



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

August 2012

Scoping Notice

Old Mill WUI Hazardous Fuels Treatment Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Spring Mountain National Recreation Area
Clark County, Nevada

Old Mill Project Area



Comments Welcome

Introduction

The Spring Mountain National Recreation Area (SMNRA) of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is proposing to treat and maintain a hazardous fuels treatment project around and adjacent to homes and private property located in Kyle and Lee Canyon and along Deer Creek Highway. This area is located 23 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada and encompasses over 4,430 acres of analysis area, and includes approximately 1,518 acres of treatment areas, all of which are within the Wildland Urban Interface areas (WUI) located on the SMNRA. The WUI areas include summer homes, state land, county land, campgrounds, private property, Clark County School Facilities, Federal Aviation Administration land, and National Forest Systems land. Please see the attached map.

The purpose of this letter is to invite those who are interested to submit comments on the Proposed Action. Information received may be considered in the analysis and preparation of the Old Mill WUI Hazardous Fuels Treatment. We plan to issue a decision by mid to late January

2013. For detailed information on how to provide comments please refer to the “Comment Process” section of this document.

This project is being completed under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003. Section 102 (a) of the HFRA authorizes hazardous fuels reduction projects on: (a) federal land in the wildland-urban interface areas or federal lands in condition class three or condition class two within fire regimes I, II, or III. It is anticipated at this time the project will be analyzed in an Environmental Assessment (EA).

Location

The project area is located approximately 23 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada. The legal description for the project includes portions of: Township 18 South, Range 55 ½ South, sections: 10, 3, 4, 34, 35, Township 18 South, Range 56 East, sections: 7, 8, 9, 17, Township 19 South, Range 56 East, sections 21 & 29 Mt Diablo Meridian. The attached project map shows the exact location and includes a vicinity map as well to show the general location of the project on the SMNRA.

Background

The Nevada Community Wildfire Risk/Hazard Assessment, a collaborative community-based wildland fire assessment, identified communities that are at risk to wildfire due to hazardous buildups of vegetative fuels. The assessment team, consisting of fire behavior specialists, forest and rangeland fuels specialists, and field technicians, visited over 250 communities in 17 counties and assessed the risk of ignition and the potential fire behavior hazard within the WUI. Collaborative partners for this assessment included numerous agencies, fire safe councils, and community leaders including the Nevada Fire Safe Council, Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Nevada Division of Forestry, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, Nevada Association of Counties, and Clark County Fire. This assessment produced the Clark County Wildland Assessment Project (CCWAP) document, which identifies communities in the Spring Mountains that are at risk from wildfire (in part due to dense vegetative conditions on National Forests System lands) and recommended a series of projects to address those hazardous fuels levels.

In 2007, as a result of the assessment and the availability of funding under the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA), the Spring Mountain Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (SMNRA HFRP) decision was signed to address the hazardous fuel loadings in six different WUI locations. The project was successfully completed in 2011 and treated over 2,230 acres of National Forest System lands through the use of mechanical, hand and prescribed fire treatments.

The Spring Mountains Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy (10-Year Fuels Plan) created in 2008 “is a unified, multi-jurisdictional strategic synopsis of the planning efforts of local, county, state and federal entities. The proposed projects in this plan provide a 10-year strategy to reduce the risk of large and destructive wildfire in the Spring Mountains Planning area. The plan’s outcome is to 1) propose projects that create ‘community defensible space,’ 2) comprehensively display all proposed fuel reduction treatments, and 3) facilitate communication and cooperation among those responsible for plan implementation. If

implemented, this plan will provide greater protection to the people, infrastructure, and resources in the planning area” (10-Year Fuels Plan). The agencies involved in the creation of this document included: Nevada Division of Forestry, Nevada Division of State Lands, Nevada Fire Safe Council, Clark County Fire, Nye County Fire, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service, Spring Mountains National Recreation Area.

Following the success of the 2007 SMNRA HFRP and using recommendations from the 10-Year Fuels Plan, the SMNRA Fire and Fuels staff are proposing additional hazardous fuels removal with the Old Mill WUI project. The project will increase and enhance the fuel breaks currently in place and, by utilizing broadcast burning, return fire in its natural role to the SMNRA.



