

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE**

ASPEN FOREST HEALTH AND RESTORATION PROJECT

Dolores Public Lands Office
Montezuma County, Colorado

Decision Summary

It is my decision to implement Alternative B (Proposed Action alternative) as described in the Environmental Assessment for the Aspen Forest Health and Restoration Project. The specifics of my decision are described in Section 4.0.

I will now summarize:

- The purpose of this Decision Notice (Section 1.0)
- The purpose and need for the action (Section 2.0)
- Scoping and public involvement procedures (Section 3.0)
- Specifics of my decision (Section 4.0)
- The rationale I used to arrive at my decision (Section 5.0)
- The basis for my Finding of No Significant Impact (Section 6.0)
- The legal framework for implementation and administrative review (Sections 7 and 8)
- Contact persons that can provide more information on the decision and my signature authorizing this decision (Sections 9 and 10).

1.0 Purpose of This Decision Notice

The purpose of this Decision Notice is to document the rationale for my choice of Alternative B. I will highlight specific details pertaining to the recommended actions and I will describe my rationale for my finding of no significant impact for this action. My decision is based on the analysis described in an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for this project under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003.

In accordance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an interdisciplinary team (ID Team) of Forest Service specialists conducted the analysis and documented the results in an EA. The EA on which I based my decision is available for review at the Dolores Public Lands Office in Dolores, Colorado.

The Aspen Forest Health and Restoration project area lies within the broader area of Caviness Mtn, Echo Basin, Transfer campground and Haycamp Mesa area. This analysis area is defined by Hwy 160 on the south moving northwest across the District to Hwy 145 and the Dolores River on the northern end. There are an estimated 32,000 National Forest acres with approximately 20,726 acres of aspen cover type (forested areas with 51% or > aspen). The analysis area is located within Montezuma county in all or portions of T38NR13W Sections 13-15, 22-27, 34-36 and T38NR12W

Sections 7,8, 16-20,30-33 and T37NR13W Sections 1-3, 10-13, 24,25 and T37NR12W Sections 4-9, 16-22,27-33 and T36NR12W Sections 3-11, 15, 16, 21-28, 34-36 and T36NR11W Sections 19, 20, 29, 30-32.

This project was developed under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, and specifically Title 1, Section 102, Paragraph 4 which defines authorized projects as

“Federal land on which windthrow or blowdown, ice, storm damage, the existence of an epidemic of disease or insects, or the presence of such an epidemic on immediately adjacent land and the imminent risk it will spread, poses a significant threat to an ecosystem component, or forest or rangeland resource, on the Federal land or adjacent non-Federal land.”

This act contains a variety of provisions to expedite projects that address threats to forest and rangeland health from insect infestations and tree diseases. The Act also requires collaboration in the development of proposals.

Two Alternatives were analyzed in detail, Alternative A (No Action) and Alternative B (Proposed Action).

2.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

Quaking aspen thrives on disturbance to reset the stand and keep it vibrant and healthy. Aspen forests traditionally develop after stand-replacing disturbance such as fire or wind-throw. The root systems of aspens usually survive fires, sending up thousands of new stems (suckers) to regenerate the forest. Drought in past years, coupled with a variety of secondary insect and disease agents has caused mature aspen trees to die at a faster rate than normally occurs. The epidemic is labeled Sudden Aspen Decline (SAD), and aerial detection surveys found approximately 11,673 acres or 36% of the analysis area affected. After consulting with forest insect and disease specialists, the San Juan Forest Supervisor, Mark Stiles, determined that an insect and disease epidemic is occurring¹.

The purpose and needs for taking action at this time are described in detail in the EA and summarized below;

- **Forest Health and Structure:** There is a need for increased acres of young (seedling/sprout stage) aspen in areas experiencing SAD in order to prevent the loss of aspen forest to insect and disease agents.
- **Local economy:** There is a need to support the local economy and its dependence on timber, grazing and recreation in the aspen forests.
- **Fuel Reduction and Fire Resiliency:** It is recognized that fire is a disturbance agent capable of creating new aspen stands. However, there is a need to maintain healthy green aspen forests as a green belt to limit the size and intensity of large wildfires adjacent to private land/homes and recreational development.
- **Historical Disturbance Patterns:** There is an opportunity to mimic large and contiguous historical disturbance patterns across the landscape.

