



File Code: 1950

Date: September 21, 2001

**SCOPING STATEMENT  
REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**USDA FOREST SERVICE  
Shoshone National Forest  
North Zone/Clarks Ranger District**

**Project Name:** Beartooth Face Fuel Reduction Project

**County:** Park County, Wyoming

**Legal Description:** T56N, R104W, Sections 12, 13  
T57N, R103W, Sections 9, 10, 15, 16, 21, 23, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35  
T58N, R103W, Sections 21, 22, 27, 28, 33, 34

**Proposed Decision Date:** Fall 2001

**Proposed Implementation Date:** 2002-2007

**Dear Interested Party:**

The 2000 and 2001 wildfire seasons were severe across the western United States. Years of fire suppression and other management practices have resulted in an increased risk of high intensity fires that are difficult to control.

Under the goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan, the Shoshone National Forest has identified a hazardous fuel reduction project to lessen conditions that contribute to such large, uncontrollable wildfires.

The Forest is considering a fuel treatment project using prescribed fire on the Clarks Fork Ranger District near the community of Clark, Wyoming. The proposed prescribed burn project is known as the Beartooth Face Fuel Reduction Project.

The overall purpose of the prescribed burning is to reduce the threat of wildfires to life, structures and property, and to improve the safety and capabilities for fire fighters in fire suppression activities. Over a three-to-five year period beginning in 2002, fire would be applied to treat approximately 3,800 acres. The general project goals are: 1) reduce natural fuel accumulations with secondary benefits of improved forage production and habitat diversity; 2) reduce future fire suppression costs; and 3) sustain or restore the fire-influenced ecosystem.



The purpose of this letter is to **solicit written comments from all concerned parties to help us design and implement this project**. Your comments and suggestions are needed and encouraged. Project alternatives will be determined and environmental consequences analyzed during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process initiated by this scoping letter. The purpose and need and proposed action are described in the following sections.

## **Introduction and Purpose and Need**

### ***Who is proposing this project?***

The Beartooth Face Fuel Reduction Project is aimed at reducing the effects of future wildfires. The Shoshone National Forest would conduct prescribed burning in strategic areas to reduce wildfire severity and intensity in order to protect resources, life, and property. The project would address fuel continuity between national forest lands and private lands along the Forest boundary. Decades of fire exclusion have changed the character of once open grasslands now being encroached with conifers and dense sagebrush providing fuel for wildfires.

District office personnel are seeking public comments to help plan and carry out the project. The purpose of scoping is to identify issues and concerns related to the proposed action. In addition, scoping may identify additional information and management opportunities that may be incorporated into the proposed action as well as formulating alternatives to the proposed action. Input would be used to determine the nature and complexity of the proposed action, identify environmental and other issues and determine the level of NEPA analysis necessary.

### ***Why is the project being proposed?***

Monitoring and assessments of fuel loading on the Shoshone National Forest have identified fire-adapted ecosystems that are in a condition that threatens their long-term resiliency, integrity, and sustainability. These assessments show that fire was an important disturbance that has been limited since the early 1900s due to aggressive fire suppression. This 90+ years of suppression has caused undesirable changes in the composition and structure (age and size) of forest and rangeland vegetation and excessive accumulations of fuels. The goal is to allow fire managers to efficiently and safely manage fire while maximizing resource benefits.

Over the past 40 years, the average size, intensity and severity of forest fires have increased; the 2000 and 2001 fire seasons have been particularly severe in Wyoming and the western states. This trend poses a greater threat to human life, including firefighters and private property. Along with the increase in fire size and intensity, the cost of fire suppression has increased. More and more people are recreating on National Forests and building homes in wildland areas, increasing their exposure to wildland fires.

The purpose and need for the action are tiered to guidance set forth in the 1986 Shoshone National Forest Plan and Record of Decision:

The purpose of the proposed action is to:

- Project Goals-
  - Reduce the threat to human life, property, and natural and cultural resources
  - Reduce future suppression costs of fires
  - Sustain or restore ecosystems

The project is needed in order to:

- Take a cooperative and proactive approach to reducing the wildfire danger both to private and to surrounding National Forest Service lands within wildland-urban or rural interface areas.
- Based on Shoshone Forest Plan management direction (pages III-6 through III-10) and the current existing condition for the area, the following resource management needs have been identified for the Beartooth Face Fuel Reduction Project:
  - Reduce the accumulation of natural fuels
  - Provide cost effective fire protection to minimize the combined costs of protection and damages, and prevent loss of human life
  - Adopt visual quality objectives that will maintain or enhance the characteristic landscapes of the forest
  - Improve the health and vigor of vegetation types outside wilderness and selected types in wilderness where necessary

## **The Proposed Action**

### ***Where is the proposed project?***

The prescribed burn would be located in Park County and involves designated burn units or areas, between the Clarks Fork Canyon north to the Montana boundary along the eastern face of the Beartooth Plateau. The project is approximately 30-40 miles north of Cody, Wyoming and less than 5 miles from the community of Clark, Wyoming. Legal Description: T56N, R104W, Sections 12, 13; T57N, R103W, Sections 9, 10, 15, 16, 21, 23, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35; T58N, R103W, Sections 21, 22, 27, 28, 33, 34.

The enclosed map shows the location of the project proposal.

### ***When would the project occur?***

The proposed decision date would be the fall of 2001. Project implementation could begin as early as the spring of 2002, and would be conducted in spring or fall burning periods over the next three to five years. Burning would be scheduled to minimally impact other uses of the area.

