

# Deschutes & Ochoco National Forests Crooked River National Grassland

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## Projects & Plans

### Project Documents

### BLM Prineville District Forest Service, Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest

### Categorical Exclusion

### Review and Approval

**Name of Proposed Action:** Thaw  
(Long Prairie) Wildland-Urban Interface  
Project

**CE Number** (OR-056-03-096):

### Location



**Home**

SCHEDULE OF PROJECTS

PROJECT INFORMATION

- ✦ **By Administrative Unit**
  - Deschutes SO
  - Bend/Fort Rock
  - Crescent
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  - Ochoco SO
  - Lookout Mtn.
  - Paulina
  - Crooked River NG
- ✦ **Forest Health, Fire, Fuels, Vegetation Management**
- ✦ **Wildlife**
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- ✦ **Miscellaneous**

PLANS, ANALYSES, ASSESSMENTS

### ▶ Links

### ▶ Evaluate Our Service

We welcome your comments on our service and your suggestions for improvement.

Forest

#### **Deschutes National Forest**

1001 SW Emkay Drive  
Bend, OR 97702

(541) 383-5300

#### **Ochoco National Forest**

3160 N.E. 3rd Street  
Prineville, OR 97754

(541) 416-6500

#### **Crooked River National Grassland**

813 S.W. Hwy. 97  
Madras, OR 97741

(541) 475-9272



The project boundary includes the interface between private property and federal land in the area between Highways 97 and 31, south of La Pine, Oregon. The legal location is T23S R10E Sections 9, 10, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, 36 and T24S R10E Sections 1, 2. The project is located in Klamath County, Oregon.

## **Purpose of and Need for Action**

The purpose of this project is to address public and firefighter safety by improving the ability to suppress wildfires on publicly managed lands that border private property, also called "urban interface or intermingled ownership".

Reducing hazardous fuels on public lands is not new, but the wildfires of 2000 raised public awareness and resulted in more funding to complete hazardous fuels reduction projects. Congress required a list be prepared of communities within the vicinity of federal lands that are at risk from wildfire. The community of La Pine was placed on this list which can be found in the Federal Register (August 17, 2001, Part III), with other such neighborhoods bordering public lands across the west.

Over the last decade, some areas of Northern Klamath County have experienced rapid development. In addition to the increase in population, the surrounding federal lands have developed a heavy accumulation of fuels that threaten private lands and rural communities. This condition is most pronounced between Highways 31 and 97. Within this area, it is common to find a mixture of flammable materials including shrubs and dense lodgepole pine saplings up to the private property boundaries. During normal summertime conditions, this reduces the ability to suppress wildfires and places lives and property at greater risk. Many residents and the Walker Range Fire Protection Association personnel have already been proactive by reducing the threat of wildfire on their own private property bordering public lands.

Small tree thinning is also needed in many areas to lessen competition for limited resources and overcrowding. In these conditions, insects, disease or fire can play a greater disturbance role than desired adjacent to private property. When young stands are free to grow with the crowns well separated, they also serve the purpose of making wildfire suppression much less difficult.

## **Description**

The project totals 863 acres and the majority of treatments will occur on BLM-managed lands (825 acres) and 38 acres on FS lands (Crescent RD, Deschutes National Forest). The objectives are specified by sub area:

**Urban Interface Surrounding Homes:** Vegetative treatment will occur radiating 500 feet from private property boundaries to achieve a 2-foot flame length during typical summertime conditions. It is expected opportunities for crown fire initiation and spread will be a rare event after implementation. The surface fuels will measure less than 5 tons per acre of 0-3 inch material. Shrubs will be mechanically

reduced to a height no greater than 9 to 12 inches beneath leave trees and patches to provide vertical separation of fuels. In the interspaces where there is less potential for crown fire initiation, patches of untreated shrubs will be retained for diversity.

All trees and snags greater than 6 inch dbh will be retained. Smaller trees will be thinned to 15-foot spacing, retaining the largest and healthiest. To inhibit crown fire initiation, ladder fuels (those branches and small trees between the surface and about 8 feet in height) should not be found on more than 10% of the stand. A road may be used as a defensible space and boundary for a treatment zone, even if the distance is less than 500 feet.

