
File Code: 1950

Date: September 19, 2019

Dear Interested Party:

The Forest Service is seeking public comment on a forest management project known as the Little Red Goose Forest Resilience Project on the New Meadows Ranger District, Payette National Forest. You are being contacted because you have expressed an interest in projects on the Forest, and/or because you live adjacent to the project area. Please see the How to Comment section of this letter for information on how to provide input into this proposal. Comments will help inform the environmental analysis and decision making process.

Project Location and Description

The project area is located within the Little Salmon River subbasin in the Upper Goose Creek, Sixmile Creek-Little Salmon River, and Lower Goose Creek-Little Salmon River subwatersheds between McCall and New Meadows, on both sides of US Highway 55. The project approximately 8,774 acres in a portion of the area previously identified in the Granite Meadows Project for similar treatment (publically scoped in 2018). See project vicinity map in project website (link to the website is included in the How to Comment section below).

The project area is within the Weiser-Little Salmon Headwaters Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (CFLRP) area, and incorporates input provided from the public and the Payette Forest Coalition on previous CFLR projects, including those provided to the Granite Meadows project. Activities would be designed as to not preclude the ability to meet the purpose and need of either project. Areas that would receive commercial vegetation treatment under the Little Red Goose project would not receive additional commercial vegetation treatments under Granite Meadows EIS. However, the Little Red Goose project area would remain within the larger Granite Meadows analysis area and could be analyzed for other treatment activities as per the purpose and need of that project, including but not limited to watershed restoration activities and recreation management activities. Cumulative effects will be analyzed by specialists as part of each proposal.

Purpose and Need for Action

Portions of the project area are experiencing high insect activity and/or are at high risk for insect infestation and mortality according to a recent USDA Forest Health and Protection report (USDA 2019). This report identified a need for the District and Forest to “adequately address the Douglas-fir tussock moth outbreak currently impacting the analysis area given recent Douglas-fir tussock moth disturbances compounded with chronic western spruce budworm and balsam woolly adelgid and root and butt rots” (USDA 2019).



The purpose of proposed treatments within the project area include:

- Move forest stands toward desired conditions by increasing forest resiliency to insects, and disease, and by promoting the development of large tree forest structures mixed with a mosaic of size classes and seral species composition.
- Reduce the risk of additional tree mortality and subsequent hazard trees to forest visitors and infrastructure in areas of high visitor use. Specifically, Last Chance Campground and Forest Service roads through the project area.

Proposed Action

Proposed treatments would occur on up to 3,000 acres identified within the larger 8,774-acre area described above, and would be designed to move towards desired conditions addressed above. In order to quickly address this emerging insect outbreak and subsequent tree mortality, this project would focus vegetation treatments in those areas with high levels of insect activity and current and anticipated high levels of tree mortality, as well as adjacent stands which are at risk due to high stand density. Treatments would also be designed to reduce hazard tree risk to forest visitors and infrastructure in high-use areas. As such, priority would be given to focusing treatments along roadways and infrastructure (e.g. Last Chance Campground). Treatments are summarized below; more detailed vegetation treatment descriptions as well as project design features are posted on the project website (link to the website is included in the How to Comment section below).

The following activities are proposed:

- commercial thinning
- non-commercial thinning
- commercial firewood removal
- slash treatments (lop and scatter or pile burning)
- broadcast prescribed burning

These treatments would be designed to promote species adapted to disturbance and desired forest and wildlife habitat conditions in accordance with the Payette Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (2003). Treatments would maximize the retention of old-growth and large trees, as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote stands that are resilient to insects and disease. Additionally, the project will consider the best available scientific information to maintain or restore the ecological integrity, including maintaining or restoring structure, function, composition, and connectivity.

Maintenance burning (burning after initial application of fire) would occur as necessary according to Fire Regime conditions to maintain desired conditions, especially density management, forest structural and species composition diversity. Prescribed burning operations may occur at any time of year when conditions permit, typically spring (April, May, June) and fall (August, September, October). Prescribed fires would be designed to achieve a mosaic of burned and unburned areas resulting in low soil severities and low-moderate vegetation severities in treatment areas.

Road maintenance activities to facilitate commercial harvest may occur on NFS roads within and around the project area. Temporary roads may be constructed for project implementation and would be reclaimed within three years of project completion. Additional non-system road

decommission or obliteration may occur to mitigate effects related to the proposed activities by reducing the total soil resource commitment within the project area and improving soil health conditions per the LRMP.

Anticipated Analysis

The New Meadows Ranger District has made a preliminary assessment for the project proposal and has determined it may fall within a category of action that is excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Specifically, under the authority of Section 603 of HFRA (16 U.S.C.6591b). An insect and disease project may be categorically excluded under Secretary authority in a project that is designed to reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, insect or disease infestation (HFRA, Sections 602(d) and 603(a)). If the analysis process determines that there are no extenuating circumstances that would preclude the use of this categorical exclusion, the project would adhere to the specifications of that authority.

Deciding Official

The Deciding Official is anticipated to be the Payette Forest Supervisor.

How to Comment:

The New Meadows Ranger District will host a public meeting to discuss the project on October 9, 2019 at 6:30 PM. More information including location will be posted to the project webpage. The legal notice regarding the scoping process is anticipated to be published in the *Idaho Statesman* on September 20, 2019. Copies of the legal notice will be posted to the project web page for reference. Comments will be accepted until October 21, 2019.

To be most helpful, please make your comments as specific as possible. Comments may pertain to the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible modifications to the proposed action. Your comments will help the Forest Service refine the proposal and ensure issues are identified and addressed appropriately, , and will also assist the agency in making a well-informed decision. 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 Little Red Goose project web site:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56833>

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this project will be accepted. Send written comments to Erin Phelps, New Meadows District Ranger, Payette National Forest, PO Box J, 3674 Highway 95, New Meadows, Idaho 83654. Comments may also be sent via facsimile to 208-347-0309. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 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. Comments may also be submitted through the Little Red Goose Project webpage at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56833> To submit comments using the web form select "Comment on Project" under "Get Connected" on the right panel of the project's web page.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the Little Red Goose Resilience Project.

Sincerely,

ERIN PHELPS
New Meadows District Ranger
Payette National Forest

cc: Tawnya Brummett