IAA by preventing tree induced power outages and reducing potential wildfire hazard to those transmission lines. Protection of the power lines is necessary for maintenance of electrical service to the local, regional, and national customers served by this power grid, and to improve public and firefighter safety in the event of wildfire.

The purpose of this project is to treat hazardous fuels to reduce wildfire risk to human life and property in the community of Sanborn Park, CO and along the Western 345 kV and 230 kV high voltage transmission lines in the project area. The purpose of this project will be accomplished by altering ground, ladder and canopy fuels through thinning, mechanical treatment, prescribed burning, or combination of these practices to modify wildland fire behavior. Modification of wildland fire behavior is intended to improve suppression effectiveness and reduce the extent and severity of wildland fire impacts. There is also a need to develop a more natural stand structure, create desired landscape mosaics and add a new cohort of trees.

The purpose of the proposed fuel reduction and vegetative treatments in the Sanborn Park WUI is threefold:

1) To reduce the risk of a wildfire causing the loss of life and property to the residents of Sanborn Park.
2) To prevent power line outages due to tree growth directly impinging on the transmission lines or becoming the source of ignition for a wildfire.
3) To prevent wildfire induced outages related to the damaging effects of wildfire to the power line.

The purpose of the proposed Western power line vegetative treatments is twofold:

1) To prevent power line outages due to tree growth impinging on the tower facilities and transmission lines or tree growth becoming the source of ignition for a wildfire.

2) To prevent wildfire induced electric outages related to direct fire impacts to the physical infrastructure of the power line.

Project Proposed Action

The Sanborn Park-Western Power Line WUI Project is within the Horsefly Creek and Beaver/ McKenzie Creek 5th Hydraulic Unit Class (HUC) watersheds in the Ironhorse Analysis Area. Primary access and the community evacuation routes are by the Sanborn Park Road (FR 530). (See Map # 2, Planning Unit and Map Series Key).

The project is located in portions of Sections 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, T46 N., R12 W.; Sections: 4, 5 T45 N., R 12 W.; Sections: 19, 30, 31,T46 N., R11 W.; Sections: 6, 7, 18, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, T45 N., R11 W.; Sections: 5, 6, 7, 18, T44 N., R11 W.; Sections: 11, 12, 13, T44 N., R 12 W.; Montrose and San Miguel Counties, Colorado.

The proposed action is to modify fuels through mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, or a combination of both practices. Prescribed burning is the application of controlled burning under specific weather and fuel conditions to achieve natural resource management objectives. Reduction of wildfire behavior and fireline intensity will improve suppression effectiveness and enhance public and firefighter safety. This should also reduce expenditures related to personnel, equipment and associated suppression costs in the event of a wildfire. In addition to reducing the risk to human lives and property, the project will also reduce wildfire impacts to valuable forest and recreation resources in the project area.

The design and implementation of fuel treatments will reinforce defensible space in the urban intermix and includes dispersed patterns of treatments to slow large fire growth that can be linked by constructed firelines in the event of a wildfire. The treatment design will facilitate all suppression tactics (direct, indirect and parallel attack). For the fuels reduction treatments to be cost effective over time it will be necessary to schedule periodic maintenance of the vegetative treatments. The duration of treatment effectiveness will be enhanced through routine maintenance. It will be necessary to provide access by contractors, line maintenance personnel, prescribed fire and timber crews along with their vehicles and equipment. The project will use existing roads and access points. The proposed action includes monitoring to facilitate achievement of Forest Plan and hazardous fuels management standards.

Planning Units

To facilitate implementation of prescribed burning operations within the project area the area is delineated into planning units. Planning units describe the contingency or secondary burn unit areas. These areas are management units that can be used operationally for initiating the firing and holding of prescribed burns. Planning units are delineated based on easily identifiable terrain and natural features, areas of low fuel loading, changes in fuel density and continuity and roads that can be used by

prescribed burning crews for conducting burning operations. They are based on commonality of factors that influence fire behavior and resistance to control such as topography, prevailing winds, slope, vegetation/fuel loading, previous types of management or treatment and landscape position that can influence channeling or shadowing effects of fire growth and spread.