¹ Reference *Sudden Aspen Decline, Epidemic Determination; Mancos Dolores Ranger District, San Juan National Forest* 6/30/08 and *Determination of Sudden Aspen Decline Epidemic in the Aspen Forest Health and Restoration Area* 10/9/08

Aspen is a unique species in that it will regenerate itself from root suckering following a disturbance (harvest, fire). Silvicultural practices are commonly used to alter forest conditions, and treatments can be implemented to favor specific species such as early successional aspen. They can be used to increase the health and vigor of the tree component by controlling stocking levels, or converting stands to younger age classes.

3.0 Scoping and Public Involvement

Dolores Public Lands Office staff met with some representatives of environmental organizations and timber industry to share the findings of our field inventory and discuss preliminary proposals. In consultation and collaboration with these interested parties and the ID team, a set of proposals was developed. The proposals were described in a written scoping document including maps and posted on the San Juan Forest website. On January 12, 2009, a letter was mailed to inform citizens that the scoping package with detailed descriptions of proposed treatments was available for their review and comment. The mailing list comprised adjacent landowners, attendees from recent aspen workshops, range permittees, outfitter guides, and interested agencies, organizations and individuals. A public service announcement was released to various media outlets including newspapers and radio stations, announcing the availability of the scoping package and requesting comments. A public open house was held on January 22, 2009 at the Dolores Public Lands Office in the evening. I used my discretion given to me as the Responsible Official, given to me by 36 CFR 215.5(a)(2) in determining the most effective time to provide a notice and comment opportunity. I made the decision to run the scoping and comment period concurrently. The public was informed that standing to object to this project would only be given to those individuals that commented during this concurrent scoping and comment stage.

The proposed action was refined into Alternative B with the addition of design features, a monitoring plan and minor adjustments to proposed treatment areas. Scoping comments contributed to the design features section; the monitoring plan, or were incorporated into the environmental analysis described in Chapter 3 of the EA.

After development of the Environmental Assessment a 30-day objection period began on May 15th, 2009. Copies of the Environmental Assessment were mailed to those that commented. Three letters were received. Two individuals voiced concerns over the project and disagreed that coppice clearcutting was needed to regenerate aspen stands. These letters did not meet the requirements of 36CFR218.7 for filing an objection. The third letter voiced support for the project but asked that the timing of the landscape prescribed burns should take into consideration the presence of hunting outfitter guides operating in those areas. Because no objections were received by individuals with standing, a 30-day objection review period is not initiated.

4.0 Decision

It is my decision to implement Alternative B (Proposed Action) in its entirety as described in Chapter 2 of the EA and including Design Features (Attached) and the Monitoring Plan (Appendix C of EA). In addition, the following design criteria is added;

When evaluating conditions and creating burn plan for the landscape burns, consider the timing of hunting season. Notify the outfitter guide that is permitted to take hunters on the Dolores District prior to initiating the burn.

This Decision includes the following actions. Maps are located in Appendix A of the EA.

Coppice Clearcut Regeneration Treatment with reserves (~1,550 acres) – See Maps in Appendix A of EA. Harvest includes the following:

- All merchantable trees removed, and unmerchantable trees cut and left on site, except patches of aspen or conifer trees retained as reserve clumps on 10-15% of each unit. Patches of existing healthy regeneration will be retained where feasible.
- Objective is a new young stand of aspen, with scattered clumps of snags, conifer, or older trees.
- Unit openings range in size from 9 acres to 109 acres. Some proposed units share a partial boundary with units in the ongoing Turkey Knolls timber sale, and larger temporary openings may be created depending on the year harvested.
- Regeneration harvests would be accomplished with commercial timber sales administered by the Forest Service.
- Areas would be cut at different times over a 3-7 year period with the first timber sale offered in 2010.
- Follow-up prescribed burning may occur on any unit, however it is likely only a few units may be selected based on timing of harvest and burning conditions.

Landscape Prescribed Burn (~1,500 acres) – These are broadcast burns and include the following,

- Burning will take place when prescriptions detailed in the burn plan allow. This would most likely be in fall, after frost kills understory plants, and when future wet weather is imminent; or in the early spring before initiation of new growth.
- Ignite by helicopter or hand crews
- Objective is a mosaic of grassy openings, stands of early seral aspen, widely scattered ponderosa pine, pockets of dense mixed conifer, and unburned pockets.
- Burns would be implemented by Forest Service or contract crews under direction of Forest staff.
- Burns are dependent on the right fuel moistures and weather conditions; therefore they may occur anytime over the next 10-15 years when the conditions are optimal.
- Each area would be burned once.

