



CANYON LAKES ECHOES

A newsletter from the Canyon Lakes Ranger District of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland

Inside this Issue:

- Canyon Lakes Ranger District Vegetation Management
- The NEPA Process
- National Fire Plan Update
- Project Progress
- Contact Information

Canyon Lakes Ranger District Vegetation Management

Welcome to the first edition of the *Canyon Lakes Echoes* Newsletter. The Vegetation Management Staff Group on the Canyon Lakes Ranger District is producing this newsletter as a way to improve communications. Its purpose is to inform you on the status of various vegetation management projects occurring on the district and to act as a forum to answer questions that you may have about our projects.

We are all aware of the catastrophic fires that have occurred over the last few years. These fires are the result of 100 years of fuel build-up and fire suppression that have allowed an unsafe accumulation of surface debris, ladder fuels and dense forest stands. Suppression activities have allowed fire fuels in our forest to build-up to unnaturally high levels. Fires now tend to be more intense, harder to control, and dangerous, resulting in catastrophic effects. The result is a higher risk to valuable resources such as wildlife habitat, watersheds, and structures. How do we protect these resources?

The answer is to pro-actively manage the forest to reduce the hazard and lower the risk. Vegetative thinning and prescribed fire are two of the tools we use to help manage your forest. The projects we are initiating use these tools to achieve the goal of protecting your resources. We hope you will find the updates on these projects interesting and we encourage you to call if you have questions.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation and marital or family status. (Not all basis apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the USDA Office of Communications at 202-720-1127.

To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call 1-800-245-6340 (Voice), or 202-720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.

The NEPA Process

NEPA stands for the National Environmental Policy Act. Its purpose is to give the public the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process by providing input in the form of comments that express concerns and ideas related to proposed projects.

The entire analysis process can be complicated, however the basic idea is that an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) of resource specialists comes together and develops a proposed project or action to meet certain goals or desired conditions for a project area. These goals can vary from wildlife habitat improvement to hazardous fire fuels reduction. Once there is a proposed action, a project description letter is sent out to the interested public requesting feedback on the proposal. We are interested in your thoughts and concerns specific to the project and project area. Once we receive your comments, we use them, as well as resource issues identified by the IDT, in developing key issues for the project. Key issues are analyzed in detail and used to develop alternatives to the proposed action. These other alternatives must address the key issues as well as meet the goals for the project. An Environmental Assessment is then written that describes the analysis process and documents the effects of implementing each alternative. It should be noted that all projects include a "No-Action" alternative.

The Environmental Assessment is then mailed to the interested public and a legal notice is published in the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* newspaper. This step begins the official 30-day comment period. Your comments and the documented analysis help the Deciding Officer, usually the District Ranger, decide which alternative should be implemented. The Deciding Officer's decision is made public and individuals and organizations that have participated in the above process have the option to challenge the decision through an appeal process. If no appeal is filed, the project may proceed towards implementation.

National Fire Plan Update

In April 1999, the General Accounting Office (GAO) published a report entitled *Western National Forests: a Cohesive Strategy is Needed to Address Catastrophic Wildfire Threats (GAO/RCED-99-65)*. In the report, the GAO asserts, "The most extensive and serious problem related to the health of national forests in the interior West is the over-accumulation of vegetation."

Throughout the West, issues of Forest Health are attributed to many ecosystems out of balance with natural processes. The resulting accumulation of fuel, changes in vegetation type, and incidence of insect and disease infestations, all contribute to a real potential of catastrophic loss by wildfire. Firefighter fatalities on the South Canyon Fire in Colorado were a tragic catalyst for change, resulting in a revised Federal Fire Management Policy. Increased urban development and conflicting social values continue to add complexity to suppression tactics. Recent fires such as the Black Tiger, Buffalo Creek, and Hi Meadow

and Bobcat Fires demonstrate the increasing impacts of property loss, watershed deterioration, and public safety.

Budget trends show a continued and steady increase in Hazardous Fuels allocations. The ten-year average in 1995 for treated acres was approximately 22,000 acres. In 1997, the Forest Service accomplished 36,000 acres, in 1998, 52,000 acres, in 1999, 61,000 acres, and in 2000, 35,000 acres for hazardous fuels reduction. For FY2001, Region 2 (Colorado, Wyoming and South Dakota) anticipates completing a 77,000-acre program.

Project Progress

Dadd/Bennett Prescribed Fire Project: This project is located north of the Pingree Park Road. It is currently in the implementation phase with burning occurring when weather and fuel moisture conditions are favorable. Prescribed fire has been used on over 450 acres with more treatment scheduled to take place in the fall of 2001. Total project area is approximately 7,000 acres



The Dadd/Bennett Prescribed Fire

Lotta Bull Project: This project is located near the northwest corner of the Canyon Lakes District. It proposes to apply vegetation management (timber harvesting) on about 86 acres with the intent of improving forest health. The Decision Notice was signed on August 3, 2001. Implementation is expected to begin in the summer of 2002.

Pescado Timber Sale Project: This project is located in the extreme northwest corner of the district. The project area was analyzed in the Roach Environmental Assessment in 1998. The treatment area covers approximately 711 acres and includes timber harvest and prescribed fire activities. The NEPA process has been completed and the contract was awarded. Implementation is expected to begin in the summer of 2002.

Cache la Poudre Fire Restoration Project: The Environmental Assessment for this prescribed fire project will be completed in the winter of 2001 with a decision in early

2002. This is a fuel reduction project in the Cache la Poudre Wilderness Area with a goal of restoring fire to the wilderness landscape. Total project area is around 3,600 acres.

Stringtown Project: This is a forest thinning and prescribed fire project covering approximately 114 acres. The NEPA process has been completed and the contract was awarded. Implementation is expected to begin in the spring of 2002.

Sheep Creek 1 Project: This project is located in the north-central part of the District, north of County Road 80C. It proposes a combination of prescribed fire and vegetation management activities on approximately 2,700 acres. An Environmental Assessment document has been completed for this project and a decision will be made in December.



Sheep Creek 1 Project Area

Sheep Creek 2 Project: This project is located in the Sheep Creek Geographic Area, south of County Road 80C. An Interdisciplinary Team has been assembled to develop a proposed project for meeting some of the landscape goals in this area. A scoping letter introducing this project will be out this fall. An Environmental Assessment document is expected early next summer.

Seven Mile Stewardship Project: This is a vegetation management and prescribed fire project covering approximately 1205 acres. The NEPA process has been completed and a stewardship contract has been awarded for the vegetation management treatments. Implementation is occurring this fall as weather permits.

Contact Information

To discuss any of the projects from this newsletter or if you have questions please write or call:

Vegetation Management Staff Group
Canyon Lakes Ranger District
Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest
1311 South College Ave.
Fort Collins, CO 80524-4147
(970) 498-1368

*Find Canyon Lakes Echoes
on the web at:
www.fs.fed.us/arnf/*

To: