

Little Humboldt

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5/23/03



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Elko Field Office

3900 East Idaho Street

Elko, Nevada 89801-4611

<http://www.nv.blm.gov>

In Reply Refer To:
4130(NV-012)

MAY 23 2003

Dear Interested Public:

Enclosed are a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Decision Record for the South Fork Little Humboldt River Basin Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (Project). A copy of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project will be provided upon request.

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other affected interest may protest a proposed decision under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1, in person or in writing to (Name, Title, and Office Address of Authorized Officer) within 15 days after receipt of this decision. The protest, if filed, should clearly and concisely state the reason(s) as to why the proposed decision is in error.

In the absence of a protest, the proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice unless otherwise provided in the proposed decision.

Pursuant to 43 DFR 4.470, 4160.3, 4160.4, and 4.21, any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal and petition for stay of the decision pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized office: Clinton R. Oke, Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources, 3900 E. Idaho Street, Elko NV 89801, within 30 days following receipt of the final decision.

The appeal shall state the reason(s), clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error and shall otherwise comply with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470. The regulations are available at the BLM field office for your use at the field office. A petition for stay must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer.
Please contact Patrick Coffin at (775) 753-0289 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Clinton R. Oke,
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources

Enclosure:

1. FONSI and Decision Record

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD
2003 Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project
South Fork Little Humboldt River Basin,
Little Humboldt Allotment
BLM/EK/PL2003/004**

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL2003/004, I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the human environment, and therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. Adherence to Standard Operational Procedures outlined in the proposed action of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Prescribed Burn Plan will avoid or minimize potential harm to the affected environment.

Decision

It is my decision to authorize implementation of the 2003 Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project for the South Fork Little Humboldt River (SFLHR) basin, Little Humboldt Allotment (LHA), as described in the proposed action of BLM/EK/PL2003/004. The project authorizes the use of Spike 20P (a 20% active ingredient, pellet form of tebuthiuron) and prescribed fire on 2,000 acres of public land within the SFLHR basin LHA. Spike 20P will be used to treat 1,000 acres of the South Basin Pasture, and 500 acres of the North Basin Pasture. Prescribed fire will be used to treat approximately 500 acres in the South Basin Pasture only. Prescribed fire will not be used to treat any vegetation in the North Basin Pasture.

Proposed Action (Spike 20P Herbicide Treatment and Prescribed Burn)

The proposed action consists of using Spike 20P to thin mountain big sagebrush and prescribed fire to create mosaics of burned vegetation within treatment block areas. All treatments would take place in the North and South Basin Pastures of the SFLHR basin portion of the LHA, located northwest of Midas, Nevada. Up to 1,500 acres in the South Basin pasture (17%) and 500 acres in the North Basin pasture (10%) are proposed for treatment with Spike 20P. About 500 acres in the South Basin Pasture would be burned using prescribed fire treatment in areas with archeological clearances. No prescribed fire treatment would be used in the North Basin Pasture.

The proposed treatments would be applied in the summer and fall of 2003. Prescribed fire would be conducted only in the South Basin pasture when environmental parameters are conducive to producing low intensity burning conditions. Treatments would be conducted while the two pastures are closed to grazing until they reach specific riparian objectives described in the LHA Evaluation. This would allow for 2 or more years of growing season rest following treatment.

Treatment would be focused on upland sites supporting high densities of mature mountain big sagebrush with the potential for response by native forbs and grasses on the site. Treatment would not be conducted within 100 feet of the stream bottom/riparian areas along the SFLHR, Secret, Sheep, Pole, or Oregon Canyon creeks.

Spike 20P would be applied aurally and by hand using Global positioning System to control application. Generally, Spike 20 pellets (1/8 x 1/4 inch particles) are applied by a fixed wing crop dusting type aircraft flying 100-125 above the ground making 45 foot wide swaths. The application would be 1.0 to 1.5 pounds per acre to provide a thinning effect (50-75% canopy cover reduction). An application rate of 1.5 pounds/acre will drop 1 pellet about every 2 feet.

A Prescribed Fire Plan would be prepared for approval prior to burning. Prescribed fire operations would be conducted when environmental parameters are conducive to producing low intensity burning conditions. Ignitions would be conducted using hand-firing (fusses, drip torch, propane torch etc.,) techniques. The fire plan would include standard operating procedures for protection of sensitive resources, property, and personnel during fire suppression and fire rehabilitation activities. This includes coordinating smoke management in compliance with Federal, state, local air quality regulations, and following interim guidelines for the management of sage grouse habitats in Nevada.

