

DECISION MEMO
RAGER WUI FUELS PROJECT

USDA, Forest Service
Ochoco National Forest, Paulina Ranger District
Crook County, Oregon
T15S&, R25E, Sections 15-17, 20-22, 27-30, 31-33

Introduction

The Rager Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) project area lies in the area immediately adjacent to the Rager Ranger Station on the southern end of the Paulina Ranger District. The project area lies west, north, and east of the District Office, with the furthest distance being nearly 3 miles to the north. The Paulina Ranger District Office and the community of Rager lie where the stream courses of Rager, Tamarack, and Powell Creeks come together. The deepest soils, the best growing sites and consequently the heaviest forest fuel loads on the Ranger District are often associated with these areas. Being at the head of the Paulina Valley, the planning area is among the driest areas on the Ranger District and it is common for summer thunderstorms to ignite fires in this area. While the historical fire regime for Rager WUI is one of frequent, low-intensity wildfires, many decades of successful, aggressive fire suppression have resulted in an accumulation of forest fuels, high numbers of understory trees, and live limbs on trees that extend low to the ground. These factors have led to a significant increase in the amount of acres vulnerable to a stand-replacing wildfire. Stand-replacing wildfires often result in undesired and unnatural adverse impacts to soils, water, wildlife, and fish on public as well as private land. Private land borders the Rager WUI area to the South.

Purpose and Need for Action

There is a need to reduce the threat of uncharacteristically intense wildfire within the Rager WUI project area. The purpose of these treatments is to reduce hazard and resource loss from wildfire and to help move forest vegetation and associated fuels toward conditions that are sustainable in a fire environment, provide habitat diversity, and improve firefighter and public safety. Underburning, non-commercial thinning, and some machine piling have been proposed for this area.

Decision

I have decided to implement underburning of 2770 acres, non-commercial thinning of 1000 acres and machine piling of 123 acres in the Rager WUI project on the Paulina Ranger District. No burning of riparian species is anticipated, units will be burned during fall burning seasons (typically during the months of October-December) or spring

burning seasons (typically March through May), and ignition by hand and aerial method will be used.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment because it is of limited scope and impact. It falls within category 10, Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire, not to exceed 4,500 acres, and listed in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, 31.2. This action is one of the actions established by the Chief of the Forest Service, which normally does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

None of the extraordinary circumstances listed below would be affected by this project.

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species;
- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.
- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.
- d. Inventoried roadless areas.
- e. Research natural areas.
- f. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.
- g. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Public Involvement

Public comments were solicited by letter in July 2007. Letters and the draft Decision Memo were mailed those who expressed interest during project scoping. No comments were received.

Findings Required By Other Laws

I have evaluated these actions and found them to be consistent with the Management Area Allocations and the Standards and Guidelines contained in the Ochoco Forest Plan (36 CFR 219.27) as required by the National Forest Management Act. Biological Evaluations were completed for fish, wildlife and plants. No effect and no impact determinations were made for all federally proposed, threatened, endangered and sensitive species known or suspected to occur within the planning area. The project was reviewed by the District Archeologist and is consistent with the terms of the 1995 Programmatic Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the USFS Region 6 (1995). It is therefore, consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Implementation Date


This action will be implemented during the burning seasons of 2007 and continue into the year 2011. No special conditions exist in relation to implementation.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

Public comments were solicited by letter in July 2007. Letters and the draft Decision Memo were mailed those who expressed interest during project scoping. No comments were received, therefore this decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.

Contact Person

For further information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Tom Mountz at Paulina Ranger District (541-477-6900).

