

# Blowing Smoke

Industrial Logging Under  
The Guise of Fuels Reduction



CASE STUDIES OF CONTROVERSIAL FUELS REDUCTION PROJECTS  
AND EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE FUELS REDUCTION

*A Report by American Lands Alliance*



American Lands Alliance

726 7<sup>th</sup> Street SE

Washington, DC 20003

202-547-9105

[www.americanlands.org](http://www.americanlands.org)

COVER PHOTO - CLEAR CUTS NEAR IRON HONEY PROJECT AREA

## Executive Summary

Over the past two years, addressing forest fires has taken on increasing urgency with both the public and national and local decision-makers.

Congress responded to the severe fire season of 2000 by dramatically increasing funding for federal wildland fire management. In FY 2001, Congress approved an unprecedented \$2.8 billion for what is now called the National Fire Plan.

Despite clear direction from Congress to prioritize the spending of hazardous fuel reduction (HFR) monies to protect human habitation, the Forest Service has revealed that only about 30% of these funds were spent on projects in the vicinity of homes and communities. The General Accounting Office (GAO) recently concluded in a scathing report that the Forest Service cannot demonstrate that the increased funding for the National Fire Plan is being spent in an efficient, effective, or timely manner.

Over the past several months there has been a great deal of demagoguery and finger pointing, claiming that obstruction by environmentalists is responsible for a delay in the implementation of fire prevention projects. After a GAO report determined that less than 1 percent of all fire reduction projects had been challenged by environmentalists, the administration created its own report claiming that half of such projects had been challenged. Based on its own analysis, the administration is now calling for a wholesale elimination of environmental laws and meaningful public participation in the management of public lands.

The analysis in this report reveals that:

- 1) The projects that were challenged were largely related to community protection from fire in name only, and were, in fact, commercial timber sales in remote areas;
- 2) Projects actually aimed at protecting communities from fire went largely unchallenged by environmentalists;
- 3) Claims brought by conservation organizations that these projects violated the law were often corroborated by internal reviews within the Forest Service and federal courts;
- 4) As a result of these challenges, brought under the National Environmental Policy Act, the agency has been forced to modify, improve, or drop numerous destructive projects; and
- 5) Goods for Services/Stewardship Contracts exacerbate existing problems by allowing the economic value of timber removed to drive both the type and location of the projects toward the back-country where the larger fire resistant trees are found.

## Community Protection Must Be Prioritized

During congressional oversight hearings in 2001, the Forest Service's then National Fire Plan Coordinator, Lyle Laverty, revealed that, despite clear direction from Congress to spend all HFR monies to protect communities at risk, less than 25% of the funds slated for HFR were spent on projects in the vicinity of homes and communities.

The latest scientific information from top Forest Service fire researchers, indicates that a zone of 100-200 feet from structures -- up to a quarter of a mile to better provide for firefighter safety -- are the maximum distances from homes and communities needed for effective fuel reduction treatments. The research found that what protects homes is reducing ignitions from flames by creating defensible space through treatments that may include thinning small diameter trees, pruning, mowing, and roof cleaning, as well as the removal of flammable landscape and building materials within the immediate area.

The projects highlighted in this report as effective fuels reduction projects are mostly noncommercial projects thinning small diameter trees within close proximity to homes and community structures.

## Salvage Logging

Under the guise of fuel reduction, the Forest Service has planned numerous salvage logging projects. Many of the "fuel reduction" projects that have been challenged by conservation groups are salvage projects. The post-fire salvage projects highlighted in this report are far from homes and communities, are low priority for fuels reduction, are in endangered species habitat, are in inventoried roadless areas, and/or propose the logging of live, healthy, fire resistant trees. Logging operations following forest fires exacerbate fire damage and erosion, and make those areas more susceptible to future fires by opening the forest canopy and exposing twigs, branches, leaves and brush to direct sunlight. Removing large live and dead trees also destroys critical wildlife habitat, and increases fire risk by leaving small trees and slash. The Forest Service regularly promotes the logging of large healthy green trees as part of post-fire salvage projects to make these projects more attractive to the timber industry.

## Stewardship Contracting Pilots

In his “Healthy Forest Initiative,” the President would permanently authorize the “Goods for Services” Stewardship Contracting Authority currently being pilot tested. The “Goods for Services” authority relies on logging large fire resistant trees to pay for removing small diameter trees and clearing brush to reduce fire risk. This creates a situation where the economic value of timber removed drives both the type and location of the projects toward the back-country where the larger trees are found. This does the most damage to forest ecosystems and protects communities least.

In fact, these activities can actually increase fire risk. According to an August 2000 Congressional Research Service report, “Timber harvesting removes the relatively large diameter wood that can be converted into wood products, but leaves behind the small material, especially twigs and needles. The concentration of these ‘fine fuels’ on the forest floor increases the rate of spread of wildfires.”

There are currently 84 Stewardship Contracting pilots that have been authorized by Congress. The program as originally planned was not to be considered for expansion until the results of the current test projects were reviewed by Congress. To date, few pilot projects have been finished, and no analysis is yet available. Congress recently opposed permanently authorizing Stewardship Contracting during the Conference Committee for the Farm Bill.

