

# Notice of Proposed Action Big Red Timber Management Analysis

**Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District, Medicine Bow – Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland  
Routt County, Colorado**

## Comments Welcome

The Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District (HPBE) welcomes your input on the Big Red Timber Management Analysis. This proposal is brought forward to advance the goals, objectives and desired conditions outlined in the Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1997 Revision (Forest Plan). The general intent of the project is to utilize silviculture, timber harvest and other forestry related practices to manage merchantable timber stands which have been significantly affected by mountain pine beetle, *Dendroctonus ponderosae*. Your comments will help with the completion of an environmental assessment (EA) that will provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI). The EA aids in the compliance of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when no EIS is necessary, and facilitates preparation of an EIS when one is necessary (40 CFR 1508.9(a)). Instructions for submitting comments can be found at the end of this document.

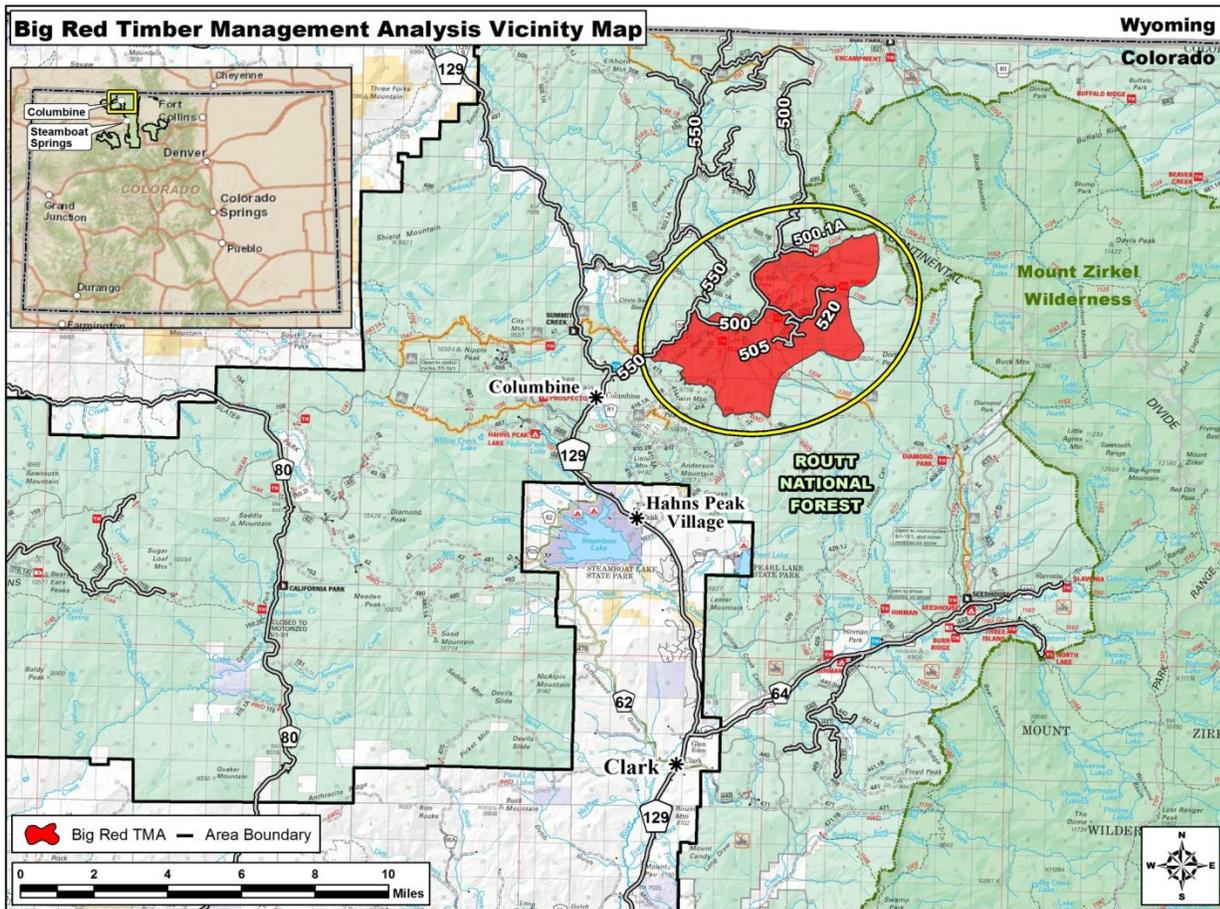
## Background

The lodgepole pine cover-type in Routt County, surrounding counties and adjacent states has experienced high levels of mortality resulting from a mountain pine beetle outbreak. This outbreak was declared an epidemic on June 25, 2007 by the USFS Region 2 Deputy Regional Forester. Various national forests and associated ranger districts as well as other federal, state and private land owners are identifying opportunities for vegetation and timber management to address the various challenges the beetle epidemic has created. Some of these challenges include but are not limited to timely salvage of merchantable timber, assurance of appropriate regeneration, accumulation of fuels hazards, removal of dead and dying trees that are posing a public safety hazard, recreational accessibility issues and risks to forest infrastructure such as trails, roads, fences, gates, powerlines and campgrounds. The Big Red project is primarily identified to capture merchantable timber values before deterioration to assist in managing the many challenges associated with widespread forest mortality.

## Analysis Area

The Big Red Timber Management Analysis is located on the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland in Routt County, Colorado approximately 19 road miles north of Clark, Colorado (Figure 1). The legal description is Township(T) 10 North(N), Range(R) 85 West(W) Sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and T11N R85W Sections 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and T11N R84W Sections 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, 30, 31, 32.

Figure 1



## Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to advance the goals, objectives and desired conditions outlined in the Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 1997 Revision (Forest Plan) by capturing marketable forest product values through timber harvest before deterioration to assist in the need to:

- Manage mountain pine beetle affected timber stands to create optimum conditions for regeneration<sup>1</sup>, diversity<sup>2</sup>, vigor and resiliency<sup>3</sup>.
- Reduce the development of large continuous high hazard fuel conditions associated with widespread mountain pine beetle tree mortality.
