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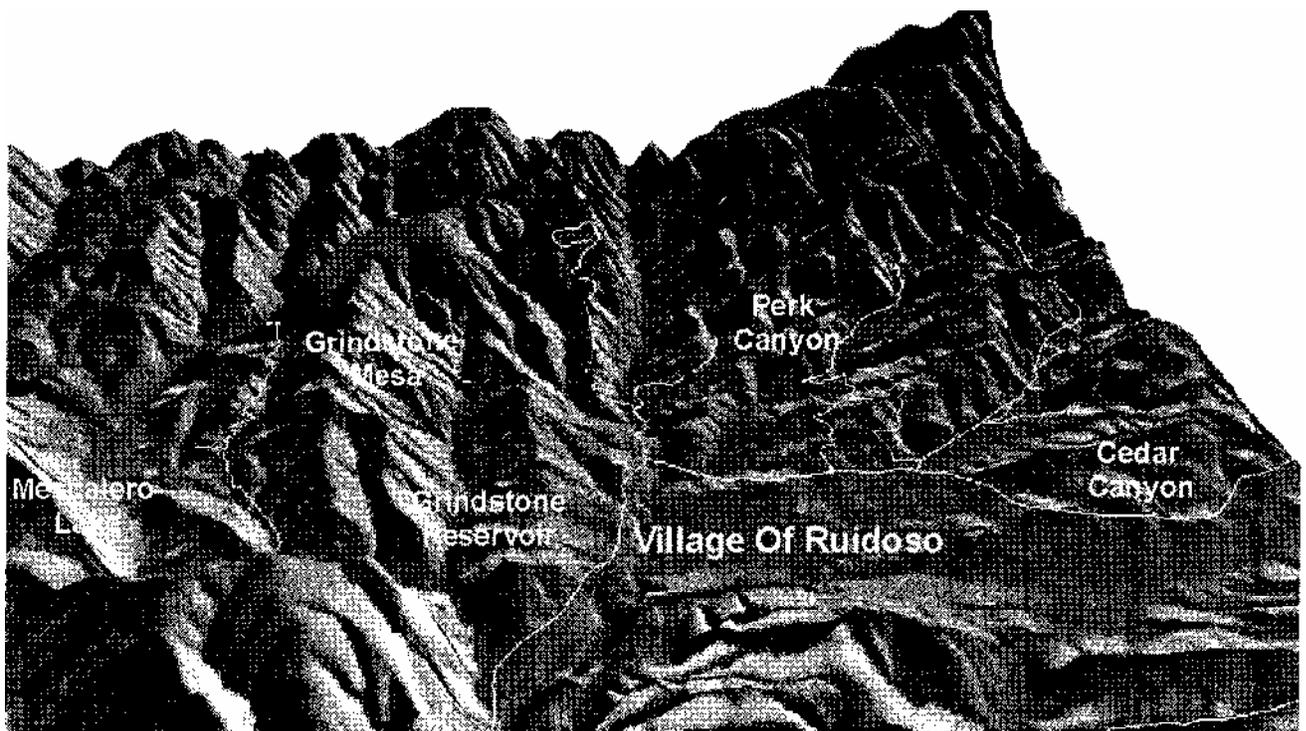
Southwestern
Region

MB-R3-08-4



Record of Decision for the Perk-Grindstone Fuel Reduction Project

Smokey Bear Ranger District,
Lincoln National Forest, Lincoln
County, New Mexico



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Record of Decision

Background

As forest supervisor for the Lincoln National Forest, I have made the Perk-Grindstone Fuel Reduction Project a top priority in an attempt to protect the greater Ruidoso area and its municipal water supply from the potentially devastating impacts of a large catastrophic fire. The purpose and need of this project is to modify forest characteristics to change fire behavior (minimize the chance of a large-scale crown fire) within this wildland-urban interface in order to protect life, property, and natural resources (EIS p. 13). This project was planned in accordance with Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) requirements, and is not only a priority for the community and national forest, but was identified as a top priority for the entire U.S. Forest Service and State of New Mexico. It plays a pivotal role in meeting wildfire hazard abatement objectives described in the "Greater Ruidoso Area Community Wildfire Protection Plan" for the greater Ruidoso area, developed in 2004 by a diverse group of stakeholders. This project was planned in collaboration with the Village of Ruidoso, a cooperating agency in development of the EIS, along with the various agencies, organizations, and tribes that are part of the Greater Ruidoso Area Wildland-Urban Interface Working Group, and other interested parties.

