

**Recommendations for Consideration in Preparing the
UPPER NORTH FORK FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT
Salmon-Challis National Forest**

**Prepared October 24, 2010
Clarification and Detail Added April 5, 2012**

This memo is intended to provide recommendations from the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group (Collaborative) to the Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) as they analyze proposed actions and alternatives for the Upper North Fork Forest Restoration Project. In our original memo from October 24, 2010, the collaborative group recognized that this would be an iterative process, and that as the SCNF continued working through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process, developing options for activities and treatments, the group would have additional opportunities to further contribute to the project.

The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group reached consensus on the following items for the Upper North Fork Forest Restoration project and the additional items of discussion and clarification that were added during the April 5, 2012 meeting are shown in italics/underline:

Purpose and Need

Purpose: The primary purpose for the Upper North Fork Forest Restoration project is to reduce hazardous fuels, restore plant communities, and improve habitat diversity for fish and wildlife.

Need: Existing forest stand structure and forest vegetation have created the potential for large-scale, high-intensity wildfires that threaten human life, property, and natural resources. Quaking aspen stands provide substantial habitat value for wildlife and contribute to landscape habitat diversity. However, many historic aspen stands in Central Idaho have been lost, and many others are either regenerating poorly or are otherwise in decline. Likewise, whitebark pine is being considered as the first tree species in the Northwest to be listed as endangered because of a lethal combination of blister rust and mountain pine beetle. Historic logging practices and fire suppression have contributed to a decline in ponderosa pine, known to be more fire resilient. In essence, the rich biodiversity in the project area is at risk.

Project Objectives

The group understands that the proposed project will be shaped largely by availability of appropriated funds and revenue generated by commercial activity. With such considerations in mind, the group has identified the following project objectives:

- Create a resilient forest and vegetative structure (fuel profile) immediately around private property, travel routes and other community values that will not sustain crown fire or flame lengths greater than those that can be suppressed by hand crews. Establish strategic fuel breaks and safe areas for communities and values at risk and improve firefighter safety.
- Modify fuel loads and forest conditions to restore ecological integrity and function, especially in regard to natural fire regimes.
- In the dry forest ecosystems, the desired future condition will be a more open forest structure/stand composition, dominated by large diameter ponderosa pine and to a lesser degree large diameter Douglas-fir. Understory vegetation will consist of mostly native herbaceous plants, including naturally regenerated shrubs and scattered ponderosa pine seedlings and saplings. This could be accomplished through commercial and non-commercial thinning and/or prescribed burning. Insect and disease impacts and trends should be considered when designing treatments.

- In the cold forest ecosystems, the desired future condition will be a more diverse forest structure/stand composition dominated by lodgepole pine. This ecosystem should be comprised of stands of different age classes, producing a diverse range of tree species, sizes and stocking densities. Whitebark pine should be one of the primary overstory trees in the higher elevations. This could be accomplished through commercial and non-commercial thinning and/or prescribed burning. Insect and disease impacts and trends should be considered when designing treatments.
- Existing roads will be used for access to treatment areas wherever feasible.
- In Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), the collaborative recommends developing two alternatives for analysis:
 - Analyze the use of temporary roads within the community protection zone (CPZ), defined as the area within one-half mile of the private property boundary where commercial thinning utilizing an 18" diameter cap is allowed, in order to achieve hazardous fuel reduction management objectives. This approach would include creating a strategic fuel break inside the Anderson Mountain IRA within approximately one half mile of private property by constructing a temporary road system.
 - LCFRG members met with the Idaho Roadless Committee and confirmed that backcountry restoration treatments met the authority of the Idaho roadless rule.
 - Analyze all fuel reduction and forest restoration opportunities that could be accomplished without building temporary roads in IRAs.
 - We ask that in any alternative that proposes commercial (mechanical) thinning or timber harvest in parts the Anderson Mountain Roadless Area, that a clear distinction be displayed between work proposed specifically as hazardous fuel reduction in the CPZ and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) a broader buffer area defined as 1.5 miles in the Lemhi County Community Wildfire Protection Plan and thinning treatments to restore Forest Health. Along with that distinction, we also request a detailed description of the rationale being used to justify the need for thinning outside the WUI, given that much of the Anderson Mountain Roadless Area is higher in elevation and on colder sites AND is located downwind from most of the human improvements proposed to be protected (the Highway 93 Corridor, Moose Creek Estates, Royal Elk Ranch).
 - Newly adopted decision-making language for LCFRG will be used to identify group member level of support for fuel reduction and forest restoration opportunities in the IRAs.
- De-classify or de-commission roads where duplicate routes exist, the need for the route is no longer valid, no historic public access exists and/or resource damage or impairment is present.
 - Lemhi County's additional criteria indicates that road obliteration may be acceptable when there are two or three roads that connect points A and B. To eliminate all access to a drainage makes the provision of emergency services virtually impossible, and also restricts management options. The County has indicated a preference in road closure instances for gating and/or humping over recontouring. Where recontouring is selected, attention to noxious weeds should be given priority.
- Initiate a landscape approach to scenery management that provides a framework for the orderly inventory, analysis, and management of visual and scenic values.
- Design appropriate restoration and preservation treatments for quaking aspen and whitebark pine stands, as well as high elevation meadows.
 - We are asking for further information about the need for the proposed tractor and skyline units (#36-42, 134, 233) northeast of Moose Creek Estates. Is the primary justification for this work the restoration of Whitebark Pine? If so, please provide detailed rationale. The Lost Trail and Chief Joseph Pass areas provide an important wildlife corridor for elk herds that summer in Montana's Big

