

Annual Report on the use of the Categorical Exclusion under Section 605, Wildfire Resilience Projects (P.L. 115-141)

April 8, 2022

Introduction

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 (2018 Omnibus Act) (P.L. 115-141) amended the 2003 Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) by adding Section 605, which established a Categorical Exclusion (CE) from extensive National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for authorized hazardous fuels reduction projects as defined in HFRA Title I. Use of the CE is limited to areas designated under Section 602 of HFRA as of enactment of the 2018 Omnibus Bill, on March 23, 2018, and treatment can occur on up to 3,000 acres.

Criteria for Project Selection

An authorized hazardous fuels reduction project is defined by Title I of HFRA. Projects being developed using the Section 605 CE must meet the established definition and parameters in Title I as well as other limiting factors specifically identified in HFRA Section 605. All authorized hazardous fuels reduction projects being analyzed through the Section 605 CE shall:

- be limited to 3,000 acres of treatment and be located with an area designated under HFRA Section 602; and
- be prioritized within the wildland-urban interface, or if outside of the wildland-urban interface, must be limited to areas within Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III that contain very high wildfire hazard potential.

A project using the Section 605 CE is a project to carry out forest restoration treatments that:

- 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, and reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, wildfires;
- considers the best available scientific information to maintain or restore the ecological integrity, including maintaining or restoring structure, function, composition, and connectivity; and
- is developed and implemented through a collaborative process.

Use of the Section 605 Categorical Exclusion

All of the projects in Tables A, B, and C below were selected because they met the Title I criteria. Eight of nine Forest Service regions are using the Section 605 CE for authorized hazardous fuels reduction projects. As of January 25, 2022:

- 46 projects have signed a decision memo;
- 8 projects using both the Section 605 CE and the Section 603 CE have signed a decision memo;
- 24 projects are currently in-progress on their environmental analysis; and
- the 80 completed/in-progress projects span 13 states.

In total, 55 Section 605 projects have entered the implementation phase and have or will likely treat a total of 113,810 acres. Of the 55 total projects that have signed a decision memo using the Section 605 authority, over 24% of the projects concluded their National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis in Fiscal Year 2021. The USDA Forest Service anticipates the treated acres using the HFRA Section 605 CE to continue at a similar pace in Fiscal Year 2022.

Table A: Section 605 and Joint Section 603/605 Categorical Exclusions Completed

Decision Memo Issued (as of January 25, 2022)				
F.S. Region	National Forest	State	Project Title	Proposed Treatments Authorized in Decision Memo
1	Nez Perce-Clearwater	ID	Parachute Fuels	Intermediate and regeneration harvest, hand thinning, hand and mechanical piling, underburning, and pile burning on 90 acres.
1	Nez Perce-Clearwater	ID	Red Moose Divide Salvage Project	Regeneration harvest 890 acres; roadside salvage 773 acres; site prep and reforestation 1,266 acres.
1	Nez Perce-Clearwater	ID	Florence Fuels Project	970 acres hazardous fuels reduction and fuel breaks, commercial harvest, prescribed burning, hand thinning.
1	Lolo	MT	Pattee Canyon Maintenance Project	Hand thinning, girdling, hand piling, pile burning, and underburning on 1,725 acres.
1	Kootenai	MT	Hoodoo Wildfire Resiliency	684 acres of commercial thin, 37 acres clearcutting, 1,209 acres precommercial thin.
1	Lolo	MT	Lower Blackfoot Corridor Ecosystem Maintenance, Forest Restoration and Fuels Reduction Project	Prescribed fire, manual, and mechanical treatments on 974 acres.
1	Lolo	MT	Westside Bypass Wildfire Resiliency Project	2,700 acres of commercial and non-commercial vegetation management activities, including pile burning, jackpot burning, and under burning
1	Bitterroot	MT	Piquett Creek Project	Improve landscape resilience to disturbances (such as fire, insects and diseases) by diversifying forest structure and composition, and reducing fuels. Improve habitat diversity, forage quality and quantity for mule deer elk and bighorn sheep. Implementation will occur on 2,534 acres.
1	Kootenai	MT	Skidale	132 acres precommercial thinning and commercial harvest.
1	Flathead	MT	March Madness Blowdown Salvage	1,028 acres of salvage and sanitation-driven regeneration
2	San Juan	CO	Fuels – Valle Seco Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project	Fuels reduction on up to 2,800 acres - mechanically mowing & shredding shrubs & small trees, and/or felling trees by hand or machinery. Material removed as saw logs, firewood, post/pole, biomass, or left on site.