Vegetation density within the project area

Existing Conditions

The Spring Mountains have a history of large and frequent wildfires. The potential for increased fire conditions results from over 100 years of fire suppression to protect communities and resources. Fire suppression has resulted in more trees and shrubs contributing to contiguous fuel beds and increased fire behavior potential. Small trees and shrubs and low hanging limbs increase the chance that fires will transition into the tree crowns. White fir trees, once removed by natural fire cycle, have increased in numbers and are at risk for insect and disease outbreaks that could escalate fire behavior. The increase of density for all tree species can also cause insect and disease vectors to transfer from tree to tree much easier.

Vegetation is often found in close proximity to structures and adjacent to highways used as fire emergency escape routes. Fire behavior modeling for the previous WUI suggests that, should a wildfire occur within proposed project areas during very high fire danger conditions, fire line intensity would be high and fire control could be difficult. The Old Mill WUI will help control these issues by:

- Reducing the risk of wildfire to federal land and adjacent county, state and private property;
- Reducing fuel loading in forested and shrub areas around federal land and county, state and private property;
- Reintroducing fire in its natural role in the ecosystem to move the landscape toward a more natural or historical fire regime; and
- Providing and maintaining defensible areas for firefighters to manage future wildland fires.

The WUI area covered by the Old Mill WUI is rated by the 10-Year Fuel Plan as *Extreme* for its Interface Fuel Hazard Condition and Community Hazard Rating due to its fuel loading and limited one-way access in and out of the canyons. Within the proposed area there is evidence of recent wildfire scars that begin along the roadside and spread rapidly uphill and up-canyon, as evidenced by the 2004 Robber's Fire, which resulted from the presence of dense vegetation during very high fire weather conditions. The 2010 Cathedral fire showed the effectiveness of a fuel break in suppression tactics by fire personnel. The defensible space around the Rainbow community allowed county, state and federal firefighters to help defend the fire's movement toward private property.

Desired Future Conditions

The proposed project will align with direction in the General Management Plan (GMP) for the NRA, an amendment to the Toiyabe National Forest Plan (1996), to implement an effective fire management program that includes planned prescribed burning and vegetation manipulation to protect resources, public safety, private property, developed areas, and to meet management objectives. Desired future conditions for the forest are to reduce fuel loads, which area at historic levels, and to create conditions adjacent to the communities where, in the event of wildfire, fire intensity would be low and fire suppression and evacuation would be effective, rapid and safe. Project activities will occur in Management Area 11 – The developed canyons. Management area prescriptions in the GMP, which provide general themes, desired conditions, and standards and guidelines, are outlined as follows:

- Vegetation manipulation may be required to meet objectives. Use planned prescribed fire to improve or enhance resource outputs (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Key, Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines, p. 4).
- The historic role of fire is mimicked through prescribed burns, fuelwood areas, shaded fuel breaks, and prescribed natural fires; fuel loads area historic levels (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Desired Future Conditions, p. 12).
- Fuel and vegetation management and fire suppression resources area adequate to reduce the risk of danger to acceptable levels (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Desired Future Conditions, p. 14).
- Partnerships are in place with local, county, and state agencies for fire prevention and suppression. A network of shaded fuel breaks is in place to interrupt continuous stands of fuel, and is designated to utilize natural barriers and existing road corridors. All recreation and administrative facilities meet defensible space requirements (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Desired Future Conditions, p. 14).
- Use prescribed natural fire throughout the SMNRA, where lives and property can be protected and outside the Creosote and Blackbrush Land Type Associations, to achieve ecosystem health goals and reduce fuels when conditions, fuel weather, and national/local fires seasons allow (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Guideline 0.20, p. 17).
- Planning for prescribed fires will include community involvement in determining the strategy, timing, and any coordination for fuelwood removal prior to and after the burn (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Standard 0.21 p. 17).
- Use prescribed fire, silvicultural, and mechanical treatments, and shaded fuel breaks throughout the SMNRA to achieve ecosystem health goals, reduce fuel loads, and protect

public safety, developed areas, and private property. (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Guidelines 0.22, p. 17).

- Develop and maintain a network of shaded fuel breaks to interrupt continuous stands of fuel... (GMP, SMNRA-Wide Guideline 0.91, p. 22).
- The historic role of fire is mimicked, while protecting the developed areas. Fuel loads within early and mid-seral stages of the Pinyon/Juniper and Mixed Conifer LTA areas are low near developed areas. Shaded fuel breaks are designed to protect the developed areas, while helping to meet the desired mosaic of vegetative communities and protecting the habitat needs of species of concern (GMP, Management Area 11, Desired Future Conditions, p. 29).

