

## DECISION MEMO

### BRYANT'S FORK SPRUCE TRAP TREE TREATMENT

**USDA - FOREST SERVICE  
UINTA NATIONAL FOREST  
HEBER RANGER DISTRICT  
WASATCH COUNTY, UTAH**

#### INTRODUCTION

The Bryant's Fork drainage is located in Township 3 South, Range 12 West, Sections 26, 27, 34 & 35, Uintah Special Meridian, near Strawberry Reservoir. Vegetation in the drainage consists of aspen, spruce-fir, and mountain brush communities, with sagebrush and grass/forb communities occurring near Strawberry Reservoir. The Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir stands extend up the drainages along the north and east facing slopes. The spruce areas range from mid-sized mature stands to large diameter old stands. The south facing slopes have mixed aspen and brush vegetation. Last March Forest Service foresters discovered spruce beetle (*Dendroctonus rufipennis*) infested trees in this area. Subsequent visits by foresters and entomologists found that an extensive spruce beetle epidemic is rapidly developing in the area. Several years of drought, abundant host trees and mild winters have likely contributed to the rapid expansion of endemic beetle populations to the current epidemic levels.

#### PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is to create approximately 150 to 250 "trap" (spruce) trees in the infested stands near Bryant's Fork. These trap trees would be green Engelmann spruce trees, and these would be felled in late May. The trap trees would be left on-site (i.e. where they are felled) during the late spring and early summer beetle flight period, and then either removed or treated in mid to late summer to prevent beetles from emerging next year and infesting other uninfested trees. The majority of these trees would be removed from the stands using traditional log skidding equipment. However, where removal would cause resource damage trap trees would be debarked in place and left. Lindgren Funnel traps have also been hung in the stands to trap and remove adult beetles as well as monitor the timing and intensity of the flight. This proposal is for one year's treatment. The following mitigation measures are incorporated in the proposed action:

- ◆ Personnel locating and felling the trees will avoid anything which resembles a historic resource (piles of cut logs or slabs, scatters of old cans and other artifacts, or any features which do not appear to be natural).
- ◆ All felled tree locations and potential skid trails will be inventoried for cultural resources before any of the trees are further treated in late summer. If any of the trap trees are located where their removal would adversely impact a National Register Eligible site, they will be debarked and left in place.
- ◆ No trees will be felled or skidder routes established through Riparian Habitat Conservation areas with live water in August, or mesic meadows. A minimal number of skidder routes may be used in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas with no live water,

wet soil conditions, tall forb areas or dry meadows.

- ◆ After the trees are felled and skid routes have been determined and mapped, but before tree removal, the areas of possible suitable habitat will be surveyed for rare plant species. If any populations are found in areas that may be impacted by skidding or removal of the trap trees, those trees will be debarked instead of being removed, or the skid route will be relocated.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The purpose of the proposed action is to reduce spruce beetle populations and the associated extent and intensity of the existing spruce beetle infestation. Down green trees are attractive habitat to emerging beetles, and the felled trap trees would draw much of this year's flight into these traps. Subsequent timely removal or debarking of the trap trees would eliminate the "trapped" beetles before they could emerge and spread into nearby un-infested trees. This action is needed because without treatment, it is highly likely the existing epidemic will continue to rapidly expand and kill most spruce trees in the Bryant's Fork area. This could also expand into other nearby spruce stands in the Strawberry Ridge area. Extensive mortality in these stands would create an extreme fire hazard adjacent to the Bryant's Fork summer cabins. Portions of the project area are within Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Other portions are in close proximity to WUI. Heavy mortality from spruce beetle would also adversely impact visual quality, forest health, and wildlife habitat.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND SCOPING**

An interdisciplinary team (IDT) of Forest Service specialists reviewed this project. Input from this team was incorporated in the design of the proposed action and the specialist reports are contained in the project file. A request for comments was published in the *Provo Daily Herald* on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004. In addition, on April 10<sup>th</sup> scoping letters were mailed to the Bryant's Fork cabin owners and other interested parties as listed on the district's mailing list. These documents, notices and responses are contained in the project file at the Heber Ranger District Office.

Several cabin owners were concerned about protecting susceptible spruce trees within the cabin area. Carbaryl spraying prior to beetle flight was discussed as their best option. They expressed no concerns about the proposed treatments. Utah Environmental Congress (UEC) submitted several detailed and valuable comments. These were considered by the IDT in evaluating effects and identifying mitigation measures and are addressed in the individual specialist reports contained in the project file. These comments were also used to ensure IDT members considered all aspects of the issues. Concern was also raised about the connectedness of this action with the Shaded Fuel Break project which is adjacent to this project and may also occur this summer. This issue is covered in more detail later in this document. A decision on that project is expected in June.

## **DECISION AND REASONS FOR MY DECISION**

It is my decision to implement the project as described above. My decision is based on the following factors and issues brought forward during the scoping process:

1. The project will reduce current beetle populations before they have a chance to expand significantly.
2. There will be some ground disturbance. Log skidding will be done in a manner to reduce the impacts to the soil and associated resources.
3. No private land will be impacted by this activity.
4. No new roads will be constructed for this project. Level 1 closed roads may be temporarily reopened and used.
5. The proposed action may, but is not likely to affect Federally listed threatened or endangered aquatic or terrestrial wildlife or plant species or on Forest Service - Region 4 listed sensitive aquatic or terrestrial wildlife or plant species. (Documentation in project folder filed at the Heber Ranger District office)
6. To mitigate ground fuels that will be created by the trap tree treatment, slash from trap trees will be lopped and scattered to reduce the aerial height of fuels to two feet or less.
7. The proposed action will accomplish the purpose and need for this project.

