



United States
Department of
Agriculture
Forest Service

March 19, 2010

Notice of Proposed Action & Opportunity to Comment

Jobs Peak Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Carson
Ranger District

Douglas County, Nevada

Comments Welcome

The Carson Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is proposing to reduce the hazard of severe wildland fire, improve forest health, and protect and enhance aspen stands and wildlife habitat by treating vegetation. Figure 1 shows the vicinity of the project area.

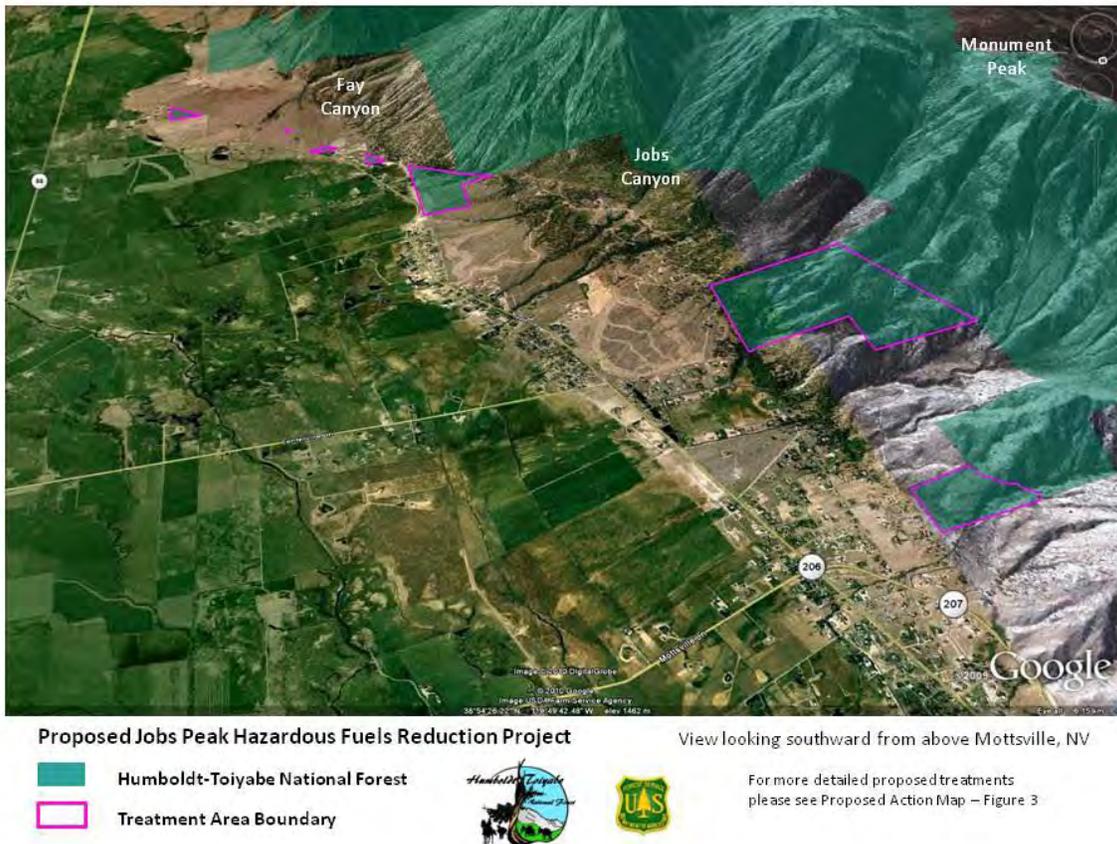
The project area includes a total of approximately 500 acres, distributed among several parcels near the eastern base of the Carson Range within Douglas County, Nevada, and approximately 3 miles southwest of Gardnerville, Nevada. The project area is adjacent to or near several subdivisions including Jobs Peak Ranch, Autumn Hills, Sheridan Acres, and Mottsville as well as many individual homes and buildings. Access to the project is via Foothill Road (Hwy 206). The project area is illustrated further in Figures 2 & 3.



Figure 1 – Project Vicinity

We welcome your comments on this proposal. For detailed information on how to provide comments please refer to “Comment Process” section at the end of this document.

Figure 2 - Terrain Overview



Purpose and Need for this Project

The northern portion of the project area is located adjacent to Autumn Hills, in which four residences and multiple outbuildings burned in 1996 during the 3,800 acre Autumn Hills Fire. The Fredericksburg Fire, just to the south of the project area, burned approximately 3,400 acres in 1986.

