

**DECISION MEMO**  
**Crooked River Ranch Fuels Project**

Crooked River National Grassland  
US Forest Service, Region 6  
Jefferson County, Oregon  
(T. 13 S., R. 12 E. secs 8, 22, 34))

**I. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED**

**A. Decision**

I have decided to implement the Crooked River Ranch Fuels Project on the Crooked River National Grassland. This project will reduce fuels adjacent to Crooked River Ranch. The project area is 200 acres (see map).

This project will contribute toward accomplishment of the National Fire Plan by reducing the risk of wildfire entering a populated area. The project area is designated a Wildland Urban Interface in the Jefferson County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (November 2005).

Project design includes the following elements:

Juniper trees less than 12" diameter at breast height (dbh) will be cut with chainsaws. Old growth junipers will not be cut. Juniper trees less than 12" dbh with old growth characteristics, such as twisted, gnarled trees growing out of rock outcrops, will not be cut. Trees over 5" dbh will be left every 30 feet, and leave trees will have their lower branches pruned.

In areas where juniper cutting is light, juniper limbs will be scattered, or piled and burned by hand.

In areas where juniper cutting is heavy, trees will be hauled off the Crooked River National Grassland and the trees will be sold.

Brush will be mowed to a depth of 1 foot or less, within 100 feet of the property line. In order to minimize soil disturbance, the mowing operation will target only the brush and small juniper which can be cut with one pass of the equipment.

There is no road construction or reconstruction planned in this project.

**B. Purpose of Decision**

There is a history of urban-interface wildfires that have threatened or destroyed homes adjacent to the Crooked River National Grassland. In the early 1980s there were 3 fires in 3 years that burned more than 100 acres on the Ranch and threatened homes. In 1996, the Little Cabin fire above Lake Billy Chinook burned 2,437 acres and came within 100 feet of homes. In 1998, the Belmont Lane fire burned 633 acres and came within 1 mile of the Round Butte subdivision. In 1999, the Elk Drive fire burned 538 acres and came within 1-1/2 miles of the Round Butte subdivision. In 2002, the Eyerly fire jumped the Metolius River and burned 18 houses in the Three Rivers subdivision.

The ability to stop the spread of wildfire from the Grassland to the Ranch is a concern due to heavy

brush and juniper along the boundary. Reducing the fuels along the boundary will reduce the flame lengths from an approaching wildfire, and reduce the potential for long-distance spotting from a wildfire, when embers from burning trees are lofted ahead of the fire front and land on roofs, decks or woodpiles. Breaking up the continuity of the junipers and brush will create more opportunities for firefighters to stop a wildfire as it approaches the Ranch.

## **II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION**

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3, or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

I have concluded that this decision is appropriate to categorically exclude from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment because it is a routine activity within a category of exclusion, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. My conclusion is based on information presented in this Decision and the Project Record.

### **A. Category of Exclusion**

These activities fall within a category of actions identified in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2, Category 10, which states: 31.2(10) Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire, not to exceed 4500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching and mowing, not to exceed 1000 acres.

### **B. Extraordinary Circumstances**

#### Federally Listed Threatened or Endangered Species or Designated Critical Habitat, Species Proposed for Federal Listing or Proposed Critical Habitat, or Forest Service Sensitive Species

There are no Threatened or Endangered Species, species proposed for Federal Listing, Designated Critical Habitat, or proposed Critical Habitat within the project area. This project will have no effect on fish or critical fish habitat (03/06 Fisheries report). There is one Forest Service sensitive animal species' habitat (Gray Flycatcher) in the project area. Due to disturbance factors, this decision may impact individual Gray Flycatchers or habitat, but will not likely contribute towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. This decision will have no impact on any other sensitive species, and no effect on TES species and their habitat (12/05 Biology Report). Habitat is not present for any sensitive plant species (06/05 Botany Report).

#### Floodplains, Wetlands or Municipal Watersheds

This project is not located in or near floodplains. This project is not located in or near wetlands. There are no municipal watersheds on the Grassland (see LRMP Allocation Map).

#### Congressionally Designated Areas

The project area is not in or near a designated Wilderness (see LRMP Allocation Map).

There are no National Recreation Areas within the project area (see LRMP Allocation Map).

