

Decision Memo

For

Star Valley Wildland Urban Interface Project

Bridger Teton National Forest

Greys River Ranger District

Lincoln County, Wyoming

USDA Forest Service

Decision

I have decided to approve the proposed action (as described below and in the scoping document dated 1/15/04) with a change to the areas that will be treated with timber harvest and canceling treatment in one of the proposed units (unit 8). The proposed action will treat approximately 175 acres as described below:

1. Slashing (cutting down) of small diameter (up to 8 inches in diameter) conifer, aspen and understory brush.
2. Limbing (removal) of lower branches on large diameter trees
3. Cutting of dead trees found in the stands - The intent of the cutting is to remove conifer trees that have been killed by insect attack in order to decrease dead fuel loading that could affect fire behavior within the stand.
4. Thinning in stands to remove live trees that have been attacked by bark beetles and removal of up to 30% of the remaining trees in the stand in order to slow bark beetle spread and aid in reducing future fire severity, improving the overall stand health and resistance to future beetle damage.
5. Hand piling or removal of pre-existing dead wood and cut limbs and trees followed by burning of hand piles. In some areas hand piling of fine fuels (less than 4 inches in diameter) may occur.
6. Pile burning will be initiated when the piled fuels are dried and weather conditions will provide for safe ignition.

Construction of temporary skid trails for the removal of timber products will take place in Units 6 and 10. These temporary skid trails will be obliterated after removal of timber products is completed. The units included in this decision but not included in the timber sale will be treated using service contracts, Forest Service crews, or other methods (depending upon availability of funds). Actual acres treated may vary by treatment area, due to acreage differences from map interpretation and actual acres derived from on the ground GPS verification. The acreage differences will not be significant.

This decision may include some acreage within the project area as providing firewood which may be made available to the public. Any fuels reduction in this alternative will require piling of slash and ultimately burning of piles. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition and after a Prescribed Burn Plan has been approved and all required documentation has been completed.

Table 1: Treatment Units (See map attached at the end of the appendices.)

Unit Number	Treatment Unit Acres Proposed/ Actual	Fuels Treatment (Slashing needed prior to Prescribed burning)
1	13/5	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
2	15/10	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
3	20/15	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
4	22/15	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
5	22/22	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
6- Timber Sale in this unit.	18/34 Timber Sale is 21 of 34	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Thinning of Conifer Trees 8-24" DBH, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
7	10/8	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
8	5/0 No Treatment	No Treatment in this unit.
9	25/24	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
10- Timber Sale in this unit.	25/42 Timber Sale 22 of 41	Slashing, Limbing, Cutting of Dead Trees, Thinning of Conifer Trees 8-24" DBH, Hand Piling, Pile Burning
TOTAL	175/175	

Mitigation Measures to be taken:

Identification of exact location of all culinary waterlines that carry water from the forest to private lands must be completed prior to implementation of the project.

Rationale For Decision

As described in the project scoping letter, the need for this action arose in response to elements of the National Fire Plan and the Presidents Healthy Forest Initiative which address hazardous fuels reduction and reduced risk from wildfire to people and property. The Bridger-Teton National Forest is working in conjunction with the State of Wyoming Forestry Department and the Local Emergency Planning Committee of North Lincoln County to provide appropriate forest fuel treatments that will help to reduce the risks to firefighter and public safety, as well as property and natural resources that can result from wildfires along the Star Valley front.

These actions will focus on utilization of different levels of fuels manipulation classified light and moderate. These fuels treatments will lessen the probability of a high severity wildfire and will move the project area towards the desired condition. Historic conditions in the area had a more open forest with fewer large diameter conifer trees, and larger stands of aspen which helped to reduce catastrophic wildfire potential and severity.

The National Fire Plan is a long-term investment that will help protect communities and natural resources, and most importantly, the lives of firefighters and the public. It is a long-term commitment based on cooperation and communication among federal agencies, states, local governments, tribes and interested publics. The Healthy Forests Initiative implements core components of the National Fire Plan’s 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan. This historic plan, which was adopted by federal agencies and western governors, in collaboration with county commissioners, state foresters, and tribal officials, calls for more active forest and rangeland management. It establishes a framework for protecting communities and the environment

through local collaboration on thinning, planned burns and forest restoration projects. This project is in accordance with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act which was signed by President George W. Bush on December 3rd 2003.