- Protect public/private property and safety of forest users through management of beetle affected timber stands.
- Utilize opportunities associated with silvicultural and timber management methods to benefit other forest uses and resources.

<sup>1</sup>/ Assurance of natural regeneration or reforestation treatments if needed (FSM 2470).

<sup>2</sup>/Diversity in vegetation composition relative to proportions within the landscape and structural diversity relating to variation in sizes, shapes and pattern (heterogeneity) of landscape (vegetation) elements (Forest Plan EIS Glossary 5).

<sup>3</sup>/Ability of ecological systems to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic ways of function, and the capacity to adapt to stress and change (FSM 2470, FSM 2020).

## Forest Plan Guidance

### *Geographic Areas*

Geographic Areas are National Forest land planning units 100,000 acres or less in size where management is directed toward achieving various desired conditions. Analyses at this scale provide a framework for short and long-term projects, for monitoring the effectiveness of forest-wide and management area standards and guidelines, and for achieving forest-wide goals and objectives (Forest Plan, 3-1).

The project analysis area (AA) is located within the **Little Snake Geographic Area** where part of the desired condition is to maintain aspen, lodgepole pine, spruce/fir, along with shrubs, grass and forbs as the dominant cover types (Forest Plan 3-50). Additionally a variety of tree sizes and seral stages will be present. Damage by insect, disease, and wildfire will be locally restricted (Forest Plan 3-50).

### *Management Areas*

Management Areas (MA) are National Forest land planning units where prescriptions, or standards and guidelines will direct management to meet specific desired conditions, consistent with the broader direction of Geographic Areas. Three MAs represent the AA and include MA 5.13-Forest Products, MA 5.11-General Forest & Rangelands, Forest Vegetation Emphasis and MA 4.3-Dispersed Recreation. Silvicultural and timber management treatments are proposed within all three Management Area (MA) prescriptions with the majority of the AA and the proposed treatment stands within MA 5.13 Forest Products (Tables 1, 2 & Map-attachment).

- **MA 5.13 – Forest Products:** The majority of treatments (77%) are proposed within MA 5.13 – Forest Products; these areas are managed to produce commercial wood products where the desired condition is to manage vegetation composition and structure for a mosaic of ages and heights for a sustained yield of forest products (Forest Plan 2-44).
  - Associated MA Forest Plan Standard is to “use a full range of biologically appropriate silvicultural practices to emphasize the production of sawtimber (Forest Plan 2-45)”.
  
- **MA 5.11 – General Forest & Rangeland, Forest Vegetation Emphasis:** Additional treatments (15%) are proposed within MA 5.11 – General Forest & Rangelands – Forest Vegetation Emphasis; these areas are managed to provide wildlife habitat along with forest products, livestock forage, and recreation where the desired future condition is to maintain vegetation composition and structure in a range of successional stages to meet wildlife, range and timber objectives (Forest Plan 2-39).
  - Associated MA Forest Plan Standard is to “use a full range of biologically appropriate silvicultural practices to emphasize the production of sawtimber (Forest Plan 2-40)”.