The project area is entirely within Ruidoso's wildland-urban interface. Prevailing winds during the wildfire season typically blow from this project area directly toward the adjacent community. A portion of the project area drains into Grindstone Reservoir, a municipal water supply. Without treatment, fuel conditions in the area indicate a potential for a large, high-intensity crown fire event that could significantly threaten the water supply, adjacent residential properties and businesses, and human lives. I recognize that we cannot prevent a wildfire from ever burning in the project area. However, it would be irresponsible for me not to take action to selectively reduce the density of forest stands within that landscape to the extent necessary to limit the magnitude and intensity of any fires that might occur.

My decision to implement this project is based on the May 2008 final environmental impact statement (EIS) and associated planning record. The final EIS consists of the draft EIS as published in December 2007, along with the "Final EIS Appendix C, Errata Sheet and Response to Comments," published in May 2008. The EIS errata sheet contains minor corrections and clarifications to the draft EIS, and the response to comments contains the letters received during the draft EIS comment period along with Forest Service responses to those comments. An entirely new final EIS was not written and circulated because the changes in response to comments on the draft EIS were minor and did not warrant further Agency action (40 CFR 1503.4(c) and 1500.4(m)). Based on review of public comments on the draft EIS, I determined there was no need to modify alternatives, develop and evaluate new alternatives, or supplement or modify the analysis in the draft EIS in order to make an informed decision on this project in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations.

On May 7, 2008, the final EIS (Appendix C) was circulated and posted on the Lincoln National Forest's Web site, and a Notice of Opportunity to Object was published in the newspaper of record (Alamogordo Daily News). In addition, the Notice of Availability of the final EIS was published in the Federal Register on May 16, 2008. The 30-day predecisional objection period started May 7 and ended June 6, 2008. One comment letter was received in the objections inbox during the objection period, although it was set aside by the reviewing officer as it was not filed as an objection.

Decision

Based on my review of all the alternatives evaluated in the EIS, it is my decision to select alternative 3, the ground-based alternative, as described in the EIS, pages 37-42.

This alternative treats 4,855 acres (92 percent) within the 5,207-acre project area using a combination of thinning and burning prescriptions. Treatments will occur over a 5- to 10-year period. The thinning treatments involve thinning out the smallest and least fire-resistant trees, creating a variable density, uneven-age pattern across the landscape. The sanitation treatments primarily involve selectively thinning out the dead and dying trees in stands severely impacted by insect and disease outbreaks. The community defense zones will be thinned toward slightly more open canopy conditions relative to other portions of the landscape. The burn only treatments will reduce fuels where tree density is not the primary fuel hazard. The vast majority of trees to be removed will be seedlings, saplings, and small pole-size trees, which currently dominate the overly dense forest stands. Thinning will follow ecosystem restoration principles that promote a landscape mosaic ranging from mature closed canopy patches to canopy gaps dominated with grasses and shrubs. (Refer to EIS, chapter 2 for details).

Alternative 3 treatments include (EIS pp. 37-42): thinning to an 8-inch diameter limit on 2,821 acres (58 percent); thinning to a 9-inch diameter limit on 1,007 acres (21 percent); sanitation thinning of dead/dying trees to an 18-inch diameter limit along with thinning some live trees to a 9-inch diameter limit, on 502 acres (10 percent); and burn only on 525 acres (11 percent).

On approximately 58 percent of the treated acreage, no wood products will be removed, mostly due to steep slopes and the lack of existing roads. *In* these no-removal areas, treatments will be applied using a combination of mastication equipment, manual felling, and burn only methods. Wood product removal will occur on the remaining 42 percent of the treated acreage, using a combination of ground-based equipment, skyline cable yarding, and cable winching (EIS pp.41-42).