Scoping and Public Involvement

A scoping letter was sent to 88 interested and concerned individuals, organizations, and affected stakeholders on January 15, 2004. The proposal was also published in local newspapers and posted to the BTNF website. Sixteen responses were received in reply to the scoping letter. Of these sixteen responses five identified concern over the project, the remainder of the responses were supportive of the project. The main concerns included the potential impact on wildlife and plant species, including the spread of Mountain Pine Beetle into adjoining areas; concern that treatment areas are within an Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) or would provide opportunity for illegal access for motorized vehicles, particularly off road vehicles onto the National Forest and private landholdings; and concern over the potential for an escaped fire resulting from burning of piles. Additional concerns were related to historical site protection, protection of soils and riparian areas, and protection of water lines that cross through treatment units. A complete listing of respondents and the District's response to concerns is in Appendix B and the project file.

Categorical Exclusion

The Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook (1909.15, Chapter 30) provides that a proposed action may be categorically excluded in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) only if the action is:

1. Within a category listed in Section 31, and
2. There are no conditions present that lead to a finding of extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action.

This project falls under Category 31.2 (10): "Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching and mowing not to exceed 1,000 acres."

Such activities:

- Shall be limited to areas (1) in wildland-urban interface and (2) Condition Classes 2 or 3 if Fire Regime groups I, II, or III, outside wildland urban interface;
- Shall be identified through a collaborative framework as described in "A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan;"
- Shall be conducted consistent with agency and Department procedures and applicable land resource management plans;
- Shall not be conducted in wilderness areas or impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation as wilderness;
- Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent infrastructure; and may include the sale of vegetative material if the primary purpose of the activity is hazardous fuels reduction.

In review of this project, a "test for extraordinary circumstances" was conducted that included conclusions on the following resources:

Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species

proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species: The Forest Service prepared a Wildlife, Fisheries, and Rare Plants Report and Biological Evaluation for this project that addressed these species (see project file). Regarding Threatened and Endangered species, there was a finding of no effect for grizzly bear, bald eagle, Canada lynx, Kendall Warm Springs Dace, or the four species of Colorado River fish that are listed, and a finding of “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” for gray wolf as the urban interface area is not effective habitat for most threatened and endangered species. Regarding sensitive animal species, there was a finding of no impact to all sensitive mammals, no impact for sensitive birds with the exception of the northern goshawk which has a short term “may impact”, and the flammulated owl which is determined to have a “beneficial impact”. A finding of “no impact” has been determined for sensitive amphibians and sensitive plants specifically Payson’s milkvetch. The proposed project may negatively affect individual plants, but is not expected to produce negative long-term effects and will not be significant.

Flood Plains, wetlands, or municipal watershed: No wetlands would be adversely affected since there is no treatment within identified wet areas.

Congressionally designated wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas: There are no congressionally designated areas within the project area.

Inventoried Roadless Areas: The project area is within an inventoried Roadless Area boundary as identified by the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II (RARE II) which is the second assessment of a National inventory of roadless and undeveloped areas within the National Forest and Grasslands. The assessment is documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement of the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation, January 1979. Temporary skid trails will be created to provide for the removal of cut timber in units 6 and 10 as part of the timber sales. The temporary skid trails will be obliterated once all harvested timber has been removed from the sale areas. These actions will not contribute to altering the character of the roadless area.

Research Natural Areas: There are no RNAs within or adjacent to the project area.

American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites: There are no known American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites in the project area.

Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas: The Forest Archaeologist reviewed the project and determined there would be no impacts to significant heritage values (Section 106 Compliance Report, Jamie Schoen, May 18, 2004, project file).

Based on the above discussion and our experience with this type of project, no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects on the quality of the human environment; therefore, the action is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA). The effects of the proposed action are not uncertain and are not significant. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Record.

Applicable Laws and Regulations

- The proposed project is consistent with the Goals, Objectives, and Management Standards of the 1991 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as

described for Management Area 33, with Desired Future Conditions (DFC) of 4 and 12. DFC 4 identifies emphasis areas for municipal water supply while DFC 12 emphasizes areas managed for high quality wildlife habitat and escape cover, big game hunting opportunities, and dispersed recreation activities.

