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Region

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National Forest

Ogden Ranger
District

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Big Creek Vegetation Treatment Project

Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

Ogden Ranger District, Wasatch-Cache National Forest, Rich County, Utah



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**BIG CREEK VEGETATION TREATMENT PROJECT
Final Environmental Impact Statement**

**Wasatch-Cache National Forest
Rich County, Utah**

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Abstract: The Wasatch-Cache National Forest proposes to treat approximately 4,800 acres of aspen, conifer, and sagebrush communities within the Big Creek project area. A combination of mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and/or herbicide treatment is proposed across the project area. This action is needed: (1) to improve vegetation structure and pattern for cover types within the Big Creek project area to move toward properly functioning condition at the landscape scale, (2) to enhance ecosystem resiliency and to maintain desired fuel levels with fire operating within historical fire regimes, and (3) to provide commercial timber that contributes to a sustainable level of goods and services. The Forest Service has developed three alternatives, including: Alternative 1 – Proposed Action, Alternative 2 - No Action, and Alternative 3 - Reduced Treatment and Wildlife Emphasis. The preferred alternative is Alternative 1 – the Proposed Action.

SUMMARY

The project is located in Rich County, Utah on the Ogden Ranger District of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The 21,000 acre project area is located about 50 miles east of Ogden, Utah at the headwaters of the Big Creek watershed, which drains to the east into the Bear River.

The Wasatch-Cache National Forest proposes to treat approximately 4,800 acres of aspen, conifer, and sagebrush communities within the Big Creek project area. A combination of mechanical treatments (including both commercial timber harvest and non-commercial cutting or brush harrowing), prescribed fire, and/or herbicide treatment (specifically herbicide treatment to thin sagebrush) is proposed across the project area. This action is needed, for the following reasons: (1) to improve vegetation structure and pattern for cover types within the Big Creek project area to move toward properly functioning condition at the landscape scale, (2) to enhance ecosystem resiliency and to maintain desired fuel levels with fire operating within historical fire regimes, and (3) to provide commercial timber that contributes to a sustainable level of goods and services.

Wasatch-Cache National Forest resource specialists conducted a watershed assessment of this 21,000 acre portion of the Big Creek watershed in 2005 (USDA Forest Service 2006d). The assessment characterized the current condition of the area and identified opportunities for vegetation management. The Big Creek Watershed Assessment indicates vegetation communities are substantially altered from what they were historically and many communities are not at properly functioning condition (USDA Forest Service 2006d). Some of the notable communities at risk are: aspen communities (being encroached upon and potentially replaced by conifer trees), sagebrush communities (in late seral condition with closed canopies of sagebrush; sites which were shared historically by sagebrush, grass, and forbs) and Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir, Douglas-fir, and lodgepole pine forests (composed primarily of dense stands skewed heavily toward old and mature age classes).

Scoping began in May 2006. The interdisciplinary team identified three significant issues: Soil Productivity, Water Quality, and Wildlife/Habitat. These issues led the agency to develop three alternatives, including: Alternative 1 – Proposed Action, Alternative 2 - No Action, and Alternative 3 - Reduced Treatment and Wildlife Emphasis.

Table S.1. Comparison of approximate treatment acres, timber volume, and roads by alternative.

	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3
Total Treated Acres	4,800	0	4,190
Timber Volume	21,300 ccf	0 ccf	13,700 ccf
Temporary Roads	9.0 miles	0 miles	5.6 miles
(Intermittent Service) Road Construction	1.5 miles	0 miles	0.5 miles

Major conclusions include: Chapter 2, Table 2.4.3 briefly summarizes and compares the effects of alternatives.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the deciding official will review the proposed action, the alternatives, and the environmental consequences in order to make the following decision:

Whether or not to implement vegetation treatments in the Big Creek project area, and if so, to what degree, where and with what conditions.