Planning units are delineated to reduce or minimize the amount of constructed and black-lined (pre-burned) fireline preparation necessary to complete the burning prescription. Typically, only a percentage of the planning unit is burned reflecting the objectives of the prescription and the natural variability of the conditions at the time of the prescribed burn. An accurate prescribed burn plan is prepared and approved based on the fuel, weather, personnel and other conditions at the time of implementation. Full consideration is made for public and firefighter safety including adequate burning, holding and suppression resources. Prescribed burning will be conducted in either the spring/early summer or fall of the year under environmental conditions specified in a prescribed burning plan for the project area. Natural control lines will be utilized to the largest extent possible. However, constructed fireline or other suppression efforts may be necessary to prevent escape from the perimeter of the planning unit. Planning units will also be used as a basis for scheduling and implementing thinning and mechanical treatments to facilitate the sequence of mechanical treatment that will be followed by prescribed burning.

For the Sanborn Park-Western Line project, prescribed burning is focused in and around the Treatment Polygons located within the Planning Unit. The Treatment Polygons are the areas proposed for mechanical fuels reduction or commercial and pre-commercial thinning followed by prescribed surface fire to reduce the mechanical treatment activity fuels and maintain the longevity of the treatments. Five Planning Units have been designated within the Sanborn Park-Western Power Line WUI Project. See: Map #2 Planning Unit Boundaries and Map Series Key. Two additional Planning Units 3 and 7 are shown on the map. Planning Units 3 and 7 are associated with pre-commercial thinning treatments in Ponderosa pine plantations scheduled for 2008.

A. Proposed Action- Sanborn Park WUI

Background

The Sanborn Park WUI zone consists of the area surrounding the community of Sanborn Park, including the San Miguel 7.2 kV power line supplying the area residences. The San Miguel power line is a single phase transmission line consisting of wooden poles, aluminum transmission lines and conductors and other minor facilities related to operations and maintenance of the power line. (See Map # 3, Sanborn Park Planning Unit 1 and Unit 7). The GMUG NF fire protection objective for the Sanborn Park WUI area is the prompt suppression of all wildfires.

The community of Sanborn Park is located in a landscape position identified by Minimum Travel Time (MTT) modeling simulations as a high priority for hazardous fuels treatments. Fire and fuels managers used MTT to evaluate the current conditions and potential wildfire risks across the Ironhorse landscape. MTT is a spatially explicit wildland fire behavior model capable of predicting pathways of large fire growth. There is a clear link between pathways of large fire growth, existing stand structure and canopy fuel load, and potential fire behavior and subsequent fire effects. Therefore, modifying and altering stand density, canopy base height and density, and surface fuel loading have the potential to alter fire behavior and moderate the severity of wildfire effects. The principal goal of the fuel reduction treatments is to reduce fire behavior to facilitate suppression effectiveness and moderate wildfire effects--not to prevent wildfires. The use of thinning, and ladder and surface fuel treatments (prescribed fire, manual and mechanical changes in fuel loading) will be used to reduce crown fire hazard.