## Conclusion

Rather than following a century of misguided fire policy with an era of lawless logging, Congress has the opportunity to create policy that will protect both homes and communities and our forests. The conservation community urges Congress to adopt a plan that:

1. Directs adequate resources and manpower to create Community Protection Zones within a maximum of a quarter mile of structures;
2. Increases funding for hazardous fuel reduction that is not tied to commercial logging of large fire resistant trees;
3. Directs 75% of hazardous fuel funds to states through block grants to ensure that work gets done on private property. According to Forest Service research, 80% of the wildlands urban interface zone is on private property;
4. Uses best value service contracts to conduct this work that will provide jobs to rural communities;
5. Opposes the “Goods for Services” provision that trades large fire resistant trees to clear brush; and
6. Upholds environmental laws including the right of citizens to meaningfully participate in land management decisions, and to enforce the laws governing land management agencies.

# CASE STUDIES

## I. Appealed Fuels Reduction Projects

### CALIFORNIA

**Big Bar  
Post-Fire Salvage  
Six Rivers  
National Forest**

#### Purpose

This 20 million board foot salvage timber sale was justified as a project to protect local communities from forest fires and extended prolonged smoke exposure. The closest community is ten miles from the project area.

The timber sale would include logging in the Orleans Mountain “C” Roadless Area, felling large, fire-resistant trees and reducing canopy closure from between 60 percent and 80 percent to 40 percent. Several miles of roads would be built or reconstructed.

#### Reasons for Appeal

- Large, fire-resistant trees, old growth, and mature forest would be logged.
- Logging debris and slash could pose a significant fire hazard.
- Logging would occur as much as ten miles away from any community and would occur in an inventoried roadless area.
- Phase I of the Final EIS acknowledges that there is no immediate threat of future wildfire.
- Imperiled and sensitive species would be adversely affected, including peregrine falcon, northern goshawk, Pacific fisher, marten, Townsend’s big-eared bat, southern torrent salamander, and the northern spotted owl.
- Soils, riparian areas, water quality, hydrology, and aquatic habitat would



*Black bear climbing tree in the Big Bar Project Area,*  
**Anthony and Christine Ambrose**

all be adversely affected.

#### Status

Several nonprofit conservation organizations appealed the timber sale. The Forest Service denied the appeal. The Western Environmental Law Center filed a lawsuit challenging the sale on behalf of seven nonprofit conservation organizations. The court ruled that the Forest Service had violated the law in approving the project, and the Forest Service withdrew the sale in August of 2002.

Contact: Christine Ambrose or Anthony Ambrose, Environmental Protection Information Center, 707-822-1343; [christine@wildcalifornia.org](mailto:christine@wildcalifornia.org), [anthony@wildcalifornia.org](mailto:anthony@wildcalifornia.org)

## Purpose

This prescribed burn project involved more than 3,700 acres of moist hardwood forests, riparian areas, and a few stands of fire-adapted pine forest miles from communities and homes. The project's official purpose was to reduce fuels and improve wildlife habitat, however the main reason these burns are done in hardwood areas in the Southern Appalachians is to increase white-tailed deer habitat and forage.

## Reasons for Appeal

The John Muir Project, a nonprofit conservation organization, appealed the portions of the project that involved burning in moist hardwood forests and riparian areas, where frequent fires and stand-replacing fires are not part of the natural fire regime. Native species associated with these forest types have evolved without the presence of fires. Prescribed fires in moist hardwood forest areas destroys habitat for declining species of ground-nesting birds, including thrushes and ovenbirds, and kills rare woodland salamanders found only in the Southern Appalachians. The John Muir Project did not object to the portions of the project that involved burning in fire-adapted pine-dominated forest types.

## Appeal and Project Status

The appeal was dismissed in response to a federal court ruling that set aside a settlement agreement that allowed for administrative appeals of prescribed burns. Three of the four burns were implemented without delay; however, the burn in the Sarah's Creek Roadless area has not been implemented due to lack of funds and personnel.

Contact: Rene Voss, The John Muir Project, 301-891-1361, [rene.voss@mindspring.com](mailto:rene.voss@mindspring.com)

## Purpose

The Myrtle-Cascade Fuels Reduction Project entailed logging hundreds of acres of moist old growth forest in the Selkirk Mountain Roadless Area and adjacent roadless areas at least ten miles from the nearest town, Bonners Ferry. The Forest Service's Environmental Impact Statement states that nearly 70 percent of the area slated for logging is within a woodland caribou recovery area dominated by moist, old growth western red cedar, western hemlock, sub-alpine fir and Englemann spruce forest.

## Appeal Status

The Lands Council, a nonprofit conservation organization, appealed the project. The Forest Service review panel removed the inventoried roadless area from the sale. Lands Council staff members visited the area one year after their appeal and found that large (up to 22 inches diameter), fire-resistant trees were marked for removal.