Need for Action

The Forest Service has proposed the second phase of the Spring Mountains Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project to meet the need for creating defensible space around communities and protecting existing infrastructure by interrupting continuous stands of fuel on National Forest System lands in the WUI. The project will increase the amount of fuel breaks needed to improve fire suppression success rates, establish effective escape routes, and provide for fire fighter safety.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to protect developed and private property and provide for public safety in the WUI

The Proposed Action

WHO: The Spring Mountains National Recreation Area staff is currently planning this project and will utilize several methods of treatment that will require an internal workforce, i.e. fire personnel, as well as contractors to complete road side removal.

WHAT: The SMNRA proposes to reduce existing vegetation/fuels to a level that will reduce the risk of stand replacement wildfire using various treatments methods, including, but not limited to the thinning of trees, mastication, chipping, piling and the use of prescribed fire. Prescribed fire would include the burning of piles and some broadcast burning under carefully prescribed circumstances of weather and fuel conditions.

WHY: Existing forest conditions pose high risks of uncharacteristic wildfire because of high stand densities, a disproportionate number of trees in small diameter size classes, high shrub densities, and other components such as weather and terrain that contribute to extreme fire intensity and spread. These conditions increase the risk of loss of key ecosystem components. High forest stand densities and stocking levels also compromise the health of these stands by increasing the risk of insect and disease outbreaks.

WHEN: Implementation is scheduled to begin spring 2014 with work beginning in Deer Creek and Kyle Canyon. Lee Canyon broadcast burning is weather dependent and will most likely commence in the fall to meet prescription parameters. Thinning prior to broadcast burning could also begin during the summer of 2014.

WHERE: The Proposed Action will create fuel breaks along State Highway 158 (Deer Creek Highway) and employ prescribed fire on a broadcast level in Kyle and Lee Canyons. See attached map of the treatment area.

HOW: The principal actions proposed for implementation are vegetative treatments to create shaded fuel breaks using mechanical and broadcast burn methods on approximately 1,650 acres of National Forest System land. The amount of vegetation modified will depend upon three factors affecting wildfire behavior: 1) vegetation type; 2) topography; and 3) weather patterns. There are two types of fuel break treatments planned—shaded fuel breaks and broadcast burning.

Shaded fuel breaks will be constructed in forested areas consisting of mixed-conifer forest, Ponderosa pine forest, pinyon/juniper woodland, and mountain mahogany woodland. In the shaded fuel breaks, trees will be thinned to reduce the ability of wildfires to spread through the tree crowns. Shrubs will be reduced in the understory and the resulting density will vary in intensity depending on height and slope.

- Tree thinning distances will vary from 10-30 feet or more between tree crowns, depending on species, size and slope.
- The thinning of trees will vary greatly upon stand density and slope but will selectively thin out undesirable and fire-prone fir trees, mistletoe, disease and insect infected trees as well as any trees that exhibit abnormal growth due to lack of sunlight.
- Removal of smaller diameter trees will greatly increase space between trees while leaving older, larger and healthier conifers that are less susceptible to fire.
- Removal of dense, continuous shrub stands through cutting and piling for burning or chipping and/or mastication (mowing), to minimize transition from a ground fire to a crown fire.
- Broadcast burning will occur in areas deemed acceptable as analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. The proposed burn will be low- to mid-severity and low intensity overall to reduce ground fuels and avoid sterilizing the soils. The areas proposed for burning are also located near and adjacent to areas that were previously treated in the 2007 HFRP, thus allowing a safe burn implementation.
- Existing fuel breaks from the 2007 HFRP and earlier fuels treatments will be maintained and treated to ensure full effectiveness. Regrowth of vegetation has occurred in some previously treated breaks and may necessitate additional shrub and tree sapling removal.

The proposed methods to treat the vegetation and consequential biomass removal will depend on vegetation type, potential effects to resources, topography, road access and proximity to features such as residences and power lines.

Design Criteria

The following list of design criteria is derived from resource specialists involved in the planning and implementation of this project.

