Introduction
The Tub Maintenance Underburn project is located just south of Bly, Oregon in the Tub Butte area and encompasses approximately 15,000 acres of which approximately 7,500 acres would be underburned in this entry. This area was initially underburned in 1987 and 1988 and then a second entry was partially completed in 1999. This current proposal would complete the second entry with prescribed fire in this area. The legal description of the project is: T37S, R14E, sections 24 – 27, 33 – 36; T37S, R15E, sections 19, 30 – 32; T38S, R14E, sections 1 – 4, 8 – 9, 17 – 18; and T38S, R15E, sections 5 – 6, W.M., Klamath County, Oregon (refer to map).

The Tub area was underburned in 1987 and 1988, using a low intensity burning prescription resulting in reduced fuel loadings that still exceed the standard 5 – 10 tons per acre of nine inch and below material left on the ground as prescribed by Fremont National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 1989 (FLRMP). The FLRMP allocates this area to Management Area 5 (MA5), Commercial Production of Sawtimber and Forage for Domestic Livestock. FLRMP, as amended, objectives are to create healthy forest and range conditions, encourage the development of large diameter trees in an open-canopy structure. Prescribed fire should be strongly considered, both to reduce fire hazard and to control species composition (FLRMP, page 151). The current average fuel loading for this area is 20 tons per acre of nine inch and below material.

Prior to the exclusion of fire, frequent, low-intensity natural fires occurred across these lands keeping the forest floor free of fuels buildup and brush. The goal is to restore more natural conditions to enhance the resilience and sustainability of forest and rangelands in the fire-adapted ecosystem.

The primary purpose of this project is to restore and maintain ecosystem health in the Tub Butte area. In the Tub Maintenance Underburn Project area there are three underlying needs for the project:
The need for low accumulations of hazardous surface fuels and ladder fuels. High fuel loadings and excessive fuel ladders create a high likelihood of large-scale intense wildfires.

The need for healthy, fire-adapted stands. Restoring and maintaining fire in the ponderosa pine stands will increase stand vigor, reduce competition and provide for developing open, park-like stands of large trees.

The need for higher quality forage. Currently the forage in the project area is predominately old, decadent, and of poor quality.

Underburning in the predominately ponderosa pine stands will maintain the stands in a fairly open condition precluding the potential for stand-replacing wildfire, inhibiting successional progression and enhancing the area for other resources.

**Project Description**
The Bly Ranger District proposes to conduct a maintenance prescribed underburn on approximately 7,500 acres in the area around Tub Butte to reduce the accumulated natural fuels. Aerial and hand ignition methods will be employed. The ignition pattern for the burn area will be a backing fire. Existing roads and natural breaks will be used as control boundaries, wherever possible, which will be on the vast majority of the area. Although there will be no line constructed in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs), some line will be constructed along private property boundaries. Line construction will consist of both hand line and tractor plow line. Burning activities will be conducted when fuel moisture and weather conditions permit, most likely beginning in May 2004.

**Resource Protection Design Measures:**
- No fireline will be constructed within RHCAs; Backing fires will be allowed to enter RHCAs.
- To the greatest extent possible/feasible all fireline will be restored to pre-disturbance contours;
- All fireline rehabilitation will occur in the same calendar year that the burning is implemented.
- Maintain at least ½ mile no-flight buffer around the bald eagle nest tree.
- Any closed roads opened for management of the burn will be closed post burn.
- Follow daily smoke management advisories. Do not burn on days where transport winds would allow smoke to impact Gearhart Wilderness or local communities.
- Modify lighting as needed to protect cultural resource sites. Exclude areas of high site density, establish control lines a sufficient distance from site areas and have on-site monitoring during ignition of units with known sites.
Public Involvement
The Tub Maintenance Underburn proposal was presented to the public in the Forest’s Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), Winter 2003 edition. Scoping letters were mailed on March 25, 2004 to adjacent landowners, permittees, government agencies, The Klamath Tribes Chairman and Director of Natural Resources, and individuals thought to have an interest in the project. The scoping letter and proposed action statement were also available to the public on the Forest’s web site. On February 9, 2004 a letter was sent to The Klamath Tribes Director of Cultural and Heritage describing the proposed project and requesting input and comments. A consultation meeting was held at Bly Ranger District on March 17, 2004 with representatives of The Klamath Tribes Cultural and Heritage department and Bly District staff members.

No comments were received in response to public scoping for the proposed underburn project.

Decision
After review of the analysis of the activities and their expected effects, it is my decision to proceed with implementation of the maintenance underburn in the Tub project area as described above. Project specific resource protection measures will be implemented to protect RHCAs and the associated stream channels, the bald eagle nest site, and cultural resources. The prescribed burn will decrease the accumulated fuels in this area, thereby reducing the risk of catastrophic fires. In addition to reducing the risk of wildfire, the burn will stimulate the growth of grasses and shrubs that would be beneficial for livestock and wildlife. The underburning will advance the potential for developing sustainable vegetative conditions with open stands containing large trees in the Tub Butte area.

