

File Code: 1950

Date: October 31, 2018

KEITH LANNOM
Forest Supervisor

Dear Interested Party:

The Forest Service is seeking scoping comments on the environmental analysis for the proposed Granite Meadows Project on the Payette National Forest. The project area is located on both the McCall and New Meadows Ranger Districts (see the Project Location section below). You are being contacted because you have expressed an interest in projects on the Payette National Forest, and/or because you live adjacent to the project area. The 45-day scoping period begins when the Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) publishes in the Federal Register, which is anticipated on October 31, 2018.

A summary of the purpose and need for the project, as well as the proposed action is below, along with information on the scoping process and how to comment. A detailed description of the proposed action with maps can be found on the project web page at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54029>.

Project Location and Description

The Granite Meadows Project is located north of New Meadows, Idaho and north and west of McCall, Idaho on the Boise Meridian, within Adams, Idaho and Valley Counties. The Granite Meadows Project area totals approximately 83,000 acres, and includes approximately 70,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands within the New Meadows and McCall Ranger Districts on the Payette National Forest. Additionally, the project area includes approximately 7,000 acres of state land and 6,000 acres of private land, where proposed treatments would be covered under the Wyden Authority (Wyden Amendment, Section 323(A) of the Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1999 as included in P.L. 105-277, Div. A, Section 101 (e) as amended by Public Law 111-11, Section 3001).

The project is located in the Hard Creek, Hartsell Creek-North Fork Payette River, Elk Creek-Little Salmon River, Lower Meadows Valley-Little Salmon River, Round Valley Creek-Little Salmon River, Sixmile Creek-Little Salmon River, Box Creek-North Fork Payette River, Fisher Creek, and Payette Lake subwatersheds within the Little Salmon and North Fork of the Payette Subbasins.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Granite Meadows project is a landscape-scale effort to improve conditions across multiple resource areas. The purpose of and need for Granite Meadows Project includes:

- Moving vegetation toward the desired conditions defined in the Forest Plan and the most recent science addressing restoration and management of wildlife habitat.



- Increase the diversity and resilience of the landscape.
- Maintain and promote dry, lower elevation, large tree, and old forest characteristics for the associated wildlife species with a focus on the processes, function, patch size, and diversity of forested habitats.
- Improve wildlife habitat for species of greatest conservation concern.
- Manage vegetation to achieve authorized recreation resource objectives in the project. Where possible or required due to other law regulation or policy, vegetation management activities should also be designed to aid in fuels, vegetation, and wildlife management objectives.
- Supporting the development of fire-adapted rural communities.
- Providing for an efficient NFS transportation network and address the need to reduce road-related negative effects to resources.
- Moving all subwatersheds within the project area toward the desired conditions for soil, water, riparian, and aquatic resources (SWRA) as described in the Forest Plan and the Watershed Condition Framework (WCF; USDA 2011).
- Implementing site-specific streambank and wetland restoration activities where stream channels, wetlands, or riparian areas are in a degraded condition.
- Managing recreation use with a focus on improving system trails, addressing unauthorized trails, improving infrastructure, minimizing the potential for conflicting use and addressing risk to forest users. There is also a need to effectively manage areas experiencing detrimental impacts from dispersed or unauthorized recreation.
- Contributing to the economic vitality of the communities adjacent to the Payette National Forest.

Proposed Action

To meet the purpose and need for the project, the Forest Service is proposing vegetation and fuel treatments, watershed improvement and restoration treatments, and recreation improvements. A brief summary of each is provided below (see the website link for more information).

Vegetation and Fuel Treatments

A mix of vegetative treatments are proposed to: reduce fire hazard in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI); improve the resilience and resistance to disturbance (such as wildfire, balsam wooly adelgid, white pine blister rust); minimize the potential for movement of insects and disease across the landscape (*e.g.* from National Forest System lands onto private or vice versa); maintain and/or enhance recreation opportunities (such as enhancement of skiing and safety at Brundage Mountain resort); restore forest structure (tree size class and spatial pattern), species composition, and tree density; and/or improve wildlife habitat for the species of greatest conservation concern within the project area.

