



# Scoping Document and Notice of Proposed Action

## Smith Ranch Fire Seeding Project



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

December 2013

Ruby Mountains and Jarbidge Ranger Districts  
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
Elko County, Nevada

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## **COMMENTS WELCOME**

The Ruby Mountains and Jarbidge Ranger Districts of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcome your comments on the Smith Ranch Fire Seeding Project. Written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the 36 CFR 215 Notice of Proposed Action in the Elko Daily Free Press. For detailed information on how to provide comments please refer to the "Comment Process" section of this document. This document initiates both the scoping process pursuant to Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 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 the scoping process is to solicit public comment early in the analysis. The purpose of the 30-day comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide meaningful input on the proposed action prior to a decision by the Responsible Official. For this project the Forest Service has decided to run the two periods simultaneously.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

In July 2013 the Smith Ranch Fire burned approximately 2,759 acres on private, BLM, and Forest Service lands. Approximately 585 acres are on National Forest System Land on the Ruby Mountains Ranger District. While the land is recovering it is imperative to seed with desirable native species in order to prevent the spread of noxious and invasive species such as medusa head, cheat grass, and thistle. Seeding will expedite recovery and restore habitat for species such as sage-grouse and mule deer.

## **FOREST PLAN COMPLIANCE**

This action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USFS 1986). Specifically .....

Goal #14 – Improve the current productive level of wildlife habitat with emphasis on maintaining or improving limiting factors such as big game winter ranges measured in acres), in cooperation with Nevada Department of wildlife. (page IV-4)

Goal #32 – Design and implement practices on-the-ground that will re-establish acceptable soil, hydrologic and vegetative conditions which are sufficient to secure and maintain favorable water flow. (page IV-9)

In addition the project will comply with the following management direction:

Livestock grazing will not be allowed for 2 years following prescribed fire, plantings, and seedings. (page IV-37)

## **DECISION FRAMEWORK**

Based on the environmental analysis and disclosure, the Deputy District Ranger would decide 1) whether to select the proposed action as proposed or modified; 2) what mitigation measures are needed; and 3) what monitoring is required.

It is expected that this project can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. The project fits within the following category – 36 CFR 220.6(e)(11): Post-fire rehabilitation activities, not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration, heritage site restoration, repair of roads and trails, and repair of damage to minor facilities such as campgrounds), to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire. Such activities:

- (i) Shall be conducted consistent with Agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans;
- (ii) Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and
- (iii) Shall be completed within 3 years following a wildland fire.

Documentation is proposed to be done with a Decision Memo.

## **THE PROPOSED ACTION**

In partnership with the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), it is proposed that 585 acres be aerially seeded with a mixture of grasses and shrubs. The legal description is at T30N R57E, Sections 8,9,16, and 17 and a map is attached. All seed would be in accordance with the agency's native plant policy and would include mountain big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, Idaho fescue, and Snake River wheatgrass, with 85-100 acres also being seeding with curl-leaf mountain mahogany. NDOW is providing the seed and paying for the aerial application.

Approximately 120 acres of private inholdings may also be seeded at the same time with the same seed mix in cooperation with NDOW and the landowners.

Implementation would occur during the winter or spring of 2014 and would last no more than three weeks.

## **PRELIMINARY ISSUES**

Based on the initial analysis of Forest Service specialists, the Forest Service has identified no issues as the project would not involve any surface disturbance and would restore uplands and watershed health.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION IMPACTS

This preliminary look at environmental impacts is focused on the seven resource conditions that are required to be addressed in categorical exclusions:

a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species:

- Listed and Proposed species – The project area, specifically Cottonwood Creek, is included in the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (LCT) Recovery Plan, however since the year 2000 there have been no fish observed during surveys. Aerial seeding would have no effect on LCT or their habitat and would likely improve habitat in the long-term. There are no other federally threatened, endangered, or proposed species or critical habitat or proposed critical habitat within the project area. A species list has been obtained from USFWS and formal consultation with the USFWS is not needed for this project.
- Forest Service Sensitive Species – Greater sage-grouse are candidates for federal listing and are known to occur in the area. Little Cottonwood lek is within four miles of the project area and was last active in 2011. This project would help restore priority habitat by increasing forage and hiding cover in the long-term. Implementation would likely not impact the species directly.

b. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:

No ground disturbing activities are proposed in flood plains or wetlands. Seeding in these areas would aid in restoring healthy watershed conditions. No municipal watersheds lie within or adjacent to the project.

c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas:

The project area is not located in or near any congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

d. Inventoried roadless areas:

Aerial seeding would occur within a portion of the Ruby- Smith Creek Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). There would be minimal short-term impacts to the character of the IRA due to the use of the helicopter and/or fixed-wing aircraft. In the long-term this seeding would be beneficial in maintaining roadless characteristics.

e. Research natural areas:

There are no research natural areas within or adjacent to the project area.

f. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites:

The activity would have no impact on this resource since seeding would be done aerially and would not cause any surface disturbance.

g. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas:

The activity would have no impact on this resource since seeding would be done aerially and would not cause any surface disturbance.

## COMMENT PROCESS

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the responsible official should consider in reaching a decision.

Your comments will help us prepare an environmental analysis on the proposed action, and will also be used to determine the level of analysis needed.

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 Elko Daily Free Press.

Comments must be submitted to the following:

Matthew Boisseau  
Deputy District Ranger  
Ruby Mountains Ranger District  
P.O. Box 246  
140 Pacific Avenue  
Wells, NV 89835

By phone at (775) 752-3357 or via fax at (775) 752-1799

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 must be submitted in a format such as an email message, portable document format (.pdf), plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to:

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

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the information identified in 36 CFR 215, including:

- Name and Address;
- Title of the proposed action;
- Specific comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
- Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility;

- For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
- Individual members of organizations must submit their own comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual. Comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, 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.

## **PROJECT CONTACT**

For further information please contact Kyra Walton Reid, Project Manager, at [kireid@fs.fed.us](mailto:kireid@fs.fed.us) or (775) 752-1701.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Project Map

# Smith Ranch Fire Seeding