Cattle have historically grazed the SFLHR Basin following snowmelt in late May or early June and remained in the basin until late October or early November. The LHA Evaluation was prepared for the allotment in 2001 and a Full Force and Effect Decision (FFE Decision) for the SFLHR basin was completed in 2002. The FFE Decision includes rest for the SFLHR basin until specific riparian objectives are achieved, followed by a rest rotation system between the two pastures. The pastures can be used early or late, but not both. Each pasture would be rested for a year after it is grazed, with the North Basin Pasture used one year, and the South Basin Pasture the next year. The LHA Evaluation provides for 444 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) in the North Basin Pasture (11 acres/AUM), and 792 AUMs in the South Basin Pasture (11.2 acres/AUM) when grazing is resumed. Specific criteria were placed on riparian stubble height (4 inches) and woody species utilization (10 percent on aspen and 20 percent on willows). The grazing system is designed to reduce use of stream and riparian areas, and improve or maintain riparian and stream conditions, as described within the LHA Evaluation

Project Stipulations

1. The proposed treatments would be conducted by the BLM under prescribed burn guidelines set by the Burn Plan and applicable label guidelines for Spike 20P. The burn plan would include smoke management, sage grouse guidelines and other standard operational procedures.
2. Spike 20P would be applied only in areas of high-density mountain big sagebrush to thin sagebrush cover down to 10 to 15 percent.
3. All interested agencies, groups, and persons would be notified as to when the treatments would be conducted.

4. The edges of burns would be irregular to avoid creating unnatural lines and vegetation contrasts.
5. BLM would avoid treatment on sites with low sage (*Artemisia arbuscula*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorus*), and/or high densities of little green rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflores*) and lupine (*Lupinus* spp).
6. A cultural inventory of potential burn blocks areas would be completed prior to any prescribed burning taking place. A cultural inventory would not be required where Spike 20P would be applied since there would be no ground disturbance.
7. Seeding of native forbs and grasses would be considered on a case by case basis, as needed, in an effort to increase forage diversity.

Rationale

The proposed action will benefit LCT, a Federally threatened species, by reducing the potential for catastrophic fire that burns through riparian areas occupied by LCT, and by reducing livestock utilization of riparian/wetland vegetation associated with LCT streams within the SFLHR basin. The proposed action would also benefit other sensitive species, including sage grouse, associated with the SFLHR basin. In addition the potential for catastrophic fire impacting the community of Midas will be reduced by the proposed action.

The proposed action, developed in cooperation and consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Division of Wildlife, the landowner, Nevada First Corporation, and the livestock permittee, Oro Vaca, Inc., provides for chemical treatment and prescribed fire on about 17% of the South Basin Pasture, and 10% of the North Basin Pasture. The 1996 Oregon hot season fire has already altered the vegetation in about 1/3rd of the North Basin Pasture. The two pastures provide separate experimental treatment areas to evaluate the most effective method of treating mountain big sagebrush at high elevations, to decrease the density of mountain big sagebrush for the benefit of various wildlife species, and to attract cattle away from the riparian areas associated with LCT streams. Prescribed fire will create a mosaic of herbaceous and shrub vegetation. Spike 20 will thin dense mountain big sagebrush from 30-55 percent to 10-15 percent at the proposed application rate.

Under the no action alternative, which would be no vegetative treatment, upland areas would continue to have dense stands of mountain big sagebrush, which would be favorable for large catastrophic fires. These type fires would be more damaging to riparian areas and could be a threat to the community of Midas. Riparian/wetland areas should improve with either the no action alternative or the proposed action since authorized grazing is restricted to early season. Early season use attracts livestock away from the stream/riparian habitat because of new green, herbaceous vegetation in the uplands during June. The riparian areas should be maintained in better condition with the proposed action because new green vegetation in the treatment areas would also help attract livestock away from the riparian corridor.

The proposed action is in conformance with the Elko Resource Management Plan; Issue-livestock management, management prescription - #2; and Issue - wildlife management prescription - # 6. The proposed action would also comply with the Standards and Guidelines for the Northeastern Great Basin. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with the BLM determination of "Not Likely to Adversely Affect" Lahontan cutthroat trout.



CLINTON R. OKE, Manager
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources

Date 5/2/03