



File Code: 1950/2600

Date: June 29,2009

Dear Interested Public,

You are invited to comment on the proposed action for the Sharps Valley Improvement Project. The public scoping period is being held concurrently with a 30 day formal notice and comment period required by 36 CFR 215.6. This comment period provides an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on a proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. 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. 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-Wasatch-Cache 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. If you wish to receive a copy of the decision memo for this project, please respond to this scoping notice.

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please contact Karen Hartman, Spanish Fork Ranger District, 44 West 400 North, Spanish Fork, UT 84660 at (801) 798-3571.

Sincerely,

DOUGLAS H. Jones  
Spanish Fork District Ranger



## Sharps Valley Habitat Improvement Project

The Spanish Fork Ranger District proposes to enhance vegetation/wildlife habitat and reduce hazardous fuels in the Sharps Valley areas of the Vernon Unit. The proposed site is located approximately 5 miles southeast of the town of Vernon in T9S, R4W, 30 and 31, and T9S, R5W, Sections 25 and 36 in Tooele County, Utah.

### Purpose

The purpose of this project is to maintain previous chainings, improve wildlife and watershed conditions, close non-system road/trails, and reduce hazardous fuels.

### Need

Pinyon-junipers are invading the sagebrush/grassland steppe habitat that was previously chained areas 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 vegetation which can cause an increase in soil erosion and results in poor wildlife habitat. The entire project area is important mule deer winter range. The northwest portion of the project area also contains 364 acres of sage-grouse winter range. Other areas have thick invasive mature Pinyon-Juniper.

Forest Service (FS) Roads 695 and 691 extend north from FS Road 038 and connect in approximately 0.35 mile. The western road (695) is not used and obscured by vegetation. The map shows road 691 ending just south of FS Road 690, when in fact it connects to FS Road 690. This 0.1 mile was inadvertently omitted from the Forest Service map.

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.

### PROPOSED ACTION

The Spanish Fork Ranger District, in cooperation with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, proposes to implement improvement of vegetation/wildlife habitat in the Sharps Valley areas of the Vernon Unit. The work (see attached map) will be completed over the next one to five years.

1. Bullhog approximately 380 acres of pinyon-juniper. Twenty percent of the pinyon-juniper will be retained as small (5 acres or less) islands along natural contours.
2. Lop and scatter approximately 670 acres of pinyon and juniper trees with a base of 8 inches or larger. Pinyon pines will be retained in the section south of road 690 and north of the fence-line found directly south of FS road 038 (see map).

3. Approximately 2.4 miles of non-system roads will be either blocked with boulders or treated using a bulldozer to make them impassable.
4. Remove FS Road 695 from the system. Correct the FS travel map by writing an errata for the Forest travel map showing that the existing 0.1 mile segment connecting FS Road 691 to FS Road 690 was an error of omission.

### **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 goal and 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 2.10: “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 2-25: “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 7 CFR part 1b.3 or the listing in 36 CFR 220.6 (d) or (e).

*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.*

This decision is subject to appeal under Forest Service regulations 36 CFR 215.