In 2005, the Douglas County Nevada Community Wildfire Risk/Hazard Assessment Project categorized the Jobs Peak Ranch, Sheridan Acres, and North Foothill Road Corridor communities as “High Hazard” due to inadequate defensible space, steep slopes, and fuel hazards. The Carson Range Multi-jurisdictional Fuels Reduction and Fire Prevention Strategy, completed in 2008 by 15 local, state and federal cooperating agencies, identified this project area a priority for treatment within 5 years. The cooperative effort also identified the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) for the communities addressed in this Multi-jurisdictional Strategy. Figure 3 shows the location of the WUI Threat and Defense Zones for the local communities. The severe fires that have burned in the area, and are anticipated to burn in the future are uncharacteristic of the area’s fire regime, which in the past consisted of many more low intensity, lightning-caused fires consuming dead vegetation and thinning the understory of young trees

and shrubs. Fire suppression by local, state, and federal agencies have severely reduce these low intensity fires, promoting the dense growth of shrubs and conifers that are highly susceptible to wildfires. In aspen stands, these conifers are also shading out aspens.

In addition to their potential for devastating communities, wildfires burning under severe conditions in the vegetative conditions found within the project area can dramatically alter ecosystem composition and structure, watershed condition, and wildlife habitat.

To address these hazardous conditions, the Forest Service is proposing to meet the following objectives:

- Reduce wildland fire hazard to the Jobs Peak, Sheridan Acres, Autumn Hills, and Mottsville communities, as well as individual residences and buildings by reducing fuel loading and ladder fuels in forested and shrub areas within the parcels identified in figure 3. Maintain the effectiveness of these treatments for 10 years.
- Improve defensible areas for firefighters attempting to control and/or suppress future wildland fires near these communities. When combined with vegetation treatments completed by local residents and Fire Safe Councils, this project will add to the effectiveness of defensible space within the communities.
- Modify vegetative conditions within the project parcels to be more reflective of those that would be produced by the characteristic fire regime. Currently dense vegetative conditions present the hazard of uncharacteristically severe wildland fires over large areas.
- Improve aspen stands in project area (as shown in figure 3) which are declining from encroaching conifer trees shading out and replacing sun-loving aspen. This action is needed to restore an ecosystem component that has diminished in size and vigor.
- Protect the watershed in the project area from the adverse effects of severe wildland fire on soil and water quality.

Proposed Action

To address the need for the project, as described above, the Forest Service proposes activities in treatment areas, as delineated in Figure 3. Some areas may receive multiple treatments, such as thinning and mastication or burning. No new road construction or reconstruction would occur, though maintenance may be required on existing roads. The Forest Service is currently conducting surveys in the project analysis area to ascertain needed resource protection measures. Input received during this public scoping process will also be considered for incorporation into the project design.

Brush and Incidental Small Tree density reduction (approximately 400 acres) would generally focus on the removal of “ladder” fuels from beneath overstory trees and reducing the fuel profile along the boundary with private property. Treatment methods may include mastication using mechanical equipment, hand cutting and piling to burn, or chipping.