Hole valley as well as sensitive forest carnivores like fisher, grey wolf, wolverine and Canada lynx. Please focus your analysis in this area on the habitat needs of these species and the impacts of the treatment proposed on their habitat.

- Minimize vulnerability to uncharacteristic fire intensities in riparian and old growth areas and help restore natural ecological function to those areas. Treatment within old growth stands and aspen clones may be acceptable where such treatments will clearly maintain or enhance the natural function and characteristics of these communities.
- Assess and treat old growth stands if such treatments are warranted to move the stand toward a state that resembles old growth characteristics as described by Hamilton, (Hamilton, Ronald G. 1993. Characteristics of old-growth forests in the Intermountain Region, USDA, USFS).
- Contain existing invasive species occurrence and incorporate the four key elements of invasive species management in project planning and implementation (prevention, early detection and response, control existing infestations and reestablishment of desired plant communities).
- Ensure that vegetation treatments retain sufficient habitat connectivity to support wildlife security, local movement and regional migration patterns.
 - See Appendix A for more specific recommendations from Beth Waterbury/Jim Roscoe.
- Enhance recreational settings, and improve travel routes and interpretive opportunities for recreation.
- Identify and implement interpretive and educational opportunities within the project highlighting forest restoration and health.

Standards and Methods

Standards: The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group believes that the following basic principles should apply to every collaborative project including the Upper North Fork Project:

1. Monitoring and documentation of project results
 - a. Tell the story so successes can be replicated, mistakes avoided
 - b. Specifically highlight wildlife, tree and plant habitat enhancements
 - c. Establish independent, multiparty monitoring within the project area
2. Economic development
 - a. Identify opportunities for material utilization
 - b. Encourage local economic development through utilization and restoration jobs
 - c. Use stewardship contracting and agreements, and best value contracting tools

Methods: The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group endorses an emphasis on long term prescriptive treatments that will maintain desired conditions and allow for sustainable forest health. The following methods are important tools to achieve and maintain the desired results for the Upper North Fork Project:

- Mechanical thinning along major ingress/egress routes, such as Highway 93 North, in consideration of CPZ guidelines and WUI requirements established in the ~~WUI and the CPZ according to~~ Lemhi County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- Commercial and non-commercial harvest in order to meet forest restoration and fuel reduction objectives.
- Prescribed burn treatments and implementation throughout the project area (approximately 41,000 acres) understanding that maintenance of these treatments (multiple entries) may be necessary.

Areas of consensus for the Upper North Fork Project

- An “all lands” approach will be taken with regard to project objectives. Collaborative members agree to help coordinate activities and assist with fundraising for non-National Forest, as well as National Forest lands. The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group agrees that this project should be submitted as part of a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program project.
 - As federal budgets shrink, those budgets with CFLRPs have a better chance of being fully funded and implemented.
 - Integrated Resource Restoration authority should also be used to direct investment toward this project.
- No commercial harvest will occur in designated old growth areas.
- Permanent road construction could be acceptable along the proposed shaded fuel break above Lost Trail Ski Area to achieve project objectives. This corridor was constructed originally during the 2000 fires. If maintained, it would provide for a strategic fuel break for wildland fire. ~~as well as a safety route for fire fighters.~~ It would also ~~enhance~~ provide access to scenic and recreational values while providing access for restoration treatments. The environmental analysis should also include an alternative without permanent road construction for comparison.
- Temporary road construction outside of inventoried roadless areas is acceptable if it provides the only means to achieve desired project results.
- Any commercial harvest in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) would be tied to aspen regeneration objectives or other vital habitat improvements.
- Commercial (*mechanical*) harvest may be acceptable within CPZ portions of IRAs in order to meet specific fuel reduction objectives that cannot be accomplished otherwise.
- Treatments along transportation corridors and other community assets (e.g. private property and special use areas such as Lost Trail Ski Area) will be designed to meet community protection needs as the highest priority and forest restoration objectives when feasible.
 - We ask that these treatments (not including Highway 93 wildlife crossing “hotspots”) consider the wildlife habitat security guidance provided in Appendix A.
- The SCNF will analyze potential environmental effects using the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and applicable sections of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The SCNF will coordinate planning and treatment activities with adjacent land management agencies and private land owners whenever possible.
 - We understand that HFRA no-action alternative analyzes worst case scenario rather than status quo no action.

We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the SCNF on this important project and look forward to continue working together as this project advances.