- The proposed project is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, in 1999. A cultural resource review was completed by the Forest Service Archeologist. Results indicated there were no adverse effects to the historical cultural resources of the area.
- The proposed action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act: On January 10, 2001, President Clinton signed an Executive Order outlining responsibilities of federal agencies to protect migratory birds. Upon review of the information regarding neotropical migratory birds and the scope of the project the Forest Service wildlife biologist determined that no significant loss of migratory bird habitat is expected from implementation of this project.
- The proposal is consistent with the Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended in 1977 and 1987. Direction provided in Forest Service Handbook 2509.22 will be used to implement applicable portions of the Clean Water Act for this proposal.

Based on my review of the project record and the Forest Plan (as amended), Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be met in this project. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for fuels management, recreation, wildlife habitat, vegetation management, and visual quality (Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, pages 161-246). No Conflicts have been identified regarding Federal, State, or Local laws.

Implementation and Review

This project will be implemented after June of 2004. Implementation will occur over several years with treatments adjacent to private lands with improvements, and areas with heavier Mountain Pine Beetle infestation being treated initially.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.4 this decision is not subject to notice, comment, and appeal procedures. Implementation of this decision may begin immediately.

Detailed records of this analysis are included in a project file available for public review at the Greys River Ranger District. For additional information concerning this decision, contact Alison Coons, Greys River Ranger District, PO Box 339, Afton, Wyoming 83110, or (307) 739-5300.

/s/CFBuchaGentry

Charlene Bucha Gentry

District Ranger

Greys River Ranger District

6/23/04

Date

Appendix A:

List of treatment units and specific activities in each unit.

Unit 1- the northern most unit of the project area. This unit has a low to moderate dead and down fuel loading currently. Approximately half of the unit consists of a very sparse overstory with light flashy fuels. The majority of the treatment of this unit will be in the half of the unit with a heavier stocking of timber and understory brush. Hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead trees and limbs. Areas with a large number of understory trees will be thinned by crews using chainsaws with limbs and smaller diameter sections of the trees being piled. Any tree boles that are sound will be set aside for use by woodcutters. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition. No public access to the unit exists.

Unit 2 – This unit has a moderate to high dead down fuel loading consisting of conifer, aspen and brush limbs and tree trunks. Hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead and dying trees and limbs. Areas with a large number of understory trees will be thinned by crews using chainsaws with limbs and smaller diameter sections of the trees being piled. Any tree boles that are sound will be set aside for use by woodcutters. Due to the heavy amount of dead and down fuels multiple years of piling and burning may be needed to keep piles to a safe size that can be kept in control while burning. Dead and dying understory brush will also be cut and piled. No public access to the unit exists. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition.

Unit 3 – Approximately one third of unit has a heavy loading of dead and down aspen in addition to standing dead aspen. The remainder of the unit has a low to moderate dead and down fuel loading with fairly open overstory. Hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead and dying trees and limbs. Areas with a large number of understory trees will be thinned by crews using chainsaws with limbs and smaller diameter sections of the trees being piled. Any tree boles that are sound will be set aside for use by woodcutters. No public access to the unit exists. Private land owners adjacent to this unit have agreed to allow foot access to forest employees and their contracted personnel. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition.

Unit 4- This unit has low to moderate dead and down fuel loading with fairly open stands of timber on the southern half of the unit, with an increasing density of standing timber and brush in the northern half of the unit. This unit is on steep uneven terrain as is the private property adjacent to the treatment unit. After review of the area it has been determined to reduce the total size of this unit by removing the steeper sloped areas at the south end of the original boundary. Hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead and dying trees, brush and limbs. Areas with a large number of understory trees will be thinned by crews using chainsaws with limbs and smaller diameter sections of the trees being piled. Any tree boles that are sound will be set aside for use by woodcutters. Public access to the unit is available from the south through Prater Canyon. Private land owners adjacent to this unit have expressed willingness to allow both foot and vehicle access to forest employees and their contracted personnel in order to reach the highest point of the unit. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition.

Unit 5- Treatment in this unit will be almost entirely through the cutting and piling of dead and down fuels and dead standing brush and trees. Overall fuel loading is low to moderate and will be

treated by hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools. Any tree boles that are sound will be set aside for use by woodcutters. Access to the unit is through Prater Canyon on the north end and across private property along the rest of the unit. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition.