Findings

Plants
A Biological Evaluation completed for the Tub Prescribed Fire 1997 project (Specialist’s Report and Biological Evaluation, Patricia Hudspeth, 11/20/1996) was reviewed by the current South Zone Botanist (Tub Maintenance Underburn Project Analysis and Environmental Review 1/4/2004) and found to be still valid. Known populations and/or potential habitat exist within the project area for the following sensitive plant species: long-bearded mariposa lily (Calochortus longebarbatus var. longebarbatus), fringed campion (Silene nuda spp. Insectivora) and sierra onion (Allium campanulatum).

Long-bearded mariposa lily is found in many places on the Fremont National Forest and is managed under a valid Conservation Strategy. The strategy designates several protected populations. The protected site that occurs
within the Tub Maintenance Underburn project area will be avoided through project design. Other populations are found near springs and in the scattered meadows of the project area. Underburning during spring conditions prescribed by the proposal will keep fire from burning through the damp meadows in which the long-bearded mariposa lily grows.

Three known populations of fringed campion are found within the project area. Habitat for this species is non-forested openings and dry meadows. Spring burning with scabrock and damp meadows acting as natural barriers to fire, and pine understory the main objective for fuel reduction, is not expected to have an effect on habitat for fringed campion.

Two known populations of sierra onion occur within the project area. Habitat for this species is ecotones between forested areas and non-forested openings. Spring burning in the understory of forested stands is not expected to have an effect on habitat for sierra onion.

The Botanist determined that implementation of this project is expected to have no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on the above species and/or potential habitat, and is not expected to contribute to the loss of viability of these species nor cause them to move toward federal listing under the Endangered Species Act.

**Wildlife**
A Biological Evaluation was completed for the Tub Underburn project (Biological Evaluation and Specialist Report, Don Gay, 11/29/1996) that has been recently reviewed by the South Zone Wildlife Biologist. The 1996 Biological Evaluation found no terrestrial species with endangered, threatened, or sensitive status occurring within the project area. A bald eagle nest has been discovered in the greater Tub Underburn area, however the area proposed for treatment in the spring of 2004 is greater than 2-miles from the known nest tree. This new information would not change the effects of the original (1996) Biological Evaluation with the following protection measure implemented:

- Maintain a no flight buffer of at least ½ mile around the known nest tree.

Potential habitat for greater sandhill crane occurs within the greater Tub Underburn project area and occupied sandhill crane habitat is at least ½ mile from the project area except at the mouth of Fishhole Creek Canyon. Here the area is within 1/8 mile of the southern most patch of occupied habitat. Since no occupied crane habitat is known within the project area, and potential habitat would be unaffected by the underburn, the Tub Maintenance Underburn is not expected to cause adverse impacts to, lead toward Federal listing, nor loss of population viability for any proposed, endangered, threatened or Region 6 sensitive wildlife species or their critical habitat.
**Fisheries**

A Biological Evaluation was completed for the Tub Underburn project (Biological Evaluation, Soil and Watershed Specialist Report, Bob Nichols, 1/22/1997). A recent review of the Biological Evaluation by the South Zone Fisheries Biologist and Hydrologist (Tub Maintenance Underburn Project Analysis and Environmental Review 1/4/2004) concluded that the effects determination is still valid.

The Tub Maintenance Underburn is likely to have no adverse effects on fish habitat within or downstream from the activity area, nor lead to Federal listing or loss of population viability for any aquatic proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive species. This project is expected to have “No Affect” on the redband trout in Fishhole Creek or its tributaries or downstream populations of listed suckers. In addition, no adverse effects on soils or watershed would occur, nor add to existing cumulative effects within the subsheds when burned under prescription.

**Cultural Resources**

Appropriate inventories have been completed and avoidance measures will be implemented. Given that the proposed activities will be monitored, there will be no effect to significant cultural resources. Section 106 SHPO consultation was completed under the Programmatic Agreement among the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region (Region 6), The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer regarding Cultural Resource Management on National Forests in the State of Oregon dated March 10, 1995, pursuant to stipulated Forest Archaeologist review dated April 22, 2004.

**Other Findings**

This action is consistent with the management direction, including standards and guidelines, as outlined in the Fremont National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement documenting the analysis for the Plan. No significant impact is expected on parkland, floodplains, wetlands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas as none occur in the project area. This action will comply with requirements of the Clean Water Act. There are no municipal watersheds, congressionally designated areas, inventoried roadless areas or Research Natural Areas present. There are no anticipated significant impacts on consumers, minority groups, American Indians, women or civil rights. There are no anticipated significant impacts to Treaty and trust responsibilities with the Klamath Tribes.

There are no known significant indirect, cumulative, or unavoidable adverse effects on the environment. There is no significant threat to public health or safety. Implementation of this project meets the resource protection requirements of 36 CFR 219.17.
Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Project
No extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects; therefore, the action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement. Based on the environmental analysis and past experience, the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity and will result in little or no effects to either the physical or biological components of the environment.

This activity is categorically excluded from an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement under Category 6 (FSH 1909.15, Section 31.2) “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction”.

Administrative Review (Appeals) and Implementation
Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.4(a) this decision is not subject to requirements for Notice and Comment. This action falls within a category of actions that are not subject to administrative appeal (36 CFR 215.12(f)). This decision may be implemented immediately.

Contact
For further information about this project, please contact Mike Haddock, Fuels Specialist, 541-353-2746, or Orlando Gonzales, District Ranger, 541-353-2427, at the Bly Ranger District, PO, Box 25, Bly, OR 97622.

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April 26, 2004
Date