Mastication with Prescribed Burn (~70 acres) – Mastication includes the following,

- Dead and dying aspen up to 10 inches DBH, and approximately 50% of Gambel oak less than 6 inches DRC would be chipped with mastication equipment. When oak is cut, the ladder fuels under ponderosa pine canopy would be targeted.
- Immediately following mastication, and before next growing season, unit should be burned.
- Desired effects from treatment are a mix of aspen sprouts, clumps of mature oak, native bunch grasses, and existing ponderosa pine with oak ladder fuels reduced.
- Mastication would be accomplished by equipment contractors administered by the Forest Service
- Implementation is expected to occur sometime between 2010 and 2015.
- Areas proposed for coppice clearcut immediately adjacent to the mastication unit may also be masticated and burned if they are not commercially viable as a timber sale. Other options for these units may be hand falling and firewood.

Roadside clearing – (~12 miles of road) –Along portions FR316 (Caviness Mtn), FR561 (W.Mancos Rd), FR385 (Chicken Creek Rd), FR559 (Millwood Rd), FR386, FR327, FR560 and FR556 (Haycamp Mesa Rd) as needed,

- Handfell dead and dying aspen trees to prevent them from falling into the roadway.
- Sections of road with heavy traffic would be accomplished through Forest Service crews.
- Other sections accomplished through commercial or noncommercial permits to cutters who would hand-fell and remove the wood.
- Conduct felling anytime between 2010 and 2015.

Root ripping – (1-3 acres) - Adjacent to natural ponds, meadows or wetlands

- Root rip around parent aspen trees to stimulate suckering.
- Locations to be identified based on field review and recommendations from the Dolores Public Lands Office hydrologist.
- Accomplish anytime from 2010 thru 2015.

Sale Area Improvements - The following actions will be listed in the sale area improvement plan (in order of funding priority). These items qualify for Knutsen Vandenberg (KV) funds that are collected from timber sale receipts. Essential KV tasks are associated with reforestation and would be funded prior to nonessential KV tasks. Adequate KV funding for all nonessential KV work is unlikely due to the low value of aspen salvage timber and these tasks may be supplemented with other funding if available.

Essential KV tasks include,

- Regeneration Monitoring - Surveys to monitor the success of aspen regeneration developed vegetatively from sprouts would be planned in all cutting units. These surveys are conducted the 1st year, 3rd year and 5th year after harvest. Effects of browse on aspen regeneration would be monitored on stocking surveys and problem units would be identified.
- Tree Planting- A need for artificial regeneration action is not anticipated at this time, but if regeneration surveys indicate a failure, and successful regeneration is not established at the minimum of 300 trees/ac, tree planting may be prescribed. Ponderosa pine would be planted at lower elevations, Douglas fir at mid elevation and englemann spruce at higher elevation.

Non-Essential KV tasks include,

- Noxious Weed Treatment – Inventory and treatment of noxious weeds as needed within the sale area boundary. Treatments may occur multiple times and anytime within five years after close of the sale.
- Exclosures- After coppice clearcut, if browsing pressure is high install wildlife/livestock exclosures to monitor browsing pressure.
- Hinge-Cut In areas that are receiving high browse pressure a hinge-cut method of falling trees along the boundaries of units to create a fence and barrier to ungulates may be used with force account or contract crews.
- Root Ripping- As described above, root ripping would be tried on small areas as a pilot project with consultation from the District hydrologist.
- Watershed Improvement in the Upper Reaches of Box Canyon Creek and within the sale area boundary, but outside of cut units, the following work would be accomplished based on hydrologist's field review. Reduce the tread width of newly identified motorcycle

- Un-needed roads identified in the Mancos/Cortez Travel Management Plan that fall within sale area boundaries may be decommissioned if funds are available. The transportation plan contains details about road decommissioning needs for each tentative sale area.

Adaptive Management – The proposed action, Alternative B, includes NEPA analysis for the following adaptations should they be required based on on-the-ground layout, research information or post-harvest monitoring.

- If layout determines stands to have less than 30% live trees and/or there is concern for successful regeneration via coppice clearcut, then the units may be burned instead of harvested, or may be dropped from treatment. Root ripping might be attempted at a small scale within harvest units.
- If layout determines the units adjacent to the mastication unit are not merchantable, they may be included in the mastication project, or offered up for firewood.

