DECISION NOTICE AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT FUELS
REDUCTION PROJECT

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
Medford-Park Falls Ranger District
Price and Taylor Counties, Wisconsin
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I. DECISION

**Decision:** I have decided to proceed with the Grassland Management Fuels Reduction Proposed Action as described in the March 2010 Grassland Management Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment ("EA", attached). This action uses prescribed fire in combination with mowing to reduce hazardous fuels across approximately 237 acres of grassland fuel types in an area which is located within a wildland-urban interface (WUI). This action would recur annually into the foreseeable future as it involves periodically burning and mowing a number of fields on a rotational basis. The objective of my decision is to keep the area in a fire-manageable, short-grass condition and prevent the development and accumulation of larger woody vegetation, brush, and fuel.

**Location:** The Buffalo Farm site is located about 15 miles east of the city of Park Falls, WI (T40N, R2E, Sections 23-26) in Price County, Wisconsin. The proposed units are in addition to other units that were included in the 2008 Vanderveen Fuels Reduction Project decision. The Medford Farm site is located approximately 20 miles northwest of the city of Medford (T32N, R3W, Sections 23 and 24) in Taylor County, Wisconsin. Actions would occur on lands administered by the Medford-Park Falls Ranger District, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, and adjacent private landowners under authorities to conduct activities on private lands that benefit the National Forest System granted by the Wyden Act (Public Law 105-477, Section 323 as amended by Public Law 109-54, Section 434). The Buffalo Farm site is allocated to Management Area 4A in the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land Resource Management Plan ("Plan"), and the Medford Farm site is allocated to Management Area 2C. My decision is consistent with these MAs in that the project emphasizes use of prescribed fire for fuel reduction actions (Plan p 3-21), and the maintenance of forest openings (Plan p 3-9). Maps of the affected site are found within the EA.

**Rationale:** The purpose of my decision is to meet Goal 2.8 of the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. That is to “safely implement the fire and fuels management program within the Forest Service Protection area of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests”. More specifically, my reason for taking action is due to a strong need to reduce “flashy fuel buildup” in these areas which occur in an important interface between the Forest and private residences (WUI). No significant issues were raised by the public during development of the EA.

I based my decision upon health and human safety considerations of people living nearby and the values of adjacent private land in the event of a wildfire. My decision will:

1. Reduce the likelihood of an accidental fire ignition developing into a wildfire that
could threaten nearby people, private property and structures, and
2. Reduce fire intensity and allow for more effective control should one occur.
3. Work cooperatively with adjacent private landowners under Congressional
   authorities (Wyden Act) to expend federal funds on projects with mutual benefits.

II. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A notice describing the proposed action was mailed to interested or affected publics
including adjacent landowners, state and local governments, tribal representatives, and
other agencies and organizations (approximately 97 letters) on January 15, 2010. The
legal notice for opportunity to comment on the project was published in the Medford Star
News (newspaper of record) and the Park Falls Herald on January 21, 2010. No comments
were received regarding this project during the 30 day notice and comment period. Since
no issues were raised regarding the proposed action, no additional alternatives to the
Proposed Action were developed.

III. FONSI

I have considered the NEPA significance criteria of both context and intensity (40 CFR
1508.27). I have considered the environmental consequences of my selected action as
disclosed in the EA (pp. 2-10). Based on these considerations, I find that this action will not
have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As further described
below, no measurable adverse impacts to resources are anticipated. Minor impacts
associated with smoke have been minimized (EA p 3). I note there was no public concern
or interest with this proposal (no comments received). Because no significant impacts to the
quality of the human environment are anticipated, an environmental impact statement will
not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

**Context:** The effect of this individual action is very small in terms of society as a whole, the
nation, or even the region. Its effects are localized to two relatively small sites within the
Medford-Park Falls Ranger District. This action affects local concerns, but has no
meaningful impacts on state and national economies or governments. The interests are
localized to two small communities in northern Wisconsin (EA p 1).

**Intensity:** The ten criteria related to intensity are discussed individually, below:

1. My selected actions results in both beneficial and adverse impacts. All adverse
   impacts are minor and of low intensity (EA pp 2-10). I have not used beneficial
   effects to counter balance adverse impacts in determining the significance of impacts
   on the environment. No individual adverse impact is intense enough to be significant
   by itself.

2. No adverse impacts to public health or safety were found as a result of my selected
   action or required management practices. Treatments to reduce hazardous fuels
   would instead reduce the risk to human health and safety by decreasing the risk of
   wildfire (EA, p 2-3).

3. There will be no impact to unique characteristics of the area such as cultural
   resources, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, roadless areas, or ecologically critical
areas (EA p 2-10). Cultural resources have been inventoried and specific design criteria identified to protect these areas (EA Appendix B). Further design, criteria require that additional surveys be conducted on Buffalo Farms units 12 and 13 prior to implementation. Should any cultural resources be discovered at this time, protective measures will be discussed with the landowner. If human remains are discovered during the survey, work must stop immediately and a Forest Service archaeologist contacted. The 2004 Plan requires sites be protected to ensure no adverse effects would occur from my decision (see PF heritage report).

4. Similar actions have been employed frequently in the past and the effects are well known. Substantial public involvement efforts were made in conducting the analysis for this proposal, and no controversy over the effects surfaced (EA p 2).

5. Similar actions have been employed frequently in the past and there is little uncertainty in anticipated impacts. Even so, the effects are very minor and any uncertainty would not cause them to become great.

6. The action is common on the Forest, across the region and across the nation. There is no indication it would establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.

7. Cumulative effects of my decision have been considered for each issue. Since there are no measurable adverse impacts anticipated (EA p 2-10), there would be no cumulative effects.

8. The EA identified no effects to resources eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (pp 9-10), nor is there any indication that the action would it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.

9. My action would have no adverse effect on a threatened or endangered species, or its critical habitat (EA pp 7-8).

10. This action does not violate federal, state, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. The EA, its appendices and its Project Record File meet the legal requirements for environmental disclosure. This action is consistent with the 2004 Forest Plan, which has been found in compliance with environmental law.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

National Forest Management Act: I have reviewed the direction in the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and find this project addresses its goals and objectives and is consistent with all standards and guidelines relevant to this action. More specifically, this action is consistent with Objective 2.8c: “Reduce hazardous fuels within communities at risk, in cooperation with local, federal, and state agencies” (2004 LRMP, pp 1-6), and Objective 3.3d: “…Cooperatively work across agencies and organizations to develop and implement hazardous fuels reduction projects that will reduce the risk of wildfire” (2004 LRMP, pp 1-8).
**Other:** Other laws and regulations that this project is in compliance with include but are not limited to the following: Clean Water Act (see Section II., B., 2. of this document), Endangered Species Act (see Section II., B., 1.), and the National Historic Preservation Act (see Section II., B., 6. & 7.).

*Wyden Act (Public Law 105-477, Section 323 as amended by Public Law 109-54, Section 434)*: The Wyden Act authorizes the Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements with private landowners to reduce the risk of natural disaster where public safety is threatened, and to protect, restore and enhance other resources.

**V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL**

The 30-day comment period for this project ended on February 22, 2010. Since no comments expressing concerns were received, or only supportive comments were received during the comment period, this decision is not subject to appeal (36 CFR 215.12).

**VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

Implementation of this proposal may occur immediately.

**VII. CONTACT PERSON**

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Dalynn B. Parks at the Medford-Park Falls Ranger District; 1170 4th Ave. South, Park Falls, WI 54542, at (715) 762-5172

**VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE**

/s/ Bob Hennes               3-30-10

BOB HENNES
District Ranger

Date