Sanborn Park has narrowly escaped several large fire events: the 1990 3,534 acre Horsefly Creek Fire and, just to the north, the 170 acre 1994 Horsefly II Fire. Ponderosa pine and pine-oak stands surrounding Sanborn Park, particularly on the west, south and east sides of the area are high priority for fuels treatment. Treatments are emphasized in areas where the prevailing wind (west and southwesterly), could drive wildfire toward Sanborn Park and the San Miguel power lines. There is also potential for wildfire to move out of Horsefly Canyon from the east and threaten Sanborn Park under less common fire weather scenarios. Past wildfires and big game winter range habitat treatments adjacent to the Sanborn Park area are helping to mitigate wildfire hazard.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to reduce fuels in 10 ponderosa pine and pine-oak/mixed shrub treatment polygons SP (Sanborn Park) 1-10 in the vicinity of Sanborn Park. The proposed action includes the use of a combination of mechanical treatments and prescribed burning on approximately 2606.7 acres. Commercial thinning would be used in ponderosa pine portions of treatment polygons SP 4, 6 and 7 to reduce the average basal area to 60-80 sq. ft. /acre creating relatively open stands to reduce crown fire risk. A hydro axe or roller chopper would be utilized to treat other non-commercial areas dominated by small pine mixed with piñon-juniper, piñon-juniper woodland, mixed mountain shrubs and Gambel oak. The objective of the mechanical treatments is to reduce surface and ladder fuels and canopy fuel continuity within the project area, as well as improve vigor of the understory plant species.

Commercial thinning in the ponderosa pine is designed to thin from below to remove small and selected trees to create open stand conditions that are at less risk for crown fire. Selected large and desirable trees will be retained in the stand and damaged, diseased and smaller trees will be removed. The target structural and basal area conditions are 40-65 trees per acre and basal areas ranging from 60-80

sq. ft./acre with a component of larger diameter trees that can withstand wildfire. While the basic approach is to thin from below, selected medium, large and overmature or damaged trees will also be removed to meet the primary structural and basal area objectives. The trees to be removed from the stand that have commercial value will be sold. The large and desirable trees retained in the stand will be managed to complement Abert's squirrel objectives (Management Area 4B). A modification of group selection will be used to maintain small groups of pine that are interspersed within the treatment unit to meet Abert's squirrel objectives. Future entries will be made to continue to move the stands toward clumpy, irregularly structured, uneven-aged ponderosa pine stands within an open grassy park. The focus will be on maintaining the ponderosa pine stands with frequent prescribed surface fires and reducing Gambel oak density.

For the areas where commercial thinning is not feasible, such as areas dominated by small pine mixed with piñon and juniper, piñon-juniper woodland, mixed mountain shrub and Gambel oak, roller chopping or hydro axe treatments will be used. The proposal is to roller chop treatment polygons SP1 and SP2 and the piñon-juniper portions of treatment polygons SP4, SP5, SP8 and SP10. A roller chopper is a large revolving drum with cutting blades that is typically pulled behind a bulldozer. A roller chopper crushes smaller trees and brush incorporating the residue at the soil surface. The bulldozer pulling the roller chopper will be fitted with seeding bins above the bulldozer tracks to seed the area with desirable grass and forb species. Three specific seed mixes have been designed to meet site specific objectives across the project area. Roller chopping will be completed in the spring or fall to maximize seeding success.

The balance of the proposal is to hydro axe the ponderosa pine in treatment polygon SP3 and the ponderosa pine in portion of SP5. The hydro axe is a machine that mows brush and small trees. The mower is approximately eight feet wide and is mounted to the front of a rubber-tired articulating loader. The high-speed blade mulches and shreds the vegetation, scattering the mulch during the operation. The hydro axe treatment would be conducted during the summer or fall months. Treatment areas and timing will be specified in a contract for the project area. Prescribed burning is proposed for treatment polygon SP9 to follow through on existing management that included a previous roller chop.

See Table #1 Sanborn Park WUI Treatments by Polygon Unit for descriptions of mechanical and prescribed burning treatments described in Planning Unit 1, Treatment Polygons SP1-10. Table #1 corresponds with Map #3 Treatment Polygons within Planning Unit #1. The Sanborn Park WUI area proposed for treatment is approximately 2606.7 acres.