- **MA 4.3 – Dispersed Recreation:** Some treatments (8%) may occur within 4.3 MA-Dispersed Recreation where timber management practices will enhance undeveloped recreation opportunities. The desired future condition in this MA is to attain a vegetation composition and structure to meet recreational objectives identified for the area (Forest Plan 2-36).
  - Associated MA Forest Plan Standard is to “Use only vegetation management practices necessary to meet resource objectives other than wood production (Forest Plan 2-37)”.
  - Associated MA Guideline is to “Focus pest management activities and methods on enhancing or protecting recreation opportunities (Forest Plan 2-37)”.

Management Area	Acres
4.3 Dispersed Recreation	762
5.11 General Forest & Rangelands – Forest Vegetation Emphasis	1963
5.13 Forest Products	6381
Private Land Inholding (Included for informational purposes, no treatments)	165
<b>AA Total</b>	<b>9365</b>

Management Area	Acres
4.3 Dispersed Recreation	156
5.11 General Forest & Rangelands – Forest Vegetation Emphasis	276
5.13 Forest Products	1436
<b>Total</b>	<b>1868</b>

The Geographic Area and Management Area goals, objectives and desired conditions are well suited to be advanced by this project. Additional goals and objectives defined throughout the Forest Plan will also be in concert with and will likely be advanced by the proposed intent of this project.

## Proposed Action – Alternative 1

The HPBE Ranger District proposes to treat approximately 1868 acres of forested stands affected by mountain pine beetle through commercial and non-commercial silvicultural treatments and timber harvest (Tables 3, 4 & Map-attachment) to meet the purpose and need for the project and to advance the objectives, goals and desired future conditions described in the forest plan. Conditions within beetle affected forests continue to change stand structure and thus enhance the need to have a range silvicultural prescriptions (Rx) and timber management actions available, including transportation considerations and post-harvest activities as well as opportunity benefits to other resources, specifically recreation and trails management needs. It is important to note, that if approved, the entirety of some stands will be treated; while only portions of others may be treated. This is due in part but not limited to: best management practices, appropriate silvicultural adaptations, market variables, unique features discovered, internal and external input, opportunities to enhance other resources and/or basic vegetation management variations at time of implementation.

***Rx1: Clearcutting with Reserves (716 Acres)***

A silvicultural harvest treatment that occurs at the stand level in which essentially all merchantable trees have been removed in one operation to regenerate a typically even-aged stand. In this setting all merchantable lodgepole pine trees and other species would be removed in order to create an exposed microclimate favorable for natural regeneration of lodgepole pine and other early-seral species; or release a fully stocked stand of advanced reproduction, which in this setting is typically sub-alpine fir below the mostly dead over-story. Depending on management objectives, a clearcut may or may not have reserve trees left to attain goals other than regeneration. These goals may be retention of character trees, wildlife trees and other reserve trees or groups as necessary or required. Post-harvest site preparation by scarification and/or slash treatment will be required when regeneration is not present. Piling and burning or pile removal of the slash may occur. When the primary source of regeneration is advance reproduction that already exists within the stand to be treated, the preferred term would be over-story removal, which generally describes the condition (stocked) and implementation technique (over-story removal) for most of these stands (FSM 2470.05).

***Rx1a: Clearcutting with Reserves and Removal of Subalpine Fir (813 Acres)***

This prescription is similar in all aspects to Rx1, but includes additional actions to remove multiple layers of subalpine fir trees during the site preparation step. Without these steps, these units will steadily transition to multi-layered stands dominated by mid- or late-seral species components (subalpine fir) and very limited lodgepole pine or other species. The stands selected for this treatment occur on good upland lodgepole pine sites, exhibit conditions that appear more prone to support pine regeneration than other stands in the area and would also support potential diversification by supplemental planting of Englemann spruce if desired or needed. In general these stands may provide an opportunity through management for species diversification within the project area as whole where most stands would be dominated by subalpine fir.

***Rx2: Salvage Cutting and Irregular Group Regeneration (339 Acres)***

These are intermediate cuttings to remove all bark beetle-attacked dead or dying trees and live lodgepole pine and other species at risk of windthrow while retaining a present multi-layered, multi-age-class subalpine fir/spruce component, the continued development of which is desired. This is intended in part to conserve and culture winter habitat and populations of the snowshoe hare, an essential winter prey of the Canada lynx, a federally listed threatened species. In conjunction, the treatment is designed to add another age-class of mixed species regeneration, non-uniformly distributed, in both small canopy gaps and irregular larger openings that salvage logging will create. Long-term future production of sawtimber or wood biomass in these areas will be served by continuing irregular uneven-aged group harvest practices at intervals over time if so desired.

Slight variants to the even and uneven-aged silvicultural methods identified above (Clearcutting with Reserves, Clearcutting with Reserves and Removal of Subalpine Fir, Salvage Cutting and Irregular Group Regeneration) may be used for site specific needs relating to wildlife habitat, hydrologic concerns, silviculture, fuels or other resource requirements that may be present or present themselves over the course of planning and/or implementation.

	Rx 1	Rx 1a	Rx 2	Total Treatment Acres by MA
<b>MA 4.3</b>	34.88	121.20	.21	<b>156</b>
<b>MA 5.11</b>	162.40	86.22	26.87	<b>276</b>
<b>MA 5.13</b>	518.35	605.16	312.20	<b>1436</b>
<b>Total Treatment Acres by Rx</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>1868</b>

\* Rounding and associated minor discrepancies may occur.

Stand	Silvicultural Rx	Acres	Stand	Silvicultural Rx	Acres
1	1a	26.39	27	2	9.06
2	1a	31.88	28	1	15.45
3	1	62.99	29	1	11.07
4	1a	28.09	30	1a	171.01
5	1a	48.96	31	1	33.81
6	1a	12.29	32	1a	49.33
7	1	61.94	33	1a	8.23
8	1	58.11	34	1a	54.02
9	1	65.59	35	1	64.37
10	1a	8.92	36	1a	38.86
11	1a	12.75	37	1a	7.25
12	1a	95.13	38	1a	31.28
13	1a	26.54	39	1	18.84
14	1	32.28	40	2	82.99
15	2	35.21	41	1	61.49
16	2	11.36	42	1	50.83
17	1a	20.77	43	1a	29.58
18	1a	10.21	44	2	23.83
19	1a	22.41	45	2	39.44
20	2	11.76	46	1	2.39
21	1a	42.57	47	1	17.87
22	1a	36.11	48	1	5.41
23	2	41.36	49	2	14.52
24	2	11.01	50	2	15.40
25	1	50.41	51	2	43.35
26	1	102.78	<b>Total</b>		<b>1868</b>

\*Area is displayed in 1/100<sup>th</sup> acres for stand level information and in whole numbers for more broad scale analysis. Rounding and associated minor discrepancies may occur.

### ***Transportation***

Existing transportation system would be utilized to provide general access to the treatment units. Existing roads may require maintenance or reconstruction to allow for implementation. Maintenance and reconstruction will also have the desired effect of stabilizing problem areas such as drainage structures or hardening where necessary to maintain and improve hydrologic condition of system roads. Most system roads within the project area could be improved through maintenance and/or reconstruction associated with this project. Approximately 7.5 miles of temporary road may be needed off existing system roads to access units. Primary temporary roads have been identified (see Map – attachment). Additional short temporary roads/spurs will be needed, generally off system roads to access unit landings. All temporary roads will be closed by re-contouring, slashing and seeding after use. Although no new specified roads are anticipated there may be a need to provide an engineered prism in some locations if deemed necessary after further analysis. If access routes are identified that require additional control measures or specified road design, it would likely be on limited basis and equate to approximately 1 mile. Opportunities associated with silviculture and timber harvest activities can benefit other forest uses and resources. In particular an opportunity exists through this analysis to assure road resource management objectives (RRMO's) are accurate for the roads within the project area. Updates to RRMO's may be appropriate. Additionally due to the regeneration type silviculture proposed, entailing a single entry, there may be opportunities for road storage or decommissioning as the next harvest entry would be well into the future. Initially National Forest System Road (NFSR) 498.1 may be closed.

### ***Post-Harvest Activities***

In most circumstances associated with this project the primary silvicultural prescriptions will ensure regeneration of the stands through natural seeding, suckering or the existing reproduction. Reliance on artificial regeneration methods may occur when the natural sequence of events and/or environmental conditions fail to regenerate the stands within five years or earlier. Artificial methods may include mechanical site preparation in non-stocked openings or where diversification is desired. Site preparation includes scarification as needed to disturb grass and sod root zone, exposing (not displacing) mineral soil while crushing any remaining pine tops and incorporating seed typically accomplished with a dozer or similar equipment. Site preparation may create slash piles that will be burned or removed. Log landings will be scarified and seeded. Additionally, infill planting to attain desired stocking levels (150 trees/acre) or as desired for compositional diversification may occur.