Decision Memo Issued (as of January 25, 2022)				
F.S. Region	National Forest	State	Project Title	Proposed Treatments Authorized in Decision Memo
2	Arapaho and Roosevelt	CO	Strawberry Bench Vegetation Management Project	Mechanical treatments on 1,707 acres.
2	Rio Grande	CO	Crestone WUI Hand Thinning Project	Hand thinning on 85 acres using chainsaws. Residual slash would be hand piled and burned.
2	Pike and San Isabel	CO	Cuchara Hazardous Fuels Reduction	Vegetation treatments on approximately 3,000 acres
2	White River	CO	Derby Mesa	Mechanized treatments and broadcast burning up to 3,000 acres
2	White River	CO	Peak 7 Hazardous Fuels Reduction	Hazardous fuels reduction on 522 acres.
2	Arapaho and Roosevelt	CO	Strawberry Bench Vegetation Management	Mechanical treatments on 1,707 acres
2	Black Hills	SD	Tepee Canyon Project	Commercial and non-commercial treatments in ponderosa pine stands - 2,669 acres
2	Black Hills	SD	Summit-Blacktail Project	Commercial and non-commercial treatments on 2,845 acres
2	Black Hills	SD	Freeland Project	Vegetation treatment using commercial and non-commercial treatments on approximately 2,600 acres.
2	Medicine Bow-Routt	CO	Rob Roy Vegetation and Fuels Management	3,000 acres of treatment - regeneration harvests, reforestation, prescribed fire, mechanized site prep, thinning, mastication
2	Medicine Bow-Routt	CO	Laramie Peak Unit Timber and Fuels Management	Treatments on 3,000 acres - mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, fuel break creation/maintenance, commercial harvest, site prep, planting/seeding
2	GMUG	CO	Rim Resiliency Project	Project addresses forest health and hazardous fuel concerns on ~2800 acres within wildland urban interface
3	Cibola	NM	Capilla Fuels Reduction and Forest Restoration Project	Thinning, hazard tree removal, prescribed fire
3	Cibola	NM	Corona Fuels Reduction and Forest Restoration	Thinning and prescribed burning on 1,518 acres
3	Apache-Sitgreaves	AZ	Oky Flat Farm Bill Insect and Disease	Up to 3,000 acres mechanical thinning
4	Caribou-Targhee	ID	Flatiron Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project	Use prescribed fire to treat 1,533 acres
4	Boise	ID	Tripod	Commercial and non-commercial thinning, prescribed burning, slash treatments up to 3,000 acres
4	Boise	ID	Ola Summit	Treatment on 2,640 acres – commercial, non-commercial, and mixed

Decision Memo Issued (as of January 25, 2022)				
F.S. Region	National Forest	State	Project Title	Proposed Treatments Authorized in Decision Memo
4	Uinta-Wasatch-Cache	UT	Parley's Canyon Watershed Restoration	Mechanical treatments and prescribed burning across approximately 2,000 acres
4	Uinta-Wasatch-Cache	UT	Reese Flat Fuels Mitigation	Mechanical treatments (mastication, lop and scatter, cut and chip on 1,070 acres of NFS lands, 1,278 acres of State lands, and 80 acres of private lands)
5	Plumas	CA	Big Bar Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project	Salvage harvest 736 acres; reforestation and maintenance activities
5	Eldorado	CA	General Sherman Wildfire Resilience Project	Fuels reduction treatments along key ridges and roads on approximately 400 acres through mastication and hand thinning with follow up herbicide treatments
5	Eldorado	CA	Scottiago Fuels Reduction Project	Create and maintain a fuel treatment network through a combination of thinning surface and ladder fuels and prescribed burning on approximately 3,000 acres
5	Eldorado	CA	Camino Pollock Pines Fuel Break	Mastication and hand thinning on 1,500 acres (of which 750 acres is National Forest System lands)
5	Stanislaus	CA	Cedar Ridge Fuels Reduction	Up to 3,000 acres thinning, prescribed burning, mechanical, biomass removal, hand thinning
5	Plumas	CA	Concow Resilience	859 acres reforestation and revegetation activities
5	Lassen	CA	Crossroads	2,646 acres using hand thinning, mastication, biomass removal, and prescribed burning.
5	Tahoe	CA	Michigan Bluff Community Protection Project	Mastication and prescribed fire on 1,792 acres, thin conifers on 925 acres, create roadside fuel breaks on 4.3 miles of roads and remove hazard trees on 13 miles of roads to reduce fuels and improve forest health and resilience
5	Stanislaus	CA	NDRC Fuel Breaks	1,800 acres ladder fuels reduction and fuel break establishing
5	Eldorado	CA	Sly Park Fuels Reduction Project	Fuels reduction treatments, including understory thinning, removal of brush and small trees, on approximately 3,000 acres
5	Eldorado	CA	Vulcan Forest Health Fuels Treatment Project	Hazardous fuels treatment to improve wildfire resilience. Commercial thinning, biomass cutting, tractor piling, and pile burning on approximately 1,100 acres. Includes areas of post-treatment prescribed fire and herbicide use.

