



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service  
April 5, 2012

# Public Scoping and Notice of Opportunity to Comment

## Long Doctor Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project

Bridgeport Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
Lyon County, Nevada

### Comments Welcome

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Bridgeport Ranger District is proposing to improve sage-grouse habitat in the Sweetwater Summit area of Lyon County, Nevada (Figure 1). The project location is described as Township 8N, Range 25E, sections 31 and 32 and Township 7N, Range 25 E sections 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, Township 8N, Range 24E, section 36 and Township 7N, Range 24E, section 1.

My preliminary assessment is that this proposal falls within a category of actions listed in the Forest Service NEPA regulations (36 CFR part 220) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and there are no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude use of the category (36 CFR 220.6 (e)(6)). This category is described as “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.”

The Forest Service is applying notice, comment, and appeal regulations found at 36 CFR 215 (specific to EAs) to this project. This document initiates both the scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7) and provides notice of the 30-day comment period pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide meaningful input on the proposed action prior to initiation of the analysis and a decision by the Responsible Official.

### Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Long Doctor sage-grouse habitat improvement project is to restore and enhance important sage-grouse habitat. Additionally, the project will reduce fuel loading within the pinyon-juniper stands surrounding the grouse habitat. The project is needed because pinyon pine and juniper are encroaching into the sagebrush flat, making the habitat unsuitable for sage-grouse. Pinyon and juniper stands found within the project area are categorized as Phases I and II (Table I). Removal of the trees in these Phases improves the understory vegetation, such as

sagebrush, grasses and forbs that are essential for sage-grouse survival. Tree removal also reduces the number of perches for avian predators, such as ravens and hawks.

The greater sage-grouse is a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act. The birds in Mono County are part of a distinct population segment (DPS) of the greater sage-grouse. This DPS, called the bi-state population, was given a higher priority for listing than the greater sage-grouse as a whole due to more immediate and severe threats the bi-state DPS is facing. These threats include habitat loss caused by development, grazing, invasive species, pinyon encroachment, and wildfire. Expansion of pinyon pine was listed as a risk to sage-grouse because it results in the loss of suitable habitat.

Sage grouse occupy the project area throughout the year. There are several leks (strutting grounds for male grouse) in or near the project area. This project is recommended by the Desert Creek Population Management Unit (PMU) through the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California (June 2004).

### **The Proposed Action**

The Forest Service proposes removal of the majority of the pinyon and juniper in the project area. The majority of the trees are pinyon pine. The project area totals approximately 1,750 acres (Figure 2). Felled trees would be available for fuelwood collection, with the stipulation that no off-road travel would be allowed to retrieve the trees.

#### Complete Tree Removal

Complete tree removal is proposed for 1,716 acres. The majority of this treatment area has a very low tree density, with less than approximately one tree per acre scattered throughout the sagebrush flat. These trees are typically small, averaging less than approximately 4 feet tall. Along the outer edges of the treatment area, tree density is higher and variable, with tree density estimated at 5-30 trees per acre. These trees are a range of sizes and ages, but based on a small sample of tree cores, the age of the largest trees is less than approximately 105 years old. Treatment would consist of hand crews using chainsaws to fell all trees within the treatment unit. Trees would be left on the site to decompose naturally. Depending on the size of the trees, limbs would be lopped and scattered to facilitate decomposition.

#### Tree Thinning

Thinning is proposed on 34 acres around the base of Round Mountain. Tree density and size is higher in this area than in the rest of the project area and would be categorized as Phase II woodlands. Tree density is estimated at 10-50 trees per acre. There is a range of tree sizes and ages in this area, but based on a small sample of tree cores, the age of the oldest trees is less than approximately 105 years old. In this treatment area, the majority of the trees will be removed, leaving one small clump of trees every two acres. The trees left will be the largest cone bearing trees. The goal of this treatment is to remove as many trees as feasible to reduce the threat of future tree encroachment into sage grouse habitat and reduce fuel loading around Round Mountain. Trees would be felled using chainsaws. Trees would be left on the site to decompose naturally. Depending on the size of the trees, limbs would be lopped and scattered to facilitate decomposition.

### Round Mountain

No treatment is proposed on Round Mountain. The 34 acres of tree thinning treatment described above is designed to thin around the base of the mountain to reduce the risk of wildfire around the mountain and to improve sage-grouse habitat on the flats.

**Table I. Description of the Woodland Phases**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description</b>
0	No trees present, or the trees present are $\leq 10$ per acre and mature.
I	Few to many young/submature trees present, but not affecting understory.
II	Rapid expansion of trees, rapid decline of understory.
III	Trees dominant, understory minimal to nonexistent.

**Decision to be made:** To implement the project as described above or not.

### **Comment Process:**

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this Project. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice for this project in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Interest expressed or comments provided after the close of the 30-day comment period will be considered, but will not confer eligibility to appeal a decision to proceed with the Project.

