



File Code: 1950

Date: January 15, 2004

Dear Interested Public Land User,

The Beaver Ranger District of the Fishlake National Forest is proposing the **South Fork Vegetation Treatment Project**. The project area is located between Circleville Mountain and Birch Creek Mountain, approximately 13 miles southeast of Beaver in Beaver County, Utah.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to remove dead trees, reduce overall tree stand densities, and reduce hazardous fuels around private lands east of LeBaron Lake, located on the Beaver Ranger District of the Fishlake National Forest. The proposed action would conduct salvage¹ and sanitation² treatments of trees infested with, or at high risk of spruce beetle infestation on approximately 2,000 acres of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir forest. Treated areas may be reforested with Engelmann spruce and Douglas-fir if necessary to supplement natural regeneration and help achieve recovery. Salvage and sanitation treatments would begin as early as spring 2004 and are anticipated to be completed within five years. Reforestation would be completed within five years of salvage and sanitation treatments.

Enclosed are a map and detailed description of the proposed action. More detailed maps can be viewed at the Fishlake National Forest website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/fishlake/>, (see "Projects and Plans"), and are also available at the following locations:

- Beaver Ranger Station, 575 South Main, Beaver, UT
- Fishlake National Forest Supervisor's Office, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT

Background

In 2001, Forest Health Protection staff surveyed stands of spruce in the South Fork of the Beaver River watershed to document spruce beetle activity, and to assess stand conditions and landscape level risk to future beetle attack. Results indicated spruce beetle populations were at outbreak levels within some drainages. Stand conditions consist of high densities (number of trees per acre), comprised primarily of spruce in the main canopy, and are either mature or are reaching maturity. These conditions have been rated as moderate to high risk for spruce beetle infestation by Forest Health Protection staff. Susceptible spruce occurs in dense clumps throughout many stands and a high potential for substantial losses of large diameter spruce is likely. During the 1990s, stands with similar risk and hazard in Utah sustained 40-90 percent loss of spruce basal area³ once beetle populations reached outbreak levels. To date, a large percentage of spruce mortality has occurred at the southern end of the project area. The dead and dying trees also create hazardous fuels that could result in uncharacteristically intense and severe wildland fire if a fire were to occur in the area.

¹ The objective of salvage treatment is to remove dead, dying or fallen trees that still have commercial value.

² The objective of sanitation treatment is to remove dead, damaged or susceptible (high-risk) trees and trees of declining vigor/health in order to reduce the spread of spruce beetles and to promote forest health.

³ Basal area is the area of the cross-section of a tree trunk near its base, usually 4.5 feet above the ground. Basal area is a way to measure how much of a site is occupied by trees. The term basal area is often used to describe the collective basal area of trees per acre, and is measured in square feet per acre.



In 2002, the Fishlake National Forest completed an assessment of the Beaver River watershed. This assessment identified a need to reduce the susceptibility of stands to spruce beetle attack and the build-up of local populations in order to maintain a forested landscape around LaBaron Lake and high use recreation areas along the Forest System Road 137 corridor. The assessment also identified a need to reduce hazardous fuels in order to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically intense and severe wildland fire around the private lands east of LeBaron Lake. More information about the Beaver River Watershed Assessment can be viewed at the Fishlake National Forest website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/fishlake/>, (see “Projects and Plans”).

The purpose of the proposed action is to reduce the susceptibility of stands to spruce beetle attack and the build-up of local populations and to reduce hazardous fuels around private lands east of LeBaron Lake. This would reduce the susceptibility and improve the overall health of the remaining adjacent stands, hasten the re-establishment of a forested landscape, and reduce the risk of uncharacteristically intense and severe wildland fire around LeBaron private lands. The use of salvage and sanitation treatments would offer the greatest likelihood of effective spruce beetle management. Chemical insecticides, trap trees, pheromone baits and funnel traps could also be used in areas not conducive to harvesting operations; however, with the current level of spruce beetle activity, the effectiveness of these management alternatives remains questionable and is not part of this proposed action.

The project area is located within Management Area 7A, as identified by the Fishlake National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Direction for this management area emphasizes wood fiber production and utilization. In addition, a general goal of the Forest Plan is to prevent and control insect infestation and disease. All treatment units lie outside the Circleville Mountain roadless area.

Decision Framework

The District Ranger of the Beaver Ranger District will decide whether or not to implement the proposed action, or as modified by any mitigation measures or alternative(s). A Forest Plan amendment is not likely to be required.

Preliminary Identification of Issues

Issues are points of discussion, debate, or dispute about potential environmental effects of the proposed action. Key issues are potential direct or indirect effects related to the proposed action, and are key because of their geographic distribution, duration of effects, intensity of interest or resource conflict. Key issues will be evaluated during the environmental analysis and may be used to design mitigation measures or develop alternatives to the proposed action.

The interdisciplinary team has identified the following key issue thus far.

- Northern goshawk: Surveys for northern goshawk have been conducted in the project area annually since 2001. A nest site and territory occurs in the Wood Lake and Buck Pastures treatment units. The proposed treatments could temporarily displace the goshawks. The standards and guidelines described in the Utah Northern Goshawk Project Forest Plan amendment would be implemented as part of the proposed action in order to minimize impacts and to help move treatment units towards desired conditions for the goshawk.

As part of the environmental analysis process, effects to the following resource conditions would be disclosed:

- soils
- water resources
- heritage resources
- management indicator species (MIS)
- threatened, endangered and sensitive species (including the northern goshawk)

Providing Comments

Your comments are requested to help identify key issues, develop alternatives and/or mitigation measures, and analyze effects of the proposed action. Please be as specific as possible in expressing your comments so they can be effectively addressed. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection.

Comments should be sent to Fishlake National Forest, Attn: Diane Freeman, South Fork Vegetation Treatment Project Team Leader, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT 84701. Although your comments are always welcome, comments received by **February 11, 2004** will be most helpful.

Contact

For more information about this proposal, please contact Diane Freeman, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT 84701, phone: (435) 896-9233.

Sincerely,

/s/ Dayle Flanigan

DAYLE FLANIGAN
District Ranger

Enclosures

South Fork Vegetation Treatment Project Proposed Action

The proposed action is to remove dead trees, reduce overall tree stand densities, and reduce hazardous fuels around private lands east of LeBaron Lake, located on the Beaver Ranger District of the Fishlake National Forest. The proposed action would conduct salvage¹ and sanitation² treatments of trees infested with, or at high risk of spruce beetle infestation on approximately 2,000 acres of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir forest. The project area lies between Circleville Mountain and Birch Creek Mountain, along a wide corridor generally following Forest System Road (FSR) 137.

Treatments would occur in six treatment units ranging from approximately 200 to 500 acres in size. Treated areas may be reforested with Engelmann spruce and Douglas-fir, if necessary to supplement natural regeneration and help achieve recovery. Harvest treatments would begin as early as spring 2004 and are anticipated to be completed within five years. Reforestation would be completed within five years of salvage and sanitation treatments.

Actions associated with **access** include:

1. Complete regular maintenance activities on Forest System Road (FSR) 137, as necessary. Maintenance activities could consist of blading to smooth and level the road surface, cleaning out or replacing culverts, and cleaning out drainage dips and lead out ditches.
2. Reopen approximately ten miles of temporary roads formerly used for vegetation treatments. Activities would consist of clearing and removing berms and debris to allow for passage of equipment. These roads would be decommissioned (restored to a natural state) and signed as closed upon completion of treatment activities.
3. Construct approximately three miles of new temporary roads, which would be decommissioned and signed as closed upon completion of treatment activities.
4. Use former skid trails and landings to transport and stack cut trees, where possible. Skid trails would be spaced a minimum of 100 feet apart, except where trails converge to landings. Obliterate and reseed skid trails and landings upon completion of treatment activities.
5. Locate temporary roads and skid trails to avoid slopes greater than 40 percent.

Actions associated with **tree cutting and removal** (heavy fuel reduction) include:

1. Conventional, ground-based logging equipment (e.g. rubber tired skidders, caterpillar tractors, forwarders, feller-bunchers) would be used to cut and remove trees.
2. A minimum of 300 snags per 100 acres, greater than 18 inches in diameter, and 30 feet in height, would be retained, where available. Where not available, snags of the largest available diameter and height would be retained.

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3. Residual live green spruce trees, subalpine firs and snags would be retained in groups or clumps to provide protection from wind throw, and to provide for visual quality and wildlife hiding cover.

Actions associated with **fuels reduction** activities include:

1. Burn, chip, or shred concentrations of slash to reduce fuel loading and insect buildup. Slash within 50 feet of a road or trail would be piled or chipped in order to minimize visual impacts.
2. Place cut pieces of green Engelmann spruce larger than 14 inches diameter and 18 inches long in slash piles and burn along with residual slash. This would eliminate beetles and prevent further infestation.
3. Lop and scatter slash to a maximum depth of 24 inches. Where slash would exceed 24-inch depth, it would be piled by tractor and burned by hand.
4. Pile landing slash by tractor and burn by hand.

Actions associated with **reforestation** activities include:

1. Scarify the forest floor to prepare the seedbed where there is heavy duff accumulation.

General Design Features and Mitigation Measures

- Treatments would be designed to maintain or improve nesting and foraging habitat for the northern goshawk, following the standards and guidelines of the Utah Northern Goshawk Project Forest Plan amendment. Treatments would not be conducted within active nest sites between March 1 and September 30.

Table 1. Treatment Unit Name, Legal Location, Acreage, and Amount of Temporary Road Construction or Reconstruction.

Unit Name	Legal Location (Salt Lake Base & Meridian)	Acreage (2,073 total)	Miles of Temporary Road Construction or Reconstruction
Anderson	T.30S., R.5W., Sec. 15, 16, 17, 21	511	Reopen 2.6 miles of temporary roads
Arrowhead	T.30S., R.5W., Sec. 1, 11, 12	276	Reopen 1.6 miles of temporary roads
Buck Pastures	T.30S., R.5W., Sec. 3, 4, 9, 10	339	Construct 1 mile of temporary road Reopen 0.5 mile of temporary road
Dry Hollow	T.30S., R.5W., Sec. 3, 10, 11	374	Reopen 2.5 miles of temporary road
LeBaron	T.29S., R.5W., Sec. 34; T.30S., R.5W., Sec. 3	366	Construct 1.3 miles of temporary road Reopen 1.3 miles of temporary road
Wood Lake	T.30S., R.5W., Sec. 9, 16	207	Construct 0.7 mile of temporary road Reopen 0.9 mile of temporary road