Unit 6- This unit will be treated with a small timber sale that will remove dead and dying trees in addition to treatments by hand crews to cut and pile dead and down trees and brush. Limbs on the ground following the timber sale will also be piled for burning. In addition to the timber sale, hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead and dying trees and limbs that are outside of the timber sale area. Private land owners adjacent to this unit have expressed willingness to allow both foot and vehicle access to forest employees and their contracted personnel in order to complete the timber sale and provide access to perform burning operations. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition.

Unit 7- Dead fuel loads in this area are low to moderate. Hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead and dying trees and limbs. Areas with a large number of understory trees will be thinned by crews using chainsaws with limbs and smaller diameter sections of the trees being piled. Any tree boles that are sound will be set aside for use by woodcutters. No public access to the unit exists. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition.

Unit 8- Upon completion of field review of this unit it has been determined that no treatment will take place within unit 8. This area is predominately sagebrush and light grass with a low dead and down fuel loading. Additionally a permitted parking area has been developed on the western half of the unit which removed most of the vegetation in that area.

Unit 9- This unit is predominately aspen stands with small pockets of conifer trees spread throughout. Dead and down fuel loading is low to moderate and made up of dead understory brush and fallen aspen trees. Hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead and dying trees and limbs. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition.

Unit 10- This unit will be treated with a small timber sale that will remove dead and dying trees in addition to treatments by hand crews to cut and pile dead and down trees and brush. Limbs on the ground following the timber sale will be piled for burning. In addition to the timber sale, hand crews using chainsaws and hand tools will cut down and pile dead and dying trees and limbs that are outside of the timber sale area. Private land owners adjacent to this unit have expressed willingness to allow both foot and vehicle access to forest employees and their contracted personnel in order to complete the timber sale and provide access to perform burning operations. All piled material will be burned by Forest Service personnel when weather conditions provide for safe ignition. Due to the high number of beetle killed trees in the area, special consideration will be given to the time and type of slash removal/burning to reduce the potential of beetle spread into adjacent timber stands.

APPENDIX B

The following concerns were brought forward by respondents:

1. Concern over prevention of flights of mountain pine beetles from infested trees into adjoining trees.

Wyoming State Forestry Division

David Day

Response: Beetles will usually remain in the tree they have entered until the food source is depleted. This usually occurs when the cambium layer (right under the bark) dries out due to the tree dying. The beetles that are in a tree leave with the tree when it is harvested. By burning piles of remaining slash more beetles are removed. Although all beetles would not be removed from the stand, the number of beetles would drop considerably. Also, by removing the dying trees, the remaining trees have less competition and can become stronger in their resistance to future beetle attacks. Additional treatment through the use of pheromones or other beetle detourants may be implemented after completion of the timber sales.

2. Concerns over damage of remaining trees, soil, and potential escaped fire resulting from prescribed burning.

Wyoming State Forestry Division

David Day

Response: The burn piles will be located on the forest within the treatment areas and away from the crowns of remaining trees. Burn piles will be ignited in cooler and wetter conditions (usually with snow on the ground) to reduce the potential of fire spread out of the piles.

3. Concern over new road construction within the treatment units that would provide additional access by off road vehicles, particularly 4-wheelers. Additionally, road construction could provide an acceptable bed for noxious weeds to grow by disturbing the forest floor.

Orval Harrison

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Response: Options exist for blocking any skid trails that may be created without the construction of large berms or other additional disturbance to the forest floor. These options include placement of logs and some slash along temporary skid trails that would impede travel by 4-wheelers, and use of logging equipment that has less impact on soils. Additionally, Forest Service timber sale contracts require that equipment be cleaned prior to entering a sale area to reduce the potential for noxious weed spread.

4. Concern for habitat of resident and migratory species, including ungulates, birds, bear, wolves, large cats, and a variety of plant species.

Orval Harrison

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Response: Surveys of treatment areas and adjoining areas indicate that little if any negative effect on resident and migratory species will result from the planned treatments. Implementation of a Limited Operating Period (LOP) from May 1- June 15th to limit human activity during big game parturition will take place. Due to the urban interface environment it is unlikely that the area would be considered acceptable habitat for many of the species in question.

Additional responses not reflecting specific concerns

5. Letter to confirm required documentation of historical and archeological surveys as required by the State of Wyoming.

Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources

6. Request that water transmission lines in areas of treatment be protected.

Sharron Bartholamew

7. General support for project.

Dr. and Mrs. Robert Giese – also indicated consideration of providing access across their property to aid in treatment.

