

## A Progress Report on the:



# Twomile Wildland Urban Interface Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project



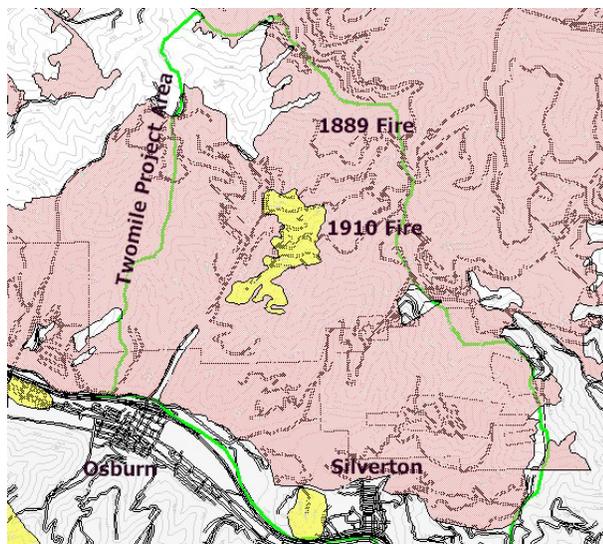
November 2003

*Welcome to Twomile....*

The Twomile project area is located on public lands administered by the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District. The project area is located north of Silverton Idaho and north of Interstate I-90.

The project area includes the following major drainages: Twomile, Nuckols, and Revenue Gulch. The entire project area encompasses about 6700 acres of Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and private lands. The project area includes all or portions of T48N, R4E, sections 3-11, 15, 16, and 29-33, Boise Meridian.

In January of 2002, an Interdisciplinary Team of USDA Forest Service employees was organized to plan hazardous fuel reduction treatments and analyze all of the potential impacts that fuel reduction activities may have on the environment and your community.



**Figure 1:** Map of the Twomile project area and the extent of the fires of 1889 (pink shading) and 1910 (yellow shading).



**Figure 2:** Photograph from Revenue Gulch showing a dense forest canopy that historically was an open stand.

### *What Do We Want to Accomplish?*

Most of the Twomile analysis area burned during a fire event in 1889 (Fig. 1). Later, in the summer of 1910, areas that were not burned in the fire 21 years earlier were consumed. The fires of 1910 were historic in our area. By the time those fires were extinguished, over three million acres of forest land was burned and many lives were lost. The 1910 fire spawned new national policies to suppress fires while they are small; to prevent what was viewed as devastating wildfire events.

Consequently, suppressing and excluding fire has allowed large amounts of vegetation to accumulate, which can set the stage for a potentially intense fire, changing the entire makeup of a forest. By excluding fire to an area, trees and shrubs that would have been naturally pruned in a low intensity fire event continue to grow and create pathways for fire to travel to the top of the canopy. Figure 2 shows an example of a dense forest canopy in the project area that could support stand replacing fire behavior.

**Forest Service specialists will be meeting to discuss this project and will provide feedback to your questions and comments.**

**November 13<sup>th</sup> @ 6:30 p.m.**

**Silver Hills Elementary, Osburn ID**

Please submit and comments about this project to:

**Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District - Attn: Twomile Project**

2502 E. Sherman Ave. Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814



**Figure 3:** This photo was taken from Revenue Gulch in the Twomile project and illustrates how close the community of Silverton Idaho is to the National Forest.

The forested stands adjacent to the communities of Silverton, Osburn, and rural residents of Twomile Creek and Revenue Gulch, are now composed of dense stands of shade tolerant trees (Douglas-fir, grand fir) amongst long-lived serals (Ponderosa pine, western larch, and white pine) that have adapted to frequent low intensity burns. With the absence of fire, shade tolerant trees have continued to grow and now characterize the forest and the potential fire behavior. Figure 3 shows the proximity of the project area to the community of Silverton, ID.

If a fire were to start within the analysis area and have conducive weather for large fire growth, fire behavior and flame lengths associated with it could be a threat to life, property, and natural resources. There are forest treatment opportunities that could be done now to mitigate that extreme fire behavior. By utilizing mechanisms such as thinning, chipping, and prescribed fire we can directly affect the potential fire behavior and reduce the probability of extreme fire events from occurring in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

The purpose and need of this project is to conduct treatments that directly affect potential fire behavior, so that when a fire occurs, it will burn with slow rates of spread and small flame lengths. This reduces wildfire risks to life and property in the urban interface and restores ecosystems that have

**What is the Wildland Urban Interface?**

This term is used to describe the area where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

historically adapted with fire.

**Key Elements of the Project**

- Reduce the risk of a lethal crown fire in the WUI
- Reduce stand density & remove ladder fuels
- Reduce the risks of catastrophic fire behavior to life, property, and natural resources
- Reduce the risk of intense wildfire behavior to firefighters.
- Help restore natural ecological processes
- Help to develop a sustainable forest ecosystem that is resistant to fire disturbances.



*The Legal Process*

Any time land management activities are proposed within the National Forest lands, we are guided by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) to perform environmental analysis and seek public involvement.