Contact: Rein Attemann, The Lands Council, 509-838-4912, [rattemann@landscouncil.org](mailto:rattemann@landscouncil.org)

*High elevation moist forests in the Myrtle-Cascade Fuels Reduction Project area. The Lands Council*



## GEORGIA

**Roadless Area  
Prescribed Burn  
Project  
Chattahoochee-  
Oconee National  
Forest**

## IDAHO

**Myrtle-Cascade  
Fuels Reduction  
Project Idaho  
Panhandle  
National Forest**

## NEW MEXICO

### Sheep Basin Restoration Project Gila National Forest



*Trees marked for "thinning" in the Sheep Basin Project*  
Todd Schulke

#### Purpose

The Forest Service initiated the Sheep Basin Restoration Project as a collaborative effort between local residents, conservationists, and loggers. The project's purpose was to "restore forests by thinning small-diameter trees, reintroducing fire, mitigating the adverse environmental affects of livestock grazing, and helping to develop local markets for small-diameter timber."

After years of working together to achieve these shared goals, the Forest Service issued a final decision inconsistent with several of these goals. That decision redefined the project's purpose to exclude restoration and instead called for the logging of large diameter trees.

The Sheep Basin Project area is characteristic of many southwestern ponderosa-pine forests that are dominated by small-diameter trees and are lacking sufficient numbers of large ones. According to the Forest Service, more than 95 percent of the trees in the Sheep Basin area are smaller than twelve inches in diameter, yet the agency plans to log many of the last, remaining large trees.

In addition to its negative effects on the forest, the Forest Service's final decision would adversely affect efforts to develop a locally based, small-diameter, sustainable wood products industry. One of the main groups in this effort, the Catron County Citizen's Group, has received a federal grant to

develop a community protection and forest restoration project based on the utilization of small-diameter trees.

#### Appeal Status

The Center for Biological Diversity appealed the project. The Forest Service review board concurred with the appeal.

Contact: Brian Segee, Center for Biological Diversity, 520-623-5252, Ext.308, [bsegee@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:bsegee@biologicaldiversity.org)

## NEVADA

### Mt. Wilson Urban Interface Project Ely District, Nevada BLM

#### Purpose

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The Mt. Wilson Urban Interface Project covers 47 square miles of one of the most sparsely populated regions in the United States. The project would liquidate old-growth pinyon and juniper forests.

According to the BLM, the project's goals are to protect human life and property from forest fires and establish a healthy ecosystem by removing hazardous fuels. However, the agency failed to demonstrate that the area has an unnaturally high fuel load or that it poses a threat to communities.

Machines weighing 30 tons and outfitted with tank-treads would be used to turn 35,000 acres of old-growth pinyon-juniper forest into hundreds of millions of pounds of wood chips, which would be left scattered on the ground, increasing the fire risk in the project area.

## Appeal Status

The Committee for Idaho's High Desert, Western Watersheds Project, and American Lands Alliance, appealed this project. The agency denied the appeal and the groups filed a lawsuit, which is currently pending.

Contact: Katie Fite, Committee for Idaho's High Desert, 208-385-7588, [kfite@juno.com](mailto:kfite@juno.com)

## Purpose

The Carrol Creek Fire Salvage and Restoration Project is a purported fuels reduction project that was appealed because the Forest Service planned to log large, old-growth fire resistant trees instead of small diameter trees that act as fuel ladders. Because the Carrol Creek watershed where the project was to occur has extremely steep slopes, helicopters were to be used for tree removal. Helicopter logging is expensive and not economically feasible unless the trees with the highest commercial value are removed.

A site visit revealed that the Forest Service allowed logging of trees that had not been killed or damaged by the fire violating the project's requirement that only dead and dying trees be removed.

Field monitoring by the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, a nonprofit conservation organization, found that at least 100 trees that were more than 21 inches in diameter had been felled. Trees of this size are protected east of the Cascade Mountains because old-growth forests have been severely depleted by past logging. Only three percent of the old growth that once covered the Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon remains. These large old trees provide critically important habitat for native wildlife.



## Reasons for Appeal

- In violation of the forest plan, the project called for the logging of the largest, most fire-resistant trees (on average at least sixteen inches diameter for most species and 21 inches for ponderosa pine),
- The project increased fire risks by removing old growth and leaving the small-diameter ladder fuels in place.

## Appeal Status

The Forest Service denied separate appeals by the Hells Canyon Preservation Council and the Oregon Natural Resources Council. The area was logged in 2001.

Contact: Brett Brownscombe and Lisa Dix, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, 541 / 963-3950, [brett@hellscanyon.org](mailto:brett@hellscanyon.org) or [ldix@hellscanyon.org](mailto:ldix@hellscanyon.org)

## OREGON

**Carrol Creek  
Fire Salvage-  
Restoration  
Project  
Wallowa-  
Whitman  
National Forest**

*Photographs taken after logging show that small trees remain standing and large stumps sit where fire resistant trees once stood.*

**Brett Brownscomb**

## OREGON

### California Timber Sale Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

#### Purpose

Although fuel reduction is listed as one purpose of the 2.4-million board foot California Timber Sale, the Forest Service has acknowledged that treatment is unnecessary because the project area is dominated by moist, high elevation forests at low to moderate fire risk.

The California Timber Sale does not focus on removing small trees, saplings, and underbrush that are necessary for reducing fire risks, but instead targets larger, more fire-resistant trees for removal. The California sale will increase fuel loads and fire risk by removing large trees and leaving the most fire-prone trees as well as logging slash and debris on the ground.