### ***Additional Activities***

Other benefits to safety and fuels management will occur, simply by removing the dead overstory component in areas near trailheads, roads, dispersed camping locations the margin of forest user safety will be enhanced. Recreational trails in the area have the potential to benefit from well-planned vegetation management and dual efficiencies. Existing or improved trail opportunities will be considered in coordination with harvest actions and relocation of currently unsafe trail systems and trail heads may occur. Timber harvest activities and associated skid trails and temporary roads will be design in concert with recreation needs in these areas too potentially realize dual benefits if feasible.

Specifically National Forest System Trails (NFST) 1155.1 Ellis, NFST 1203.1A Ellis Connector, NFST 1203.1 Farewell Trail, NFST 1204.1 Manzaneras, NFST 1149.1 and NFST 1204.1 may see minor relocation of some sections to a more sustainable location. NFST 1203.1b Kids Loop may be relocated

from within a timber stand to a more open setting in adjacent range land allowing for safety concerns associated with site distance, hazard trees and access to be mitigated.

### ***Initial Design Criteria***

Design criteria would be implemented as part of the proposed action. In developing this proposed action, most environmental constraints have been considered including but not limited to steep slopes, wetlands, streams, riparian areas, access and road engineering issues, wildlife concerns, potential soils issues and botanical constraints. Initial project design considered and designed around many of the typical issues minimizing or avoiding many resource concerns. Additional design criteria may be added if unforeseen issues are discovered during project planning. Initial design criteria for known issues by resource are as follows:

#### **Botany**

- Delineate a 100 ft buffer around known occurrences of R2 sensitive and local concern plant species and flag for avoidance.
- Avoid any loss of rare wetlands such as fens and springs.
- Where appropriate, revegetate project area with native species to reduce risk of invasive species establishment and work with forest botanist to identify appropriate species for planting.
- Establish effective ground cover on disturbed sites to prevent accelerated on-site soil loss and sediment delivery to streams. Restore ground cover using certified native plants as practicable to meet revegetation objectives. Avoid persistent or invasive exotic plants.
- Fell trees away from identified buffered populations.
- Limit operations in buffered populations areas to hand and/or non-ground disturbing mechanical equipment. Unless identified as a fuel hazard, trees felled in buffered areas would be left on site
- Do not place or burn slash piles or broadcast burn slash in buffered areas.
- Keep all slash out of perennial and intermittent stream courses, and all riparian areas and wetlands. Do not accumulate slash in ephemeral stream courses.
- Landings should be located in upland areas to minimize the potential for slash piles and burning of slash to affect protected stream courses.

#### **Fire & Fuels**

- Restrict slash piles to 7068 ft<sup>3</sup> or current Colorado Air Pollution Control Division (APCD) specifications (smoke permit limits efficient burning to a maximum pile size).
- Follow all applicable pile burn requirements specified in the APCD smoke permit and/or Routt Zone programmatic pile burn plan.
- Machine Slash piles be located 1/8 mile from any residence and hand piles shall be located at least 100' from any residence.
- Material that is lopped and scattered shall be distributed evenly across the forest floor with a fuel bed depth of 24" or less.

#### **Fisheries**

- "If specific impacts from the alternatives to threatened, endangered, and Region 2 sensitive species (TES) and/or their habitats are identified, management may be adjusted as necessary to reduce those impacts through working with the biologists or botanists. Timing restrictions may

also need to be applied. The TES species of interest include goshawks, raptors, pygmy shrews, amphibians, and rare plants.”

### **Heritage**

- All proposed temporary road corridors outside of unit boundaries that have not been adequately surveyed for cultural resources will be identified during sale preparation and approximate locations will be provided to the archeologist for review, which will be completed prior to sale implementation.
- Significant cultural and/or paleontological resources in the project area should be avoided or the effects of project implementation otherwise mitigated based decisions identified during analysis of the undertaking under the National Historic Preservation Act and other relevant cultural resource protection laws and regulations, and consideration of the undertaking’s effects to historic properties.
- If in connection with operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, or previously unidentified resources are encountered, work shall be immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials. Notify the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer (36 CFR 800.110 & 112, 43 CFR 10.4).
- If affected properties are discovered after project activities are completed, the District would document any damage and consult with SHPO and the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation pursuant to 800.13(b).

