

Draft Decision Notice for the Lost Horse Project

Cascade Ranger District, Boise National Forest, Valley County, Idaho



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Cover photo: View of the current overstocked vegetation conditions within the project area in 2019.

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Introduction

This decision notice documents my decision to implement the proposed action in the Lost Horse Project Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact and my determination that the proposed action is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the environment.

The Boise National Forest has proposed Lost Horse Project to implement a variety of vegetation treatments that would improve forest health and increase resiliency to uncharacteristic insect, disease, and wildfire disturbance.

The Boise National Forest discloses the environmental effects of the proposed action relative to the factors used in determining significance as described at 40 CFR 1508.27 in the Lost Horse Project Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. This decision notice hereby incorporates by reference the Lost Horse Project Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. The environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact and project record contains analysis and documentation used to support the decision and conclusions in this decision notice.

Decision and Rationale

My Decision

Based upon my review of the analysis documented in the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact and the project record, and consideration of the public comments received throughout the process, I have decided to implement the proposed action of the Lost Horse Project. My decision includes all activities identified in the “Proposed Action” section of the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact (EA and FONSI, pages 7–16). This includes all vegetation management treatments (commercial and noncommercial thinning and prescribed burning), all associated road activities, and all project design features. Table 1 summarizes acres of vegetation and fuels treatments and road activities to be implemented under my decision. Table 2 identifies the specific road segments to be decommissioned.

Table 1. Lost Horse Project proposed activities

Proposed Activities	Units
Vegetation Treatments	
Commercial thinning—tractor or off-road jammer (acres)	2,684
Commercial thinning—skyline (acres)	1,108
<i>Commercial thinning total (acres)</i>	3,792
Noncommercial thinning—plantations (acres)	2,217
Noncommercial thinning—natural stands (acres)	1,225
<i>Noncommercial thinning total (acres)</i>	3,442
<i>Commercial and noncommercial thinning total (acres)</i>	7,234
Fuels Treatments	
<i>Prescribed burning (acres) *</i>	5,586
Road Activities	
Road maintenance (miles)	66
Temporary road construction (miles)	18
Roads decommissioning (miles)	5.4

* Fuels treatments include prescribed burning in the inventoried roadless areas (970 acres).

Changes to the Transportation System

The Forest-wide Travel Analysis Process (USDA FS 2015) was reviewed and amended for the Lost Horse Project. The addendum updated recommendations for future road needs within the project area. To reduce existing road density, eleven road segments (5.4 miles) are proposed for decommissioning (table 2). The project proposes no changes to the Boise National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map, meaning the roads proposed for decommissioning are not currently open to public motorized use.

Table 2. Road segments proposed for decommissioning

Segment	Length (miles)
405A	0.2
405B	1.2
405B1	0.2
405B2	0.1
406B	0.2
406C	0.8
409B	0.9
409B1	0.9
409C2	0.2
409C3	0.3
433B	0.4

Rationale for my Decision

The proposed action was designed to meet the purpose and need as outlined in the “Purpose and Need for the Proposal” section of the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact (EA and FONSI, pages 3–7). Design features were incorporated into the project to mitigate potential adverse effects (EA and FONSI, pages 13–16). The Lost Horse Project activities are consistent with the 2010 Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) direction. The proposed action is also consistent with federal, state, and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1500–1508). No significant adverse effects were identified in the analysis and finding of no significant impacts (see “Effects Relative to the Finding of No Significance Elements” in the EA and FONSI, pages 19–38).

The conclusions summarized in the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact are based on a review of the project record, which contains analysis of relevant scientific information and responsible opposing views raised by internal or external sources, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk, where pertinent to the decision being made. For further information on how I considered the best available science in making this decision, refer to the project record for detailed Forest Service responses to comments and review of opposing views literature, the literature cited sections in the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact and each resource technical report, and the 2010 final environmental impact statement and planning record supporting the 2010 amendment to the 2003 Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Following is the rationale for my decision to select the proposed action and adopt the project as written. It reflects how I have considered each question in the “Decision to be Made” section of the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact.

How well Does the Proposed Action Meet the Purpose and Need Described in the Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact?

Implementation of the proposed action, using silviculture prescriptions as described in the project record, will reduce stand density and trend species composition towards desired conditions by potential vegetation group, while creating new patches of early seral regeneration. Guidelines and design features such as retaining large tree size classes, green snags and legacy trees, and coarse woody debris, will ensure that desirable functions of the forest are maintained. Model outputs predict development within the large tree size class to meet or exceed forest plan levels in all potential vegetation groups in the long term, which would assist the deficit within the large tree size class on the Boise National Forest. The proposed action not only provides opportunities to increase ponderosa pine within the project area but also provides opportunities to increase western larch and aspen, currently deficit on the Boise National Forest.

The proposed action alternative displays improvement in regard to reducing wildfire hazard ratings and crown fire risk, thereby reducing the potential for uncharacteristic wildfire behavior and effects (size, intensity, and severity) within the project area.

Reducing the wildfire hazard and restoring the non-lethal fire regime would be accomplished by implementing treatments to reduce overstory densities; reduce and decrease the continuity of ladder fuels by re-patterning smaller tree size classes into groups, clumps, and openings; and treating natural and activity fuels, all of which increase the likelihood of low-intensity surface wildfire behavior and reduce the risk of a surface fire transitioning to a crown fire, resulting in a more effective and safer management of wildfires.

How well Does the Proposed Action Alternative Address the Issues Generated from Comments Received from Interested Parties?

During the comment period for the project, five comment letters were received. All of the comments submitted by the public were evaluated and two issues were identified, and the proposed action was modified to address the issues. A summary of how comments were considered can be found in the project record.

Additional field reconnaissance was conducted along the proposed containment line within the Peace Rock Inventoried Roadless Areas to refine the width of the line needed to facilitate prescribed burning. National Forest System trail 099, known as the East Mountain Trail will be used as a containment line, and the width of the containment line was modified from 100 feet wide down to 50 feet wide, except for specific locations along the trail that may be up to, but would not to exceed, 60 feet in width to include dense pockets of regeneration along the outer portion of the containment line. A vegetation buffer would be retained, starting at Clear Creek Summit (east end of trail 099) and heading west for an approximate distance of .50 mile before reaching the prescribed fire boundary. Mechanical treatments would begin at this location and travel west along trail 099 until reaching an end point, located about .01 mile before the trail intersection with National Forest System road 405C.

Approximately 18 miles of temporary roads have been identified as needed to facilitate vegetation treatments. Initially 13 miles of temporary roads were identified to remain on the landscape through prescribed burning implementation before being decommissioned. Further analysis by the interdisciplinary team determined that 1.5 miles of temporary roads would be sufficient to facilitate prescribed burning activities; therefore, 1.5 miles of temporary roads would remain on the landscape and the remainder would be decommissioned at the completion of harvest activities.

Does the Proposed Action Mitigate Potential Adverse Effects Identified in the Analysis as Needed to Support a Finding of No Significant Impact?

The interdisciplinary team did not identify any significant adverse effects associated with implementing the proposed action as documented in chapter 3 of the environmental assessment and finding of no

significant impact. The specific direct, indirect, and cumulative effects will be within standards set forth by the forest plan, and consistent with applicable environmental laws (EA and FONSI, chapter 3). The analysis supports a finding of no significant impacts, as detailed in the “Effects Relative to the Finding of No Significance Elements” section of the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact.

Public Involvement

The Lost Horse Project was first described on the Boise National Forest website in July 2019. Invitations for a public field meeting were sent to project subscribers on July 30, 2019 via the electronic GovDelivery system. The field trip was held on August 6, 2019. Private landowners within the Clear Creek and Horsethief Reservoir subdivisions, recreationists, ranchers, county commissioners, federal and state congressional elected representatives, and representatives from environmental conservation groups, the timber industry, and State of Idaho agencies were sent letters with instruction on how to subscribe to the project and submit comments using the GovDelivery system. The project was listed in the October 2019 edition of the Boise National Forest’s quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions. On November 7, 2019, the Forest Service emailed the proposed action report through GovDelivery and posted the document on the Boise National Forest project website. A legal notice soliciting comments was published in the Idaho Statesman on November 8, 2019.

Throughout the development of the proposed action the project has been presented to and discussed with the Valley County Fire Working Group, the Boise Forest Coalition, and the Valley County Lands Committee, Valley County Commissioners, the Idaho State Snowmobile Association, and the Idaho Roadless Commission.

The project was presented to representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service on December 11, 2018.

Tribal consultation was completed according to the consultation protocols established with each tribe. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes was consulted during a Wings and Roots meeting held on September 12, 2019. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and the Nez Perce Tribe were notified by letter in November 2019.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The Lost Horse Project was designed in conformance with direction summarized in the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact (EA and FONSI, page 19)

I reviewed the Lost Horse Project Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact, and I determined these actions will not significantly affect the quality of the environment, and an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

For a list of laws and regulations, refer to factor 10 of the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact (EA and FONSI, page 38) and the summary portion of the project record.

Predecisional Administrative Review (Objection)

This decision is subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218, Subpart A and B. Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with section 218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after designated opportunities. Minimum content requirements of an objection are identified at section 218.8(d). Incorporation of documents by reference in the objection is permitted only as provided for at section 218.8(b).

The Objection Reviewing Officer is the Intermountain (Region 4) Regional Forester. Written, facsimile and electronic objections will be accepted. Send written objections, including any attachments, to: Objection Reviewing Officer, Intermountain Region U.S. Forest Service, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; or fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to: objections-intermtn-regional-office@usda.gov, within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice in the *Idaho Statesman*, the newspaper of record. The Objection Reviewing Officer is not accepting hand-delivered comments at this time as there are limited office functions as part of precautions in response to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Email objections must be submitted in a format such as an email message, pdf, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc or .docx). It is the responsibility of objectors to ensure their objection is received in a timely manner (section 218.9). Objections may also be submitted through a web form on the Lost Horse Project webpage (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56535>). To submit an objection using the web form, select "Comment/Object on Project" under "Get Connected" on the right panel of the project's webpage.

Implementation Date

To allow for the distribution of the decision notice, implementation of this project may begin five business days following the signature of the decision notice.

Contact Information

For additional information concerning this decision, please contact Jim Bishop, Team Leader, at james.bishop@usda.gov or by phone at 208-382-7400; or Jake Strohmeyer, Cascade District Ranger, Boise National Forest, at jake.strohmeyer@usda.gov or by phone at 208-382-7400.

Approved by:

TAWNYA BRUMMETT
Forest Supervisor
Boise National Forest

Date