Guidance is provided through agency and forest policy, including the National Resources Agenda, Land and Resource Management (Forest) Plan, and Forest Service Road Management and Transportation System Rule; as well as studies such as the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, Northern Region Overview, and Geographic Assessment for the Coeur d’Alene River Basin. Scientific publications and other reference material are used as well.

We are utilizing the most current science and are complying with land management acts and policy to develop the most efficient and practical plan to achieve the purpose and need of the project. In compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act, our planning process provides the opportunity for public involvement, explores treatment options to reach the project objectives, and analyzes the impacts of land management activities.

## What's Been Accomplished So Far?

### Data Collection / Determining Issues

As mentioned above, forest specialists have been working in the Twomile project area gathering data to characterize the existing conditions and determining what the potential impacts are with the associated treatments. Topics such as water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, road conditions, and forest health are some examples of the natural resource subjects that are being analyzed for potential impacts. As stewards of the National Forests, it is our job to identify impacts to the land and natural resources and minimize those effects while providing for multiple uses.

### Developing a Landscape Approach

Considering all resources within an ecosystem and understanding how they all interact helps to develop a landscape approach to forest management. This type of management focuses on all aspects of an ecosystem and works to ensure that the management practices that may occur on a fine scale do not have far-reaching impacts at a broad scale.

Figure 5 shows a sensitive species, the Flammulated Owl, and an actual nesting site for this bird. The landscape approach to management includes understanding how wildlife species interact in their habitats. The presence or absence of threatened, endangered or sensitive species needs to be determined before treatments can begin.



**Figure 6:** Failed culvert the East Fork of Twomile Creek. Failures such as these lead to erosion, stream sedimentation, and prevent fish from moving upstream.



**Figure 4:** Ponderosa pine fire scar obtained from the Nuckols drainage that shows on average a fire occurred here approximately every 30 years prior to 1910. Since then, no evidence of fire disturbance is evident on this sample.



**Figure 5:** These photos show a flammulated owl and an actual nesting site. Snags like this one are typical nesting sites for this owl.

Figure 6 is an example of a watershed disturbance that is negatively impacting how an ecosystem functions. This culvert is not working effectively to move water downstream. The culvert is plugged and water is flowing around the channel and over the road surface. This condition contributes to erosion and sedimentation and negatively effects fish habitat.

As land managers, we identify disturbances such as these and include them as opportunities for restoration. This is an example of the landscape approach the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) takes to mitigate treatments and their connectivity to other natural resources to prevention significant impacts from occurring.

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## Developing Alternatives to the Proposed Action

In the effort to evaluate the issues raised by others since the initial scoping letter (sent in Jan. 2003) the team members developed different alternatives to meet the purpose and need of the project. Some of the treatment options for the area include timber harvesting, thinning, chipping, piling, and controlled burning to reduce surface, ladder, and canopy fuels.

### *A Collaborative Effort*

From the onset of the work with this project, the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Working Group has been providing input on behalf of local communities. This working group is comprised of members from the USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Idaho Department of Lands, the Bureau of Disaster Services, the Shoshone County Commissioners, and the Fire Chiefs Association. We are collaborating our efforts in this project (an action item from the National Fire Plan [www.fireplan.gov](http://www.fireplan.gov)) to address the wildfire issues throughout Shoshone County

Collaboration for this project has also included site visits from Senator Craig's and Representative Otter's offices. Foresters visiting from the Regional Office in Missoula along with local Forest representation from Fire, Silviculture, and Insects and Disease have all previewed the existing conditions and helped to develop treatment options.

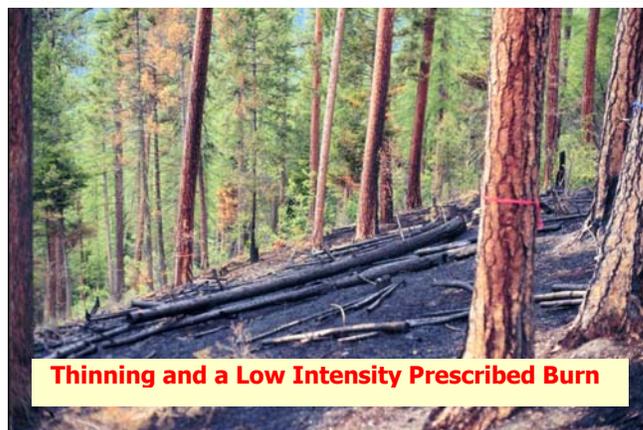
### Local Feedback / Town Meeting

The planning team is once again asking for public input. **If you happen to be living in an area adjacent to the project area, the district would like to know of any ongoing or planned future activities within the area that are scheduled to occur within the next five years.** If you are planning activities on your land, please let us know so that we can properly analyze all the potential effects. Anyone interested in learning more about this project is encouraged to attend the November 13<sup>th</sup> meeting in Osburn, ID.

**Figure 7:** These three images show a treatment area through three progressive stages of a hazardous fuels reduction project. This area was treated through mechanical methods to reduce the fuel load. The goals were to reduce the density of trees, remove the ladder fuels, and return a frequent low intensity fire regime.



**Pre-Treatment**



**Thinning and a Low Intensity Prescribed Burn**



**Green-up the Following Spring**

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