### **Hydrology & Soils**

- “The management measures and associated design criteria for this project address hydrologic function, riparian areas, water quality, sediment control, and soil quality to a degree commensurate with the standards set forth in the Forest Service National Core Best Management Practices (BMP) Technical Guide, the Rocky Mountain Region Watershed Conservation Practices (WCP) Forest Service Handbook 2509.25, the Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1997 Revision (Forest Plan), and the Forestry Best Management Practices to Protect Water Quality in Colorado (2010). “
  - USDA Forest Service, 2012. National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands. FS-990a, Vol.1: National Core BMP Technical Guide. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 165p.
  - USDA Forest Service, 2006. Rocky Mountain Region Watershed Conservation Practices (WCP). Forest Service Handbook 2509.25
  - USDA Forest Service, 1997. Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1997 Revision
  - Forestry Best Management Practices to Protect Water Quality in Colorado. Fort Collins, Colo.: Colorado State Forest Service, 2010. Print.

## Range

- Locate and use weed free project staging areas e.g., landing areas.
- Avoid or minimize all types of travel through weed infested areas, or restrict to those periods when spread of seed or propagules are least likely. If questions arise consult noxious weed coordinator.
- Remove mud, dirt, and plant parts from equipment before moving it into a project area.
- Clean all equipment, before leaving the project site, if operating in areas infested with weeds. Yellow toadflax is in unit 1 (*see map below*). There is one additional infestation in the analysis area next to FSR 500 but it is not located within a harvest unit.
- Minimize soil disturbance to the extent practical, consistent with project objectives. Where project disturbance creates bare ground, consistent with project objectives, re-establish vegetation to prevent conditions to establish weeds.
- Inspect ground disturbing operations in noxious weed infested areas for at least three to five growing seasons following completion of the project. For on-going projects, continue to monitor until reasonable certainty is obtained that no weeds have occurred. Provide for follow-up treatments based on inspection results.
- There are no fences located within the analysis area. There are three livestock water developments within the analysis area: one is located on west side of unit 12 and one on the south side of unit 30. The third is located in Little Red Park, but not near any unit. Protect or avoid these improvements.

## Recreation

- Coordinate layout of skid trails and temporary roads to prevent “road creep” after sale closure by designing natural or man-made barriers and slash over all temporary roads and all main skid trails.
- Trails and trailheads within identified logging units need to be protected or improved in the timber sale contract. If impacted, rehabilitate to previous grade, profile and drainage per the approved Trail Management Objectives.
- During layout, work with recreation/trails staff on specific tactics to accomplish accessibility to the area and trails. If not feasible, identify alternate routes to maintain the recreational opportunity.
- Allow recreation/trails staff to provide input on temporary road and skid trail locations, where enhancements to the trails system may result from implementation.
- Allow recreation specialists to identify segments of trail not to protect within units, and replaced with segments in more desirable locations within or outside timber sale units.
- Operations – close and sign trails in units where operations are occurring. Limit operations to confined areas (e.g. operating in only one subdivision at a time) to minimize impacts to OHV users. Unit or subdivision scheduling within any contract will occur as per recreational needs and recreation staff input as the lead objective.
- Utilize control of operations frequently through direct date specific or unit and subdivision sequencing/scheduling within any timber contract as deemed necessary by recreation staff.
- Prohibit operations during the first weekend of the four Colorado Big Game Hunting Seasons, and prohibit hauling during the July 4<sup>th</sup> Holiday and Labor Day weekends.
- Units 1 and 8 are in the vicinity of the Ellis North Trailhead, and “Kid’s Trail” (NFST 1203.1B). Coordinate with recreation, trails and landscape architect on the long term management of this

trailhead. Protect improvement the existing Kid's Trail will be difficult and existing location is not desirable, so allow recreation to identify replacement trail in the vicinity in an open area.

- Winter Operations – No winter plowing north on NFSR 550 from the junction with NFSR 500. If winter plowing is desired south on NFSR 550 from the junction with NFSR 500, it will only be allowed if an appropriated temporary replacement groomed snowmobile trail can be located. Include safety mitigation and signing requirements in the timber sale contract as a responsibility of the purchaser with coordination with recreation staff.
- Outfitter and Guides will be allowed access to the Hare and other trailheads if access is closed to the general public. Permit Administrators may be able to work with permittees for alternate routes, but if not feasible, allow access.
- Close NFSR 498.1 after sale closure. This road is poorly aligned, and difficult to use. This area is in the proximity of the Manzaneres trailhead, and popular for dispersed camping.
- In consultation with recreation staff, keep temporary roads/skid trails into Unit 45 open for dispersed camping.
- Recontour and slash over all temporary roads and main skid trails.

