
Draft Decision Notice for the Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project

USDA Forest Service
Boise National Forest, Emmett Ranger District
Gem and Valley Counties, Idaho
November 2020

Decision

Based upon my review of the Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action as described in the Need for the Proposal and Proposed Action chapters of the environmental assessment to include the modifications to the proposed action identified below in the Decision Rationale section.

Decision Rationale

The Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project (project) is needed for the following reasons:

- To improve vegetation conditions for the purpose of increasing forest resiliency to uncharacteristic disturbances
- To restore watershed function for the purpose of improving aquatic resources, including bull trout habitat connectivity and diversity
- To improve and manage recreation opportunities and use
- To support local and regional economies

The project was developed using best available science, corporate data, local knowledge of on-the-ground conditions, and internal and external feedback. The proposed action was modified based on consideration of comments received during the public scoping and comment period, discussions with interested public, elected officials, the Boise Forest Coalition, other interest groups, and the project interdisciplinary team. Modifications to the proposed action include:

- Reduction of 981 acres of commercial harvest
- Reduction of 34.2 miles of proposed temporary roads
- Addition of 8.1 miles of new aggregate surfacing and 20.3 miles of aggregate resurfacing to reduce fugitive dust and sediment delivery to streams and improve user access and comfort during travel
- Addition of a vault toilet at the Renwyck trailhead

By implementing activities at a landscape scale and using a condition-based management approach, the project optimizes biodiversity and maintains resilience and integrity, while increasing the options for management and allowing for endemic levels of disturbance. The project conserves and restores wildlife habitat for species dependent on low-elevation, old forest habitats within the nonlethal and mixed 1 fire regimes.¹ In addition, the project is in the public's interest. Specifically, the proposed action addresses critical health and safety needs by reducing hazardous fuels and removing hazard trees, thereby reducing risks to firefighters and visiting public. The work focuses on public safety and ensures continued, safe access to the forest in the Sage Hen project area. The project supports local livelihoods and economies and improves recreation opportunities for the rapidly growing Boise metropolitan area.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

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 impact. Implementation of design features will ensure that desirable functions and qualities of the forest are maintained during and after treatment.

Public Involvement

The Boise National Forest has been engaging with the Boise Forest Coalition on project development since the coalition's inception in 2009. The coalition has participated in six Sage Hen project field trips since 2012 and multiple meetings during which they provided input on the project. These discussions, along with goals and objectives outlined in the forest plan and current conditions on the ground, informed management objectives for the project area. The project was presented to the Idaho Roadless Commission on May 29, 2019 and October 2, 2019. The Commission indicated no concerns about the proposed actions.

The project was first published as a proposal on the Boise National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on October 1, 2019. Public engagement was initiated on February 20, 2020, with a public information meeting at the Emmett Ranger District to provide an opportunity for the public to learn about the proposed project and provide input on issues or concerns they had. Verbal comments provided by the public were transcribed and are included in the project record. Tribal consultation was initiated according to established protocols with the Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute tribes. Consultation processes with the State Historic Preservation Office and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been initiated. (The decision will not be finalized until required consultation processes are complete.) Comments regarding the proposed action were solicited from

1. **Nonlethal fire regimes** have a fire return interval of 5 to 25 years, with fire intensity resulting in equal to or less than 10 percent mortality. The resulting vegetation patterns are relatively homogenous with small patches generally less than 1 acre of different seral stages, densities and compositions creation from mortality.

Mixed 1 fire regimes have a fire return interval of 5 to 70 years, with fire intensity resulting in greater than 10 to 50 percent mortality. The resulting vegetation patterns are relatively homogenous with patches created from mortality ranging in size from less than 1 to 600 acres of different seral stages, densities and compositions (forest plan, page A-3).

the public and interested parties. On April 14, 2020, the Forest Service released the Preliminary Purpose and Need and Proposed Action via the Boise National Forest project website and emailed the notification of availability through GovDelivery to 464 project subscribers. Hard copy notification was provided to three recipients. A legal notice soliciting comments was published in the *Idaho Statesman* (newspaper of record) on April 14, 2020. Sixteen comment letters were received. Comments and how they were considered are included in the project record. The environmental assessment includes a list of agencies, organizations, and persons consulted regarding this proposal.

Objection Opportunities

This decision is subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 218, Subparts A and B. The Objection Reviewing Officer is the Intermountain (Region 4) Regional Forester. Written and electronic objections will be accepted. Electronic objections may be submitted through a web form on the [Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project webpage](https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56701) (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56701>). 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. Send written objections, including any attachments, to: Objection Reviewing Officer, Intermountain Region U.S. Forest Service, 324 25th Street, Ogden, UT 84401; or by email to: objections-intermtn-regional-office@usda.gov. Objections must be filed 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. Electronic objections must be submitted in one of the following formats: pdf, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc or .docx). It is the responsibility of objectors to ensure their objection is received in a timely manner (36 CFR 218.9).

Implementation Date

As per 36 Code of Federal Regulations 218.12, if no objection is received within the legal objection period, this decision may be signed and implemented on, but not before, the fifth business day following the close of the objection-filing period. If an objection is filed, this decision cannot be signed or implemented until the reviewing officer has responded in writing to all pending objections.

Contact Information

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Catherine Blackwell, Team Leader, 1249 S. Vinnell Way, Suite 200, Boise, Idaho 83709 (phone: 208-373-4245).

Approved by:

Signature reserved for final decision

Tawanya Brummett

Forest Supervisor

Date

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