## **CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THIS PROJECT**

The proposed action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 states that “*a proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation...only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and if:*” ... “*the proposed action is within a category listed in section 31.1b or 31.2*” (FSH 1909.15, section 30.3 (ID\_1909.15-2002-2)) The proposed action is within one of the Forest Service Chief's categories for categorical exclusion (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 31.2, No. 14):

*14. “Commercial and non-commercial sanitation harvest of trees to control insects or disease not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction, including removal of infested/infected trees and adjacent live uninfested/uninfected trees as determined necessary to control the spread of insects or disease. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.” (FSH 1909.15, ID# 1909.15-2003-2, 7/29/2003)*

The proposed action fits this category. The treatment area is less than 250 acres in size (about 200 acres), does not involve any classified or temporary road construction, and the purpose and need for the project is to control the spread of spruce beetles.

FSH 1909.15, Section 30.3 (WO Interim 1909.15-2002-2) lists the following as ‘extraordinary circumstances’:

- 1 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 has determined that this project will not adversely affect any federally protected species or critical habitat (documentation in project file).

- 2 Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The Forest Service has determined that this project will not adversely affect floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds. While there are wetlands within the project area, there will be no activity within them.
- 3 Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – The project area does not reside in, and the project would not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any congressionally designated areas.
- 4 Inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) – The project area does not reside in, and the project would not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any inventoried roadless areas. (IRAs are mapped in Appendix C to the FEIS for the 2003 Forest Plan. The nearest IRA is the Two Tom Hill Roadless Area which is shown on page C-9 in the FEIS for the 2003 Forest Plan).
- 5 Research natural areas – The project area does not reside in, and the project would not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any research natural areas.
- 6 American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites –The project would not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any American Indian religious or cultural sites. If these are discovered during the survey process prior to tree removal, these sites will be protected. No sites are known or suspected.
- 7 Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas - The project would not have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on any archeological sites, or historic properties or areas. If these are discovered during the survey process prior to tree removal, these sites will be protected. No sites are known or suspected.

The proposed action will be of limited context and intensity (on average, less than 2 trees/acre will be cut) and capable of producing little or no significant environmental effects (40 CFR 1508.4) individually or cumulatively on the quality of the human environment; is within a category listed in FSH 1909.15; and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action.

#### **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

This project area lies within the Strawberry Reservoir Management Area. The management prescriptions for the general project area are 5.2-Forested Ecosystems – Vegetation Management (2003 Forest Plan, p. 5-132), and 8.4-Recreation Residences. The ROS (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) designation for the area is ‘Roaded Modified’ (2003 Forest Plan, p. 5-133). The Visual Quality Objective is ‘Partial Retention’ (2003 Forest Plan, p. 5-134). The project is consistent with Forest Plan Sub-goal G-2-17 - “*Activities and vegetation management minimize or eliminate the occurrence of non-native pests (including noxious weeds) and epidemic episodes of native pests*”. My decision is consistent with all applicable Forest-wide, Management Prescription, and Management Area Forest Plan direction. This includes Forest Plan guidelines MP-5.2-2 which states “Vegetation management activities are allowed” (2003 Forest Plan, p. 3-47) and MP-8.4-3 which states “Vegetation management is limited to activities or treatments that

provide scenic quality and healthy vegetation while providing for fire prevention and public safety.” (2003 Forest Plan, p. 3-52) The action is also consistent with standard ‘Timber-12’ which pertains to limitations on timber harvest activities in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas.

There are floodplains or wetlands within the project area, but these areas would not be significantly impacted. The proposed action would cause some soil disturbance but would have little or no impact on water quality. The project is consistent with the Clean Water Act. Equipment used in implementing the project would generate a very minimal amount of air pollutants. The project complies with the Clean Air Act. The site was visited by the Forest Service biologists who determined that the action “may affect but is not likely to affect” threatened or endangered species or Forest Service sensitive species. Boreal toad, a Forest Service sensitive species, would not be affected. The proposed action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act. No adverse impacts on birds are anticipated, and this decision is consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or Executive Order 13186. There will be no sub-surface activity; and therefore, no implications on mineral resources. Mitigation measures incorporated in the proposed action and my decision will prevent cultural resources and historical or archeological sites from being adversely affected. The decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

There is a shaded fuel break proposed that would surround the adjacent summer home tract. The purpose of this fuel break is to reduce the intensity of approaching fires by reducing the amount of surface, ground and ladder fuels available. This is an understory vegetation treatment and would not have an effect on the larger overstory spruce component or the treatments in that component with the purpose of reducing spruce beetle populations. While both of these projects are located in the same stand, they are in different areas of the stands. Trap trees would not be located within the fuel break area. They will all be located outside of the perimeter of the fuel break area. Implementation of either project will have no affect on the other. They are independent actions, each with an independent and different purpose and need.

In accordance with Executive Order 12898, this action will not result in any disproportionate impact to minority or low-income populations.

Implementation of this proposal is consistent with other Federal, State, and local laws for the protection of the environment.

**ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (f), this decision is not subject to a higher level of review or appeal.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation of this project may begin immediately.

**CONTACT PERSON**

For further information please contact District Ranger Julie King at the Heber Ranger District Office, 2460 South Highway 40, Heber City, UT, 84032 or by phone at (435) 654-0470.

/s/ Julie K. King  
JULIE K. KING  
District Ranger  
Heber Ranger District  
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05/07/2004  
Date