**Beal Road:** The objective is for safe public evacuation in the event of a wildfire, using the road as a defensible control line. Use the identical prescription as above with a 200-foot treatment area from the ditchline. Retain most large logs that are already down in place for wildlife habitat and to discourage inappropriate OHV use and illegal dumping. Pile the limbs and fine fuels attached to the logs to reduce the hazard. In portions of Beal Road bordering private property, consider fuels reduction techniques that maintain screening between the structures and traffic.

**Split Rail Drive and Redundant Subdivision Access:** The objective is to maintain conditions that would allow for emergency access until the location of the Outback Fire Station is known. At that time, further needs would be assessed. Thin, mow and prune as specified above to a distance of 15 feet from the ditchline on either side of the road.

**Wildlife Movement Corridors:** Incorporate wildlife connectivity/movement corridors to maintain or enhance a forested vegetative condition that allows wildlife movement and/or migration through the area as free of human disturbance as possible between remnant stands (attached map). The primary focus in this area will be to enhance their function with future vegetation management, except where their function conflicts with the objective of home protection. The corridors should be 1000 feet wide where practical, with a 400 foot core that could be adjusted to accommodate fragmentation while maintaining overall connectivity. Where sufficient habitat does not currently exist in the corridor, use existing patches and clumps of larger trees, and manage toward improving conditions. Corridors include existing patches of relatively late and old remnant stands and clumps with a goal to manage for a fully forested condition in the future. Corridors would be located north of Antelope Meadows running northwest to southeast crossing Beal Road, between Antelope Meadows and the Split Rail subdivision crossing Beal Road, between Split Rail and Forest Meadows subdivisions, and between Forest Meadows and Sun Forest divisions.

## Public Participation

Public involvement in the planning process began in winter of 2002/2003 when notice of the project was published in the **Central Oregon Schedule of Projects**. To identify the stakeholders and to get involvement in the solution, project team members attended several meetings with homeowners before and after development of

the proposed action to discuss project scope and design. Members also attended a Community Action Team (CAT) meeting to obtain feedback on the process and to receive input on project implementation.

Comments were solicited when the project proposal was mailed to over 300 affected homeowners, agencies, and groups in March of 2003. The proposed action was also posted on the Deschutes National Forest's web site and appeared in several local newspapers and in the June, 2003 American Forestry Resources Council journal.

A number of letters and phone calls were received throughout the planning cycle. Most comments expressed support for the project. Many individuals wanted to be involved in the implementation phase and a notification list has been maintained for when project execution begins.

There were concerns for loss of hiding cover and fragmentation of habitat for big game and species dependent upon remnant forest conditions. Also, Oregon Natural Resources Council asked for adequate public participation, to prioritize high risk areas, ensure fuels reduction treatments are effective, and use rational and informed decision making.

The project was designed with big game travel corridors, retaining remnant stands where they do not compromise public safety. Also, areas immediately adjacent to the subdivisions were prioritized for immediate action, deferring fuels reduction treatment greater than 500 feet adjacent to the homes. A third party monitoring plan to measure treatment effectiveness is currently being developed from stakeholders who reside in the southern Deschutes/northern Klamath County area.

## Plan Conformance

The project has been reviewed and found to be in conformance with one or more of the following plans:

*The Record of Decision and management direction found in the Brothers/La Pine Resource Management Plan, July 1989:*

- Page 25 #4, #5 Shrub Control: . Project design has incorporated prescriptions that will blend into the surrounding areas using mosaic patterns.
- Page 97 Wildlife Habitat and Deer Migration Routes Project implementation incorporates design elements that mitigate the impacts of human activities on important seasonal wildlife habitat. Vegetation manipulation is prescribed to occur in a mosaic pattern.
- Page 101 Fire Management: . The project has been designed to maintain fuel profiles that are consistent with conditional fire suppression parameters listed in Table 19.

