

BRYANT'S FORK SPRUCE BEETLE TREATMENT SCOPING DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Bryant's Fork Summer Home Tract is located near the southwest corner of Strawberry Reservoir in the Bryant's Fork drainage. The Forest Service recently discovered a rapidly building epidemic of spruce bark beetle both in the cabin area and the stands adjacent to the cabin lots. A treatment using a combination of trap trees and funnel traps to temporarily reduce beetle populations was authorized on May 7, 2004. In addition a shaded fuel break surrounding the summer homes is also being planned. A decision on the fuel break is expected in June, 2004.

This proposal is for long term management strategies in the analysis area and for study of the cumulative effects of the various projects and activities. See the attached Analysis Area map.

BASIC INFORMATION

Project Name:	Bryant's Fork Forest Health
Forest Plan Management Area:	Strawberry Reservoir
Forest Plan Management Prescription(s):	5.2 Forested Ecosystems – Vegetation Management. 8.4 Recreation Residences
Legal Description:	R3S, T12W, USM, Sections 26,27,34,35;
Drainage:	Bryant's Fork Creek and side drainages
County:	Wasatch
Total Acreage of Area:	Approximately 240 treatment acres
Topography:	North facing mountain slopes 7,800' to 8,600'
Target NEPA Completion Date:	Fall 2004
Target Implementation Date	Spring 2005
USGS Quad:	Strawberry Reservoir NW

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The stands in Bryant's Fork, as along most of Strawberry Ridge, vary from being dominated by subalpine fir mixed with aspen, to almost pure Engelmann spruce. The spruce areas range from mid-sized mature stands to large diameter old stands. A rapidly growing spruce beetle infestation was recently discovered in these stands. Several years of drought, abundant host trees and mild winters have likely contributed to the rapid expansion of endemic beetle populations to the current epidemic levels. A treatment is currently under way to reduce beetle populations in the short term. This proposal addresses the long term forest health and structural diversity issues.

The purpose of the proposed action is to modify the structure and composition in the stands such that they are no longer as susceptible to significant outbreaks of spruce beetle while retaining the overall forested spruce character of the area. While the trap tree treatment currently in progress should reduce spruce beetle populations in the short term, stand conditions remain that are susceptible to another rapid population buildup if no further treatments occur.

This proposed action is needed because without further treatment, it is likely that spruce beetle populations would again rapidly expand and cause extensive mortality in these stands. This mortality adjacent to the recreation residences would pose a significant fire hazard.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is to use a timber sale (salvage and sanitation) in these stands to reduce average stand density and diameter as well as promote regeneration of spruce. Revenues from the salvage and sale of the timber could be used to reforest the affected stands. Areas that would regenerate to aspen would be clearcut in patches to create young aspen stands.

PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES & COORDINATION

This project would also include coordination with and participation from the Bryant's Fork homeowners. Several of the cabins are either adjacent to infested trees or have infested trees currently on the lots which would need to be removed. Operations may be designed to assist with removal of hazard trees within the cabin lots.

LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES

The proposed treatments are located within the Strawberry Reservoir Management Area (see attached map) as identified in the Uinta National Forest 2003 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). This identifies as part of the Desired Future Condition that vegetation within the 5.2 prescription is "managed to maintain or restore vegetation to achieve multiple resource values while providing for multiple uses and attaining goals and objectives for timber commodity production" (Forest Plan, page 5-124). The management prescriptions for the project are 5.2-Forested Ecosystems – Vegetation Management (Forest Plan, page 5-132) and 8.4 - Recreation Residences (Forest Plan, page 5-132) within the summer home tract. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum designation for the area is 'Roaded Modified' (Forest Plan, page 5-133). The Visual Quality Objective is 'Partial Retention' (Forest Plan, page E-7). The area is outside of the Two Tom Hill Inventoried Roadless Area.

POTENTIAL ISSUES

Vegetation/Forest Health

Many of the stands are single storied, older, large diameter spruce with sparse regeneration, and patches of subalpine fir or aspen/fir mix. There are some stands that are primarily subalpine fir, some of which is mixed with remnant aspen indicating that it is replacing the aspen component in these areas. Structural and species diversity is lacking in the analysis area which leaves these stands susceptible to large scale disturbance events such as the current beetle epidemic.

Fire

Mass mortality in these stands would create an environment in which a fire event would potentially be more intense than were the forest green, should a fire ignite. This would threaten the adjacent summer home group, and make fire suppression efforts much more difficult. Catastrophic high-intensity wildfires associated with heavy fuel loadings such as could occur following a spruce beetle epidemic, would also potentially cause a variety of undesirable environmental impacts (e.g., severe erosion, loss of wildlife habitat, etc.).

Wildlife

Three-toed Woodpeckers (a Forest Service “sensitive” species) are known to nest in this general area. Spruce bark beetles are an important food source for these birds. Wildlife habitat, in particular old growth spruce, would be reduced by either high spruce mortality rates if stands are left untreated or by any possible vegetation management treatments.

Soils

Soil disturbance would occur through the logging operations. Both compaction and disturbance could be largely mitigated through attentions to proper logging practices and post sale rehabilitation.

Water Quality/Fisheries/Riparian Habitat

All of the affected stands include Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) along the lower edge of the slopes. Operations would be designed to either avoid, or to minimize impacts to these areas. Lack of treatment and the resultant mortality would also have an affect on RHCAs.

Social/Economic/Public Safety

Part of the Bryant’s Fork Summer Home Tract lies within the proposed treatment area. Dead trees on the cabin lots pose a safety hazard to people and structures and could affect the recreation experience and visual quality of the area for the homeowners. Harvest operations would need to utilize the main access roads used by the cabin owners which may pose traffic safety risks.

Summer home owners are responsible for removing hazard trees on their lots. Given the wide-spread mortality anticipated if no spruce beetle treatments are implemented, these impacts could be substantial. In addition, if no additional treatments occur, potential effects from wildfires in the area could increase substantially due to their potentially higher intensity.

Access/Roading

The primary existing access is via a Forest Service road that provides access to the summer home tract. There are also some existing closed (Level 1) classified roads in the area that could be utilized for any project implementation. Approximately 3 miles of temporary road would need to be constructed and then obliterated. There is an opportunity to close unclassified, user created roads following the operations.

DECISION TO BE MADE

Through this environmental analysis process the Forest Service will decide what type of treatment, if any, will be done to address the spruce beetle epidemic and long term structural diversity issues.

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

It appears that this project will result in an Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice/FONSI. If the analysis indicates a finding of significant impact, then an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

ANALYSIS TIMELINE

This Scoping Notice initiates the analysis process. A decision is expected in the fall of 2004. Implementation of the project is expected in spring 2005.

WHAT IS NEEDED FROM YOU

The Forest Service uses public input to help determine the issues of concern and the possible consequences of the proposed action. Comments are weighted based on their content, not necessarily on the number of times they are received. If you have comments, suggestions, or concerns we need to hear them from you.

WHEN ARE YOUR COMMENTS NEEDED

Public comments can best be incorporated into the process if they are received early on. Comments need to be received by July 2nd, 2004.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact Jim Gibson (Interdisciplinary Team Leader) at 435-654-0470 if you have questions or need additional information.

SUBMITTING COMMENTS

Submit comments in writing by June 25th, 2004 to:

Julie King, District Ranger
2460 South Highway 40
P.O. Box 190
Heber City, UT 84032

Comments may also be provided by e-mailing: comments-intermtn-uinta-heber@fs.fed.us