Table #1 Sanborn Park WUI Treatments by Polygon Unit

Sanborn Park Unit Number	Mechanical Treatment	Prescribed Fire	Commercial Pre-Commercial Thin	Acres
SP-1	Roller Chop Gambel Oak	BCB 90% of Oak	N/A	95.8
SP-2	Roller Chop Gambel Oak	BCB 60-80%	N/A	147.9
SP-3	HydroAxe Ponderosa Pine	BCB 80-90%	N/A	36
SP-4	Roller Chop Piñon-Juniper	BCB 60-80%	Ponderosa Pine 60-80 BA	530.7
SP-5	Roller Chop Piñon-Juniper HydroAxe Ponderosa Pine	BCB 60-80%	N/A	173.7
SP-6	N/A	BCB 60-80%	Ponderosa Pine 60-80 BA	372.4
SP-7	N/A	BCB south half only	Ponderosa Pine 60-90 BA	69.3
SP-8	Roller Chop Piñon-Juniper	BCB Roller Chop	N/A	530.1
SP-9	N/A	BCB Prior Roller Chop Piñon-Juniper	N/A	532.4
SP-10	Roller Chop 50% of Ponderosa Pine	Spot burn in Roller Chop	N/A	118.4
Total				2606.7

B. Proposed Action-Western Power Line Treatments

Background

The Western 345 kV and 230 kV high voltage transmission lines are located in utility corridors along the eastern and southern sides of the Ironhorse Analysis Area (See Map # 4 Planning Unit Boundaries 2, 3, and 4 and, Map # 5, Planning Unit Boundaries 5 and 6). The two power lines come together in the southeastern corner of the analysis area and share the same corridor as they exit the area and cross the San Miguel River Canyon. The Western 345 kV and 230 kV transmission lines

consist of steel towers, aluminum transmission lines, access roads and other minor facilities related to operations and maintenance of the power line. The 345 kV line is 12.57 miles long and the 230 kV line is 6.59 miles long. The combined total length of the transmission lines are 19.16 miles. The GMUG NF fire protection objective for the Utility Corridor (Western Transmission Line) is the prompt suppression of all wildfires.

The purpose and need will be accomplished by applying fuels reduction and vegetative manipulation in the immediate vicinity of the power line wire zone-border zone (WZ-BZ) and with a dispersed pattern of mechanical treatments designed to modify wildfire behavior up to one half mile adjacent to the power line. See attachment: electrical transmission line clearance requirements (Wire Zone-Border Zone) illustration. Treatments are emphasized in areas where the prevailing wind (west and southwesterly) would drive wildfire toward the transmission lines.

The objective of treatments in the transmission line area is to prevent the trees in the immediate proximity of the power line from coming into contact with the power lines. This objective can be accomplished by maintaining early seral (non-forested) conditions with low vertical structure and, by preventing natural succession to mature forest conditions and encroachment of trees from adjacent stands. For the WZ-BZ objective to be cost effective over time, it will be necessary to schedule routine maintenance of vegetative treatments and to provide for access by maintenance crews and vehicles. A dispersed pattern of mechanical treatments that can be linked with constructed fireline in the event of a wildfire will be implemented up to one half mile adjacent to the power line to modify wildfire behavior in proximity to the utility corridor.

Proposed Action

Since the initial construction of the transmission lines, immature trees, trees that were topped under the line and trees along the sides of the line have grown to the height that they now pose an arcing risk to power line reliability. Trees under the line in the wire zone and danger trees from the adjacent border zone will be removed. The proposal includes a dispersed pattern of landscape treatments up to one half mile from the transmission line that are designed to interrupt large fire growth and can be linked with constructed fireline in the event of a wildfire to reduce the risk of damage or physical loss to the transmission line infrastructure.

The proposed action is to use a combination of commercial and pre-commercial thinning and mechanical treatments utilizing a roller chopper or hydro axe followed by prescribed surface fire to treat approximately 19 miles of transmission line utility corridor. The treatments will be within in the wire zone-border zone (Management Area 1D, Utility Corridor) of the transmission line and in a pattern of dispersed treatments in an area up to one half mile of the transmission line. The treatments are tailored to the proximity to the transmission line in the WZ-BZ and in stands adjacent

to the utility corridor. The proposed treatments are designed for the terrain and vegetative fuel type that the transmission line runs through.