5.0 Rationale for My Decision

Alternatives A (No Action) and B (Proposed Action) are discussed in comparative format below.

Alternative B takes steps to address SAD in some of the worst affected areas of the District that are also suitable for contributing to the timber production base. With SAD agents, research indicates that if aspen roots die, the clone may not regenerate itself, or would do so in a patchy, sparse manner that does not result in a fully stocked aspen stand. In many of the aspen stands in this analysis area, there is a mix of dead and live healthy crowns, or live fading crowns that suggest that taking prompt action will result in adequate suckering to maintain aspen on the site. Under no-action, regeneration in SAD affected stands is expected to be sparse or clumpy and in some cases areas may convert to other forest types such as oak, pine or mixed conifer. Under Alternative B, aspen regeneration is expected to be denser and more consistent, thereby increasing the likelihood of maintaining aspen on these sites and providing for future closed canopy stands

In addition, the coppice clearcuts of this project, combined with previous regeneration efforts results in a total of 5736 acres or 27.6% of the aspen forest type in early seral stages (seedlings, saplings, poles). This is a 7.5% increase in early seral stages compared to taking no action. To date, young aspen forests are showing greater resistance to insect and disease agents compared to more mature stands.

From a fire perspective, the removal of dead trees reduces fuel loads where treatments occur and regenerated areas are expected to provide aspen ‘greenbelts’ that help deter unwanted wildfire effects. Our ability to suppress fires near private land and facilities is enhanced while our options for allowing lightning fires to burn under appropriate conditions are maintained to a higher degree than they would under the No Action alternative. Fire’s role in aspen regeneration is re-introduced in the two large prescribed burns. Also, the coppice clearcuts are located in the interspaces between past regeneration harvests, which expands the total

contiguous patch sizes of young aspen forest more closely mimicking natural disturbance patterns.

This project contributes aspen product for approximately 3-5 years, which contributes to the needs of the two local mills in our area. Aspen forests provide for many other social values related to outdoor recreation and cattle grazing. The No Action alternative does not contribute aspen product from the Dolores Public Lands for at least the next 3 years or until such time as other areas are analyzed.

As described in Chapter 3 of the EA there are short-term impacts followed by long-term benefits to the area. I recognize the short-term disturbance effects of timber sales in close proximity to each other occurring over a relatively short timeframe. In addition, smoke may drift to local communities during the burning. However, these short-term impacts are outweighed by the long-term benefits. I look forward to the results of monitoring as the first projects are implemented and expect to incorporate our findings into the remaining portions of the project.

Under the No Action alternative there is no harvest or other activities with mechanical equipment and therefore none of the vegetation disturbance, or activity disturbance that would occur with Alternative B. No steps would be taken at this time to regenerate aspen stands through harvest or prescribed fire. Some regeneration in SAD stands is occurring, as noted in recent comment letters. However, the regeneration is sparse and well below the amount we would expect to see after a disturbance that kills the parent trees. Letting the stands run their course under the No Action alternative may result in less future aspen in the treatment areas than Alternative B. Alternative A (No Action) does not meet the purpose and need described in Chapter 1 of the EA.

5.1 Response to Compliance Issues and Established Management Goals

I have determined that the selected alternative complies with requirements of the following applicable laws, plans, and recommendations:

National Forest Management Act	Clean Water Act
National Environmental Policy Act	Clean Air Act
Endangered Species Act	National Historic Preservation Act
Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act	Healthy Forests Restoration Act
Executive Order 11990 - Wetlands	Executive Order 12898 – Environmental Justice

In my judgment, the proposed action will be effective in meeting the Purpose of and Need for the proposed action (EA, pages 5-6).

No Federal permits are necessary to implement the proposed activities. A smoke permit issued by the State of Colorado Division of Air Quality will be obtained before burning proceeds.

There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers (existing or proposed), no Wilderness and no Research Natural Areas within the analysis area. A small portion of roadless area overlaps with the analysis area boundary, but no activities are proposed in or near this mapped area (see project file).

5.2 Compliance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) [16 USC 1600 ET SEQ.]

The National Forest Management Act requires documentation of several specific findings at the project level.

5.2.1 Consistency with Forest Plan [16 USC 1604(i)]

The San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) establishes management direction for the forest. This management direction is achieved through the establishment of Forest goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and Management Area goals and accompanying standards and guidelines. Project implementation consistent with this direction is the process by which we move toward the desired condition described by the Forest Plan. Forest Plan direction provides the sideboards for project planning. In addition, the National Forest Management Act requires that all resource plans are to be consistent with the Forest Plan [16 USC 1604 (i)]. The ID team reviewed and affirmed that the selected alternative is consistent with current Forest Plan management direction and multiple use of the general area (various specialist reports in project file).

