

Snowy Range Vegetation Treatment Project Scoping Notice

**SCOPING NOTICE
for
SNOWY RANGE VEGETATION TREATMENT PROJECT**

**Bureau of Land Management
Rawlins Field Office**

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

An interagency group consisting of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Rawlins Field Office, the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department proposes to carry out a series of vegetative treatment projects in the shrub lands surrounding the Snowy Range. The Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation will also be assisting in the project. The group is officially known as the Snowy Range Interagency Habitat Management Group (Interagency Group).

The proposed treatments would occur over the next 25 years with the goal of treating approximately 2,500 acres a year to recreate historic burn frequencies in shrub areas of the Snowy Range¹. After an initial treatment in the spring of 2000, other areas of the Snowy Range would be treated in successive years, with the ultimate goal of treating the initial 2,500 acres again 25 years from now (the enclosed map depicts proposed treatment areas). Ideally, by the end of the 25-year period, shrub stands across the Snowy Range would contain a multitude of different age classes.

The Interagency Group is proposing the vegetative treatments to improve the quality of ungulate big game seasonal ranges. Vegetative treatments (prescribed burns in particular) would improve seasonal ranges by replacing older browse species (e.g., mountain mahogany, sagebrush, serviceberry, antelope bitterbrush, willow, and wax current) with new growth, thereby providing more nutritious forage for wildlife. Typically, the types of vegetative treatments proposed kill most sage species but stimulate the roots of other shrubs. The new shoots produce forage with a higher nutritional value than the mature plants. In addition to rejuvenating the shrubs, an abundance of grasses and forbs would also become established following the burns. With the increase in vegetative diversity, it is anticipated that the types and numbers of wildlife species using the Snowy Range would increase.

Prior to initiating the vegetative treatments, a treatment plan would be developed. The plan would identify which treatment method would best achieve the objectives described above in specific areas. For the prescribed burns, the plan would also identify a target for the moisture content of the vegetation and the types of equipment that would be needed to ignite and subsequently control the fire.

In conjunction with the Laramie District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the BLM Rawlins Field Office will complete an analysis to more specifically determine the effects of the proposed vegetation treatments. The analysis will then be

¹ Prescribed burning would be the method of choice. However, certain field situations (e.g., avoidance of historic properties, unacceptable risks) could make prescribed burning infeasible. In those situations, either herbicide or mechanical treatments (e.g., roller chopping) could be implemented to achieve the desired results. Each treatment area will be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

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documented in an appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document. The information gathered during the analysis and the types of issues and concerns or information submitted during the public comment period for this proposal will dictate the type of NEPA document that is prepared.

RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS AND DOCUMENTS

The Great Divide Resource Management Plan (GDRMP, November 8, 1990) provides management direction for resources contained within the Rawlins Field Office area. According to the GDRMP, "Prescribed burning will be used to achieve management objectives such as those for allotment management plans (AMPs) and habitat management plans (HMPs). Prescribed fire proposals will be considered case-by-case to ensure environmental integrity and consistency with multiple resource objectives and activity plans" (ROD, p. 13). The objective for wildlife habitat management is to provide habitat quality (food, cover, space, and water) adequate to support a natural diversity of wildlife and fisheries and to maintain or improve vegetation condition and/or avoid long-term disturbance in high priority standard habitat sites. In addition, the Medicine Bow-Divide Draft Environmental Impact Statement describes and discusses various vegetation treatment methods (p. 375) that could be used to meet the objectives of the GDRMP.

The Medicine Bow National Forest Plan (Plan) also provides direction for the use of prescribed burning on the Medicine Bow National Forest. According to the Plan, prescribed burning will be used to achieve fuels management activities as well as improvement of habitats for wildlife and livestock (Plan, p. II-61). The objective of wildlife habitat management is to maintain viable populations of all known native vertebrate species and meet population objectives of management indicator species (Plan, p. III-4).

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT COMPLIANCE

On reviewing the proposal, the Interagency Group determined that the proposed project was not likely to significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Pursuant to NEPA and Council on Environmental Quality regulations on implementing NEPA, the Interagency Group is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) that will describe and evaluate the probable impacts of the proposed action and alternatives. The purpose of an EA is to provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact. The EA also provides the public and decision-makers with sufficient information to understand the environmental consequences of the proposal and to identify and develop appropriate mitigation measures to minimize environmental impacts.