The proposed action is to reduce fuels in 100 ponderosa pine, pine-oak/mixed shrub, treatment polygons W (Western)-1-6, W-8-20, W-25-83, W85-108, in the vicinity of the Western transmission line. There are minor components of piñon-juniper, aspen, and spruce-fir in some of the treatment units. Aspen and sagebrush stands will be retained. Aspen will be retained to provide a fuel transition because of its ability to alter and reduce fire behavior. Sagebrush stands are featured for maturation to provide potential Gunnison sage grouse habitat and will not be mechanically treated or prescribed burned. The proposed action includes the use of a combination of mechanical treatments and prescribed burning on approximately 2360 acres.

Commercial thinning would be used in ponderosa pine and other conifer portions of treatment polygons W-1,3,4,8,9,10,13-14,18,20,37,40-41,50-51,76,88,93-95 to reduce the average basal area to 50-70 ft/sq per acre, creating relatively open stands to reduce crown fire risk. Within the WZ-BZ area of the proposed treatment units the treatment will be to remove the trees remaining following construction or that have become established in the wire zone after transmission line construction. The wire zone area is a vertical projection from the maximum side-swing distance from the transmission line to the ground. The area will be maintained in a low vertical structure of grasses, forbs and low growing shrubs. Danger trees will be removed from the border zone, which is the area immediately adjacent to the wire zone. Danger trees are those in the border zone that are in danger of falling into the line from outside of the wire zone. The border zone distance varies with tree height and the side slope of the terrain. The balance of the WZ-BZ treatment polygon will receive commercial thinning with the open structure and density prescription described above. This graduated treatment prescription works from the core area of the WZ-BZ outward to create a feathered fuel treatment along the transmission line corridor. A hydro axe or roller chopper will be utilized to treat other areas dominated by small pine mixed with piñon-juniper, piñon-juniper woodland, mixed mountain shrubs and Gambel oak. The objectives of the mechanical treatments are to reduce surface, ladder, and canopy fuel continuity within the utility corridor and adjacent area, as well as improve vigor of the under story plant species.

The commercial thinning in the ponderosa pine is designed to thin from below to remove small, and selected medium and large trees, to create more open stand conditions that are at less risk for crown fire. The target structural and basal area conditions are 40-65 trees per acre and basal areas ranging from 50-70 sq. ft./acre with a component of larger diameter trees that can withstand wildfire. Commercial thinning may also be combined with, or followed by, a mechanical treatment to prepare the site for prescribed surface fire. There are seven commercial thinning treatments (W-11, 12, 15,101-104) outside the WZ-BZ area designed to interrupt large fire growth with open tree densities of 45-70 trees per acre and a target basal area of 60-80 sq. ft. /acre.

The primary approach in this treatment will be to thin from below. However, excess over-mature, medium and large, or damaged trees will be removed to meet the desired structural and basal area objectives designed to reduce crown fire risk. The trees to be removed from the treatment units with commercial value will be sold. The large and desirable trees retained in stand will be managed to complement Abert's squirrel objectives (Management Area 4B). A modification of group selection will be used to maintain small groups of pine that are interspersed within the treatment unit to meet Abert's squirrel objectives. Future entries will be made to continue moving the stands toward clumpy, irregularly structured uneven-aged ponderosa pine stands within a grassy aspect. Re-entry will focus on reducing the Gambel oak density and maintaining the stands with frequent prescribed surface fires. There are seven mixed treatment units (W78-83,85,86) that combine commercial thinning with hydro axe treatments with target structural and basal area conditions of 40-65 trees per acre and basal area ranging from 50-70 sq. ft. /acre.

