



File Code: 1900
Date: February 25, 2015

Dear Interested Citizen,

The South Park Ranger District, Pike National Forest, is requesting your comments regarding the Lake George Environmental Assessment proposal. The project area is located north and south of Lake George, Colorado, Park County, Colorado (see table 1). This request initiates the scoping process under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementation regulations. Scoping allows the Forest Service to identify important issues and determine the extent of analysis necessary to make an informed decision on a proposed action. It is anticipated that the analysis level under NEPA would be an Environmental Assessment. The Forest Service plans to use an adaptive management framework in assessing this project.

Table 1

NAME	ACRES	LEGAL DESCRIPTION	WATERSHED NAME	FOREST MANAGEMENT AREAS
Upper Fish Creek	3,014	T14S.R72W.S5,4,3,2,1; T13S.R72W.S32,33,35,36	Elevenmile Reservoir Elevenmile Canyon Fish Creek	2B,4B,6B
Caylor Gulch	3,958	T13S.R72W.S4,5,6,7; T12S.R73W.S25,36; T12S.R72W.S29,30,31,32,33	Elevenmile Reservoir Elevenmile Canyon	4B
Pulver Gulch	3,744	T11S.R73W.S36; T12S.R73W.S1,2,11,12,13,14; T12S.R72W.S5,6,7,8,9,17,18,19	Pulver Gulch Chase Gulch	2B,5B
Arkansas	1,296	T12S.R72W.S17,20,21,22,26,27	Pulver Gulch Elevenmile Canyon	2B,5B
Round mountain-South	2,684	T12S.R72W.S1,11,12,13,14,15; T12S.R71W.S7,18,19	Pulver Gulch Lower Lake George	2B
Round mountain	4,210	T11S.R72W.S22,23,25,26,27,28, 33,34,35,36; T12S.R72W.S1,2,3,4,9,10,11	Tappan mountain Lower Lake George Pulver Gulch	2B,6B
Happy Platte	5,208	T11S.R72W.S23,24,25,26,36; T11S.R71W.S29,30,31,32; T12S.R71W.S5,6,7,8,17,18,20,2 1,28,29	Tappan mountain Lower Lake George Elevenmile Canyon	2B
Webber Park	8,749	T10S.R73W.S25,26,33,34,35,36; T11S.R73W.S1,2,3	Lowest Tarryall Marksbury Gulch Puma City	2B,4B,6B



Praise mountain	231	T13S.R72W.S24; T13S.R71W.S19,30	Elevenmile Canyon	2B
Lake George East	974	T12S.R71W.S20,21,28,29	Elevenmile Canyon Lower Lake George Twin Creek	2B
Badger mountain	213	T12S.R73W.S1, T11S.R73W.S35,36	Chase Gulch Tappan mountain Pulver Gulch	2B,5B

I am requesting your input regarding our proposal to treat approximately 34,000 acres using a variety of silvicultural treatments and activities. Treatment prescriptions would be aligned with management objectives and areas as directed by the Pike-San Isabel National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Management Areas identified in the Forest Plan are explained below:

- 2B – Emphasis is on rural and roaded – natural recreation opportunities.
- 4B – Emphasis is on habitat for wildlife management indicator species.
- 5B – Emphasizes the management of forage and cover on big game winter ranges.
- 6B – Emphasis management for livestock grazing.

The Purpose and Need

Purpose:

The purpose of the Lake George Area Fuels Management Project EA is to improve forest health and resiliency to high severity wildfire, insects and disease. The specific purposes of this project are:

1. To reduce the size and extent of potential high severity wildfires as well as post - fire negative impacts, especially in the vicinity of adjacent private land developments, infrastructure, critical watersheds and wildlife habitat.
2. To protect aquatic habitat by reducing the potential for high severity wildfires to degrade riparian and fisheries habitat.
3. To improve wildlife habitat by enhancing shrublands and grasslands, and creating structure changes to vegetation where opportunities exist.



Need:

The size, severity and behavior of recent wildfires on the Pike National Forest highlight the risks posed by current forest conditions. The human and environmental costs of wildfire suppression and forest restoration have increased significantly across the region in recent decades.

Strategically placed vegetation treatments can reduce the vulnerability of surrounding communities, municipal watersheds, infrastructure and natural resource and cultural values at risk to high severity fire and reduce the severity of post-fire impacts.