#### Reasons for Appeal

- Despite acknowledging that roads contribute more sediment to streams than any other land management activity and that roads impose adverse impacts to wildlife, the project would reconstruct 35 miles of roads in an area where road density currently exceeds forest plan standards.
- The proposed logging would increase sedimentation and water temperature, thereby exacerbating and perpetuating existing Clean Water Act violations.
- Logging will adversely affect numerous native wildlife species, according to the Forest Service's analysis. Loss of old growth will have particularly harmful effects on wildlife species, including the threatened Canada lynx.

#### Appeal Status

The Hells Canyon Preservation Council appealed the timber sale. The appeal was denied. Bids for the contract for this sale will be accepted in September of 2002.

Contact: Brett Brownscombe and Lisa Dix, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, 541-963-3950, [brett@hellscanyon.org](mailto:brett@hellscanyon.org) or [ldix@hellscanyon.org](mailto:ldix@hellscanyon.org)

## OREGON

### Charlie Brown Vegetation Man- agement Project, Deschutes National Forest

#### Purpose

The Charlie Brown Vegetation Management Project is a 17-million board foot commercial timber sale that would include ten miles of road reconstruction. Logging and road reconstruction would further damage a previously logged area as well as pristine, unroaded forest encompassing about 9,000 acres. The vast majority would be logged, and several hundred acres would be subject to prescribed burning. The project's official purpose was fire risk reduction.

#### Reasons for Appeal

- Imperiled and sensitive wildlife species, including Canada lynx, northern spotted owl, pileated woodpecker, northern three-toed woodpecker, sapsucker, black-backed woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, Pacific fisher, and American pine marten, would be adversely affected.
- Water quality would be degraded.
- Soil productivity would be degraded.
- Old growth would be destroyed.

## Appeal Status

The Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, Cascadia Wildlands Project, American Lands Alliance, Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Oregon Natural Resources Council Fund appealed the timber sale. The appeal was denied, and the groups filed a lawsuit. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and directed the agency to reconsider the proposed timber sale.

Contact: Susan Jane M. Brown, Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, 503-680-5513; E-mail: [susanjanebrown@yahoo.com](mailto:susanjanebrown@yahoo.com)

## Purpose

This project is controversial because it purports to “correct” an “unnatural” forest condition: the forest is multi-storied mixed conifer, rather than single-story ponderosa pine. The USFS maintains that the ponderosa pine is the historical condition of the area, but field data indicates otherwise. There is also no indication that fuel loading is a problem in this area, and fuels reduction was never a stated purpose and need of the project.

The Crawford Management Project includes a ten-million-board foot commercial timber sale and the construction or reconstruction of more than 60 miles of roads—more than three times as many miles as the project proposes to obliterate. The selected alternative would also burn an estimated 9,498 acres.

## Reasons for Appeal

- Endangered and threatened wildlife species would be adversely affected, including Canada lynx, mid-Columbia River summer steelhead, Columbia River Basin bull trout, mid-Columbia River Spring Chinook, and Interior redband trout.
- Streams in the area currently do not meet state clean water standards. Logging and road construction and reconstruction would further degrade water quality.
- Some of the last remaining old growth on the Malheur National Forest would be logged in violation of the Northwest Forest Plan.

## Appeal Status

The Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project has filed an appeal. Contact: Susan Jane M. Brown, Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, Phone: 503-680-5513; E-mail: [susanjanebrown@yahoo.com](mailto:susanjanebrown@yahoo.com)

## OREGON

**Crawford  
Vegetation  
Management  
Project  
Malheur  
National Forest**

## TEXAS

### Texas Blowdown Reforestation Project Angelina, Sabine, and Sam Houston National Forests

#### Purpose

Although the Forest Service listed this timber sale as an appealed fuel-reduction project, hazardous fuels were not a primary concern in the agency's original proposal and analysis. The official purpose of the Texas Blowdown Reforestation Project, which proposes clearcutting 3,400 acres including the few remaining large commercially valuable trees, was purported to ensure forest regeneration after high winds caused a large blowdown, and to meet habitat needs for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

#### Reasons for Appeal

- The endangered red-cockaded woodpecker would be adversely affected.
- Vehicles used for logging would compact soils, damaging root systems and increasing erosion.
- Water quality would be degraded by increased erosion and sedimentation.
- Impacts of prescribed burning in an area that is not fire dependent.

#### Appeal Status

The Houston Sierra Club appealed the project. The Forest Service denied the appeal. Contact: Brandt Mannchen, Houston Sierra Club, Lone Star Chapter, 713-664-5962, [brandtshnfbt@juno.com](mailto:brandtshnfbt@juno.com)

## WASHINGTON

### Conger Integrated Resource Project Okanogan National Forests

#### Purpose

The Conger Integrated Resource Project is a 10-million board foot commercial timber sale listed by the Forest Service as an appealed fuels-reduction project. However, the Conger Project is three miles from the nearest community, a small camping and recreation area called Conconully, and would log big trees (up to 21 inches diameter) and clearcut lodgepole pine forests.

#### Reasons for Appeal

- Logging large, fire resistant trees will damage or destroy wildlife habitat not reduce fire hazards.
- Removal of canopy cover and clearcutting will cause erosion and potential flooding without reducing fire hazards.
- Soils will be compacted by the use of multi-ton logging equipment and soil productivity will be reduced.
- The project does not provide for any treatment in the community protection zone and therefore will not protect human lives and homes.
- Impacts to threatened lynx habitat.