For the areas where commercial thinning is not feasible, such as sites dominated by small pine mixed with piñon and juniper, piñon-juniper woodland, mixed mountain shrub and Gambel oak, roller chopping or hydro axe treatments will be used. The proposed action is to roller chop treatment polygons W 25-33, W 52-60, W 62-65, W 67-72, W 74-75, W 77, W 90-92, W 99, W108. The roller chopper will be fitted with seeding bins above the bulldozer tracks to seed the area with desirable grass and forbs. Three specific seed mixes have been designed to meet site specific objectives across the project area. Roller chopping will be completed in the spring or fall to maximize seeding success. The balance of the proposal is to hydro axe the ponderosa pine with desired basal areas ranging from 50-70 sq. ft./acre in treatment polygons W-2,5-6,16-17,19,34-36,38-39,42-49,61,66,73,87,89,96-98,106-07. The hydro axe treatment would be conducted during the summer or fall months. Treatment areas and timing will be specified in a contract for the project area.

See Table # 2 Western Area Power Administration WUI Treatments for specific descriptions of mechanical, prescribed burning and seeding/mitigation treatments described in Planning Units 2-6, Treatment Polygons W 1-6, W 8-20, and W 25-108. The total area proposed for treatment is approximately 2360 acres.

Table # 2 Western Area Power Administration WUI Treatments by Polygon Unit

Western Area Power Administration Unit Number	Commercial & Pre-Commercial Thinning	Mechanical Treatment	Prescribed Fire	Acres
W-1,3,4,8-10,13-14,18,20,37,40,41, 50,51,76,88,93-95	WZ-BZ treatment under line. Adjacent to WZ-BZ, treat to BA 50-70 sq. ft. /acre Retain 40-65 trees/acre.	Treat activity fuels.	BCB 80% +	354.7
W-11, 12, 15,101-04	Retain 40-65 trees/acre. BA 60-80 sq. ft. /acre	Treat activity fuels.	BCB 60-80%	80.8
W78-83,85,86 Combination Treatment	Retain 40-65 trees/acre. BA 50-70 sq. ft. /acre.	Hydro Axe Non – Commercial Portion of Unit	BCB 80% +	352.9
W 25-33, 52-60, 62-65, 67-72, 74,75, 77, 90-92, 99,108.	N/A	Roller Chop	BCB 80% +	767.9
W-2,5-6,16-17,19,34-36,38-39,42-49,61,66,73,87,89,96-98,106-07	N/A	Hydro Axe Non – Commercial Ponderosa Pine	BCB 80% +	803.2
Total Treatment Acres				2359.6

BA- Basal Area
BCB- Broadcast burn

Foreseeable Actions

Ponderosa Pine Plantation Pre-Commercial Thinning

During the 1970's and the 1980's, approximately 3,600 acres of ponderosa pine plantations were established in the IAA as part of a nation-wide effort to restock open stands. Trees were machine planted at a rate of about 680 trees per acre. Plantation survival rates were good and presently the stands are overly dense. There are approximately 500 trees per acre in these stands and individual tree crowns have grown into neighboring tree crowns, and competition has slowed down tree growth. Crown canopy closure in these stands contributes to a high risk of potential stand replacing fire. This is consistent with a key IAA finding: "*There are over 3,600 acres of ponderosa pine plantations within the IAA. These plantations represent a sizable reforestation investment. The current condition of the pine plantations represents a significant risk of loss to potential wildfire and continuing decline in growth potential." (IAA VMS 2006).*

There are 14 ponderosa pine stands in the vicinity Sanborn Park and under the Western transmission line scheduled for thinning beginning in 2008. The stands will be thinned to about 150 trees per acre. The thinning of these stands, totaling approximately 900 acres, will be accomplished through pre-commercial thinning contracts over a period of up to five years. This activity will begin to improve each stand's survivability in a wildfire. Thinning will moderate wildfire behavior in the plantations under less than extreme weather conditions. Prescribed burning is not planned in the plantations to avoid mortality in the immature pine. Prescribed burning will be used on the perimeter of the plantations to reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to the plantations to reduce the risk of loss to wildfire. The location of the pre-commercial thinning in the pine plantations is included in the project map series as the thinning complements the hazardous fuels reduction treatments. There is one 12.12 acre wire zone-border zone roller chopping treatment, W-108, in plantation unit T-41 that will obviate the need for pre-commercial thinning as improved tree growth is not desired under the transmission line. Maps showing the plantation thinning is intended to enhance the public's understanding of the nature of the dispersed pattern of treatments in the Sanborn Park-Western Power Line WUI to reduce wildfire risk.