*August 12, 2003 Draft Alternatives 2-7 for the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan:*

- Objective F-1: Fuels and Fire Management for wildland interface

areas

- Objective F: Wildland fuels profiles are managed to ensure that firefighter and public safety are not compromised.
- Objective FP: Although timber harvest is not one of the elements of this project, utilization of forest products for services (stewardship-type model) will be utilized to meet objectives for forest health and fuels reduction.
- Objective V-4b: Vegetation is managed to maintain or mimic natural disturbance regimes so that plant communities are resilient.
- Objective V-5: Special status plant species are managed such that the BLM actions do not contribute to the need for federally listing of species.
- Objective V-8: Protect existing and developing old lodgepole pine forests from human development and from severe natural disturbances. Remnant forests were maintained and protected where they did not pose a hazard to homes.
- Objective W-9: Including new information provided as a result of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project pertaining to noxious weed encroachment, downward trends in ecological integrity, and concern for increases in fragmentation and loss of plant and animal species diversity.
- Objective W: Maintaining adequate numbers of snags and down wood where appropriate. Although minimal amounts of snags and downed wood would be maintained in the urban interface (500'), there are adequate levels from a watershed standpoint.
- Objective W: Management for deer and elk migration and habitat effectiveness.

*A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment*

*The 1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Standards and Guidelines*

- Scenic Views/Retention (4-121): Management activities are to be designed and located to blend into the natural landscape and not be visually apparent to the casual forest visitor. Consistency with this goal would also satisfy the goals for the Outback National Scenic Byway.
- Management of the soil resource: Maintain or enhance long-term soil productivity (LRMP 4-70, SL-1). Regional Standards and Guidelines included in FSM 2500, R-6 supplement 2500-98-1 describe conditions determined to be detrimental to soil productivity and outline Soil Quality Standards intended to limit the extent of these conditions to less than 20% of an activity area.

## **Categorical Exclusion Reference**

This action is within the scope of the Department of the Interior Manual 516 DM, Chapter 2, Appendix 1 and Department of Agriculture category 31.2 (10), Hazardous fuels reduction activities. This category was established where actions normally do not

individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and therefore may be excluded from documentation in an EA or an EIS. Dated June 5, 2003, Federal Register Volume 68, Number 108.

### Exceptions to Categorical Exclusions Documentation

The proposed action would not create adverse environmental effects under the CE exceptions, unless as noted. The propose action will:

Exception	YES	NO
1. Have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?		X
2. Have significant, adverse effects on unique geographic characteristics or features, or on special designation areas such as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; or prime farmlands. This also includes ecologically significant or critical areas, such as significant caves, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), National Monuments, Wilderness Study Areas, Research Natural Areas, and those listed on the National Register of Natural Landmarks?		X
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects (40 CFR 1508.14)?		X
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or unique or unknown environmental risks?		X
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principal about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?		X
6. Be directly related to other actions with individually insignificant, but significant cumulative environmental effects, which include connected actions on private lands (40 CFR 1508.7 and 1508.25 (a))?		X

7. Have adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, which includes Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties?		X
<b>Cultural Clearance Initial</b>		
8. Have adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed as Federally Endangered or Threatened Species, or adverse effects on designated critical habitat for these species? This includes impacts on BLM-designated sensitive species or their habitat. When a Federal listed species or its habitat is encountered, a Biological Evaluation (BE) shall document the effect on the species. The responsible official may proceed with the proposed action without preparing a NEPA document when the BE demonstrates either a "no affect" determination or a "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" determination.		X
<b>T&amp;E Clearances Initial</b>		
<b>Wildlife</b>		
<b>Fish</b>	N/A	
<b>Plants</b>		
9. Fail to comply with (Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management); (Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?		X
10. Violate a Federal, State, Local, or Tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-Federal requirements are consistent with Federal requirements?		X
11. Involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources (NEPA section 102(2)(E)) not already decided in an approved land use plan?		X
12. Have disproportionate significant adverse impacts on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice)?		X
13. Restrict access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioner or adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites)?		X

14. Have significant adverse effects on Indian Trust Resources?		X
15. Contribute to the introduction, existence, or spread of federally listed noxious weeds (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act); or invasive non-native species (Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species)?		X
16. Have a direct or indirect adverse impact on energy development, production, supply, and/or distribution (Executive Order 13212, Actions to Expedite Energy-Related Projects)?		X

## Documentation of Mitigation Measures

### Wildlife

1. Protect and retain snags wherever possible unless they must be felled to meet safety regulations. If felled they should be retained on site unless in excess of Mitigation Measure #2 and not needed for access management.
2. To provide for dependent wildlife species, retain a minimum of 120 linear feet of down logs per acre where available, of the largest diameter. The logs may be retained in clumps or scattered to satisfy requirements.
3. If northern bald eagle roost site(s) are discovered prior to, or during the lifetime of the fuel treatment activities, establish a 400 meter radius restricted zone as needed to eliminate human and mechanized disturbance to wintering bald eagles. The restricted period would run from November 1 through April 30 each winter.
4. Include provisions in contracts that allow for the protection of proposed, endangered, or threatened species or critical habitat that may be discovered or federally designated during the lifetime of project implementation.