Decision Memo Issued (as of January 25, 2022)				
F.S. Region	National Forest	State	Project Title	Proposed Treatments Authorized in Decision Memo
5	Plumas	CA	Mooreville Ridge Fire Salvage SIR and CE	The Forest Service originally proposed the Mooreville Ridge Insect and Disease Resilience Project to reduce the risk of insect and disease tree mortality and reduce fuel loads across the 3,000-acre project area using mechanical thinning, mastication, and prescribed burning. In September 2020, much of the project area burned in the North Complex Fire. As a result, there is now a need to address dead and dying trees in the burned area. To accomplish this task, the Forest Service proposes to add salvage logging as an additional activity included in the project plan.
5	Plumas	CA	Bootsole Project	4,233 acres of mechanical and manual treatments and prescribed burning. The project will treat 2,969 acres under Section 605 of HFRA. The remaining 1,264 acres treat wildlife habitat in California spotted owl habitat using 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6).
5	Plumas	CA	Strawberry Wildfire Resilience Project	Mechanical and hand thinning, mastication of brush, grapple and hand piling, targeted grazing, and prescribed and pile burning. Implementation will occur on 445 acres.
6	Malheur	OR	Frost Wildfire Resiliency	Commercial and precommercial thinning 2,930 acres
6	Malheur	OR	Loco Wildfire Resiliency	Commercial and precommercial thinning 2,832 acres
6	Wallowa-Whitman	OR	Five Points Fuels Reduction Project	Fuels reduction on approximately 3,000 acres of wildland urban interface. Management activities include commercial harvest, noncommercial thinning, and prescribed burning.
6	Malheur	OR	Laycock Creek Firewise Project	2,981 acres commercial and non-commercial thinning, prescribed burning, and juniper treatments
8	NFs in AL	AL	Byler Road Hazard Tree Mitigation Project	Treatment of 26 acres.
9	White Mountain	NH	Conway Wildfire Resiliency Project	Apply prescribed fire to 15 WUI units ranging between 25-600 acres in size, treating about 3000 total acres, and create about 100 acres of shaded fuel breaks in non-fire areas. Conduct maintenance burning on prescribed fire areas every 5-7 years.

Table B: Section 605 Categorical Exclusions In-Progress

Projects In-Progress (as of January 25, 2022)				
FS Region	National Forest	State	Project Title	Proposed Treatments in Scoping Document
1	Helena-Lewis & Clark	MT	Hogum Wildfire Resilience Project	Commercial vegetation treatment of approximately 1,600 acres and prescribed burning on 1,360 acres
1	Flathead	MT	Jackknife Project	Commercial vegetation treatment of 1,234 acres and non-commercial treatment of 256 acres
2	Pike and San Isabel	CO	Wet Mountains Wildfire Potential Control Locations	2,500 acres; in order to address the threat of landscape-scale wildfire in the Wet Mountains, the F.S. proposes to increase the defensibility of potential control features, such as roads & trails, by reducing fuels mechanically, with hand treatments, and Rx fire.
2	Pike and San Isabel	CO	Raspberry Mountain Fuels Reduction Project	2,540 acres; hand treatments, mechanical treatments, and forest product removal to increase wildfire resilience in a critical municipal watershed and adjacent to critical infrastructure. Developed with adjacent landowner (utilities) and state agencies.
2	Pike and San Isabel	CO	Methodist Mountain Vegetation Treatment	Up to 3,000 acres thinning
2	Medicine Bow-Routt	CO	North Routt Fuels Reduction	Fuels reduction on up to 3,000 acres
2	Medicine Bow-Routt	WY	Laramie Peak Unit Vegetation Management - Ellison Pass	Vegetation management to improve forest conditions and reduce wildfire risk. Implementation will occur on 2,396 acres.
2	Pike and San Isabel	CO	Warm Springs Fuels Mitigation Project	Conduct fuels reduction activities on approx. 415 acres using mechanical and hand thinning techniques. Activities may include product removal and pile burning.
2	Shoshone	WY	2021 North Fork Fuels Project	Vegetation treatment and pile burning across 1,430 acres
3	Cibola	NM	Terrero Forest Restoration and Fuels Reduction	The purpose of the project is to improve the ecosystem resilience of a priority landscape to future disturbances by restoring forest structure and composition and reducing the risk of wildfire.