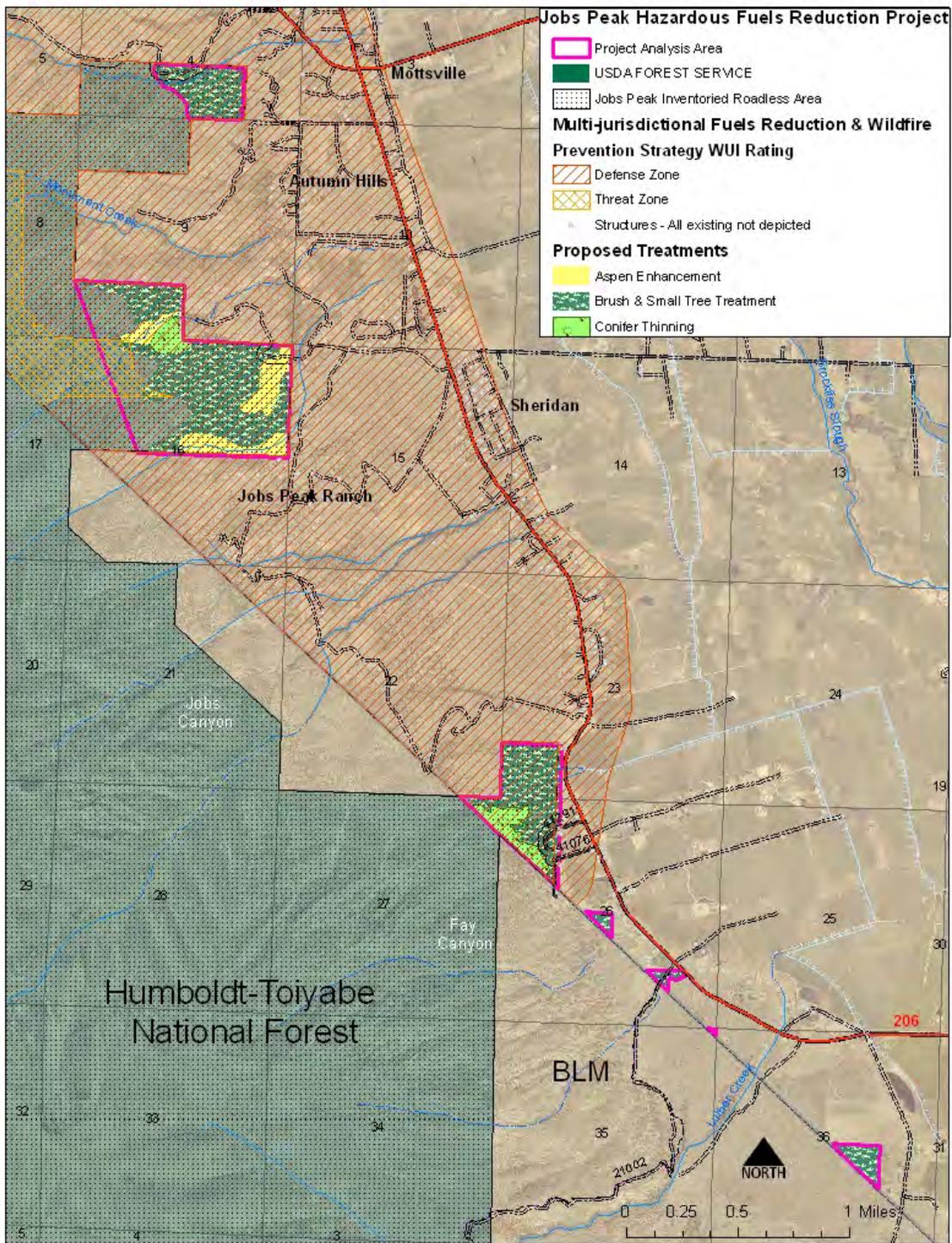


Figure 3 - Proposed Treatments

Conifer Thinning on Forested Areas (approximately 40 acres) would involve thinning by removing generally smaller diameter trees, while leaving the dominant tallest trees. Some incidental trees up to 24" diameter at breast height (dbh) may be removed, where necessary to adequately reduce stand density. Disease, mistletoe, and insect infested trees would have priority for removal. Ladder fuels would also be treated in these areas.

Aspen Enhancement (approximately 40 acres) through the removal of encroaching conifers and stimulation of aspen regeneration. Treatment would include removal of most conifers up to 24" (dbh) from within and approximately 100 feet (1 ½ times the tallest aspen tree) from the edge of the existing stand. Some conifers, in areas where removal would be difficult, may be girdled and left standing to provide snags for wildlife habitat. If successful aspen regeneration does not occur with conifer removal alone, prescribed fire may be utilized to stimulate sprouting.

Prescribed Fire may be used throughout the project area and is most often done after initial mechanical treatments lowering fuel loading have been completed. Burning piles of slash created during the mechanical treatments is a typical method of disposing of small diameter wood, limbs, and brush. The Inventoried Roadless Area designation and steep slopes of much of the project area may make the removal of slash and larger material generated by the treatments difficult by other methods. Burning is typically done during the winter and spring seasons, with snow or other high moisture conditions. Slash created during the treatment would be a priority for burning. Understory and broadcast burning, not confined to piles, may be done to incorporate ecological benefits in addition to fuel reduction.

Maintenance would include repeated treatments to remove ladder and surface fuels and maintain the treated areas. Maintenance may occur on areas that receive initial treatment and would be based on monitoring the vegetative response to the initial treatment. Maintenance may include brush and small tree mastication, hand cutting and piling, chipping, removal and/or prescribed fire and invasive weed treatments (hand-pulling and/or seeding). Maintenance may occur within three years of the initial treatment and would continue, as needed for 10 years, after which the project will be re-evaluated to access the needed for further treatment.