Wildlife	
Design Criteria	Potential Impacts Addressed
<p>Limited Operating Periods for migratory birds: Thinning activities will occur between July 21st and May 19th to avoid bird breeding season (May 20-July 20). If an exception is requested, it may be granted if a nest search is conducted and substrates (i.e., trees, bushes, or ground) on which nests are found are avoided until nestlings fledge. A qualified biologist who is familiar with the birds of southern Nevada and can accurately identify nesting and breeding behaviors will conduct all nest searches. Appropriate buffers will be designated for any nests located based on the species habitat requirements.</p>	<p>Prevent nest abandonment and loss of young for migratory birds and bats</p>
<p>Limited Operating Periods for sensitive bats: Thinning activities will occur in daylight hours only, i.e. dawn till dusk.</p>	<p>Minimize disturbance to foraging bats.</p>
<p>Cover Sites: Retain two piles of woody debris per acre.</p>	<p>Provide shelter locations for Palmer's chipmunk and sensitive reptile species.</p>
<p>Pile and Burn Treatment: Cut, pile and burn treatment is preferred over cut and chip method.</p>	<p>Minimize degradation of sensitive butterfly habitat and ensure survival of butterfly larval host plants.</p>

Soils & Hydrology	
Design Criteria	Potential Impacts Addressed
<p>Erosion: Install erosion devices to prevent sediment and debris from clogging up culverts.</p>	<p>Minimization of post-fire sediment and clogging of culverts during high rainfall/flash flooding conditions.</p>
<p>Soil compaction/disturbance: Place slope limitations in pinyon/juniper or desert shrub cover types with 30% maximum for mechanical equipment. No entry into entrenched channels except to cross. Hand treat and remove material in channels. Keep travel routes 60 feet apart. Locate burn piles away from drainages and culverts.</p>	<p>Minimization of impacts upon soil and water channels due to mechanical equipment and burning slash piles.</p>

Soils & Hydrology	
Design Criteria	Potential Impacts Addressed
<p>Best Management Practices (BMP's): Compliance with the State of Nevada conservation measures contained in the Best Management Practices Handbook Section 208 of the Clean Water Act (PL-500) and Chapter 8 of the Forest Resources Management Handbook.</p>	<p>Minimization of the amount of pollution generated by non-point sources, to a level compatible with water quality goals.</p>
<p>Monitoring: Monitor on a project basis as required by the Forest Plan and as outlined in Chapters 5 and 32 of FSH 2509.19 National BMP Handbook. Use standard methods to classify, monitor and evaluate soils conditions.</p>	<p>Minimize long-term effects and comply with federal laws.</p>

Archaeology	
Design Criteria	Potential Impacts Addressed
<p>Prescribed fire mitigations: Avoid impacts to archaeology sites within prescription burn area by digging fire line and/or utilizing fire suppressant foam. Archeological sites will be flagged to identify areas that need to be protected from fire. The District Archaeologist will provide archaeological site protection input and on-site monitoring as needed.</p>	<p>Minimization of disturbance to archaeological sites with flammable material from broadcast burning.</p>
<p>Mechanical treatment: Sites found in areas proposed for mechanical treatments must ensure they are avoided by mechanical equipment. Brush piles will need to be placed a minimum of 30 meters from site boundaries should pile burning occur near sites. The District Archaeologist will provide archaeological site protection input and on-site monitoring as needed.</p>	<p>Minimization of disturbance to archaeological sites from mechanical treatment and/or from pile burning.</p>

Botany	
Design Criteria	Potential Impacts Addressed
<p>Implementation Timing: Preferred timing of implementation will be early fall to early spring (August–March) when plants are not actively growing and have dispersed their seed.</p>	<p>Minimize impacts on plants found within project area and help mitigate impacts to reproductive potential for the year</p>

Botany	
Design Criteria	Potential Impacts Addressed
Timing would minimize impacting plants when they are actively growing and root carbohydrate reserves are at their lowest.	
Burn Pile Location: Burn piles will be located in areas determined to be free of sensitive plants and butterfly larval host plants.	Minimization of impacts to seed banks and underground meristems that may be killed from extended fire residence times.
Weed Prevention: USFS and Humboldt-Toiyabe NF Best Management Practices (Humboldt-Toiyabe Supplemental FSM 2080) will be employed during project implementation to reduce the introduction and spread of weeds. Inspection of out-of-state/region contractor equipment/vehicles will be done prior to contracted work	Minimization of invasive and noxious weeds brought onto the project area and adjacent federal land.