The cutting generated slash will be put into piles on about 763 acres of the project area along the Ruidoso community boundary, and then burned during cool, moist conditions. Slash on the rest of the project area (4,092 acres) will be cut up and scattered where needed, and then surface broadcast burning will be conducted in stages to further reduce fuel loads. Maintenance burns would periodically be conducted in the future to maintain the desired conditions.

Connected road management actions involve a total of about 20 miles of road that will be constructed or reconstructed. About 16 of those miles would be on existing roadbeds from authorized, unauthorized, or former roads; 4 of those miles involve a new road, along with the few existing road segments that are relocated to improve water drainage. After project use, all 20 miles will be closed (11 miles) or decommissioned (9 miles). (Refer to EIS, pp. 29, 36, and 38).

This decision includes implementing all the mitigation measures and monitoring requirements associated with this alternative (EIS pages 42-52). Mitigation requirements include forest plan direction and other actions relevant to the thinning and burning activities, specifically those designed to protect: Mexican spotted owl, northern goshawk, bald eagle, Sacramento Mountain salamander, management indicator species, and other wildlife species and their habitat; old growth and ecosystem diversity characteristics; sensitive plants; soil and water quality; recreation and scenic resources; heritage resources; air quality; and public health and safety. Additionally, mitigation measures are required to minimize the spread of invasive plants, future insect and

disease outbreaks, and the effects of smoke from prescribed burning (EIS pp. 42-50). Monitoring requirements include actions intended to ensure that the mitigation measures are implemented as planned and the effectiveness of those measures is evaluated and documented. This alternative includes specific monitoring requirements for Mexican spotted owl, northern goshawk, bald eagle, Sacramento Mountain salamander, sensitive plants, invasive plants, and air quality (EIS pp. 51-52).

Project-specific amendments to the land management plan (forest plan) for the Lincoln National Forest are needed to implement this alternative. The EIS describes how and why these project-specific forest plan amendments were deemed necessary to meet the purpose and need for this project (pp. 30-32). These amendments apply to relatively small portions of the project area, and will only be applied where found to be needed during layout and implementation. The forest plan amendments exempt this project from the following standards and guidelines: (1) the 9-inch diameter limit on cutting trees in protected spotted owl habitat; (2) the 40 to 70 percent canopy cover retention requirement for mid-age, mature and old-age forest areas inside and outside goshawk post-fledgling areas; (3) the retention and partial retention visual quality objective requirements that there can be no evidence of human activities within 1 year after activities are implemented; and (4) the limit on using wheeled or tracked logging equipment to slopes less than 40 percent (to allow mastication equipment to be used on steeper slopes where possible without causing unacceptable environmental impacts or safety hazards).

Prior to implementing certain activities, the following authorizations or permits are needed: (1) obtain concurrence from the New Mexico Environment Department on all burn plans and smoke management plans, and obtain required burn permits for the prescribed burn treatments; and (2) consult with the Army Corps of Engineers and obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit if necessary for disposal of dredge or fill material.

Decision Rationale

Based on comparing the alternatives, I determined that alternative 3 will best meet the purpose and need for reducing fuel and wildfire hazards in this wildland-urban interface area (EIS pp. 3-13). It will result in a 64 to 83 percent reduction in the acreage considered at high risk to mortality due to high stand density index (over 55 percent of maximum). It will result in a 30 percent reduction in the acreage currently having a high, very high or extreme crown fire hazard rating. By reducing the potential size and magnitude of a crown fire event in the area, alternative 3 would reduce the risk of wildfire-related adverse impacts to soil, water, air, wildlife habitat, scenery, and recreation opportunities. In addition, alternative 3 will result in lower costs and fewer safety hazards than alternative 2.

All practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the decision have been adopted. Exceptions to certain forest plan standards and guidelines were determined necessary to adequately meet the purpose and need. Based on the issues identified in the EIS, the effects of alternative 3 that I considered in selecting this alternative are summarized as follows. Issues in the EIS were used to develop appropriate design criteria and mitigation measures to reduce the potential for significant adverse impacts.