Responsible Official:  Date: 9/6/07

Cathy Lund, Acting District Ranger
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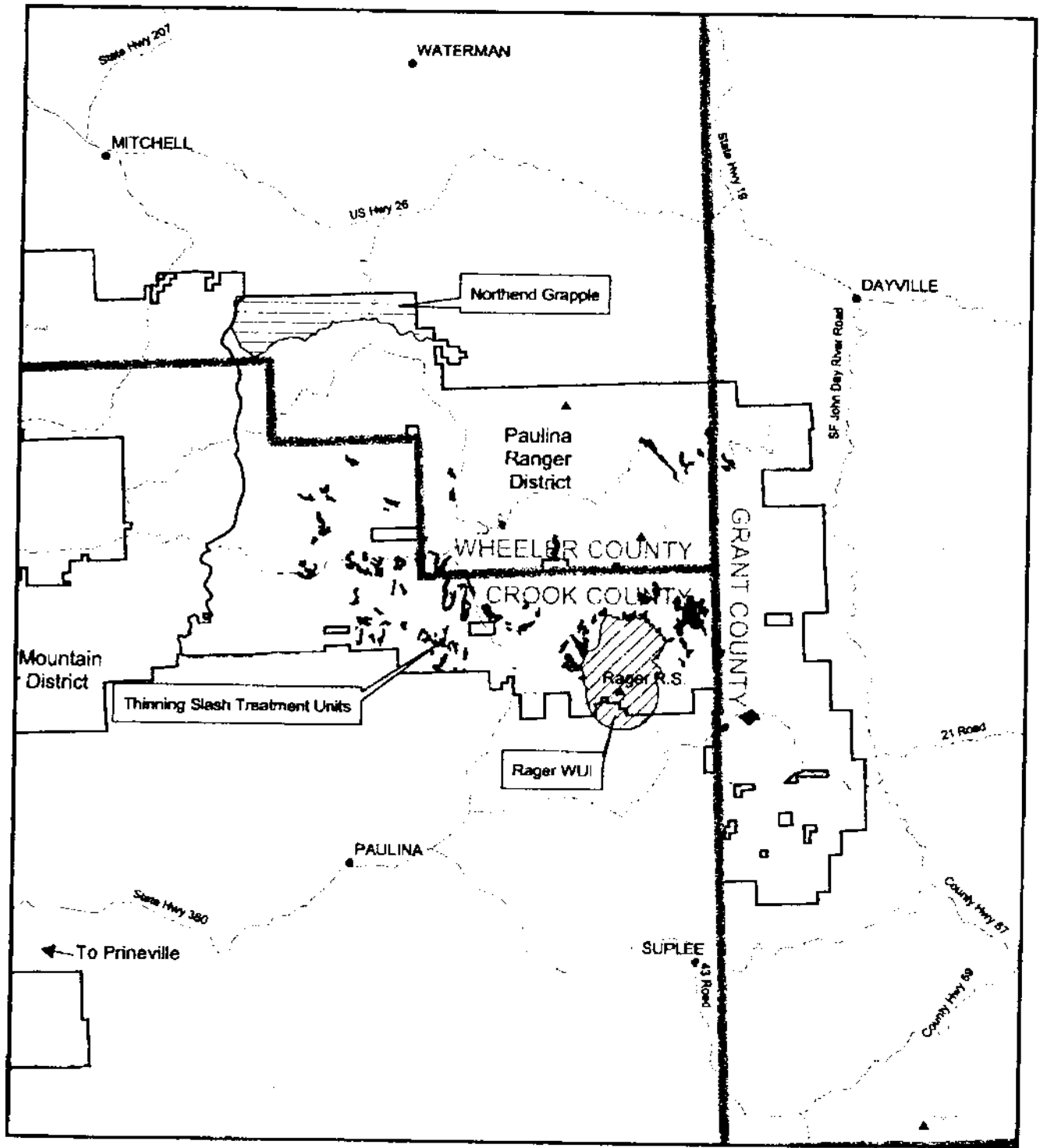
APPENDIX ONE: Mitigation and Monitoring Measures for the Rager WUI Fuels Project, Paulina Ranger District, Ochoco National Forest, Crook County, OR.

Mitigation and Monitoring

The following project specific mitigation measures will be incorporated into project implementation to assure objectives are met and resource protection commitments are fulfilled.

- At any time fire enters a Riparian Habitat Conservation Area (RHCA), the District Fisheries biologist will be notified and activities monitored to maintain INFISH Riparian Management Objectives (RMO for large woody debris).
- No new roads, skid trails or landings would be constructed to support the project.
- Prescribed burning will occur at least 50 feet from the outer edge of riparian vegetation.
- Firelines will not occur in RHCA's.
- No motorized vehicles, including ATV's, are allowed on roads 58-120, 58-125, 58-131, 58-133, 5820-110, 5820-113, 5820-115, 5820-116, 5820-117
- No motorized vehicles, including ATV's are allowed within scablands.
- Do not pile precommercial thinning slash within scabland habitat, and do not fall trees into scabland habitat.
- Do not allow fire to burn within scablands.
- To reduce the spread potential of medusahead, the Rager WUI #23 unit may only be burned in the spring. Spring burning will allow vegetation to recover before medusahead produces seed, and will reduce the amount of duff consumption which leads to bare ground.
- No vehicle traffic (including ATV's) is allowed on the 5830-403 road, this includes pre and post burn surveys and monitoring. This will reduce the risk of spreading the medusahead population to other locations within the area.
- No activities are allowed within or near the Dusty Material Source (5830-402 Road). Activities include any type of motorized vehicle traffic, including helicopters. Keep the traffic on the 5830-402 road to a minimum.
- Consult with the District Weed Coordinator when working within the Rager Compound, for specific weed locations and mitigation.
- All equipment operating outside the road prism require cleaning prior to coming onto National Forest lands as to be free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold noxious weed seeds.
- Do not allow fire within scablands. This will help prevent the spread of North Africa grass (ventenata).
- Notify the District Weed Coordinator for locations of equipment staging areas, fueling areas, and parking areas, to determine if they are weed-free.
- Stay off the road shoulders of main roads including the 5830 and 5820 roads. Limit the amount of disturbance on all native surface roads.

Figure 1. General location of the Rager WUI, Northend Grapple and Thinning Slash Treatment Projects Paulina Ranger District, Crook, Wheeler, and Grant Counties, Oregon



Amanda McKinnis
January 12, 2006

0 2 4 8 Miles



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