Vegetative treatments include: commercial treatments; non-commercial thinning; prescribed fire; and associated actions. Additionally, coordination with existing permittees on grazing programs would occur within the project area to meet the purpose and need of reducing the risk of uncharacteristic and undesirable wildland fire. Other activities associated with implementing the above vegetative treatments include commercial harvest-related road maintenance and use; cone collection; temporary roads; fireline construction; rock pits; slash treatment; site preparation; and planting.

Watershed Improvement and Restoration Treatments

Four types of activities are proposed to meet the purpose and need related to improving watershed health: national forest system (NFS) road treatments, unauthorized route treatments, streambank and wetland restoration activities, and fish passage improvements.

Approximately 30-35 miles of NFS roads are proposed for decommissioning across the project area. Of that, portions of four roads (total less than 2 miles) would be a new closure to public (*i.e.* removed from the open road system). NFS roads proposed to remain would be maintained or improved to reduce sediment production. All unauthorized routes not needed for future management would also be evaluated for some level of restoration treatment. Actions to improve stream channels, riparian habitat, and wetlands may include: streambank stabilization, minor channel re-alignment, fence reconstruction, planting native vegetation, placement of instream or streambank structures such as (but not limited to): rock, large woody debris, beaver dam analogs (BDAs), and barriers to prevent unauthorized motorized travel in sensitive areas. Five NFS road/stream crossings have also been identified in the project area to improve fish passage and improve hydrologic connectivity.

Recreation Improvements

To meet the purpose and need for the project, recreation improvements would include: improving the existing trail system by establishing user-created (unauthorized) trails as system trails where appropriate, and removing user-created trails that negatively impact watershed and soil health; reestablishing and/or rerouting existing Forest Service trails as needed within the project area; replacing or repairing existing facilities, including restrooms and lake amenities; evaluate authorized and unauthorized roads identified for decommissioning for possible conversion to motorized or non-motorized trails; manage or improve dispersed recreation opportunities by hardening and improving sites, closing some sites, and/or sign installation; managing roads (including relocation), posting signage and/or considering closure orders where conflicting use may occur; improving skier experience and safety through vegetative treatments within the Brundage Mountain Resort's ski area.

Scoping Process

The detailed document describing the proposed action can be found on the project web page at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54029>. A hard copy of the proposed action document is available upon request by email to Erin Phelps, New Meadows District Ranger, ephelps@fs.fed.us or by telephone at 208-347-0300.

The Payette National Forest is contacting interested persons, groups, and agencies to make them aware of the project and to gather pertinent feedback. As mentioned previously, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is expected to be published in the Federal Register on October 31, 2018. To be most helpful please submit your scoping comments within 45 days of the publication of the NOI, and make your comments as specific as possible. Comments may pertain to the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible alternatives to the proposed action. Your comments will help us refine the proposal and identify preliminary issues, interested and affected persons, and possible alternatives. Comments received in response to this request will become part of the project record and will be available for public inspection on the "Public Comment/Objection Reading Room" on the project web site:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54029>. A legal notice regarding the scoping process is also expected to be published in the *Idaho Statesman* (newspaper of record) on November 1, 2018; however, the NOI in the Federal Register initiates the timeframe for the opportunity to comment. Copies of both the NOI and the *Idaho Statesman* legal notice will be posted to the project web page.

How to comment

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this project will be accepted. Send written comments to Keith Lannom, Forest Supervisor, 500 N. Mission Street, Building 2, McCall, Idaho 83638. Comments may also be sent via facsimile to 208-634-0744.

Comments may also be submitted through the Granite Meadows Project web page at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54029>. To submit comments using the web form select "Comment on Project" under "Get Connected" on the right panel of the project's web page. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may also be provided at the New Meadows Ranger District Office during normal business hours via telephone 208- 347-0300 or in person.

Establishing Eligibility to Object

The project implements land management plans and is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and is subject to 36 CFR 218.7 parts (a) and (b). In order to be eligible to file an objection, specific written comments related to the project must be submitted during scoping, by the comment period on the draft EIS in accordance with procedures in 40 CFR 1506.10, or during any other periods public comment is specifically requested on this EIS (36 CFR 218.5). Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to meet the requirements of eligibility as an individual. Objections received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only. Names and addresses of those who comment and/or file objections will become part of the public record.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the Granite Meadows Project.

Sincerely,

/s/ Keith B. Lannom

KEITH LANNOM

Forest Supervisor

cc: Erin Phelps, Phil Burgess