#### Appeal Status

Separate appeals were filed by The Lands Council and the Kettle Range Conservation Group. The Forest Service review panel concurred and withdrew the sale. Contacts: Mike Petersen, The Lands Council, 509-838-4912, [mpetersen@landscouncil.org](mailto:mpetersen@landscouncil.org)

## II. STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING PROJECTS

### Purpose

The East Rim Vegetation Management Project is located on the rim of the Grand Canyon in an area known as the Kaibab Plateau. This old-growth timber sale would log eight million board feet from 10,000 acres of forest less than three miles from Grand Canyon National Park and adjacent to the Saddle Mountain Wilderness Area. The Kaibab Plateau has no human inhabitants. Instead of using prescribed fire and small-diameter thinning near communities, the Forest Service is logging remaining old growth forest in remote areas.

Thousands of large and old-growth fire resistant trees would be logged to pay for the fuels reduction and restoration work through the goods for services stewardship contracting authority.

The Kaibab Plateau has the best remaining old-growth stands anywhere on national forest land in Arizona and New Mexico. These forests provide habitat for the densest breeding population of northern goshawks in North America as well as for species found nowhere else in the world. Teddy Roosevelt designated the entire North Kaibab area as the “Grand Canyon Game Preserve” in 1907, placing a separate duty on the Forest Service to manage it for the benefit of wildlife. Nonetheless, the Forest Service continues to log old-growth forest on the Plateau.

**Appeal Status** The Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, and Southwest Forest Alliance filed an appeal this year. The Forest Service review panel concurred with the appeal and withdrew the sale.

Contact: Brian Segee, Center for Biological Diversity, 520-623-5252, Ext. 308, [bsegee@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:bsegee@biologicaldiversity.org)

### Purpose

This project was justified by the Forest Service to improve forest health, visual quality, wildlife habitat, fire resilience and watershed condition, promote responsible recreation use, and implement new “stewardship end results” contracting. The project covered 14,000 acres and included logging as much as 15 million board feet of timber, seven miles of road reconstruction, and 17 miles of road decommissioning, logging to improve Nordic skiing, some Christmas tree cutting, construction of a new warming hut at Breckenridge Nordic center, a new overnight hut, and 10 new interpretive sites.

Beneficial components of this project were planting Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, tree species formerly present but extirpated from the area during the mining era, prescribed burning, numerous miles of road decommissioning, and designing campsites.

### Reasons for Appeal

- Imperiled and sensitive species, would be adversely affected, including clustered lady-slipper, boreal western toad, American marten, pygmy shrew, northern goshawk, boreal owl, olive-sided flycatcher, golden-crowned kinglet, and northern three-toed woodpecker.

## ARIZONA

**East Rim  
Vegetation  
Management  
Project  
Kaibab National  
Forest, Arizona  
Stewardship  
Contracting Pilot  
Using Goods for  
Services**

## COLORADO

**Upper Blue  
Stewardship  
Project  
White River  
National Forest**

- The hut would be in Canada lynx habitat, which is listed as threatened.
- The Ten Mile Roadless Area would be invaded and damaged.
- Already high phosphorus levels in the Dillon Reservoir could be increased by logging and development activities.

**Appeal Status**

Colorado Wild, a nonprofit conservation organization, appealed the project. The Forest Service review board concurred with the appeal and withdrew the project pending revision of the forest plan. Contact: Rocky Smith, Colorado Wild, 303-839-5900; [rocky@coloradowild.org](mailto:rocky@coloradowild.org)

**IDAHO**  
**Middle Black Project**  
**Clearwater National Forest**  
**Stewardship Contracting Pilot**  
**Using Goods for Services**

**Purpose**

The Middle Black Project would log 64-million board feet of timber, including extensive logging in the Pot Mountain Roadless Area and other ecologically sensitive areas near the North Fork of the Clearwater River, an area devastated by landslides in the mid-1990s. This massive logging project would be one of the largest timber sales in recent history.

The project’s official purpose is to increase young forests, increase elk habitat, increase white pine, restore wildfire, and reduce catastrophic fire risks. The project area is 30 miles from the nearest town. Despite the fact that the North Fork Ranger

District has a wildfire plan (1999) that would allow this area to burn naturally, the Forest Service is proposing intensive logging to reduce fire risk. Further, the Forest Service EIS acknowledges that this project will result in a loss of older forest communities.

The Middle Black Project is within the most ecologically intact unprotected wildland in the lower 48 states. It has the highest concentration for large carnivore habitat anywhere in the U.S. and Canadian Rocky Mountains. The project area also includes critically important habitat for the threatened bull trout.

While proposed road decommissioning and culvert repair have restoration benefits, these benefits are outweighed by the adverse affects of the proposed logging. Water quality in the North Fork River has been seriously harmed by previous logging and road building and has yet to recover.

**Appeal Status**

The comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement ended in January of 2002. The Final EIS is expected in November 2002. Contact: Gary Macfarlane and Larry McLaud, Friends of the Clearwater, 208-882-9755, [gary@wildrockies.org](mailto:gary@wildrockies.org) or [lorenzo@wildrockies.org](mailto:lorenzo@wildrockies.org).



