

Scoping Statement  
Homestead Park Fuels Reduction Project  
(Project Number #S0301)

USDA Forest Service  
Shoshone National Forest  
South Zone/Washakie Ranger District  
Fremont County, Wyoming

**Introduction**

The Shoshone National Forest is proposing a vegetation and fuels management project adjacent to the Homestead Park Subdivision to address problems, issues, and concerns identified through collaborative efforts with property owners and State and Federal agencies during the fall of 2002 and summer of 2003. The overriding reasons for proposing this action is to respond to the increasing wildfire risk which could threaten life, property, and resource value. One or a combination of the following activities are proposed for consideration: 1) Thinning approximately 51 acres adjacent to the Homestead Park Subdivision, 2) Clear-cutting approximately 138 acres, dispersed into four units less than 40 acres each, 3) Conducting approximately 1221 acres of prescribed burning. These actions are discussed in more detail in the proposed action section.

The proposed action is located approximately 6 miles south-southwest of Lander in T32N, R100W, Sections 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12 and 13, Fremont County, Wyoming (See Map 1).

**Proposed Action**

The proposed action is designed to modify behavior of a wildfire adjacent to the subdivision, should one occur. While there is no guarantee that a wildfire will not enter the subdivision, altering vegetation patterns can change fire pattern and flow, allowing additional response times for firefighters and to provide for public and firefighter safety. The proposed actions can be summarized as (See Map 2):

**Clear-Cutting.** Clear-cutting would be conducted on approximately 138 acres, separated into at least four treatment areas of less than 40 acres each. All stems, merchantable and un-merchantable, would be cut. This activity would allow for: 1) The creation of fuel breaks<sup>1</sup> to modify fire behavior from potential wildfires moving from west to east into the subdivision creating a more defensible space along the subdivision boundary, 2) the removal of trees infected with mistletoe and commandra blister rust and infested with needle-mining insects, 3) removal of heavy fuel loads within the treated areas, 4) and enhance the regeneration of aspen, which due to their moister microclimate than conifers act as a “natural” fuel break.

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<sup>1</sup>Fuel Break – A natural or human-made change in vegetation (fuels) that alters fire behavior by decreasing the rate of spread and fire intensity, allowing suppression and containment opportunities. For maximum effectiveness, fuel breaks are in place prior to a wildfire event threatening life and property.

**Thinning.** Thinning would be conducted in approximately 51 acres along the subdivision boundary. Trees would be cut to approximately 15x15 foot spacing, with up to 50% variation in spacing to provide for spatial variety. On the northern end of the thinning unit, conifers would be cut from existing aspen stands and aspen stems would be cut to encourage aspen sprouting. This activity would allow for: 1) The reduction in fuel loads within the treated areas, 2) enhance the regeneration of aspen, 3) and the reduction of diseased and insect infested trees while reducing visual changes directly on the subdivision boundary.

**Prescribed Burning.** Prescribed burning would be conducted on approximately 1,221 acres during the spring using snow lines and/or man-made fire lines as necessary to contain the burn. Necessary Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality air quality permits would be obtained prior to burning activities. Burning will not take place unless specific weather, moisture and vegetative conditions are met prior to ignition. Adjacent property owners have made specific requests for 24-hour coverage during burning operations and cutting the burned conifers at completion. This activity would allow for: 1) The reduction in fuel loads within the grass/forb/sage communities, 2) enhance grass/forb growth, 3) enhance defensible space along the forest/urban interface, 4) provide structure safety during burning, 5) and provide for visual enhancement.

**Vegetative Removal.** All merchantable and/or un-merchantable materials treated would be considered for timber sale contracts, service contract, stewardship contracts, or other means, depending on right-of-way and road maintenance agreements with the adjacent landowners. Regardless of material handling, all slash materials would be disposed of through piling or pile and burn methods. This activity would allow for: 1) commercial use of treated materials, 2) reduction of fuel loads within the treated stands, 3) and reduce visual affects from cut timber.

All unit boundaries on accompanying maps are approximate. Unit boundaries may be altered slightly depending on site-specific access and topographic conditions.