Recreation	
Design Criteria	Potential Impacts Addressed
Visuals: Treatment will take into consideration visual appeal of the project area to recreationists and/or community members. Feathering of project boundaries and the utilization of tree screens to reduce visual impact of project. Tree pruning should be kept to a minimum if used at all.	Minimization of visual appeal to recreationists and community members.
Recreation activities: Implementation work will be made known to public and informative signs will be placed to educate the public about work in the area. This will reduce the potential for accidents occurring during heavy recreation use seasons.	Minimization of accidents to public and workforce in the project area.

Public Involvement

This project was posted on the Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in January 2012. Further information about this project can be found on our website located at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/htnf/projects> .

Nature of the Decision to Be Made

The Area Manager for the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is the responsible official and will decide the following questions:

- Which of the alternatives proposed in the EA will be approved; and
- What mitigation measures, design features and monitoring requirements, if any, will be applied to the proposal.

Comment Process

The Forest Service encourages your specific written comments related to the project on this Proposed Action. Although comments can be made at any time during preparation of the environmental document, your comments will be most useful in the development of key issues and alternatives if they are received within 30-days. Please submit your written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, or electronic comments concerning this action within 30 calendar days of August 20, 2012. Comments can be submitted to: Spring Mountain National Recreation Area 4701 N. Torrey Pines Las Vegas NV 89130, Attn: Judy Suing or Mike Frank, Old Mill WUI Hazardous Fuels Treatment Project, or fax to 702-515-5499. The office business hours for those submitting comments in person are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments can be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Adobe Acrobat (.pdf), or Word (.doc or .docx) to oldmillwui@fs.fed.us.

An open collaborative public meeting on this project is planned for August 30, 2012, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on August 30, 2012, at the Mt. Charleston Public Library, 75 Ski Chalet Place, Las Vegas, NV 89124. Written comments specific to this project will be accepted at this meeting.

This project was planned under authorities outlined in the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. The Responsible Official who will issue a decision on this project is the Area Manager for the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. This proposed project is subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218 Subpart A and is not subject to notice, comment and appeal procedures under 215 (218.5). Instead of a post-decision appeal period, there will be an objection process before the final decision is made and after the environmental document is mailed to interested parties.

The Old Mill WUI Hazardous Fuels Treatment Environmental Assessment will be completed and mailed to those who have submitted comments during this scoping period or any other periods public comment is specifically requested, to those who have requested the document or have requested to be included on the project mailing list, and to those who are eligible to file an objection in accordance with 36 CFR 218.7(a). A copy of the final EA is planned to be mailed in March 2013.

When the EA is complete, a 30-day opportunity to object to the authorized hazardous fuel reduction project will commence following the publication date for the legal notice of availability of the EA in the newspaper of record, which in for this area is the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. Instructions concerning opportunities and eligibility to object, instructions on filing an objection, and timing and implementation of the project decision will be forwarded to all individuals and organizations that submit comments during this scoping period, and will also be published in the legal notice for release of the EA.

In order to be eligible to file an objection, specific written comments related to the project must be submitted during scoping or any other periods public comment is specifically requested on the project (36 CFR 218.5). Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to meet the requirements of eligibility to object as an individual; comments received