Mexican Spotted Owl: Alternative 3 would result in approximately 26 percent of spotted owl protected habitat in the project area being adversely impacted, by reducing the number of trees larger than 9 inches in diameter (199 acres within protected activity centers and 422

acres outside protected activity centers.) While this is likely to cause some potential adverse impacts to spotted owls and their habitat in the short term, the EIS and biological assessment indicate that these treatments could beneficially affect spotted owl habitat in the long term by reducing the potential extent and magnitude of stand-replacing wildfires in spotted owl habitat.

Northern Goshawk: Alternative 3 would cause a potential for up to 3 percent of the acres in goshawk post fledgling family areas having canopy cover reductions that drop below goshawk standards due to thinning trees up to 18 inches in diameter. While this is likely to cause some potential adverse impacts to goshawks and their habitat in the short term, the EIS and biological assessment indicate that these treatments could beneficially affect northern goshawk habitat in the long term by reducing the potential extent and magnitude of stand-replacing wildfires in goshawk habitat.

Cost: Alternative 3 would result in lower costs than alternative 2; approximately \$3.9 million compared to \$5.9 million respectively. Total costs for alternative 2 would be within expected budget constraints, thereby aiding in timely implementation.

Safety: Alternative 3 would result in fewer safety hazards compared to alternative 2. The lower safety hazard under this alternative is mostly due to using mastication equipment instead of helicopters with manual ground crews for treating many forest stands, particularly those on steep slopes that contain high proportions of dead trees. It is unlikely that prescribed burns would escape burn areas and threaten the public or their property. Log truck traffic is not expected to cause any major increase in traffic safety hazards over current conditions.

Water, Soil and Air: Alternative 3 would not result in any significant or long-term adverse impacts to soil productivity or water quality, or cause smoke emissions that would exceed air quality standards, based on the design criteria, mitigation measures, and best management practices to be applied.

Old Growth: Old growth management requirements in the HFRA and forest plan would be met (EIS pp. 2-3, 45-46, and 64-65).

Invasive Plants: Mitigation measures in alternative 3 are expected to limit the magnitude and extent that treatment activities promote the spread of invasive plant species in the area, and invasive plant monitoring and treatment will further reduce impacts associated with invasive plants in this area.

Scenic Quality: Alternative 3 would alter the scenic character of existing forests and detract from the natural appearance of the landscape until rehabilitation is complete. However, scenic quality and diversity would improve in the long term.

Recreation: Alternative 3 would result in temporary reductions in recreation opportunities in portions of the project area where treatments are being conducted, in order to protect public safety during operations, but would not result in a loss of recreation opportunities in the long term.

Wood Utilization: The trees that are cut but not removed as products have relatively low market value and would not cause any major effects on the local economy.

Road System/Project Effectiveness: Alternative 3 allows for certain roads to remain available for future treatments, which will help to maintain desired conditions in the long run (rather than decommissioning all roads). Retaining some roads will also improve the effectiveness of wildfire management in this wildland-urban interface area.

In making this decision, I also considered the many citizens and elected representatives in the Ruidoso area and State of New Mexico who expressed their support for implementing this project in order to reduce the potential for a large crown fire that could threaten lives, homes, businesses, water supply, and natural resources.

Other Alternatives Considered

The EIS evaluated two other alternatives in detail, and another alternative that was considered and later dropped from further study.

Alternative 1 is the no-action alternative required by NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1502.8. Under this alternative, none of the proposed fuel reduction treatments would be implemented on national forest lands in this project area (EIS p. 24). I did not chose this alternative over alternative 3 because under this alternative, over 80 percent of the forest stands in the project area would remain at high risk—exceeding stand density thresholds for sustainability. Additionally, about 60 percent of the project area would continue to be at a high, very high, or extreme crown fire hazard rating (EIS, p. 54)

Alternative 2 is the original proposed action, or "helicopter emphasis" alternative. Like alternative 3, it involves treating the same 92 percent of the project area with the same combination of thinning and burning prescriptions. The difference was that most of the thinning involves using helicopters (with manual ground crews). It also included the use of ground-based equipment, skyline suspension systems, and cable winching (see EIS, pp. 24-36). Otherwise, prescriptions were essentially the same as alternative 3. Connected actions included 14 miles of road construction or reconstruction, and then closing (8.5 miles) or decommissioning (5.5 miles) those same 14 miles of roads after treatments are completed. Like alternative 3, this alternative would result in a 64 to 83 percent reduction in the amount of high risk forest stands in the area (exceeding stand density thresholds). It would cause a 30 percent reduction in the stands having a high, very high, or extreme crown fire hazard rating (EIS, p. 54). I did not chose this alternative over alternative 3 because this alternative would result in substantially higher costs and safety hazards compared to alternative 3, and could take longer to implement based on budget constraints.