### **Existing Conditions**

Lodgepole pine stands on Timber Top Mountain are past their pathological rotation age. The majority of the lodgepole stands are pole-sized (five to seven inches diameter at breast height (DBH)) with a heavy component of saplings (one to five inches DBH), and a component of small sawtimber (seven to twelve inches DBH). Stands are dense (in excess of 1000-1500 trees per acre), are approximately 120 years old, and have stagnated in growth due to lack of management.



**Dense stands of lodgepole pine on Timber Top Mountain**

Several consecutive years of drought have also stressed the senesced trees. Reduced moisture levels and aged trees have left these stands vulnerable to impact by insect and disease (See Map 3). Stands are infested with lodgepole pine needle miners. These needle-mining insects have been defoliating lodgepole pine stands on Timber Top Mountain for the past few years. Unmanaged stands and drought conditions have led to the outbreak of this uncommon defoliator along the front range of the Wind River Mountains in the Lander area. (This can be seen from Lander as a brown cast or hue on the tree foliage on Timber Top Mountain and the unburned portion of Wolf Point.) Expected mortality from needle-miners is unknown at this time, but extended drought conditions could exacerbate defoliation and mortality. Dwarf mistletoe and commandra blister rust are also present in these tree stands. Some patches of older, larger sawtimber exist scattered on Timber Top Mountain. These stands are in excess of 200 years old, contain approximately 60-120 feet of basal area, and are undergoing negative net growth (where more trees are dying than are being recruited or are growing in the stands). Mortality is occurring from the combined effects of drought, age, and heavy dwarf mistletoe and commandra blister rust infection.

Lodgepole stands within the subdivision are infested with needle-miners, dwarf mistletoe and commandra blister rust.

Aspen clone remnants with individual trees or stands of varying sizes and densities are also present on Timber Top Mountain where they are being out-competed by lodgepole pine. They exist primarily in the vicinity of Timber Top Spring and in the head of Quakenstead Gulch. They also exist on conifer/meadow edges.

Grass/forb/sagebrush meadows exist in the Timber Top area. Sagebrush in these areas is decadent. Sagebrush also contains volatile oils, which add to their flammability and burn intensely during wildfire conditions. Limber pine and Rocky Mountain juniper are also present scattered through some of these meadows.

Douglas-fir stands are also present to the east (in Sheep Gulch through the Homestead Park subdivision) west and south of Timber Top Mountain. These stands contain a component of limber pine where they border meadow edges or are found in fewer numbers per acre. Limber pine is infected with white pine blister rust in the Timber Top and Sinks Canyon areas. Aspen clone remnants can also be found in some of the Douglas-fir stands in Sheep Gulch. Mortality from Douglas-fir beetle has occurred throughout these stands.

Access to Timber Top Mountain from Forest Service lands is poor and generally accessible only All Terrain Vehicle trails only. The entrance into Homestead Park subdivision is gated and locked.

### **Desired Conditions**

Based on the Shoshone Forest Plan management goals (pages III-6 through III-11) and management direction for Middle Fork (pages J-174 through J-176) and Squaw Creek Analysis Areas (pages J-161 through J-164), actions to reach desired conditions are identified as:

- Reduce fuel loads and potential spread of wildfire
- Maintain or enhance tree age class and diversity
- Salvage dead and dying timber in insect infested stands
- Improve wildlife habitat
- Maintain scenery and visual condition.

### **Purpose and Need**

**Purpose for the Action.** The primary purpose for the proposed action is to develop and implement a vegetation and fuels management strategy to address human health and safety concerns resulting from the increasing fuel conditions, drought, insect and disease and wildfire risk. Actions would move vegetation, along the forest/subdivision boundary, toward desired conditions, primarily through such tools as fire and mechanical treatments. An emphasis would be given to priority areas to reduce wildfire hazards to life and property, to firefighters, and to reduce fire suppression costs by means of vegetation and fuels treatments. All actions would be taken in an effort not to adversely affect other resources within or near the treatment areas. Additionally, improvements of aspen stands in some areas would be a result that benefits diversity and wildlife habitat.