Leron Allred

J.D. Anderson- Surprise Valley Historical Society

Board of Lincoln County Commissioners- T. Deb Wolfley-Chairman, Alan Linford-Afton, and Kathleen Davidson-Kemmerer

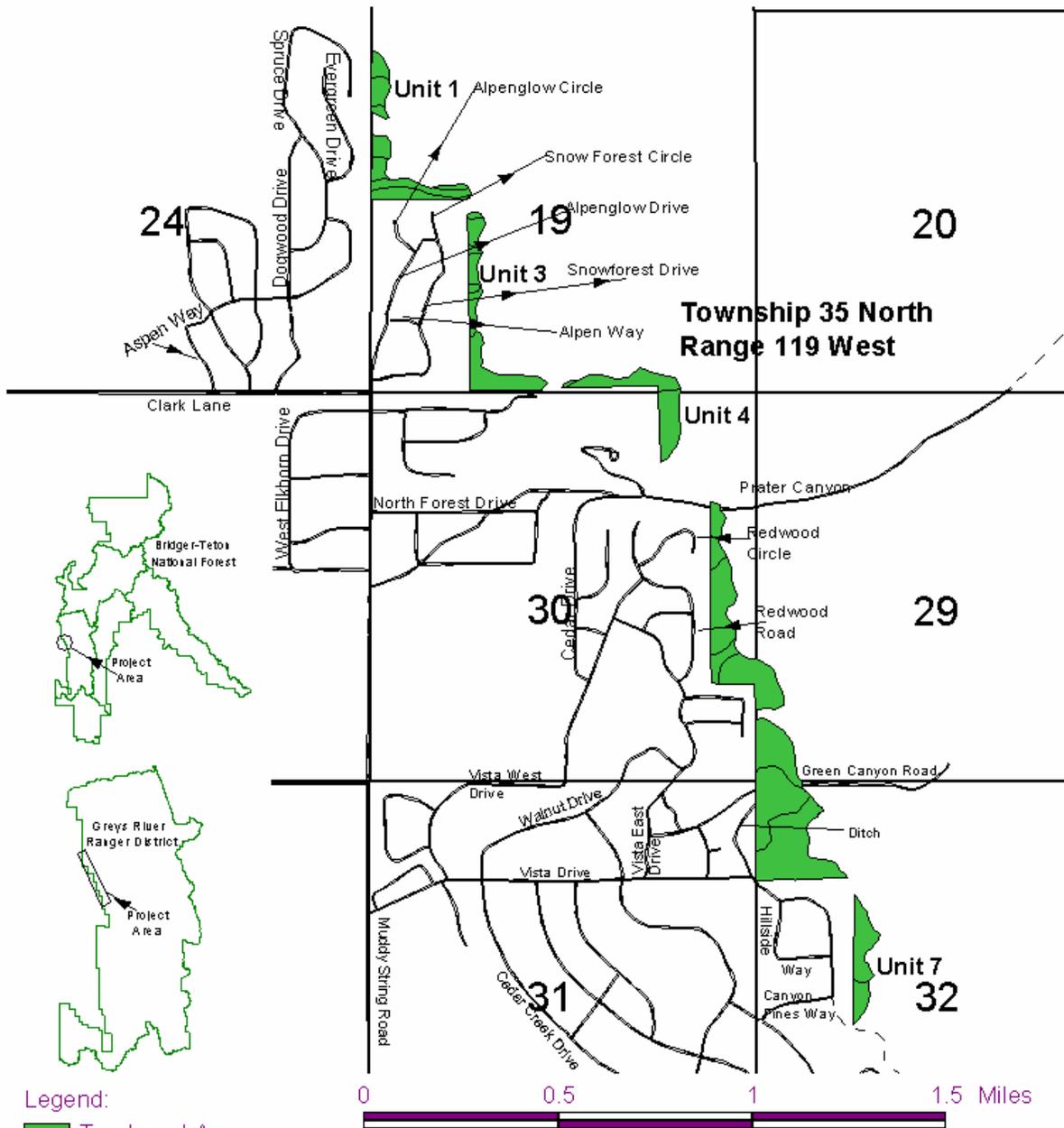
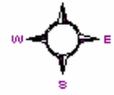
Russell Juillerat