An alternative considered and dropped from detailed study was proposed by the Forest Guardians and refined through collaboration with the Forest Service. This alternative avoided the need for forest plan amendments by limiting thinning prescriptions to a 9-inch diameter limit in all spotted owl protected habitat, and retaining 50 to 70 percent canopy cover in goshawk post-fledgling family areas and 40 to 60 percent in the rest of the project area. In addition, it would leave over 30 percent of the project area untreated. A preliminary analysis indicated that only about 8 percent of the area would be reduced from a high, very high, or extreme crown fire hazard rating. It would not to meet the purpose and need for this project. Some other features of this alternative were incorporated into the two action alternatives that were analyzed in detail.

Public Involvement

The Forest Service made diligent efforts to reach out to and involve interested people throughout the project planning process. From December 2004 through July 2005, we completed the public scoping and preparation of an environmental assessment, and then circulated it for public review and pre-decisional objections. In September 2005, the Regional Forester determined that the EA must be revised to correct deficiencies and address the objections. Public involvement on revising the EA and the design of alternatives continued throughout 2006. During this time, the Forest Guardians submitted an alternative to be considered and we collaborated with them to further develop and refine that alternative (discussed in chapter 2).

In September 2007, we published a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS (Federal Register, Vol. 71, No. 184, September 22, 2006), and we also published minor corrections to that Notice in September 2007 (Federal Register, Vol. 72, No. 179, September 17, 2007). Throughout 2007, various public participation opportunities were offered during preparation of the EIS, through letters, public notices, media announcements, news articles, Internet information, public meetings and workshops, phone calls, and e-mails (EIS pp. 16-17). We used the internal and external comments received during scoping to identify issues and develop alternatives and mitigation measures (EIS pp. 17-19). We met monthly with the Greater Ruidoso Area Wildland-Urban Interface Working Group, and held other meetings with the Mescalero Apache Tribe, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Village of Ruidoso and Lincoln County officials, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Guardians, and other interested parties. We used other comments received during public meetings and other public participation efforts to further refine alternatives and mitigation measures (project record).

In December 2007, we circulated the draft EIS for a 45-day public review period. We considered and responded to comments received on the draft EIS, as documented in the final EIS Appendix C. In May 2008, we published a Notice of Opportunity to Object, starting a 30-day objection filing period. In June 2008, the objection reviewing officer completed the written review and determination on the objections received.

Comments received throughout the many years of planning this project have been taken into account in making this decision. We hope to continue to maintain collaborative working relationships with interested parties during implementation of this important project.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with many applicable laws, regulations and Agency directives. The following is not an all-inclusive listing, but summarizes our conformance with the laws and regulations most relevant to this project decision.

This decision to implement alternative 3 is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long-term goals and objectives, forestwide standards and guidelines, as well as applicable management area standards and guidelines (for management area 11). The EIS incorporates and discusses conformity with forest plan direction throughout (pp. 8, 10, 11, 15, 18, 30-33, 39, 42,45, 65, 66, 71, 72, 82, 84, 87, 89, 92, 93, 102, 104, 105, 106, 109, 117, 119, 120, 124, 126, 128, 161, 166, 169, 180, 187, and 188). The most relevant forest plan direction is incorporated in the mitigation measures section of the EIS.

Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974 (Section 9), the Plant Protection Act of 2000, the 1990 Farm Bill, Executive Order 13112, and 36 CFR Subpart A, Section 222.8

Alternative 3 complies with these laws, executive order, and regulations that require the Forest Service to cooperate with other Federal and state agencies or political subdivisions thereof in carrying out measures to detect and respond rapidly to eradicate, suppress, control, or prevent the spread of noxious weeds. The Forest Service plans to continue to develop and coordinate programs to help prevent and control undesirable plants on National Forest System lands. (Refer to EIS pp. 46-47, 52, and 75-78.)

