

Decision Memo

Evergreen Timber Stand Improvement Project

USDA Forest Service
Clear Creek Ranger District, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests
and the Pawnee National Grassland
Clear Creek County, Colorado

Project Location

The project is located on the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland, Clear Creek Ranger District and includes National Forest System (NFS) lands. Units are located near the Cub Creek and Maxwell Falls Trailheads vicinity, south of the Brook Forest Area, and north of Black Widow Drive and South Warhawk Road systems. The legal for the locations of the units are Sections 31, 32, T5S, R71W; Section 1, T6S, R72W; and Sections 5, 6, T6S, R71W.

Decision to Be Implemented

The Clear Creek Ranger District will implement a thinning project within old clearcuts on approximately 108 acres of NFS lands that are directly adjacent to private lands within the wildland urban interface (WUI). The purpose of this project is to thin young, overstocked stands by reducing the overall tree density and reducing existing fuel loads.

The proposed action includes manual thinning, chipping, lopping and scattering, and pile burning fuel reduction treatments. Due to the general size of the material that will be treated, fuelwood would not be made available from the implementation of this project. Two units near the Cub Creek Trailhead (approximately eight acres) may also be thinned as part of the Clear Creek Ranger District's Holiday Tree Program. No new permanent or temporary roads would be constructed under this proposal. The decision also includes the design criteria and mitigations described in Appendix A of this document.

Thinning would reduce the number of conifer trees to approximately 300 to 400 per acre, leaving the healthiest dominant trees. Aspen would not be cut except where needed to create openings for burn piles. Approximately five percent of each unit would be left untreated to aid in cover and thermal patches for wildlife and structural diversity both horizontally and vertically within the unit. The thinning prescription involves using a range of distance between each tree as the primary measure for determining residual trees. Preference for residual trees is for those that are under-represented species in these lodgepole pine dominated stands (aspen, Engelmann spruce, and Douglas-fir).

Reasons for Categorically Excluding this Project

An environmental analysis was conducted for this proposed action. Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) when they are within one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Sections 31.2, and there are no adverse impacts to resources conditions resulting

in any extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

I have concluded that this decision is appropriately categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA as it is an activity within the category of exclusion and there are no extraordinary circumstances or impacts related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Project File and Record.

The decision is within FSH 1909.15 Section 31.2, Category 6 that states the following: Timber stand and / or wildlife improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction. Examples include but are not limited to:

Extraordinary Circumstances

In determining the appropriateness of using the categorical exclusion, a determination of the potential impact to the identified resources conditions identified in FSH 1901.15 Section 30.3(2) must be made. The following is a list of the potential effects to the resource conditions from project activities:

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.

*There are two federally listed threatened wildlife species, Canada Lynx and the Mexican Spotted Owl, that have potential habitat in the project area. The Proposed Action for the Evergreen Timber Stand Improvement project area is estimated to have **no effect** to the Canada lynx.*

The treatment will occur in regenerating lodgepole pine, and is intended to thin trees, maintaining a healthy understory of grasses and shrubs. While highly unlikely it is possible that a hunting Mexican Spotted Owl may be disturbed during implementation, however the overall effect should benefit Mexican Spotted Owl habitat. Therefore, the project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the Mexican Spotted Owl.

2. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

Flood plains: There are no flood plains within the project area; therefore, flood plains will not be impacted by the fuels reduction treatment.

Wetlands: There are no wetlands present in the timber stand improvement units. There will be no impacts to wetlands.

Municipal Watersheds: There are no municipal watersheds in this project area; therefore, there will not be adverse impacts. This project will not impact water quality or watershed resources adversely. The proposed action includes manual

thinning, chipping, lopping and scattering, and pile burning fuel reduction treatments. Due to the general size of the material that will be treated, fuelwood would not be made available from the implementation of this project. Two units near the Cub Creek Trailhead (approximately eight acres) may also be thinned as part of the Clear Creek Ranger District's Holiday Tree Program. No new permanent or temporary roads would be constructed under this proposal. The decision also includes the design criteria and mitigations described in Appendix A of this document.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.
The project is outside all wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas; therefore, there will not be adverse impacts.
4. Inventoried roadless areas.
The project is outside inventoried roadless areas; therefore, there will not be adverse impacts.
5. Research Natural Areas.
The project is outside Research Natural Area; therefore, there will not be adverse impacts.
6. American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.
This decision complies with all applicable laws and regulations. The proposed activities do not have the potential to adversely affect historic properties pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act, 36 CFR 800.3(a)[1] and the Programmatic Agreement among the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office, and the U.S.D.A. Forest Service.