Maury Jones-Jackson Hole Outfitters

8. Request to be included on the list for future mailings.

David Hartnett

Star Valley Wildland Urban Interface



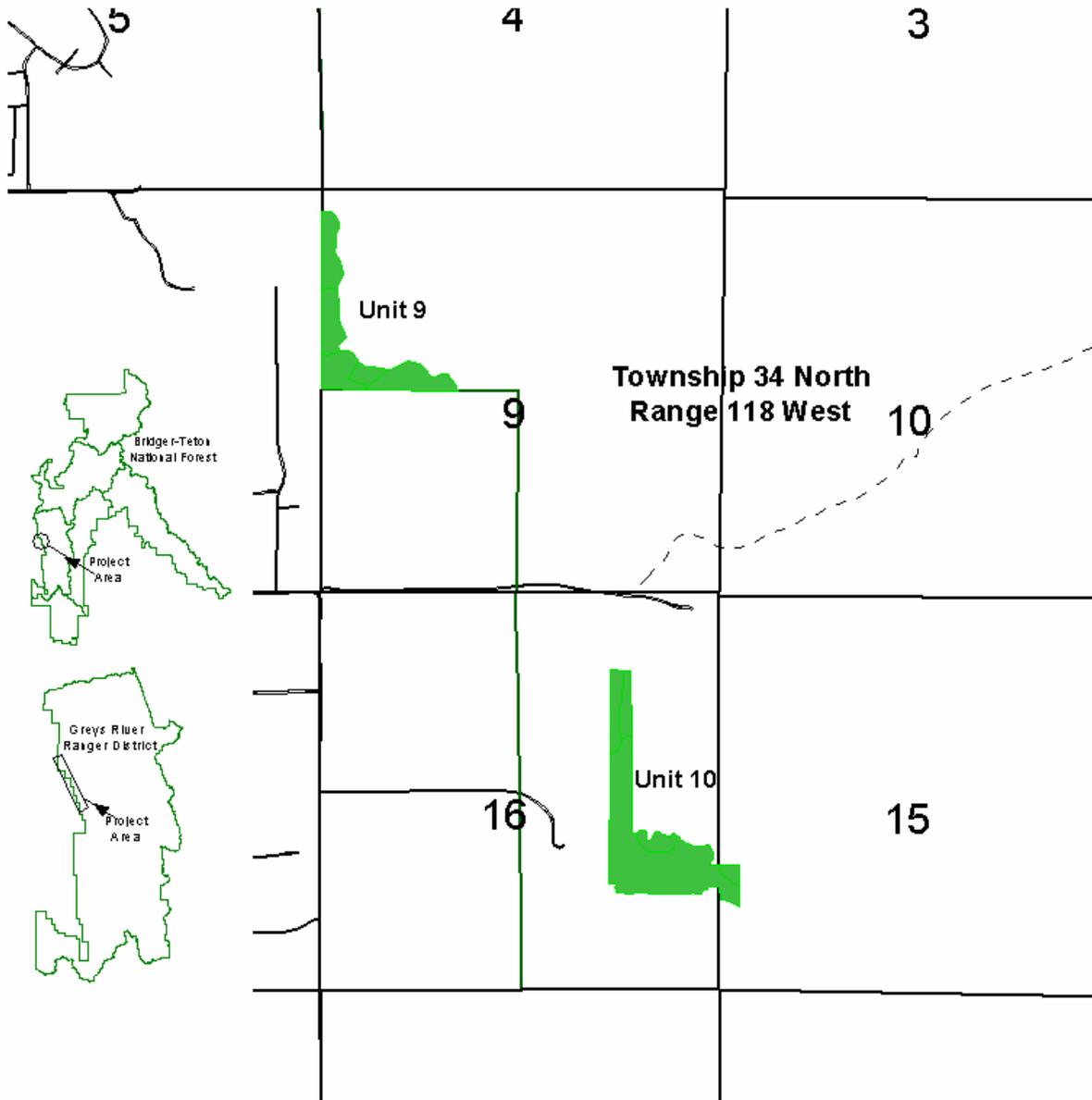
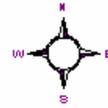
Legend:

- Treatment Areas
- Section Lines
- Road Systems
- ROAD
- TRAIL



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Star Valley Wildland Urban Interface



Legend:

-  Treatment Areas
-  Section Lines
-  Greys River District Boundary
- Road Systems
 -  ROAD
 -  TRAIL

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles



Map by: www.starvalleywildfire.com
2010