Endangered Species Act

On December 21, 2007, the Forest Service submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) a biological assessment that evaluates the effects of implementing alternative 3. We requested formal consultation under section 7(a)(2) of the ESA based on the potential for adverse effects to the Mexican spotted owl beyond recovery plan recommendations. On April 21, 2008, the FWS issued a final biological opinion (BO) in which they concurred that the thinning treatments prescribed would adversely affect owl habitat (BO p. 22), and would be likely to result in "incidental take" in the form of harm and harassment, due to the thinning activities in protected activity centers that will deviate from recovery plan recommendations, such as maximum tree diameter and canopy cover limits. They also determined that this alternative "is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl and not likely to destroy or adversely modify its designated critical habitat" (BO p. 34). The EIS (pp. 81-97), biological assessment, and biological opinion (project record) provide evidence that we completed all requirements pursuant to ESA requirements. In implementing this alternative, the Forest Service will follow the terms and conditions that implement the reasonable and prudent measures, as well as the conservation measures, identified in the biological opinion.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186

As identified in the EIS, there are no designated important bird areas (IBAs) or important over-wintering areas (large wetlands) in the project area or in the vicinity of the project area where they would be expected to be impacted by activities prescribed in alternative 3 (EIS p. 133). The EIS discloses that alternative 3 will have neutral to positive effects on migratory birds and their habitat (EIS pp. 134-135). No violations of the MBTA or EO 13186 are anticipated.

Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act

Alternative 3 will not likely result in adverse impacts to the municipal water supply reservoirs downstream from the project area, or to water quality within or downstream from the area (EIS pp. 148-153). With application of site-specific design criteria, mitigation measures, and best management practices (EIS pp. 47-48), this alternative meets the laws and associated regulations designed to protect water quality. There are no perennial (year-round) streams, waterbodies, or jurisdictional wetlands within the project area boundary, although potential impacts to downstream water resources were evaluated (EIS pp. 138-146). Alternative 3 is expected to result in a minor first year increase in sediment delivery to the low gradient, intermittent/ephemeral stream channels during road construction, road improvement work, and other project activities. The Forest Service consulted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and New Mexico

Environment Department during the planning process, and did not receive any significant concerns about the effects of alternative 3 on water quality. Prior to implementation we will consult with the Army Corps of Engineers and obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit if necessary for disposal of dredge or fill material.

The Clean Air Act

Alternative 3 is designed to be consistent with the provisions of the Clear Air Act, its implementing regulations, and associated state and Federal air quality standards. The primary concern with this project in regards to air quality is with smoke emissions from prescribed burning. The EIS discloses that under alternative 3, concentrations of smoke emission contaminants will not be likely to accumulate to the point of violating air quality standards (EIS, pp. 49-50 and 154-160). Prescribed burns will be planned, designed, and implemented to achieve good smoke dispersal and minimize adverse smoke effects to air quality or public health and safety.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Forest Service consulted with and obtained concurrence from the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer regarding identification, evaluation, and determination of effect of the project on heritage resources, and complied with applicable requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800. We also consulted with federally recognized Indian tribes. The EIS documents the evaluation of effects to heritage resources, including historic and traditional cultural properties and sacred sites, in accordance with the NHPA and associated regulations (EIS, pp. 169-170). Alternative 3 would not adversely impact heritage resources, based on application of appropriate mitigation measures described in the EIS, page 50.

The National Forest Management Act of 1976

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires the Forest Service to make several specific findings regarding consistency with the applicable forest plan. I have determined that this decision is consistent with the management direction contained in the forest plan for the Lincoln National Forest, except where specific actions are exempted from consistency by the project-specific amendments to the plan.

Pursuant to NFMA, the forest plan, and Agency directives (FSM 2670), we completed an evaluation of the effects of alternative 3 on sensitive plant and animal species, including all sensitive species listed by the Regional Forester that occur or are likely to occur in the project area (EIS pp. 79-80, 98-116, EIS appendix B, and the biological evaluation in the project record). Specific mitigation measures and monitoring requirements are identified in the EIS for the conservation of sensitive species and their habitat (EIS pp. 46 and 51). The analysis indicated that alternative 3 is not likely to result in a loss of population viability or trend toward Federal listing for any sensitive species (EIS pp. 79-80, 98-116, and appendix B).