Mailed comments must be submitted to: District Ranger, Mike Crawley, Bridgeport Ranger District, HC 62, Box 1000, Bridgeport, CA 93517-1000. The fax number is (760) 932-5899. Office business hours for those submitting written comments in person or providing oral comments are 8am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc/.docx) to:

Email: [comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@fs.fed.us)

### Appeal Eligibility:

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the information identified in 36 CFR 215.6, including : [i] name and address; [ii] title of the proposed action; [iii] specific comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision; [iv] signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comment(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility; [iv.A] for appeals listing multiple organizations or multiple individuals, a signature or other means of verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization and for each individual in the case of multiple names, to meet appeal eligibility requirements; [iv. B] those using electronic means may submit a scanned signature. Otherwise another means of verifying the identity of the individual or organizational representative may be necessary for electronically submitted comments or comments received by telephone; [v] individual members of an organization must submit their

own comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility; comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

For additional information please contact Sherri Lisius, Wildlife Biologist, phone (760) 872-5022, fax (760) 872-5050.

Sincerely,

/s/ *Michael O. Crawley*

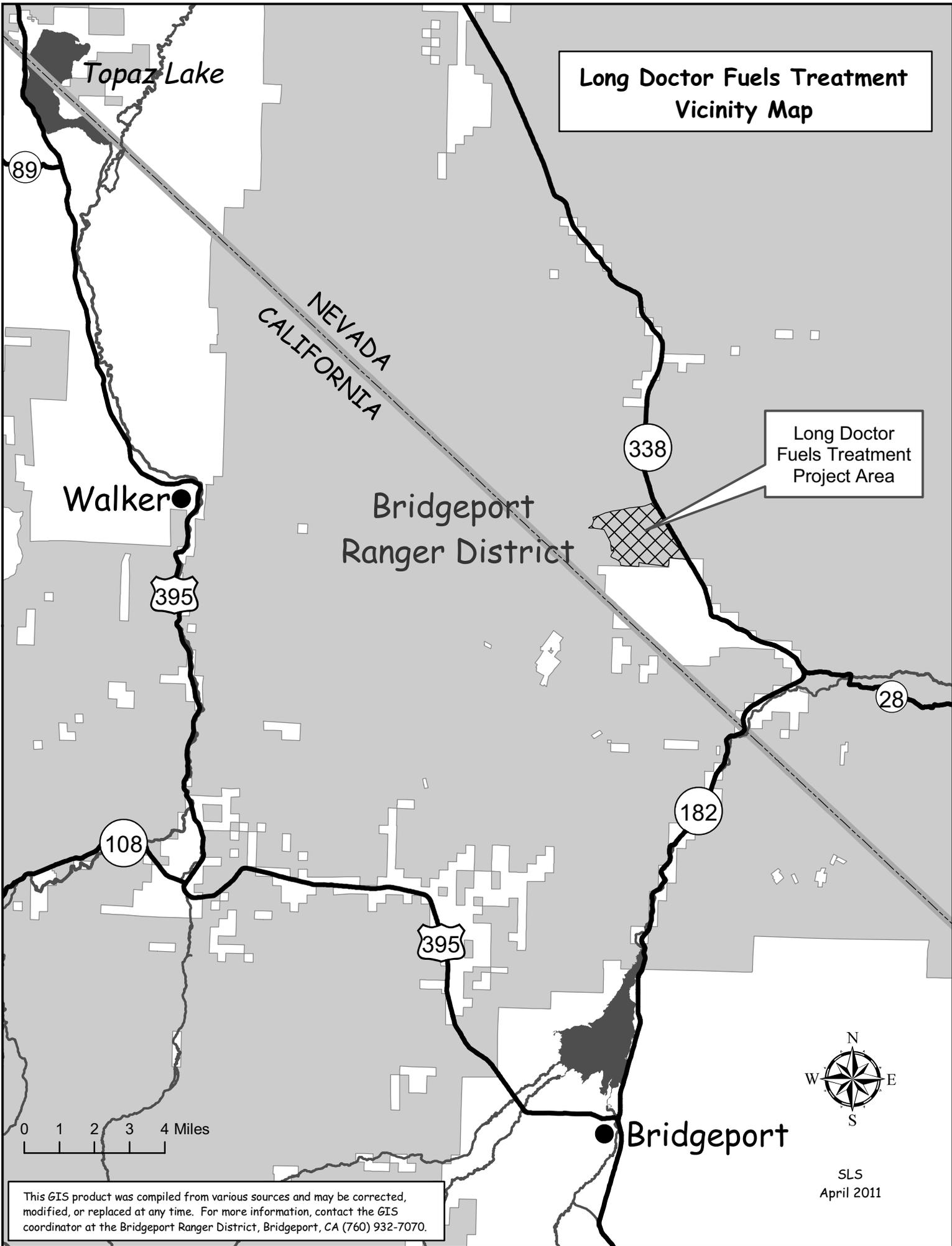
MIKE CRAWLEY  
District Ranger

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# Long Doctor Fuels Treatment Vicinity Map



Long Doctor Fuels Treatment Project Area

Bridgeport  
Ranger District



0 1 2 3 4 Miles

This GIS product was compiled from various sources and may be corrected, modified, or replaced at any time. For more information, contact the GIS coordinator at the Bridgeport Ranger District, Bridgeport, CA (760) 932-7070.

SLS  
April 2011

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