Projects In-Progress (as of January 25, 2022)				
FS Region	National Forest	State	Project Title	Proposed Treatments in Scoping Document
4	Caribou-Targhee	ID	Bear Lake West Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Restoration Projects	The Forest Service is proposing to treat approximately 2,984 acres (2,510 forested acres, 179 non-forested acres, and 295 woodland acres) within the project area. Treatment types may include harvest, fuel modification zones, and prescribed burn.
4	Caribou-Targhee	ID	East Palisades Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project	Mechanical fuels removal techniques and prescribed fire on approximately 2,416 acres
4	Sawtooth	ID	Hearn Vegetation Management Project	250 acres; Proposal is to conduct controlled harvest activities to reduce high intensity infestation of dwarf mistletoe and reduce competition in high density Douglas-fir stands.
5	Los Padres	CA	Mount Pinos Forest Health Project	1,682 acres of mechanical and manual treatments and prescribed burning
5	Shasta Trinity	CA	McFarland Fire Recovery	3,000 acres; Post-fire restoration activities in order to treat the long-term impacts from the 2021 McFarland Fire. Activities include site preparation (mastication, salvage, machine piling/burning, etc.) and reforestation.
5	Shasta Trinity	CA	August Fire Restoration Project Phase 2	Mechanical and hand thinning, prescribed fire, reforestation, and road repair and maintenance over 3,000 acres
5	Plumas	CA	Berry Brush WUI Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project	Treat no more than 3,000 acres using a variety of restoration techniques for wildlife habitat and fire- and climate-resilience; salvage cut, hand-cut-and-pile brush, burn brush piles, plant trees in the ground, masticate brush, prune, dig fire-lines
5	Eldorado	CA	Brown Rock Forest Health Project	Reduce hazardous fuels, improve forest health, enhance watershed conditions, and re-establish a sustainable landscape on approximately 3,000 acres by commercially and pre-commercially thinning, understory burning, and reconstructing roads.
5	Plumas	CA	French Creek Hazardous Fuels Reduction	Commercial and non-commercial thinning, prescribed burning up to 3,000 acres
5	Eldorado	CA	Kelsey Fuels Reduction Project	476 acres of mechanical and manual treatments and prescribed burning

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FS Region	National Forest	State	Project Title	Proposed Treatments in Scoping Document
5	Eldorado	CA	Brown Rock Forest Health Project	Reduce hazardous fuels, improve forest health, enhance watershed conditions, and re-establish a sustainable landscape on approximately 3,000 acres by commercially and pre-commercially thinning, understory burning, and reconstructing roads.
5	Mendocino	CA	Salt Forest Health Improvement Project	Forest health and restoration treatment that reduces the risk/extent of insect/disease infestations, increase the resistance and resilience of stands to current and future infestations/epidemics. This project will treat up to 3,000 acres.
6	Malheur	OR	Neighbor Wildfire Resiliency	Commercial and noncommercial thinning on up to 3,000 acres.
6	Deschutes	OR	42 Road GNA Wildfire Resilience Project	Commercial and noncommercial treatment on approximately 2,994 acres and prescribed burning

Future Projects

New projects will be included in future reports to Congress once they are identified as initiated. The attached map identifies those areas designated under Section 602 prior to February 28, 2021.

Approximately, 77,231,001 acres of National Forest System lands have been outlined as Section 602 designated areas. Use of the Section 605 CE is limited to these designated areas.