Design Features

Design features and resource protection measures incorporated into the proposed action will include, but are not limited to:

- Archeological sites would be flagged and avoided during project implementation. Trees would be directionally felled away from identified archeological sites, skid trails would avoid archeological sites and no slash piles would occur in identified archeological sites.
- Where available, three of the largest snags per acre would be retained for wildlife habitat. Large woody debris would be retained, at least 3 pieces per acre, greater than 12" dbh or the largest available.

- Treatment activities would not occur April to July during migratory bird breeding season in identified habitat locations.
- Generally, ground based equipment will operate on slopes less than 35% (30% on decomposed granite soils), except for pitches of 150 feet or less. However, mechanical mastication operations may occur on slopes up to 50 %; these will be designed on a unit by unit basis only after soil stability, soil rock content and the location of the steep slope in relation to the remaining portions of the treatment unit have been determined to be appropriate by the Forest Service.
- Rare plant populations would be flagged and avoided.
- Pile burning would be minimized in riparian conservation areas and within aspen stands.
- Prescribed fires are subject to permitting by the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection and burn plans will comply with the standards established by that agency. For each prescribed fire, the Forest Service will have contingency plans identified to reduce smoke emissions.
- A noxious weed risk inventory and assessment will be conducted to adequately address and mitigate the risk of noxious weed spread within the project area.

Implementation Date This project was initially posted on the Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in October 2009 and a decision is expected in the spring of 2010. Implementation of the project may begin in the summer of 2010, however scheduling in some areas will be dependent on acquiring temporary legal access to the project.

Analysis and Decision Process

A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) if the action falls within certain categories of actions. Preliminary analysis indicates that the actions proposed in this project are within categories of actions identified in 36 CFR 220.6(e) as requiring only a project or case file, and a decision memo signed by the responsible official. These categories are: (6) *timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction and (12) harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of road construction.*

This project lies within the Jobs Peak Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). An initial assessment of the effects of the proposed project activities on the roadless area characteristics indicates that there will likely be no effect to most characteristics and that there may be beneficial effects on some. Initial assessment of the effects of project activities on wilderness attributes also indicate no effect to the area's suitability for wilderness designation. The project area also lies within mule deer winter area. An initial assessment of the effects of the proposed project activities indicates that there will likely be no effect to this habitat. Other resource conditions which will be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances exist include federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species; flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds; congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas; research natural areas; American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological or historic properties or areas.

If extraordinary circumstances are found to exist regarding the effects of this proposed project on specific resources, an EA would be prepared under the provisions of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The EA and associated Proposed Action would be subject to the 36 CFR Part 218, Subpart A Predecisional Administrative Review Process. See the “How to Participate” description below regarding “objection” eligibility. .

How to Participate

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this proposal, along with supporting reasons that the responsible official should consider in reaching a particular decision regarding this project.

Categorical Exclusion (CE):

Should this project be categorical excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, your written, facsimile, hand-delivered, mailed, and electronic comments concerning this action would be most helpful if submitted within 30 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice of this comment period in the Reno Gazette Journal. See directions below for submission address and format. Should this project proceed as a CE, it will not be appealable.

HFRA Environmental Assessment (EA)

Should this project be documented in an EA, only individuals and organizations who have submitted specific written comments related to the proposed authorized hazardous fuel reduction project during this public comment period may file an objection following completion of the EA (36 CFR Part 218, Subpart A Predecisional Administrative Review Process). Your written, facsimile, hand-delivered, mailed, and electronic comments concerning this action must be submitted within 30 calendar days following the publication of legal notice of this comment period in the Reno Gazette Journal. Comments must be submitted to: District Ranger, Carson Ranger District, 1536 South Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89701, ATTN: Jobs Peak Hazardous Fuels Project or fax 775-884-8199. The office business hours for those submitting comments in person are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc or .docx) to *comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-carson@fs.fed.us*. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

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, will be available for public inspection, and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

Our website will be updated with information about this project, please visit the site at www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf/projects. A public open house meeting to present this project is scheduled for Tuesday March 30, 2010 from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the Sheridan Volunteer Fire Station (Station 8) at 980 Sheridan Lane off Centerville Lane (Hwy 756 west from Gardnerville). If you have questions or need further information please contact Beth Nabors at 775-884-8120.