Design Features Common to the Project

Features common to all Sanborn Park- Western Power Line treatments:

- Prescribed burning would be utilized to broadcast burn stands of ponderosa pine, piñon-juniper, mixed conifer/aspen and Gambel oak following mechanical treatments to reduce surface fuel loads and ladder fuels.

- Hand crews with chain saws would be used to prune and/or thin small diameter ponderosa pine to protect desired large trees and clumps prior to burning and in selected units W-101-102, and W104.
- Burning would be conducted in either the spring-early summer or fall of the year under environmental conditions specified in a prescribed burning plan for the Planning Unit.
- Natural control lines will be utilized to the largest extent possible. Constructed fireline or other suppression efforts may be necessary to prevent escape from the perimeter of the Planning Unit
- Trees designated for removal may be cut by either a chainsaw or a mechanical harvester.
- Trees of commercial value will be offered for sale.
- The slash generated from this project will be treated through lopping and scattering or mechanical crushing. Lopped slash will be to a depth of 18 inches or less to facilitate natural decomposition. Lopping and scattering and mechanical crushing will be accomplished concurrently with the thinning of each stand.
- The boles of cut trees may be offered for sale as fence posts and firewood to further help reduce slash
- Constructed firelines will be rehabilitated and seeded to prevent erosion and noxious weeds.
- Only existing roads will be used for this project.
- Best Management Practices (BMPs) for noxious weed treatment will be employed to include equipment washing, spot and area weed control treatment, monitoring for re-treatment as necessary, and re-seeding of disturbed areas with approved seed mixes.
- Fuel reduction and thinning projects will be accomplished over a period of up to five years with follow-up maintenance of prescribed burning or mechanical treatments.
- Mechanical treatment is not scheduled for stands of healthy aspen. Aspen stands may be prescribed burned to stimulate regeneration. Sagebrush stands will not be mechanically treated or prescribed burned. Sagebrush stands will be managed to provide for late seral (mature) Sage grouse habitat.
- Improve the visual quality of the existing Utility Corridor by modifying the linear feature with undulating (increased sinuosity) edges.
- A three year grazing plan will be developed in consultation with each grazing permittee prior to implementation.

Prescribed Fire Design Features

- An accurate prescribed burn plan will be prepared and approved based on the fuel, weather, personnel and other conditions at the time of implementation. Full consideration will be made for public and firefighter safety including adequate burning, holding and suppression resources.

- Prescribed burning in this project will coordinate with the State and follow the State Implementation Plan to protect air resources, including, obtaining and following, air quality permits. Prescribed Burn Plans contain:

- Location and description of the area to be burned,
- Personnel responsible for managing the fire,
- Type of vegetation to be burned,
- Area (acres) to be burned,
- Amount of fuel to be consumed (tons/acre),
- Fire prescription including smoke management components,
- Criteria the fire manger will use for making the burn/no burn decisions,
- Safety and contingency plans addressing escaped fire situations,
- Safety and contingency plans addressing smoke intrusions.