### ***What is being proposed?***

An Interdisciplinary (ID) team of resource specialists would review and analyze the effects of the proposed action in relation to issues raised during the internal and public scoping process. The team will develop project design features for implementation of the project.

The proposed action would be designed to comply with Forest Plan Management Area Direction contained under management prescription 2A – semi-primitive motorized recreation and the Forest-wide standards and guidelines for other resources as applicable.

Current fuel accumulations and fuel continuity are such that a wildfire start on national forest lands could develop into a large, uncontrollable wildfire that would threaten life and property on adjacent private lands. The proposal would mimic the historical fire pattern by creating a mosaic of burned and unburned vegetation. Fuels targeted to burn and create fuel breaks include sagebrush, down and dead litter accumulation and encroaching trees.

The burn units were identified as areas of high fuel and litter accumulations that exceed desired standards. This sets the stage for large, uncontrollable fires with an associated high level of damage to resource values. The proposed action, using prescribed fire under specific, controlled conditions, would treat these areas to move units from a high risk category to a lower risk category and/or maintain those areas that are already within desirable standards for fuel loads. Implementing the management actions would minimize the possibility of losing entire stands to a large, intense fire that may burn across the entire landscape with catastrophic results.

In addition, activities are focused on wildland-urban or rural interface areas to reduce risk to life and property. The proposed project would result in fuel reduction treatment on approximately 3,800 acres of National Forest land.

- The specifics of the proposed action and project implementation include:
  - Acres: The project boundaries include about 3,800 total acres in 6 separate areas, implementation will concentrate in areas of continuous fuels of sagebrush and timber adjacent to forest boundary and private in-holdings.
  - Air Quality: Air quality and smoke management would be addressed in project design. Federal and state standards would not be exceeded.
  - Fuels: Areas of continuous fuels of sagebrush and timber adjacent to the forest boundary and private in-holdings are the primary focus areas for fuel reduction.

- Grazing Allotments/Range Improvements: Rest/rotations would be coordinated with permittees; range improvements such as fences and water developments would be protected.
- Heritage (Cultural) Resources: A cultural resource survey would be completed on all proposed areas prior to implementation to protect any historical resources.
- Ignition Type: A combination of aerial ignition with a helicopter and ground ignition systems by personnel with handheld torches would be utilized for safety and efficiency.
- Noxious Weeds: A noxious weed evaluation would be conducted for the project prior to treatment.
- Prescribed Burn Plan: All prescribed burning would be conducted under a Prescribed Burn Plan that would specify conditions under which the burn can safely occur.
- Public Notification: Clark area residents would be notified in advance of the implementation of the project to limit impacts to individuals with smoke sensitive conditions.
- Recreation/Scenic values: No developed campgrounds or trails exist within the project area.
- Roads: No roads would be constructed as part of the project.
- Soil and Water Protection: Areas identified on steep slopes with erosion or landslide potential would be excluded from burning or burned at a minimum intensity to limit bare soil exposure.
- Summary-Prescribed fire would be used to reduce fuel loading, improve livestock/wildlife forage conditions and improve ecosystem resiliency.

### **Preliminary Opportunities/Concerns/Issues**

- How to reduce excessive fuel accumulations and continuous fuel concentrations that may contribute to a catastrophic fire?
- How to protect human health and safety, property and natural resource values in a cost effective manner?
- What is the best timing for the project to minimize potential conflicts with other activities?
- What is the potential effect on National Forest lands or other landowners?
- What is the effect on wildlife or other natural resource values?
- How will the Forest Service safely implement prescribed burning?
- Are there any extraordinary circumstances such as excessively steep slopes, wetlands, congressionally designated areas, Research Natural Areas, archaeological sites, etc. present that should receive careful consideration as part of planning?

### **Possible Alternatives**

- No Action Alternative – Current management would continue and the proposed prescribed burns to reduce fuel loads would not be implemented.

- Alternative actions or area(s) would be analyzed if issues and concerns related to the proposed area are identified and could not be addressed through project planning or mitigated.
- Proposed Action - The project would be authorized as proposed.

### **Nature of Decision**

The decision to be made is whether or not to authorize the prescribed burn as proposed, or an alternative to the proposal. Also, the decision could include what mitigation measures need to be applied to the proposal. Based on public comment from this scoping notice and environmental analysis, the Forest Service must determine whether significant issues or concerns exist. If there are any, they will be addressed in the analysis and the eventual decision.

### **Contacts**

The public is provided this opportunity to identify and submit issues and concerns they feel the Forest Service should address. If you feel we have overlooked something or have additional information, comments need to be as specific as possible to assist us in the analysis. To be most helpful, comments should be submitted in writing no later than October 21, 2001.

For further information, contact project leader Clint Dawson, North Zone Fire Management Officer at (307) 527-6921.

Written comments can be mailed to: Attention-Marty Sharp, NEPA Coordinator, North Zone/Wapiti Ranger District, 203A Yellowstone Ave., Cody, WY 82414, e-mailed to [msharp@fs.fed.us](mailto:msharp@fs.fed.us), faxed to (307) 527-1202, or phone (307) 527-6921.

**NOTE:** If you no longer want to be included on the NEPA mailing list to receive these scoping notices, please notify the office and help us keep the list current. Scoping Statements, the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) and other related NEPA documents are now being posted on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/shoshone>. See “Forest Management”, then “Land Management Planning”, and then “Project Information” on the Shoshone National Forest home page.

Again, your comments are important to us.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Brent L. Larson*  
BRENT L. LARSON  
District Ranger