The "Lincoln National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan" was designed to meet the management requirements envisioned by NFMA. The following summarizes how alternative 3 complies with these management requirements, consistent with the Lincoln National Forest plan.

Resource Protection Requirements

1. Alternative 3 conserves soil and water resources and does not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land. (EIS pp. 138-146)
2. Within the scope of the project and consistent with other resource values involved, alternative 3 activities will minimize the risk from serious or long lasting hazards from flood, wind, wildfire, erosion, or other natural physical forces unless these are specifically exempted. Alternative 3 is designed to improve the resilience of forest ecosystems in the project area to catastrophic events, as described throughout the EIS.
3. Consistent with the relative resource values involved, alternative 3 will prevent or reduce serious, long lasting hazards and damage from pest organisms, utilizing principles of integrated pest management. Under this approach, all aspects of a pest-host system will be weighed to determine situation-specific prescriptions which may utilize a combination of techniques including, as appropriate, natural controls, harvesting, use of resistant species, maintenance of diversity, removal of damaged trees, and judicious use of pesticides. The basic principle in the choice of this strategy is that, in the long term, it would be ecologically acceptable and compatible with the forest ecosystem and the multiple use objectives of the plan (see EIS, chapters 2 and 3).
4. Alternative 3 will protect streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water that are located within or downstream from the project area (EIS, pp. 148-153).
5. Alternative 3 provides for and maintains diversity of plants and animal communities to meet overall multiple-use objectives (see plant and animal species discussions, EIS pp. 79-137, particularly regarding management indicator species and sensitive species).
6. Alternative 3 provides for adequate fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native vertebrate species and provides that the habitat for management indicator species chosen under § 219.19 is maintained or improved consistent with multiple-use objectives in the forest plan (EIS pp. 81-137).
7. The EIS assessed potential physical, biological, aesthetic (scenic), cultural (heritage), and economic impacts of alternative 3 (EIS chapter 3), and is consistent with multiple uses planned for the Lincoln National Forest. This project has been identified as a priority for Ruidoso's community wildfire protection plan, as well as for the State of New Mexico, and for all levels of the Forest Service—district, forest, regional, and national offices (project record).
8. Alternative 3 includes measures for preventing the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat for threatened or endangered species, as described in the EIS, biological assessment, as well as the final biological opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (in project record).
9. Alternative 3 does not require a new right-of-way corridor decision in order to accommodate a significant transportation or utility corridor or corridor designation (EIS, chapter 2).

10. Alternative 3 will adhere to Forest Service regulations, directives, and forest plan direction designed to ensure that any roads constructed for this project are designed according to standards appropriate to the planned uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and effects upon lands and resources (EIS, chapter 2).
11. Alternative 3 will adhere to Forest Service regulations, directives, and forest plan direction requiring that all temporary roads will be planned and designed to re-establish vegetative cover on the disturbed area within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed 10 years after termination of a contract, lease or permit, unless the road is determined necessary as a permanent addition to the national forest transportation system (EIS pp. 21-15,28-30, and 38-40).
12. Alternative 3 is designed to be consistent with maintaining air quality at a level that is adequate for the protection and use of National Forest System resources and that meets or exceeds applicable Federal, state and/or local standards or regulations (EIS pp. 49-50 and 154-160).

Vegetative Manipulation

1. Alternative 3 is best suited to the multiple-use goals established for the Lincoln National Forest, considering potential environmental, biological, cultural resource, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts as stated in the forest plan being considered in this determination.
2. Alternative 3 does not involve clearcutting or similar even-age regeneration prescriptions and is not designed to create permanent new openings for wildlife habitat improvement, vistas, recreation uses or similar purposes (EIS chapter 2).
3. Alternative 3 is not being chosen primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber, as previously described in the rationale for this decision.
4. Alternative 3 is being chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands (EIS pp. 57-75 and other parts of chapter 3).
5. Alternative 3 will avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources (EIS pp. 148-153).
6. Alternative 3 is anticipated to provide the desired long-term effects on water quantity and quality, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields, as described in the existing and desired conditions section of the EIS (pp. 6-12 and chapter 3, "Environmental Consequences").
7. Alternative 3 is designed in a practical manner in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements, and total costs of preparation, logging, and administration. It will have a lower cost to implement than the other action alternative evaluated for this project (EIS p. 53).

Silvicultural Practices

1. The treatments prescribed in alternative 3 are not aimed at timber production and do not need to be conducted on lands classified as suitable for timber production pursuant to § 219.14. Alternative 3 involves a sanitation/salvage prescription to remove dead and dying trees, and thinning prescriptions designed for fuel reduction purposes. Reforestation and timber regeneration are not the objectives of this project.
2. The timber volume generated by this alternative will be a byproduct of implementing fuel reduction treatments, and will not result in exceeding the allowable sale quantity estimated in the forest plan (see volumes in EIS 54, 182-185).
3. This project does not involve cutting trees to achieve timber production objectives, although timber may be a byproduct of the fuel reduction treatment prescriptions.
4. This project involves cultural treatments such as thinning and other partial cutting that are intended to increase the rate of growth of remaining trees, favor wildfire resistant tree species, and species or age classes which are most valuable for wildlife, and to achieve project objectives described in the EIS.
5. This project does not involve intensive management practices and high harvest levels that would require implementation timing adjustments based on forest planning schedules.
6. This project does not involve timber harvest cuts designed to regenerate even-aged stands of timber.
7. Timber harvest and other silvicultural treatments prescribed in alternative 3 are designed to prevent potentially damaging population increases of forest pest organisms. Silvicultural treatments will not be applied where such treatments would make stands susceptible to pest-caused damage levels inconsistent with management objectives (EIS pp. 45-47 and chapter 2).

Even-aged Management

1. Openings that may be created when implementing alternative 3 will be located to achieve the desired combination of multiple-use objectives, to blend with the natural terrain to the extent practicable, and to achieve aesthetic, wildlife habitat, or other objectives established in the forest plan.
2. Silvicultural prescriptions designed for alternative 3 are consistent with forest plan requirements regarding maximum size limits and other vegetation and timber management requirements in the forest plan.

Riparian Areas

The EIS discloses that there are no riparian areas, perennial streams, or waterbodies within the project area that may be directly affected by implementing alternative 3. However, the EIS analysis evaluates potential offsite and downstream effects to riparian and water resources (EIS, chapter 3). No management practices in alternative 3 are anticipated to cause detrimental changes in water temperature or chemical composition, blockages of water

courses, or deposits of sediment which seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat.

Soil and Water

Alternative 3 is designed to be consistent with conservation of soil and water resources as described in Agency regulations, directives and forest plan direction. The EIS appropriately evaluates the potential effects of alternative 3 on soil and water resources, and incorporates mitigation measures to avoid or mitigate damage to such resources (EIS pp. 47-48 and 138-153).

Diversity

Treatments under alternative 3 are designed, to the extent practicable, to preserve and enhance the diversity of plant and animal communities, including endemic and desirable naturalized plant and animal species, so that it is at least as great as that which would be expected in a natural forest and the diversity of tree species similar to that existing in the planning area.

Implementation

This decision is not subject to further administrative review. The Forest Service completed the objection process set forth in 36 CFR 218, which implements a predecisional administrative review process for proposed hazardous fuel reduction projects authorized by the HFRA (§ 218.13). The Perk-Grindstone Fuel Reduction Project is an HFRA project subject to regulations at 36 CFR 218 rather than appeal regulations at 36 CFR 215.

This decision was signed after the reviewing officer responded to all pending objections and no sooner than the fifth business day following the end of the objection filing period (§ 218.11). Therefore, implementation of this decision is now authorized to begin.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or project, please contact:

Buck Sanchez, District Ranger
Smokey Bear Ranger District 901
Mechem Drive Ruidoso, NM 88345
Phone: (505) 630-3010

Approval

JACQUE A. BUCHANAN
(Acting) Forest Supervisor
Lincoln National Forest

Date: 06/16/2008