- Approval to authorize prescribed fires is based on existing air quality and the ability of the airshed to disperse emissions (e.g., meteorological conditions) from all burning activities on the day of the burn.
- Burning specifications will be designed to avoid consuming large diameter logs and stumps on the forest floor.
- Fuels will be cleared away from the base of large diameter snags and cull trees prior to ignition to protect them from fire. Slash will be piled at the base of designated large diameter trees to create snags. Ponderosa pine > 18''dbh will be protected with pre-burn site prep and ignition techniques.
- The extent of burning or mechanical treatments will be limited during the primary nesting season for evaluated species (May 1-June 30).
- When spring burning, avoid burning the entire project area in one year. Divide the project area up into smaller treatment areas and implement burning in scheduled phases.
- Retain patches of untreated shrubs within treatment unit to provide cover and food for the species evaluated. Treat up to 80% with 20% untreated patches to provide a mosaic of cover and forage.
- Implement road closures during project implementation to improve big game habitat effectiveness.
- Follow the State Implementation Plan to protect air resources. Obtain and follow an air quality permit. If necessary, use smoke monitors on State Hwy. 145 for public safety.
- Notify Sanborn Park residents in a timely manner prior to ignition.

Mechanical Design Features

Soils Design Features

Avoid saturated soils when utilizing mechanical equipment to avoid soil rutting. The primary period of concern for soil rutting from the use of mechanical equipment is during the spring snowmelt period

Noxious Weeds Design Features

- The timber sale purchaser/contractor would not move any "Off-Road Equipment" which last operated in an area that is infested with one or more invasive species of concern onto the timber sale area without having first taken reasonable measures to make sure each such piece of equipment is free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds.
- The purchaser/contractor would seed exposed areas of raw soil as designated by the Forest Service. Certified weed-free seed would be used. The seed mix would be prescribed by a Forest Service Range Management Specialist.
- The sale area would be surveyed and treated for noxious weeds in the second and third years after logging is completed.

Decision Framework

The Norwood Ranger District is preparing an Environmental Assessment and proposing this project as an authorized hazardous fuels reduction project utilizing the appropriate tools under Title I of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003. The purpose of this Act is to expedite hazardous fuels reduction and forest-restoration projects on Federal lands at risk of wildland fire or insect and disease epidemics. The Act provides for expedited procedures to complete project planning and requires an emphasis on collaboration with local communities**.**

The Norwood District Ranger will be the Responsible Official. The following decisions will be documented in an Environmental Assessment:

> Whether or not to implement mechanical hazardous fuels and connected commercial/pre-commercial thinning and prescribed burning treatments and, if so, the appropriate conditions, mitigation measures, monitoring and Forest Plan standards and guidelines that must be applied.

When the Environmental Assessment for the proposed Sanborn Park- Western Power Line Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project is complete, a legal notice will be published in the Telluride Daily Planet. The publication of the legal notice will begin the 30-day objection-filing period for the proposed Sanborn Park- Western Power Line Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project.

Public Involvement

This opportunity to comment serves as scoping as described in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 and under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act described in 36 CFR 218.subpart A. Public Notice of this scoping opportunity to comment will be published in the Telluride Daily Planet. The comment period will end September 19, 2008. The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on the proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official.

Those who provide written comments during the public comment period provided by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 are eligible to file pre-decisional administrative review (objection) pursuant to 36 CFR part 218, subpart A .

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted. Comments can be received at the following places:

Written Comments via the U.S. Postal Service: Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests 2250 Highway 50 Delta, CO 81416-2485 Attention: Sanborn Park- Western Power Line WUI Project
Written Comment via e-mail: TO: comments-rocky-mountain-gmug-norwood @fs.fed.us SUBJECT: Sanborn Park- Western Power Line WUI Project
Written Comments via facsimile: (970) 874-6698 Attention: Sanborn Park- Western Power Line WUI Project
Written Comments hand delivered or Oral Comments via telephone or in person, during business hours (8:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M., Monday – Friday, excluding federal holidays): Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests 2250 Highway 50 Delta, CO 81416-2485 (970) 874-6600

To be most helpful electronic comments should be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the scoping period. Only those who submit timely comments will have eligibility to file pre-decisional administrative review (objection) under 36 CFR 218.6(a). Individuals and organizations wishing to object must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 218.7.

For further information please contact John Moore at (970) 874-6696 or, comments-rocky-mountain-gmug-norwood @fs.fed.us.