Parts of the project area fall within the Middle Deschutes & Lower Crooked Wild and Scenic River Management Plan area. The Management Plan allows for juniper thinning, vegetation manipulation and fire management strategies. The Management Plan also states that improvements needed for resource protection shall be designed to blend with the natural character of the landscape.

#### Inventoried Roadless Areas

There are no inventoried roadless areas in the project area (see LRMP Allocation Map). There is no roadbuilding or road improvement in this project.

#### Research Natural Areas

There are no Research Natural Areas (RNA) in or near the project area.

#### Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites or Historic Properties or Areas

Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision. No historic properties were located in the project area. No tribal concerns were identified for this project (see 06/05 Cultural Resources Report).

No extraordinary circumstances related to the project were identified.

### **III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

This project is a product of collaboration with the Crooked River Ranch Fire Department and the Jefferson County Community Wildfire Protection Plan committee. The project was listed in the Spring 2005 *Schedule of Proposed Actions*. A news release was issued on June 14, 2005. Local fire officials were solicited for input by direct mail. Two local radio stations were granted on-air interviews. Several owners of adjacent property were personally contacted during project layout, and expressed support. On November 23, 2005, a legal notice soliciting public comment was placed in the *Bend Bulletin* and *Madras Pioneer* newspapers.

One commenter responded. One comment suggested “reducing or removing livestock grazing to restore natural fire regimes and encourage native grasses.” Grazing practices are not part of this decision, reducing junipers will encourage native grass production, and the project area is not in a grazing allotment.

One comment stated that “Juniper with old growth characteristics must be retained.” One element of project design is that trees over 12 inches in diameter will not be cut, and trees under 12 inches with old-growth characteristics (such as twisted, gnarled trees growing out of rock outcrops) will not be cut.

One comment outside the scope of the project stated “Make sure owners of homes and structures in the wildland-urban interface have taken fire-wise precautions such as metal roofs, removal of flammable material near structures, ect.” While this is a collaborative project with the Crooked River Ranch Fire Department, which offers hazard-reduction advice to homeowners, the federal government does not have the authority to direct homeowners to replace roofs or remove material on private property.

#### **IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

This decision is consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Crooked River National Grassland, as required by the National Forest Management Act. The Plan is amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy, which provides standards and guidelines for protection of watersheds and riparian habitat conservation areas. There are no riparian habitat conservation areas within the project area. The project occurs within the General Forage land use allocation, which has the objective of providing natural composition and cover values of native grasses, sedges, forbs and palatable shrubs, and is in conformance with applicable standards and guidelines.

##### Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)

Public involvement did not identify any adversely impacted minority or low-income populations. This decision is not expected to adversely impact minority or low-income populations.

##### Clean Air Act

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is responsible for assuring compliance with the National Clean Air Act. In 1994, the U.S. Forest Service, in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Bureau of Land Management, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a framework for implementing an air quality program in Northeast Oregon. Prescribed burning is coordinated with the Oregon State Department of Environmental Quality thru the State of Oregon smoke management program.

Due to the location of the project area and local weather patterns, smoke from pile burning will not effect Class I wilderness areas or urban Special Protection Zones. Depending on wind direction, smoke from pile-burning could impact homes on the Ranch, but would be short-term. Pile burning would be avoided during persistent inversion conditions.

#### **V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

My decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Individuals or organizations who submit substantive comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal my decision. Any notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

Any appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Forest Supervisor, Ochoco National Forest, 3160 NE Third Street, Prineville, OR 97754. Appeals submitted via fax should be sent to (541) 416-6695. Appeals can be filed electronically at: *appeals-pacificnorthwest-ochoco@fs.fed.us*.

Electronic appeals must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in plain text (.txt), Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf). E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed, or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the appellant to confirm receipt of appeals submitted by electronic mail.

The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 8:00 am - 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of the legal notice announcing this decision in *The Bulletin* newspaper, Bend, Oregon. Attachments received after the 45-day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in *The Bulletin* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

**VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If any appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of disposition of the last appeal.

**VII. CONTACT PERSON**

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Bryan Scholz during normal office hours (weekdays, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) at the Ochoco National Forest office (Address: 3160 NE Third Street, Prineville, OR 97754; Phone: (541) 416-6500, Fax: (541) 416-6695; e-mail: bscholz@fs.fed.us)

**VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
KRISTIN BAIL  
District Ranger

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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