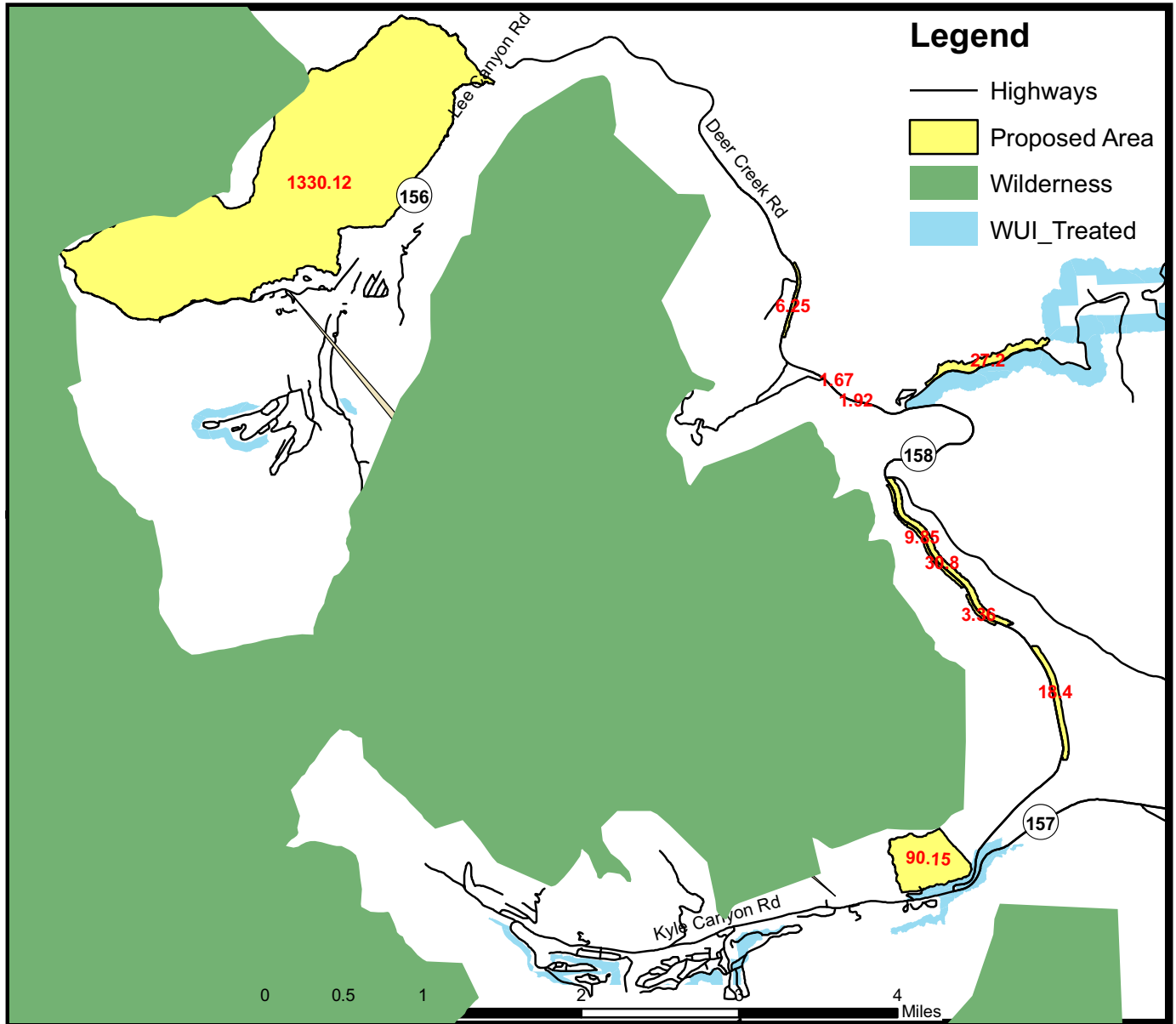
on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only. Names and addresses of commenters will become part of the public record.

For more information on how the objection process works and the requirements, contact Judy Suing, SMNRA Acting Natural Resources Officer, or you may read the regulations under 36 CFR 218 Subpart A on the national Forest Service web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/36cfr218a.htm>.

For further information about the project, please contact Judy Suing, Acting Natural Resources Officer, at 702-515-5441 or Mike Frank, Fuels Coordinator, at 702-515-5401.

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



Old Mill WUI Hazardous Fuels Treatment

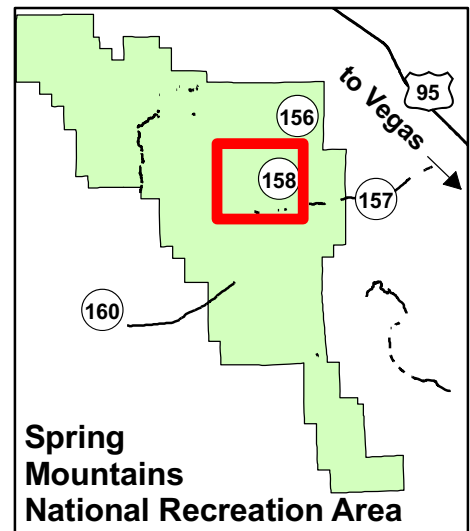
Proposed acreage is in RED

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Spring Mountains National Recreation Area

Las Vegas, Nevada



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Map Created by Michael Frank