### Botany

5. To minimize disturbance to pumice grape-fern plants through their entire above-ground life cycle, restrict thinning, pruning, mowing, and slash piling activities to September 1 - March 31. After the initial fuels reduction activities are completed and the area is scheduled for maintenance, non-mechanical treatments (i. e. homeowner stewardship-type agreements) may occur without seasonal restrictions.
6. Except on existing skid roads, avoid more than one "pass" over an area with mechanical brush reduction equipment. Also, minimize traversing areas with little vegetation.



7. Handpile slash away from areas approximated on the attached map. Also, avoid handpiles in areas relatively free of vegetation (possible pumice grape-fern habitat) prior to fuels reduction activities. Mechanical brush manipulation within these areas is allowed during the identified timeframes.
8. Where possible, incorporate known pumice grape-fern sites and habitat into retention areas (i.e., identified wildlife movement corridors).

### **Soils**

9. To minimize soil displacement and compaction, avoid excessive maneuvering and sharp turns with the mowing machinery and make turns in roads and skid roads where possible. Keep chipping trucks and machinery on skid trails and landings.
10. Promote hand-felling of trees under 6 inch dbh during treatment operations.
11. Hand pile cut material on existing areas of detrimental compaction such as skid trails and landings.
12. Avoid mowing over highly decayed down woody material on the soil surface.
13. Operate mowing machinery during periods of reasonable soil moisture, somewhere between field capacity and wilting points.

### **Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plants**

14. Require equipment and vehicles used in the project area be clean and free of soil, seeds, and plant parts (attached cleaning provisions).

### **Archeology**

15. Avoid activities in cultural site adjacent to Antelope Meadows subdivision.

### **Recommendations:**

In the implementation planning phase, include Walker Range Protection Association, wildlife, cultural, botany and contracting staff.

### **Monitoring**

Continue to monitor pumice grape-fern sites and habitat in the project area to determine population trends.

### **Summary of Findings**

The proposed action would not create adverse environmental impacts or require the preparation of an EA or EIS under 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 or 516 DM 6, Appendix 5. The proposed action has been reviewed

against the criteria for an exception to a categorical exclusion listed in 516 DM 2.3 A(3), or the additional criteria listed in Instruction Memorandum No. 99-178, the Lacey Act, as amended; the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974; the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended; EO 13112 on Invasive Species; EO 12898 on Environmental Justice; Clean Water Act of 1987; Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments to the Clean Water Act of 1996; EO 12088 on federal compliance with pollution control standards, as amended; EO 12589 on Superfund compliance; and EO dated July 14, 1982 on intergovernmental review of federal programs. In addition, this CE complies with IM 2002-053 on the Preparation of Statement(s) of Adverse Energy Impact.

## CE Determination

The proposed action and specified mitigation measures have been determined to meet the criteria for a CE and does not fall under any of the CE exceptions. No additional environmental analysis is required. All cultural resources and special status species for the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have been reviewed by the appropriate specialists and they have provided clearances for the project.

This hazardous fuels reduction was identified through a collaborative framework as described in the "Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan". A site-specific strategy for this area was developed (attached).

Activities will not be conducted in Wilderness Areas or where they would impair the suitability of wilderness study areas. This will not include the authorization to use herbicides or pesticides. There will be no construction of new permanent roads or other infrastructure. Hazardous fuels reduction is the primary purpose. Activities will occur within the Wildland-Urban Interface in a Fire Regime IV and Condition Class 2.

Reviewed By \_\_\_\_\_ Title  
Date

Environmental Coordinator

## Approval:

Based on a review of the proposal and field office staff recommendations, I approve of the project as proposed and mitigated:

Approved By \_\_\_\_\_ Title  
Date

Robert Towne  
Prineville BLM Field

Manager  
Deschutes Resource Area

Approved By \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Title

Phil Cruz  
District Ranger Crescent  
RD  
Deschutes National Forest

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