Buckingham Lake deep inside the Pot Mountain Roadless Area, site of a proposed cutting unit in the Middle Black Project to be logged by helicopters

Mic Metz

## Purpose

The Iron Honey Restoration Project, a 27-million board foot timber sale (about 5,500 log trucks), would clearcut 1,919 acres of Douglas fir and hemlock forests in the headwaters of an already heavily clearcut watershed of the Little north fork of the Coeur d'Alene River. Although the Forest Service's original justification for this project was "watershed restoration", it has subsequently appeared on the list of appealed fuels reduction projects. The Forest Service claims that this high elevation (between 3,800 to 4,800 ft), moist western hemlock, grand fir and western red cedar forest which receives 50 inches of rain per year, has a high fire risk

This project is a stewardship contracting pilot. The Forest Service has not disclosed any information about the contracting authorities being used.

## Reasons for Appeal

- Logging will increase flooding, transporting heavy metals from the flood plain of the Coeur d'Alene River to the Lake Coeur d'Alene and the Spokane River, whose watersheds provide 80% of the water for 400,000 people. The watershed is already impacted by 11 miles of road per square mile .
- During the five to nine years the Forest Service believes it would take the watershed to return to "normal," the main stem of the Coeur d'Alene River will be in the middle of intense toxic waste cleanup. The Forest Service cannot ensure that during those five to nine years there will not be flooding in the basin, potentially redistributing heavy metals.
- The Forest Service claims that clearcutting has the same impacts as natural fire disturbance - a disturbance absent from this moist forest type.



*Clearcuts surrounding the Iron Honey Project area*

**The Lands Council**

## Appeal status

The Lands Council filed an appeal in April of 2002. The Forest Service denied the appeal. Contact: Neil Beaver, The Lands Council, 509-838-4912; [nbeaver@landscouncil.org](mailto:nbeaver@landscouncil.org)

**IDAHO**

**Iron Honey  
Restoration  
Project  
Idaho Panhandle  
National Forest  
Stewardship Con-  
tracting Pilot**

## OREGON

### Sprinkle Timber Sale Stewardship Contracting Pilot Wallowa- Whitman National Forest

#### **Purpose**

Although this project's official purpose is to reduce forest fire hazards, it would remove six-million board feet of timber, including large, fire-resistant trees. The project includes two-stage clearcuts which will leave slash and dry out the soils, increasing fire risk.

This timber will be given to the contractor in exchange for stream restoration and trail construction work that is also part of the Sprinkle Timber Sale.

Slash and logging debris along with the removal of fire resilient trees are likely to increase, not decrease, forest fire risk. Logging will further reduce wildlife habitat in this already heavily logged area. Although road removal will occur, the net road density resulting from the project will exceed current standards for elk habitat.

#### **Appeal Status**

Hells Canyon Preservation Council, a nonprofit conservation organization, appealed the sale. The appeal was denied. Although the project is ready for implementation, the timber sale has not been sold.

Contact: Brett Brownscombe and Lisa Dix, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, 541-963-3950, [brett@hellscanyon.org](mailto:brett@hellscanyon.org) or [ldix@hellscayon.org](mailto:ldix@hellscayon.org)

### III . PROPOSED CONTROVERSIAL FUELS REDUCTION PROJECTS

The Forest Service proposes to log several hundred acres of mature and old growth forest in a recently burned area. While this project is justified as a means to remove dead and dying trees, site visits by independent scientists revealed that the majority of mature and old growth trees to be logged are alive, green, and healthy.

California spotted owls have recently returned to the burned area, and at least one pair has nested there. A detailed site inspection by a spotted owl expert found that the majority of the area proposed for logging is still highly suitable for California spotted owls. This is due largely to the presence of large older trees slated to be logged. Fire scientists have further demonstrated that large living trees are the most fire-resistant structural elements in a forest, and that their removal will reduce the canopy cover, creating hotter, drier conditions on the ground and causing rapid growth of combustible brush.

Contact: Chad Hanson, The John Muir Project, 530-273-9290  
[chadhanson@juno.com](mailto:chadhanson@juno.com)

In the wake of a 2001 fire that began on previously logged private land and spread to the Tahoe National Forest, the Forest Service proposed a massive salvage logging project -- currently the largest timber sale in the nation-- primarily in old-growth reserves and in the Duncan Canyon Inventoried Roadless Area.

On approximately 60 percent of the project area, the Forest Service proposes to remove only trees greater than 15 inches in diameter (many greater than three and four feet in diameter) while leaving behind all fire-killed saplings and brush, as well as all flammable slash and debris (branches and twigs from felled trees).

Without salvage logging, the branches on fire-killed trees would fall to the ground gradually, where they would decay slowly over decades. But, if the proposed salvage logging occurs, this highly combustible small-diameter material will be piled on the ground all at once, and exposed to direct sunlight, creating a severe fire hazard.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Red Star Restoration Project discloses that the proposed logging in these areas will leave huge amounts of small-diameter fuels (75 tons per acre) and will not comply with the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan. The Forest Service refused to consider an alternative that focused on reducing the smallest, most flammable material.

