



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Region One

200 East Broadway
P.O. Box 7669
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Route To:

Subject: Management of Unplanned Ignitions for Whitebark Pine Restoration

To: Forest and Grasslands Supervisors

This letter serves to inform you of whitebark pine restoration opportunities that exist through the management of unplanned ignitions during years of moderate fire severity.

Whitebark pine is a keystone species and serves many vital functions, particularly at higher elevations, including snow pack retention, visual aesthetics for recreationists, and forage and habitat values for wildlife. Whitebark pine ecosystems have been declining across much of their historic range due to the combined effects of mountain pine beetle epidemics, fire exclusion and widespread exotic blister rust invasion.

Guidance to support the use of wildfire as a tool to promote ecological restoration is found in forest plans, manuals and direction letters from both the Regional Office and Washington Office:

- Fire policy allows for resource benefit accomplishments from unplanned ignitions (see Regional Forester letter 5100, January 26, 2009, Washington Office letter 5100, April 9, 2009 and Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management, February 13, 2009 from the Fire Executive Council).
- Ecological restoration (FSM 2020 – Ecological Restoration and Resilience: “All resource management programs have a responsibility for ecological restoration including, but not limited to, management of vegetation, water, wildland fire, wildlife, and recreation. Management activities may range from monitoring resource conditions to manipulation of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems to regulation of human uses.”)
- FSM 2475 Protect existing cone-collection plus trees, marked in the field with three paint strips and metal tags. Tree improvement coordinators on units have location records.

Work closely with your local specialists to determine where unplanned ignitions may meet restoration needs in whitebark pine. The attached technical overview describes desired conditions, objectives and management approaches for unplanned ignitions in whitebark pine ecosystems. An interactive map is also available at ftp://ftp.r1.fs.fed.us/pub/open/Whitebark_Pine_Fire/ that displays blister rust, mountain pine beetle, fire history, plus tree locations and areas potentially available for resource benefit from fire relative to the range of whitebark pine.



If you have questions, please contact Steve Shelly at (406) 329-3041, Barry Bollenbacher at (406) 329-3297, Mary Manning at (406) 329-3304 or Pat Garbutt at (406) 329-3266.

/s/ Jane L. Cottrell (for)
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