One element of the NEPA process is scoping. Scoping activities are initiated early in the process to:

- Identify reasonable alternatives to be evaluated in the EA;
- identify environmental issues and concerns related to the proposed project; and
- determine the depth of analysis for issues addressed in the EA.

This scoping statement has been prepared to enable government agencies, the general public, and other interested parties to participate in and contribute to the analysis process. Public input is important in establishing the scope of analysis for any NEPA document, and the BLM encourages public participation.

IDENTIFIED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following issues and concerns have been identified by the Interagency Group to-date and from comments received on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest's initial scoping notice. It is not meant to be an all-inclusive lists, but rather a starting point for public input and a means of identifying the resource disciplines needed to conduct the analysis.

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- Potential for escaped fire and the possibility that private property and/or nearby resources could be threatened.
- Impacts to air quality and the possibility of smoke from the burns creating a health and visibility hazard.
- Potential for spread of noxious weeds following the vegetative treatments.
- Potential impacts to cultural and historic values within the analysis area.
- Potential impacts to aquatic systems.
- Sufficient shrub and forb seed source to revegetate treated areas.
- Post-treatment grazing management.
- Potential impacts to sharp-tailed and sage grouse.
- Potential impact to rare or sensitive plants and/or increase in non-native plant species.
- Potential impact to insect communities.
- Impacts from mechanical or chemical treatments.
- Impacts on recreation use.
- Safety.
- Potential fragmentation of shrub communities.

TIMING NEEDS OR REQUIREMENTS

Public input is important in establishing the level and scope of the analysis. The public is encouraged to participate throughout the environmental analysis process to help in identifying the level of analysis needed, alternatives to the proposed action, other issues or concerns that should be analyzed, mitigative opportunities, and any other comments or ideas to help ensure the completeness of the analysis process.

Your scoping comments are due by October 6, 2000. Please submit your comments to:

Mary Apple, Team Leader
BLM Rawlins Field Office
1300 N. Third Street
P.O. Box 2407
Rawlins, WY 82301

Email: rawlins_wymail@blm.gov

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following individuals, and organizations will receive a copy of this scoping statement:

Federal Government

U.S. Senator Craig Thomas
U.S. Senator Mike Enzi
U.S. Representative Barbara Cubin
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

U.S.D.A. Forest Service
Natural Resource Conservation Service
Bureau of Land Management
Environmental Protection Agency

State Government

Office of the Governor
Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming State Historical Preservation Office
Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District

State Legislators
Laramie Rivers Conservation District
Office of Federal Land Policy
Medicine Bow Conservation District

County Governments

Carbon County Commissioners
Carbon County Planning Commission

Albany County Commissioners
Albany County Planning Commission

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Municipalities

Town of Saratoga
Town of Elk Mountain
Town of Sinclair
City of Rawlins

Town of Encampment
Town of Riverside
Town of Hanna
City of Laramie

Native American Tribes

Eastern Shoshone Tribe
Northern Arapaho Tribe
Southern Cheyenne Tribe
Rosebud Sioux Tribe
Oglala Sioux

Ute Tribe
Southern Arapaho
Northern Cheyenne Tribe
Comanche Tribe
Crow Tribe

Grazing Permittees, Landowners and Individuals

The scoping notice will be mailed to approximately 100 grazing permittees, landowners, and individuals.

Media

KLDI
KIMX
Laramie Daily Boomerang
Saratoga Sun
KRAL/KIQZ

KOWB/KCGY
Casper Star Tribune
Rawlins Daily Times
KUWR
Grassroots Advocate

Other Agencies, Individuals, and Organizations

Ancient Forest Rescue
Inyan Kara Grazing Association
National Wildlife Federation
Izaak Walton League
Wyoming Natural Diversity Database
Wyoming Wildlife Federation
Wyoming Public Lands Council
The Nature Conservancy
Carbon County Stockgrowers
Wyoming Woolgrowers Association
Mauriel Peters Audubon Society
Carbon County Economic Development

Biodiversity Associates
Carbon County Coalition
Wind River Multiple Use Advocates
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming Outdoor Council
Sierra Club, Snowy Range Group
Wyoming State Grazing Board
Wyoming Stockgrowers Association
Murie Audubon Society
Cowboy 3 Shot Invitational