**Project Status** Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement are due in September of 2002.

Contact: Chad Hanson, The John Muir Project, 530-273-9290;  
[chadhanson@juno.com](mailto:chadhanson@juno.com)

#### CALIFORNIA

**Eldorado Star  
Fire Restoration  
Project  
Eldorado  
National Forest**



*Green trees slated for logging in the Eldorado Star Project*

**The John Muir Project**

#### CALIFORNIA

**Red Star  
Restoration  
Project  
Tahoe National  
Forest**

## OREGON

### Boulder Beetle Salvage Sale Wallowa- Whitman National Forest

The Boulder Beetle Salvage Sale proposes more than 4.5 million board feet of logging within the Pine Creek watershed. The project's official purpose is to reduce fire risk caused by dead and dying trees in the project area. The Forest Service, however, limits its definition of "dead and dying," to trees with at least "4 percent sound saw timber." Thus, the Boulder Beetle project will log only commercially valuable dead and dying trees and large, fire resistant, green, healthy trees. The most fire-prone trees will be left on site.

The Boulder Beetle project is also of concern for the following reasons:

- The project would log in an unroaded area, adjacent to the Eagle Meadows Roadless Area and Eagle Cap Wilderness, far from homes and communities.
- Many large, healthy trees and all but four snags per acre in this ecologically sensitive area would be removed, thus eliminating habitat for many wildlife species that depend on large trees and abundant snags, including northern goshawk, pine marten, Canada lynx and many cavity-nesting bird species.
- The project would clearcut more than 400 acres, build two miles of new logging roads, two new helicopter landings, and reconstruct 20 miles of roads, many of which were closed to protect wildlife. Some roads would be reconstructed in sensitive fish habitat.
- The project is estimated to cost the taxpayers over \$195,000. This figure does not include the imminent post-project restoration costs, decommissioning newly built logging roads, soil restoration due to logging, and future "thinning" of overcrowded stands caused by clearcutting.

Contact: Lisa Dix, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, 541-963-3950, [ldix@hellscayon.org](mailto:ldix@hellscayon.org)

The Ward Lake Fuels Reduction Project and the Skinner Horse Timber Sale includes the logging of three million board feet of timber from an area that includes an estimated 115 acres of old growth. The sale would not contribute to reducing fire risks to local communities and would likely increase that risk. The entire Ward Lake Project would involve six miles of road construction or reconstruction. Its official purpose is to reduce fuel loading around public recreation facilities and private land boundaries to protect lives and property from forest fires and to produce commercial timber.

The project is of concern for the following reasons:

- The project links an old growth timber sale with a fuels reduction project.
- Part of the fuels reduction project would occur in the spruce-fir forests, where such treatments are unnecessary and would have adverse ecological impacts.
- Extensive wetlands and relatively low-elevation, rolling topography mean that the area is biologically rich and productive, which would be impaired by logging.
- Many wetlands within the project units are not correctly identified as such and may be damaged by logging and road construction.
- More than 100 acres of old growth would be logged possibly in violation of forest plan standards.
- Many imperiled or sensitive species may be adversely affected by this project, including bald eagle, Canada lynx, boreal toad, Colorado River cutthroat trout, northern leopard frog, tiger salamander, northern goshawk, osprey, boreal owl, northern three-toed woodpecker, golden-crowned kinglet, pygmy shrew, wolverine, purple martin, dwarf shrew, American marten.

#### Appeal and Project Status

Colorado Wild and other nonprofit conservation groups submitted comments on the draft environmental assessment, which was completed in April of 2002. The draft indicates that implementation would begin in the summer of 2003. The final environmental assessment not yet been released for public comment.

Contact: Jeff Berman, Colorado Wild, 970-385-9833; [jeff@coloradowild.org](mailto:jeff@coloradowild.org)

## COLORADO

### Ward Lake Project Grand Mesa- Uncompahgre- Gunnison National Forests



*Wetlands within a  
Ward Lake logging unit*  
Jeffrey Berman

**NEW  
MEXICO**

**Scott Able Forest  
Health Project  
Lincoln National  
Forest**

The proposed Scott Able Fire-Salvage Sale would log ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forest on 2,000 acres in a severely burned part of the Sacramento Mountains. The Forest Service estimates 10 million board feet of timber would be removed. Trees up to 24 inches diameter would be logged. The project's official purpose is to reduce the risk of additional fires.

On May 11, 2000, a fire ignited in the Scott Able Canyon area of the Lincoln National Forest that burned approximately 15,500 acres, including nearly 14,000 acres of national forest. The Forest Service states that about 8,000 acres burned severely.

While the Forest Service has not clearly stated what logging prescription would be used, it has indicated that only five trees per acre on average will remain in the project area after logging, which is essentially a 2,000 acre clearcut.

Contact: Brian Segee, Center for Biological Diversity, 520-623-5252, Ext.308, [bsegee@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:bsegee@biologicaldiversity.org)

## V. EXAMPLES OF GOOD FUELS REDUCTION PROJECTS

This is an example of a fuels reduction project that was implemented in the wildland urban interface, directly adjacent to private lands. The Dixie Fuelbreak project was a noncommercial fuel reduction project on approximately 100 acres that was limited to within 100 to 200 feet of structures in Dixie, Idaho. The purpose of this project was to reduce threat of wildland fire moving from adjacent national forest to private lands, improve safety of fire fighters in the area and reduce threat to property.