### Visual Resources

- The shape and pattern of harvest units should be designed to complement and maintain the landscape character of the analysis area. Permit boundaries of harvest units to locate adjacent to edges of aspen stands to create natural appearing edges.
- Retain natural features such as rock outcrops, young healthy trees, understory trees of lodgepole pine, aspen and spruce/fir, sagebrush, juniper and other shrubs, forbs and grasses in the immediate foreground (approximately 25 to 100 feet from edges of road) of NFSRs 500.1, 505.1, 520.1 and FDTs 1149, 1155, 1199, 1203 and 1204, dispersed camp sites and trailheads to minimize visual impacts. Heavy logging residues shall be removed and stumps shall be cut as close as possible to the ground in the immediate foreground (approx. 25 to 100 feet) of the abovementioned roads, trail and trailhead. It is acceptable to have light logging residues (small twigs, broken branches, etc.) to remain on the ground if it does not attract the attention of Forest visitors. Beyond the immediate foreground, lop and scatter slash evenly.
- Recontour, scarify, reseed temporary roads and slash over to be closed after the project completion to better blend with the surrounding landscape. When using rocks as barrier, rocks should be buried as least 1/3 in the ground as to look natural.
- Revegetate disturbed soils on landings, burned slash pile sites, skid trails and temporary roads with native seed mixture after the completion of treatments to reduce visual contrast.

### Wildlife

- Retain on average 1 existing 'hard' snag per acre within treatment units.
- Retain coarse woody debris to the extent practicable, and where available, some existing deadfalls (whole trees) or logs (portions of tree boles) measuring  $\geq 16$  inches in diameter and that are  $\geq 20$  feet in length.
- Retain lynx habitat exclusion zones in units and/or sections of units that are determined to be lynx primary habitat.
- Protection of known Northern goshawk nest stands (identified before award of timber sale contract). This measure would modify any planned silvicultural prescription to conserve key elements of nesting habitat in a treatment stand where a nest is present or in a stand which is designated as alternative nesting habitat.

- Protection of raptor nesting sites (identified before award of timber sale contract and all species other than goshawks). This measure would modify any planned silvicultural prescription to conserve key elements of nesting habitat in a treatment stand where a nest is present or in a stand which is designated as alternative nesting habitat. The design of the prescription would be devised at the time of marking and implementation in consultation with a wildlife biologist. Where treatment management actions are proposed within a 3/8-mile radius of a known raptor nesting site, a wildlife biologist will establish one nesting habitat protection area of no more than 30 acres in size. The size of a nest stand protection area necessary for a species' protection will vary by species and for many small owl species is typically no more than 5 acres. Trees within the nest stands and/or reserve nest stands shall not be marked for removal.
- Protect raptor nesting using seasonal restrictions in logging operations. This criterion is for the Northern goshawk but may be reduced for other species if determined appropriate by a wildlife biologist. Prohibit all logging-related operations or activities, including log haul, within 1/4-mile of an active raptor nest between March 15 and September 15. Use of National Forest roads, otherwise open to unrestricted public vehicle use, is specifically exempted from this seasonal control. A wildlife biologist must determine nesting status (active or inactive) for each year during sale implementation.
- Monitoring of Northern goshawk nest locations during implementation. Prior to Sale contract award, train timber sale layout, engineering and resource personnel to identify and report active goshawk nests. After TS contract award and between May 1 and July 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, a wildlife biologist or trained crew will conduct goshawk inventory (detection) surveys in areas scheduled for treatment during the upcoming operating season if adequate surveys have not been completed to the degree to evaluate goshawk occupancy. An adequate survey requires appropriate surveys of the area for two consecutive years. Protect new nests located during these surveys as described below.
- Protect newly discovered Northern goshawk nests and other Sensitive species or critical TES habitats or sites identified after the award of the timber sale or other treatment contract. Pursuant to TS contract standard provision B6.25 and upon discovery of a new goshawk nest location or TES wildlife species nesting/breeding site, suspend any active logging or other contract operations underway in the immediate vicinity until a wildlife biologist assesses the situation and determines appropriate action(s) to take for protection of habitat or individual animals. Imposition of a seasonal restriction to protect a TES species from disruption/harassment or habitat destruction; changes in timber marking (and included timber species or quantities) to protect or maintain existing habitat(s); or complete withdrawal of included timber within a specified protection area.

## Alternatives to the Proposed Action

The EA may document consideration of a no-action alternative through the effects analysis by contrasting the impacts of the proposed action and any alternative(s) with the current condition and expected future condition if the proposed action were not implemented (36 CFR 220.7(b)(2)(ii)).