5.2.2 Suitability for Timber Production

NFMA states no timber harvest, other than salvage sales or sales to protect other multiple-use values, shall occur on lands not suited for timber production [16 USC 1604(k)]. Treatment units were reviewed by a certified silviculturist and are included in the suitable timber base as described in the Forest Plan.

5.2.3 Timber Harvest on National Forest Land

A Responsible Official may authorize site-specific projects and activities to harvest timber on National Forest System lands only where:

1. Soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged [16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(i)]. The selected alternative will avoid impairment of soils. Where effects occur they are short-term and reverse themselves or conditions improve in the long-term. Activities occur on slopes less than 30% and there are no sensitive soil types where activities occur (see vegetation and watershed reports).
2. There is assurance that the lands can be adequately restocked within five years after final regeneration harvest [16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(ii)]. Sprouting following coppice clearcut harvests is expected to result in stocked stands within five years. A contingency for planting was also analyzed in the EA thereby ensuring stocking of all harvested stands though minimal planting is expected. See Chapter 3 of the EA and the Vegetation report in the project file.
3. Streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water are protected from detrimental changes in water temperatures, blockages of water courses, and deposits of sediment where harvests are likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat [16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(iii)]. The selected alternative meets

Forest Plan direction and implements best management practices and specific project design criteria (see Appendix B, Chapter 3 of EA, and Watershed Report in project file).

4. The harvesting system to be used is not selected primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber [16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(iv)]. The decision to implement the selected alternative is based on a variety of reasons as discussed earlier in this decision, not solely on economics. Economics was but one of the many factors which I considered.

5.2.4 Clearcutting and Even-Aged Management

A Responsible Official may authorize projects and activities on National Forest system lands using cutting methods, such as clearcutting, seed tree cutting, shelterwood cutting, and other cuts designed to regenerate an even-aged stand of timber, only where:

1. For clearcutting, it is the optimum method; or where seed tree, shelterwood, and other cuts are determined to be appropriate to meeting the objectives and requirements of the relevant plan [16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F)(i)]. Coppice clearcut is generally considered the primary option for harvest and regeneration of aspen in the Rocky Mountain Region. This has been documented in the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement, Silviculture Standards and Guidelines, for Land and Resource Management Planning for the Rocky Mountain Region (which is incorporated by reference) and the San Juan Forest Plan (p. III-35G). I have determined that clearcutting is the optimal method of treatment for the units in the selected alternative (EA Chapter 3 and Vegetation Report (project file).
2. The interdisciplinary review has been completed and the potential environmental, biological, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts have been assessed on each advertised sale area, and the cutting methods are consistent with the multiple use of the general area [16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(ii)]. Chapter 3 of the EA documents analysis and interdisciplinary review.
3. Cut blocks, patches, or strips are shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain [16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(iii)]. The selected alternative meets visual quality objectives (VQOs). See Chapter 3 of EA and Scenery Management Report in project file.
4. Cuts are carried out according to the maximum size limit requirements for areas to be cut during one harvest operation [16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(iv)]. The National Forest Management Act, and the Forest Plan require certain steps be followed for proposals where temporary openings created by clearcuts are greater than 40-acres. The steps include a 60-day public notice, and Regional Forester review and approval. These requirements were met (see Scoping public service announcements, scoping package and Regional Forester letter in project file).
5. Timber cuts are carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, esthetic resources, cultural and historic resources, and the regeneration of timber resources [16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(v)]. The timber harvest conducted under the selected alternative provides the necessary protection for the above resources. This determination is supported by disclosures in Chapter 3 of the EA.

5.2.5 Sensitive Species

The National Forest Management Act provides direction applicable to sensitive species. For those species that have the potential to occur, the findings are disclosed in the Biological Evaluation, and in the EA Chapter 3. There are no effects that would likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing, or cause a loss of viability to the population of any affected sensitive species.

6.0 Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

My review of the analysis of the environmental consequences displayed in the environmental assessment for the Aspen Forest Health and Restoration Project, my understanding of the level of anticipated effects which were disclosed, and my familiarity with projects similar in nature, indicates to me this is not a major federal action as defined in 40 CFR 1508.18.