The project called for the removal of all material 3 inches diameter and less followed by burning, pruning of tree branches to 18 feet, and removing pole sized trees to create 10 foot crown spacing. Material was left on site after limbing and burning.

This project, although it touches the boundary of the Cove Roadless Area, would reduce fuel around buildings in Dixie, Idaho. It represents a project that is based on research by Forest Service fire scientist Jack Cohen. The Forest Service originally had planned to clearcut 600 acres in the roadless area, but the project was changed due to public input. This project was not appealed and has been implemented.

Contact: Gary Macfarlane and Larry McLaud, Friends of the Clearwater, 208-882-9755, [gary@wildrockies.org](mailto:gary@wildrockies.org) or [lorenzo@wildrockies.org](mailto:lorenzo@wildrockies.org).

The Ashland Watershed Protection Project is an example of public involvement improving agency decision-making. Initially, the Ashland Watershed Protection Project was named the HazRed Timber Sale Project, a four-million board foot timber sale that would have logged trees as much as three feet in diameter. The community of Ashland was concerned about the proposed logging, and several groups and individuals appealed the project. A diverse group of residents formed the “Ashland Watershed Stewardship Alliance,” which met twice a week for six months. The Alliance included representatives from the mayor’s office, small-business owners, forest workers, members of the Society for American Foresters, environmental groups, and other concerned citizens.

During the public comment period the Alliance produced a 95-page proposal that became the basis for the development of an alternative, included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. A modified version of this alternative was approved by the agency.

The Ashland Watershed Protection Project embodies many of the values and concerns voiced by the conservation and scientific community regarding fuels reduction for fire restoration projects and should be a model to emulate.

Implementation of the project began in 2001 and will continue for several years. Treatments include the following:

- Treatment of 10 percent of Ashland’s municipal watershed. It reduces fuels on national forest lands using manual treatments (e.g. brush cutting, pile and swamper burning) directly within the wildland urban interface (WUI) zone and in areas within

### IDAHO

**Dixie Fuelbreak  
Red River  
Ranger District,  
Nez Perce National Forest**

### OREGON

**Ashland  
Watershed  
Protection  
Project  
Rogue River  
National Forest**

the interior proposed for prescribed understory burning.

- Prescribed under burning in area-wide treatments in suitable and manually pre-treated areas and fuel break maintenance are also taking place.
- Unfortunately, the project does allow for some overstory tree removal by utilizing a 17-inch diameter cap. Trees 17 inches or greater in diameter in southern Oregon are typically considered late successional and resistant to fire.

Contact: Joseph Vaile, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, 541-488-5789; [joseph@kswild.org](mailto:joseph@kswild.org)

## OREGON

### Highway 20 Fuels Reduction Project Sisters Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest

The Highway 20 Fuels Reduction Project has been implemented and will increase fire protection in the wildland-urban interface along both sides of US Highway 20, from Sisters, Oregon, to the junction of Camp Sherman Road. The project uses prescribed fire, brush mowing, and noncommercial thinning of small trees (less than eight inches in diameter) to reduce woody fuels. The project was not appealed.

The Highway 20 Fuels Reduction Project retains the large, old-growth ponderosa pines, native grasses, and thickets of trees for wildlife cover, while removing small trees and brush, thus making the area safer for the thousands of local residents of Sisters, Black Butte, Tollgate, Crossroads, and Indian Ford. Reintroducing fire through prescribed burning simulates natural processes and produces new growth of native grasses and shrubs.

All of these activities were open to public comment and subject to all environmental laws and accomplished without a single appeal or lawsuit.

Contact: Tim Lillebo, Oregon Natural Resources Council, 541-382-2616, [tl@onrc.org](mailto:tl@onrc.org)

## OREGON

### Chiloquin Community Fuels Reduction Project Winema National Forest

The Chiloquin Community Fuels Reduction Project is an example of public involvement encouraging the Forest Service to make the right decision: one that focused on removing small-diameter trees and reducing fire risk to the community of Chiloquin, Oregon.

In its final decision for the Chiloquin Community Fuels Reduction Project, the Forest Service rejected an alternative that would have logged four million board feet of mature and old-growth ponderosa pine up to 21 inches diameter. The timber production alternative was rejected in favor of an alternative that would instead limit conifer logging to trees eight inches diameter at breast height.

In selecting this alternative, the Forest Service stated that the 8" diameter maximum alternative "best addressed" the "National Fire Plan to reduce fire hazard around communities at risk from wildfire." The district ranger wrote: "I have selected Alternative 2 because it will reduce high fuel loadings over a large-scale, high severity wildfire occurrence.... It will reduce the high hazard fuel loading in the (4,100 acre) analysis area and reduce the overall risk of stand replacement fire." In addition prescribed "burning and mechanical (brush) treatment will increase the quantity and quality of forage by stimulating new shoot production, retaining a seed source, and provide a growing space for new plants in burned areas."

Winema National Forest's Chiloquin Ranger District concluded that it was unnecessary to log large, fire resistant trees.

Contact: Susan Ash, Oregon Natural Resources Council, 503-283-6343, Ext. 212, [sa@onrc.org](mailto:sa@onrc.org)