### No Action- Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is the No Action Alternative. Under this alternative, the Big Red Timber Management Analysis would not be implemented, and current management would continue in the project area. No

silvicultural treatments would occur. The natural process after beetle killed trees would continue with additional trees deteriorating and falling to the ground to either decompose naturally or accumulate on the forest floor. Forest products would not be utilized and values to potentially capture would not be and would continue to decrease as deterioration increased. Roads would remain unchanged and maintenance thereof would continue as scheduled. Removal of overhead safety hazards in the form of deteriorating dead tree would not occur as part of the timber management action. Other identified resource opportunities especially to fuels and recreation would not be addressed. Under the No Action Alternative, valid previously approved management actions would continue to be implemented in the project area, and new independent actions could be analyzed and/or implemented.

## Effects and Issues to Consider

The environmental assessment will address the effects and issues, if any, of the proposed action to the following resources.

- Botany
- Engineering/Transportation
- Fire/Fuels
- Fisheries
- Heritage
- Hydrology
- Lands/Minerals/Special Uses
- Range
- Recreation
- Soils
- Visuals/Scenery
- Wildlife

*Issues* are unresolved conflicts that arise as a result of the proposed action. The environmental assessment will be issue-driven and contain detail commensurate to the degree at which a resource may be affected. The Forest Service identified and evaluated preliminary issues from internal scoping and known external issues. The following issues have been resolved by changes to the proposed action and/or application of design criteria:

- Timber units were modified to minimize potential impacts associated with steep and rocky slopes, wetlands, streams and riparian areas, access and road engineering issues.
- Potential roads segments with watershed concern areas have been identified and if used would be improved through timber contract clauses.
- Treatment units were modified to avoid impacts on heritage and watershed resources currently known.
- Known raptor nest stands and reserve stands have been removed from proposed timber units.
- Timber unit locations, boundaries, and prescriptions have been modified to meet Canada lynx management objectives.
- All Roadless Areas were removed from proposed timber units.
- Road decommissioning was designed to ensure recreation and travel objectives are achieved while minimizing environmental effects.

Other issues raised through further field analysis or in response to this notice of proposed action will be considered and addressed in the environmental analysis. Surveys by resource specialists are ongoing and will be completed for the majority of the project area and all identified stands. Some issues may be addressed through modification of the proposed action, development of a new alternative, or additional or modified design criteria.

## Nature of Decision to be Made

For this project, the responsible official is the HPBE District Ranger. Given the purpose and need, the responsible official will review the environmental analysis of the proposed action, other alternatives, and any public comments in order to make the following general decisions:

- Treatment units to be implemented
- Authorized prescriptions for treatment units
- Road utilization, maintenance or re-construction/construction
- Trail improvement actions
- Determining what design criteria, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements are to be incorporated

Based on the environmental analysis and public comment, the responsible official will decide whether or not to implement the proposed action, a modified or alternative to the proposed action, or not at all.

## Public Involvement

The project was first listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in January of 2015 and updates are provided quarterly or as needed. This is the first opportunity for the public to provide comments for the Big Red Timber Management Analysis.

## Comment Process

The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and subject to the objection process described in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. The Forest Service is combining scoping with the legal notice and opportunity to comment, consistent with §218.24. The public is encouraged to provide specific written comments (§218.2) on this proposal, including supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. Specific written comments should be within the scope of and have a direct relationship to the proposed action.

Written comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in *The Steamboat Pilot & Today*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted via mail, fax (970-870-2284), electronically, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Mark Cahur, Timber Management Assistant & Planner, USDA Forest Service, 925 Weiss Dr., Steamboat Springs, CO 80487. Electronic comments including attachments can be submitted to: [comments-rm-medicine-bow-routt-hahns-peak-bears-ears@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-rm-medicine-bow-routt-hahns-peak-bears-ears@fs.fed.us). Acceptable formats for electronic comments include rich text (rtf), Word (doc or docx), and pdf.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments will have eligibility to file an objection under §218.8. For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments must either sign the comment or verify identity upon request. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements in §218.25(a)(3). Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

If the agency determines there are no significant impacts, that finding along with the EA and a draft decision notice will be published for a 45-day objection period. If no specific written comments are received during the designated opportunity for comment, the project will not be subject to objection. If the EA concludes there is potential for significant impacts, then an environmental impact statement will need to be prepared.

This Notice of Proposed Action also is requesting your comments under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (NHPA). Consultation under the NHPA seeks to consider the views about an undertaking and its effects on historic properties for the agency official to consider in decision making (36 CFR 800).

Additional information regarding this proposal can be obtained from: Mark Cahur, Timber Management Assistant & Planner, USDA Forest Service, 925 Weiss Dr., Steamboat Springs, CO 80487, (970) 870-2214, mcatur@fs.fed.us.

**Enclosures:** Attachment - Map

**Disclaimer:**

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