



File Code: 1950

Date: February 11, 2008

Dear Interested Public:

You are invited to comment on the proposed action for the Sabie Mountain Habitat Improvement Project. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project. Comments should be as specific as possible and have a direct relationship to the proposal. Anyone providing comments or otherwise expressing interest in the proposed action by the close of the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215.6 will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations. Comments will be accepted within 30 days of publication of legal notice in the *Provo Daily Herald*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. Send comments to the Responsible Official, Douglas H. Jones, Uinta National Forest, Spanish Fork District Ranger, 44 West 400 North, Spanish Fork, Utah 84660; phone (801) 798-3571; fax (801) 798-3050; or you may hand deliver your comments during normal business hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. You may also e-mail your comments. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to [comments-intermtn-uinta-spanishfork@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-uinta-spanishfork@fs.fed.us). Oral comments may be provided at the Spanish Fork Ranger District office during normal business hours via telephone (801) 798-3571, or in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments. If you wish to receive a copy of the decision memo for this project, please respond to this scoping notice.

For additional information on this project, please contact Karen Hartman, Wildlife Biologist, at the address or phone number shown above.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Douglas H. Jones*  
DOUGLAS H. JONES  
Spanish Fork District Ranger

Enclosure



## **SABIE MOUNTAIN HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

The Spanish Fork Ranger District proposes to enhance vegetation/wildlife habitat, reduce hazardous fuels, and remove non-system roads and trails in the Sabie Mountain area of the Vernon Unit. The proposed site is located in T9S R4W, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 34, and T10S R4W Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8, in Tooele County, Utah (see attached map). The dominant vegetation types are big sagebrush shrublands, sometimes with seeded grasses, and pinyon-juniper woodlands, with a few acres of riparian meadow.

### **PURPOSE**

The primary purpose of this project is to maintain previous chainings that were implemented to enhance wildlife and watershed conditions.

Additionally, this project will reduce hazardous fuels in the Sabie Mountain area and improve the fire condition class. Non-system roads and trails will be obliterated.

### **NEED**

Sabie Mountain is located within the Vernon Management Unit as outlined within the Uinta National Forest 2003 Land and Resource Management Plan. The management prescription for the proposed project area is (3.1) Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources.

Pinyon-junipers are invading the sagebrush/grassland steppe habitat that was previously chained in the 1970's. The invasion of pinyon-junipers is limiting resources (water, light and nutrients) available to the understory vegetation. The increase in pinyon-junipers causes a decrease in understory which can cause an increase in soil erosion which results in poor wildlife habitat. Other areas have thick invasive mature Pinyon-Juniper, and have a limited understory. This area is important mule deer habitat. Mule deer are browsers that primarily eat shrubs and other woody materials. Pinyon-juniper outcompete the understory vegetation and reduces the amount of browse available to deer. Maintaining the chainings will promote the growth of sage-brush, a common browse species for deer.

The desired condition for pinyon/juniper in the *Vernon Ecosystem Management Plan for Vegetation* (May 1996) is to maintain greater than 85 percent of potential ground cover on pinyon-juniper sites and to remove pinyon-juniper on sites with less than 30 percent slope. Pinyon-Juniper invasion in the old chaining is outside of the range of natural variability of the ecosystem. Removing pinyon-juniper will help maintain at least 85 percent of potential ground cover on these project sites for long term watershed health needs. This desired condition for pinyon-juniper was developed to mimic conditions created by past fire regimes and is within the range of natural variability for the Vernon Ecosystem. This project will also improve fire regime condition class by reducing the current high departure from reference conditions caused by encroaching junipers.

User created roads introduces additional disruptions to wildlife, promotes soil erosion, decreases suitable habitat, and decreases availability of forage.

## **PROPOSED ACTION**

The Spanish Fork Ranger District, in cooperation with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, proposes to implement improvement of vegetation/wildlife habitat (see list below) in the Sabie Mountain area of the Vernon Unit. The proposed site is located in T9S R4W, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 34, and T10S R4W Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8, in Tooele County, Utah. The work will be completed over the next one to five years.

1. Approximately 1260 acres of pinyon-juniper that were previously chained will be retreated. All the pinyon-juniper will be removed with chainsaws at the base of the plant.
2. Approximately 120 acres of mature pinyon-juniper will be removed with a brush-hog. Approximately 25% of the pinyon pine in the cutting unit will be retained.
3. Obliterate approximately 2 miles of non-system roads and trails.

## **FOREST PLAN CONSISTENCY**

This project is within the Vernon Management Area as defined by the 2003 Land and Resource Management Plan for the Uinta National Forest. The management prescriptions for this area include (3.1) Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologis Resources, (3.3) Aquatic and Terrestrial Habitat, and (6.1) Non-forested Ecosystems.

This project is consistent with the following sub-goals of the Forest Plan:

**FW-Goal-2:** Biologically diverse, sustainable ecosystems maintain or enhance habitats for native flora and fauna, forest and rangeland health, watershed health, and water quality.

- Sub-goal 2-1: “The fuel management aspect of the fire management program is emphasized through application of hazard reduction activities.”
- Sub-goal 2-6: “Ecosystems on the Forest provide and maintain viable and well-distributed populations of flora and fauna. New listings of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species as a result of Forest Service management activities are avoided.”
- Sub-goal 2.10: “Management actions maintain ecosystem health and encourage conditions that are within the historic range of variation.”
- Sub-goal 2-23: “Areas identified as being of special concern for habitat such as big game winter range, big game natal areas . . . are maintained and, where potential exists, improved or expanded.”
- Sub-goal 2-24: “Adequate amounts and distribution of big game hiding and thermal cover are maintained. Adequate amounts of hiding cover for wildlife is retained around created openings and along roads where vegetative management activities are implemented.”

- Sub-goal 2-25: “Maintain stable and upward conditions in big game winter range habitats and improve downward trend sites.”

It is anticipated that this project will be categorically excluded according to FSH 1909.15 31.2(6):

*Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides and do not require more than one mile of road construction. A decision memo will be issued.*

Pursuant to *Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, No. CIV F-03-386 JKS (E.D. Cal., October 19, 2005), the decision will be subject to appeal under Forest Service regulations 36 CFR 215.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Douglas H. Jones*  
DOUGLAS H. JONES  
Spanish Fork District Ranger