**Need for the Action.** The Forest Plan, Chapter III, includes direction for management of the Forest. The need for action is derived from comparing relevant Forest Plan direction/desired conditions to the existing conditions in the analysis area. At this time, comparisons of existing and desired conditions show where a need or opportunity for action exists. The proposed action was developed in response to that management need or opportunity. Additionally the homes within the area are immediately adjacent to the east boundary of the National Forest. Prevailing winds blow west to east carrying wildfire off of the Forest. The old, dense insect infested stands immediately adjacent to these homes pose a significant risk in the event of a fire start to the west.

### **Scoping and Public Involvement**

Public involvement began in the fall of 2002, in informal meetings with adjacent landowners, Wyoming State Forestry, Fremont County Firewise, Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service to discuss aspects of the existing and desired conditions and possible needs/opportunities within the proposed area. Additional meetings were conducted during early summer 2003 on site of the proposed action. The above parties have collectively been working on manipulating vegetation in the Homestead Park area to alter fire behavior in the event of a wildfire, should one occur. For example, Wyoming State Forestry and Fremont County Firewise have been working with individual landowners to write and implement management plans for fuels reduction projects around their homes and properties, and to remove trees infested with Douglas-fir beetle. They have also been working with the homeowner's association to place a series of fuel breaks within the subdivision. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have conducted prescribed burns in Sinks Canyon over the last few years to reduce the amount of sagebrush. The Forest Service also completed a fuel break on the south side of Sheep Creek, to the west of Homestead Park, in 1999.



**Fuel Break west of the Homestead Park subdivision completed on the Shoshone National Forest in 1999.**

This Scoping Notice is provided to encourage public participation in the development of this proposed action. Scoping is to determine the scope of the issues to be addressed and to identify issues and concerns relative to the proposed action. This is an opportunity for your involvement early in the planning process; your comments and suggestions are needed and encouraged. Alternatives to the proposed action will be determined and environmental consequences analyzed during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process initiated by this Scoping Notice. We are asking for comments, alternatives to the proposed action and any information you may want us to consider during planning and analysis.

An interdisciplinary team of resource specialist will review and analyze the effects of the proposed action commensurate with the issues raised from the scoping and public involvement process. Additional specifics of the proposed action and possible project design/mitigation measures would be included in the analysis document. Other alternatives that meet the purpose and need may result from scoping and further analysis. Alternative actions or area(s) will be analyzed if issues and concerns related to the proposed area and actions are identified and could not be addressed through additional planning or mitigation. At a minimum, these alternatives will be considered: 1) No Action Alternative – Proposed action would not be implemented, 2) Proposed Action – The proposed action would be authorized as described, 3) and possible alternatives based upon comments and additional information or other identified issues.

**Contact**

The public<sup>2</sup> is provided this opportunity to identify and submit issues and concerns they feel the Forest Service should address related to this project. If you feel you have information pertinent and specifically related to the proposed action, we welcome your participation during this 30-day public comment period. Questions related to the prescribed burn in this proposal should be directed to Karl Brauneis, Fire Management Officer, telephone (307) 332-5460, or email at [kbrauneis@fs.fed.us](mailto:kbrauneis@fs.fed.us). Questions related to the mechanical treatment in this proposal should be directed to Ellen Jungck, Silviculturist and Project Leader, telephone (307) 445-2466, or email at [ejungck@fs.fed.us](mailto:ejungck@fs.fed.us). Your comments will be most helpful if received in writing no later than close of business, September 25, 2003. Written comments can be mailed to: Mark King, NEPA Coordinator, South Zone/Washakie Ranger District, 333 E. Main Street, Lander, WY 82520, email at [comments-rocky-mountain-shoshone-washakie@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-rocky-mountain-shoshone-washakie@fs.fed.us), or faxed to (307) 578-1204 ATTN: Mark King. Please reference "Homestead Park" in the subject line of your response.

/Mark King

/Burns Davison

Mark King  
NEPA Coordinator  
South Zone, Washakie Ranger District

Burns Davison  
District Ranger  
Washakie Ranger District

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<sup>2</sup> NOTE: If you no longer want to be included on the NEPA mailing list to receive scoping notices, please notify the office so that we can maintain a current mailing list. Scoping Notices, Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) and other related NEPA documents and decisions are available on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/shoshone/planning.htm>.