Public Involvement

Scoping commenced on the Evergreen Timber Stand Improvement Project on August 5, 2008. At that time it was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland. A scoping letter was mailed to 20 interested parties on August 5, 2008. An internal scoping letter was also distributed to various resource specialists on May 21, 2008. The official comment period was initiated on August 5, 2008 and the legal notice was published in the Clear Creek Courant. Two comment letters were received during the official comment period. One comment letter was in favor of the thinning that will improve the wildfire hazard in the area. The other comment letter was in regard to notification to neighbors when controlled burns were to occur.

Findings Required by Other Laws

All management practices and activities or the proposed action are consistent with the current management direction, including standards and guidelines in the 1997 Revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Arapaho and Roosevelt National

Forests and Pawnee National Grassland as required by the National Forest Management Act.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

My decision to implement the Evergreen Timber Stand Improvement Project is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8(4) and may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision contact Kevin Zimlinghaus, Project Leader, at (303) 245-6415 or Mark Martin Team Leader, at (303) 245-6409.



Daniel A. Lovato
District Ranger

9/8/2008
DATE

Appendix A

Project Design

The following were incorporated as part of the project design:

Hydrology and Soils

The Watershed Conservation Practices in FSH 2509.25 are to be implemented as appropriate during implementation. The appropriate WCPs are listed below:

- 11.2 Standard (2) – Manage land treatments to maintain enough organic ground cover in each land unit to prevent harmful increased runoff.
- 12.1 Standard (3) – In the water influence zone next to perennial and intermittent streams, lakes, and wetlands, allow only those actions that maintain or improve long-term stream health and riparian ecosystem condition.

Fuels

- All material must be piled, chipped, or masticated.
- Minimum pile size, hand or machine created, shall be no less than 6' high (measured on the uphill side) and 6' in diameter.
- Maximum pile size is 20' in diameter by 12' high.
- Piles shall be compact. Piles shall be constructed by laying slash material in a manner as to eliminate large air spaces within the piles.

Wildlife

- For unit 8 adjacent to Lynx winter foraging habitat, a spacing of 8 feet between boles will be used.
- Within the dripline of identified aspen stands, conifers up to 8 inches will be cut, lopped and scattered.
- Every attempt will be made to directionally fell all conifer trees so as to reduce or eliminate damage to existing aspen.
- Conifer trees 8-15 inches that cannot be felled without damaging aspens will be girdled and left in place.
- Spacing and clumps to be uncut will be marked by the wildlife biologist.
- LOP: March-May. Work should not occur within the goshawk buffer area until it is confirmed there are no goshawks in the area.
- LOP: March-September. If goshawks or other raptors are found at any point prior to the completion of the project, activity will cease within the buffer area and time period specified by the wildlife biologist, units 9, 10, and 11 should be surveyed for goshawks prior to this LOP.

Mitigations

Botany

- Project botanist will survey the project area prior to implementation and at times during the season when Region 2 sensitive species may be identified.
- If any federally-listed or proposed species or R2 sensitive species are found, delineate no action areas sufficient to protect them.

Lands

- Roads: Protect roads being used by local residents; keep roads open and do not degrade lower than pre-use condition.
- Private Land/Improvements: Keep logging slash off private land. Protect utility lines.
- Landlines: Protect survey markers, bearing trees, brass caps, and survey monuments.

EVERGREEN TSI 2008

unit	acres	treatment
1	4	xmas tree thinning
2	4	xmas tree thinning
3	5	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
4	7	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
5	3	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
6	13	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
7	12	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
8	8	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
9	14	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
10	15	chainsaw thin, chip w/in 150' of road, pile, burn
11	16	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
12	8	chainsaw thin, pile, burn
		chainsaw thin, chip w/in 150' of road, pile, burn
Total	108	