A 2011 wildfire risk assessment completed by the South Park Ranger District identified numerous locations on National Forest land within the greater Lake George area at high risk of negative impact from wildfires. This assessment was based on values at risk (such as development on adjacent private land, critical watersheds and infrastructure), potential fire behavior at 90th percentile weather and likelihood of fire occurring. The countywide Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) (Park County 2009, Teller County 2005 Revised in 2011) rates this same general area as the highest priority in the county and the highest on the South Park Ranger District. Subsequently in 2011, a Forest wide wildfire risk assessment reinforced the South Park Ranger District's identification of high priority locations.

Surveys of this area rated the majority of the 6th order watersheds as functioning, but at risk, or with impaired function, which would be worsened by high severity wildfires.

Many identified high - risk areas have already been treated or are currently in the process of being treated. The areas being analyzed in this document are the remaining high priority areas in the vicinity of Lake George located on National Forest lands.

Natural processes such as low severity fire are an essential part of maintaining forest health and wildlife habitat. These processes have been significantly altered over time. There are opportunities within the proposed project area to restore some of these in order to improve forest health and wildlife habitat.

Proposed Action

In response to the conditions described above, the proposed action is to treat a majority of the acres within the 34,281 acre analysis area where economically feasible due to terrain, slope and access. Mechanical and hand treatments and prescribed burning will be used to shift forest conditions across the analysis area toward agreed upon desired conditions.

Mechanical and hand treatments will be utilized to reduce densities and/or remove ladder fuels. Openings may be occasionally created to improve forest health and/or wildlife habitat. Treatments may include mechanized and hand thinning, mechanized mastication or crushing, and removal of timber products.



Low intensity/severity broadcast burning will be employed to reduce ladder fuels, surface fuel loading, recycle nutrients and improve grasslands and shrublands. Pile burning may be used to eliminate slash created from thinning treatments. Mechanical treatments and prescribed burning may be used alone or in combination.

Emphasis will be on retention of older trees in all forest types, opening up denser stands of mid to late - seral classes, creating a more open forest environment and improving shrub and grass diversity. The dry and mesic mixed conifer, aspen, shrublands and grasslands will be the primary targets for treatments.

Temporary roads may be utilized in certain locations if necessary and will be ripped, seeded and closed after use. Some forest products such as firewood may be produced for utilization by treatments where there is demand and it is economically feasible.

The following treatments are proposed within the Planning Area and are explained below:

Density Management/Commercial Thinning – This treatment involves the selective removal (thinning) of some trees within a stand to increase growth in the remaining trees. Stands receiving this treatment are often even-aged. This form of treatment is generally referred to as commercial “thinning” and favors retention of the healthiest trees that best meet structural and compositional goals. Density Management treatment within the project area would be attained by mechanical methods (ground based) of harvesting and on-site hand thinning.

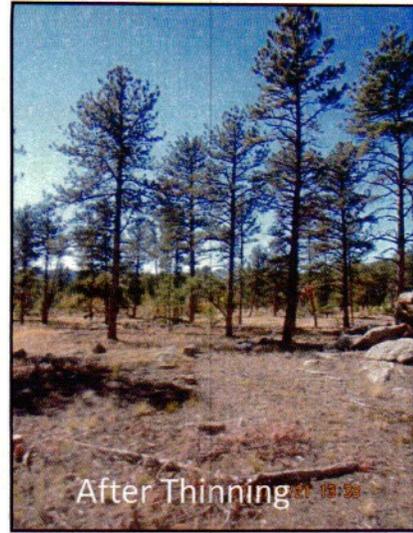
The two most important benefits of this type of treatment are retention, which favors the healthiest trees, and stand thinning, which reduces competition between dominant and co-dominant trees and wildfire risk. (See photos below).

It is anticipated that, where appropriate, trees could be removed through commercial harvest and/or on-site hand thinning. The majority of these stands are accessed by the existing road system. Road maintenance would occur on the existing road prism such as; ditch line cleaning, new culverts where needed, drain dips where needed and re-contouring for safe hauling and passage of public vehicles. No new permanent roads would be constructed. Any short spur or temporary roads that are created to access potential treatment units would be ripped and seeded after their use; barricades would be used if needed to close off areas where proposed thinning has occurred.