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, regionwide, or statewide potential for setting a precedent.

I have determined that no significant effects on the quality of the human, biological, or physical environment (as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27) are anticipated within either the context or the intensity of the selected alternative. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for this proposal.

The following is my rationale for reaching a FONSI determination considering the 10 factors required for significance determinations under 40 CFR 1508.27:

- 1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.*

The effects are typical of aspen coppice clearcut, prescribed burning, and tree cutting along roads and the project itself is routine in nature. This is because the stands chosen for harvest include enough of a green tree component to ensure regeneration response. On balance, the effects of implementing Alternative B will be beneficial, but my finding of no significant impacts is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. I recognize that there are adverse effects such as noise, smoke and loss of some habitat. However, these effects are temporary and minor in nature and will not impair land productivity. The result of the project will be more productive and healthier land.

- 2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

Alternative B does not broadly affect basic public health and safety either positively or negatively. This action is typical of other management actions on lands managed by the Dolores Public Lands Office. No public health or broad safety issues were raised during this analysis process, and no unusual actions are proposed that might lead to issues in these areas.

- 3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

There are no unique characteristics present in the area of the proposed action. The vegetation, wildlife and landforms are typical. This proposal will not cause loss or

destruction of significant park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. No actions occur within roadless areas.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The effects of implementing this proposal on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Although research continues on the topic of SAD, the stands chosen for harvest are similar to those regenerated successfully in the past, and the road system to facilitate logging is already in place. Prescribed burns have been successfully conducted on similar landscapes. Comments not in favor of the project presented no new scientific evidence of controversy. Past evidence indicates that treatments of this type can occur without significant environmental effects.

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The effects of the proposed action on the human environment are not highly uncertain, nor do they involve unique or unknown risks. We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. Coppice clearcut in aspen and prescribed burning in areas of pine, oak and aspen have been conducted for many years on the Dolores Public Lands.

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The proposed action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. My decision does not establish any future precedent for other actions within or outside the project area that may have significant effects.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.*

The effects of one project must overlap in time and space with the effects of other projects in order to produce a cumulative effect. The area analyzed for cumulative effects varied depending on the resource analyzed. Past and foreseeable future coppice clearcuts, roadwork, cattle grazing and recreation were included as appropriate to each resource. Cumulative effects are displayed in Chapter 3 of the EA under the various resource sections. No significant cumulative effects were identified for each resource, and when reviewed together, I find no major effects. As discussed in the rationale section, this project combines with past regeneration harvests in a cumulative manner resulting in a beneficial effect to forest health and structure. This project will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, either as an individual action or as part of the cumulative effects of other past, present, and planned actions within this area.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

A cultural resource investigation of the effects of the actions described in this proposal was performed. The results of that survey were documented in the EA. The Colorado State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the Agency's assessment that the proposed action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in, or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Part of this concurrence included recommendations for protection of historical aspenglyph trees and these recommendations were included in the design features in Appendix B of the EA. The proposed action will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

No habitat is present for any threatened, endangered, sensitive or proposed plant species within treatment areas. There are no endangered wildlife species with potential habitat within the analysis area. One threatened species, the Canada Lynx, has suitable habitat and the determination for this species is "May affect, but not likely to adversely affect". Six Regional Forester Sensitive species are affected by the project however, when the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts are considered, there is not a trend towards federal listing, or loss of viability to the population of the species. A biological assessment is located in the project file.

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

This action complies with all other relevant federal, state, and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Prescribed burning will adhere to a written burn plan and a smoke management plan that complies with state and county Air Quality Management District standards.

7.0 Implementation Date

This project may be implemented immediately.

8.0 Administrative Review and Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative review or appeal.

9.0 Contact Person(s)

For additional information concerning this decision or the environmental analysis, contact Mark Krabath or Eric LaPrice at the Dolores Public Lands Office 970-882-7296.

/s/ Mark Krabath

Mark Krabath, Supervisory Forester

July 1, 2009
Date

/s/ Eric LaPrice

Eric LaPrice, NEPA Coordinator

July 1, 2009

Date

10.0 Responsible Official's Decision

By my signature, I certify that I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment prepared for this proposal. I have made the determination that implementation of this proposal will result in No Significant Impact to the human environment and it is my decision to implement the action as described in the Environmental Assessment and this Decision Notice.

/s/ Steven K Beverlin

Steven K. Beverlin
Manager, Dolores Public Lands Office

July 2, 2009

Date