



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Salmon-Challis  
National Forest  
North Fork Ranger District

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File Code: 1950  
Route To:

Date: March 20, 2012

Subject: Project Initiation Letter – Salmon Municipal Watershed HFRA Project

To: Interdisciplinary Team

I am initiating the Salmon Municipal Watershed HFRA Project NFMA analysis. The analysis area is the Jesse Creek 6th field HUC west of Salmon, Idaho on the Salmon-Cobalt Ranger District. The watershed (reference the attached map) lies within management area 2B in the Salmon Forest Plan, and is tiered to the *Municipal Watershed Plan* and to the *Cooperative Agreement for the Purpose of Conserving and Protecting the Water Supply for the City of Salmon, Idaho*, as entered into by the City of Salmon and the Secretary of Agriculture. You have been selected to participate on an interdisciplinary team. We will first develop the proposed action fully and carry that forward through the NEPA process to analyze the effects of this project.

### Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is a reduction of the potential for high-intensity, stand replacing wildfire, to reduce flame lengths and to produce conditions that support low intensity fire behavior. There is a need to reduce the potential for adverse effects of wildfire within and adjacent to the Salmon Municipal Watershed (SMW). The entire project area has been classified by Lemhi County as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Predicted fire behavior exceeds levels that can safely be attacked by hand crews. The project also responds to policies directing the Forest Service to take action to protect municipal watersheds and wildland urban interface (WUI) areas from wildfire (e.g., National Fire Plan of 2000, Healthy Forests Initiatives of 2004, Healthy Forests Restoration Act 2004).

Lemhi County developed its Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan (also known as a County Wildfire Prevention Plan (CWPP)) to include localized mapping and definition of WUI areas and designated the SMW as high priority for hazardous fuels reduction treatment. The identified need for reducing hazardous fuel conditions together with the County's high priority designation for the SMW are essential criteria allowing the use of authorities and expedited analysis under the Health Forest Restoration Act (HFRA).

### Proposed Action

I would like you to continue to develop the proposed action working with the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group. I anticipate treatments may include commercial, pre-commercial thinning, ladder fuel reduction, shaded fuel break creation, broadcast and pile prescribed burning on select acres. Preliminary evaluations have identified potential needs for limited temporary roads for accessing priority treatment areas within the municipal watershed that are within Idaho Roadless areas (Jesse Creek #510/BCR). I would like to see a finalized proposed action by the fall of 2012 at which time I will provide you with further direction in the form of an update to this Project Initiation Letter.



**No Action with Wildfire:** The Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) under Section 104 does not require the Forest Service to analyze any alternative to the proposed action within a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) setting (HFRA Field Guide, 2004). HFRA also states that while agencies are not required to fully develop a no action alternative, “*they should evaluate the effects of failing to implement the project*”. This evaluation should allow an assessment of the short and long-term effects of failing to implement the project in the event the court is asked to consider requests for an injunction”. Changes in forest structure in the project area have significantly increased the potential for uncharacteristic fire behavior. A landscape scale, stand-replacing wildland fire during summer drought and extreme weather conditions is a plausible consequence of not implementing hazardous fuels reduction activities. This is the context for which a “No Action with Wildfire” needs to be evaluated for this project.

### **ID Team Members**

I am designating the following persons as members of the Interdisciplinary Team.

Michael Smith-IDT Leader

TBD– Silviculture

Maggie Milligan – Timber

Dan Garcia - Fisheries

Cindy Haggas - Wildlife and Plants

Cammie Sayer - Cultural Resources

David Deschaine – Hydrology, Water, Soils

Larry Vogel-Recreation

TBD-Visuals

Diane Schuldt - Weeds

TBD - Fuels

Christine Droske-Air Quality

Pete Schuldt - Engineering

Ken Rodgers – Idaho Roadless Expert

Fields Bender – GIS

Ingrid Drieling-Range

TBD – Writer/Editor

I expect the ID team, during the spring and summer of 2012, to:

- Review and refine the project area as needed.
- Continue to collect field data.
- Identify design features and mitigation measures.
- Continue collaborative involvement including field trips and other discussions with the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group in order to develop a proposed action to carry forward into the NEPA process.
- Begin the preliminary identification of potential environmental effects including possible significant cumulative effects.

## Timeline

I have developed the following tentative timeline. Keep in mind these dates are only a few of the major deadlines and are subject to change. A more detailed timeline will be issued with an updated PIL once the proposed action has been refined. If you cannot meet this timeline because of conflicting priorities, negotiate with your supervisor and me.

1. Finalize proposed action – October, 2012
2. Complete Field Data Collection-October, 2012
3. Updated PIL initiating NEPA analysis and new timeline-October, 2012
4. Release of Draft EIS – May, 2013
5. Release of Final EIS; 30 day Objection Period – December, 2013
6. Record of Decision signed – April, 2014
7. Implement – Summer 2014-2019

Thank you for the team effort and spirit necessary to make it happen.



Gary L. Foli  
Acting District Ranger

cc: SMW IDT