Before Thinning 18:23



After Thinning 18:58

Individual, Clumps and Openings – Planned silvicultural prescriptions would call for individual tree removal of co-dominant trees leaving the healthiest trees remaining. Clumps and openings would be implemented to open up stands and to mimic historic stand structure. Clumps and openings would also add diversity to the stand structure.

Mastication – The use of machinery would be used to remove or “chew up” biomass and brush, hence reducing ladder fuels and reducing density. (See photos below)



Rotary Head Masticator



After Mastication

Hand Thinning – Work would be completed by government contractors and or Forest Service personnel. Trees would be thinned and removed by hand with the use of chainsaws. Ladder fuels, small diameter trees and shrubs/brush would be removed and hand piled and burned at a later date by Forest Service fire personnel. Small diameter trees in some instances could be used for public firewood collection.

Biomass Removal – Removal of nonmerchantable materials that are byproducts of preventive treatments, such as trees, wood, brush, thinning, chips and slash by either hand piling or mechanical means.

Public Fuelwood Areas – Certain areas of the project area would be open to the public to gather firewood under permit. Some project units would be decked with access to cut firewood or areas would be identified for small diameter tree thinning and would be then opened to the public under permit.

Riparian Restoration – Riparian zones that are identified at risk during the analysis could have treatments ranging from thinning, planting of riparian vegetation to placement of shade (logs).

Meadow Restoration – Planned and controlled burning to reduce unwanted brush and tree encroachment to enhance native grass species.

Low Intensity Burn – Planned and controlled burning implemented with primarily low intensity fire behavior that targets consumption of surface and ladder fuels, but not overstory canopy.

Broadcast Burn - Often thought of as a “prescribed burn,” broadcast burns are defined as, “the controlled application of fire to wildland fuels in their natural or modified state over a predetermined area.” Broadcast burns are often conducted to reduce wildland fire fuel loads, restore the ecological health of an area, or to clear weeds. Broadcast burning within the Lake George planning area would be used where appropriate to reduce thinning slash and any slash created by on-site hand thinning. Broadcast burning would be completed by Forest Service fire personnel following federal and state prescribed burning protocols.

Pile Burning – Is a fuels treatment where accumulated harvest activity slash is piled (by hand or mechanical equipment); the resulting piles are burned (typically in the winter) when the risk of escaped fire has subsided, risk to soils and the residual stands are minimal, and resulting smoke can be managed in coordination with weather conditions. Concentrated areas of fuel (biomass) are usually hand cut with chainsaws, manually piled, and disposed of by burning, if deemed necessary. Burning of localized piles in project units where hand thinning or mechanical piling has occurred would be completed by Forest Service fire personnel following federal and state burning protocols.

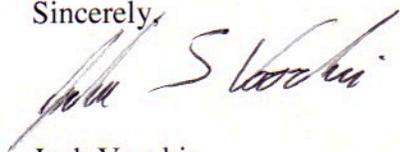


I am interested in hearing any comments, concerns or issues you may have regarding this proposed action. A decision has not been made; this letter is part of the continuing public involvement scoping associated with project environmental analysis. Those who respond to this request for involvement will be kept informed of our progress and notified when our analysis is complete. All comments received in response to this solicitation will be part of the public record and will be made available for public review and release pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552). Comments concerning the scope of this project must be received within 30 days of the publication of this notice in the newspaper of record, the Fairplay Flume.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments should be as specific as possible. Only individuals or entities who submit timely and specific written comments will have eligibility to file an objection under 36 CFR 218.8. For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments must either sign the comment or verify identity upon request. Issues raised in an objection must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed action unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities.

For additional information regarding the Proposed Action, please call Jim Fiorelli at (719) 836-3870. Please mail comments to South Park Ranger District, PO Box 219, Fairplay, Colorado 80440 ATTN: Jim Fiorelli or fax comments to (719) 836-3875 ATTN: Jim Fiorelli. You may also e-mail comments to jfiorelli@fs.fed.us, in the subject line write ATTN: Lake George. You can also access the scoping letter and maps on the Forest Service web site: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/psicc/landmanagement/projects>

Sincerely,



Josh Voorhis
District Ranger

Enclosure (5)



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