

GAO Report
Information on Forest Service Decisions
Involving Fuels Reduction Activities

Scope

Conducted a web-based survey of all 155 national forests (100% response rate and grasslands not included) to collect data on fuels reduction decisions issued in FY 2001 and 2002 (first two years under the National Fire Plan)

Results

- 762 total decisions involving fuels reduction activities covering 4.7 million acres
- 457 decisions (60%) covering 3 million acres were not appealable (CEs)
- 305 decisions covering 1.7 million acres were appealable
- 180 decisions were appealed (Equals 59% of appealable decisions and 24% of all decisions)
- 63 decisions had more than one appeal (totaling at least 267 appeals on the 180 decisions)
- 23 (3%) of all decisions were litigate

Appellants

- 7 groups appeared as appellants 20 or more times (Alliance for Wild Rockies, Ecology Center, Forest Conservation Council, Lands Council, National Forest Protection Alliance, Oregon Natural Resources Council, Sierra Club)
- Interest groups were most active in Southwest and Pacific coast states

Key Points

- Acres somewhat misleading in that 1 million acres of fuels treatment shows up in one forest wide firewood CE
- Almost as much controversy in wildland urban interface (52% of appealable decisions appealed) as in interior forests (59% of all appealable decisions were appealed)
- Wildland urban interface decisions more complex having local government involvement and multi-agency fire departments
- Number of decisions does not tell the whole story as there averages more than one appeal per decision (180 appealable decisions with 267 appeals)
- Most of the appeals are found to be without merit -- 19 of 180 (11%) reversed
- High rate of appeals (59%) results in increased efforts and costs to appeal proof a decision