



THE TOOLBOX FIRE RECOVERY PROJECT (What's Been Happening & Where We Are Now)

Fire Background Information –

- On July 12, 2002, a lightning storm ignited 67 fires on the Fremont National Forest.
- On Silver Lake RD, two of these fires, the Toolbox Fire and the Silver Fire, became the primary fires within the Toolbox Complex.
- The Toolbox Complex includes approximately 85,000 acres, including 49,500 of National Forest lands, 8,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management lands, and 27,500 of privately owned lands.
- The primary factors that contributed to the fire rapidly growing to 85,000 acres were:
 - Weather factors: precipitation in Silver Lake between 1/1/02 & 7/12/02 of 2.5" and 5 consecutive days prior to the fire that exceeded 95 degrees
 - Availability of Resources: Due a widespread area of fire activity, resources, particularly air support were very limited
 - Structural Forest Conditions: Stand densities have steadily increased over the past 80 years producing unprecedented levels of both horizontal and vertical continuity of potential fuels
- Suppression costs totaled approximately 9.8 million dollars; at peak suppression efforts, approximately 2,500 personnel were assigned to the for complex.
- Most of the fire complex occurred in a pure ponderosa pine forest type; therefore, much of the resource damage involved stand replacement mortality or mortality that occurred in a mosaic that is heavy to black (light to green). Numerous 200 – 500 year old ponderosa pine trees were killed. In addition, lodgepole pine forest and mixed conifer forests experienced heavy mortality.

STEP 1

Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation Activities ("BAER"). Placement of log erosion barriers and rice wattles, ditch cleaning, installation of relief culverts.

Work completed December 2002*

*Some noxious weed treatment to occur spring-summer 2003

STEP 2

Inventory/ Field Reconnaissance on 48,500 acres of National Forest (within the burned area) to determine the Current Status of:

Forest Stands (mortality level)
Wildlife Habitat
Soils (compaction levels)
Cultural Resource Sites
Streams and Fish Habitat
Fuels Profiles
Road System
Recreation Facilities
Range

Completed Fall – Winter of 2002

Introduction for May 12 and May 13, 2003 Open Houses at North Lake School and La Pine – R. Elston

STEP 3

- A **site-specific initial proposal** was presented to the public and other agencies.

The purpose of these project activities is to promote the long term development of sustainable forest conditions, reduce the likelihood of future high intensity wildfire, recover commercial timber value, initiate restoration of riparian areas, and protect remaining live forested stands. The Fremont National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (or "Forest Plan") provides the general direction for project design. That plan has been periodically amended since it took effect in 1989.

The initial proposal (called the Proposed Action) was distributed in November and December of 2002 through individual mailings, news releases to several local and regional newspapers and other media, and through the Fremont-Winema National Forest website on the World Wide Web. The Proposed Action was characterized as an alternative developed early in the planning process, based on the best information available at the time. The Proposed Action included:

- Commercial Salvage of Fire Damaged Trees - including design features to protect riparian resources and wildlife habitat
- Reforestation
- Fuels Reduction, including re-introduction of prescribed fire in some lightly burnt areas.
- Watershed Protection and Improvement Projects
- Plantation thinning in plantations that partially burned

Completed December 2002

STEP 4

The Proposed Action was designed to **generate public feedback and identify concerns** about its content or focus. These concerns were received through letters, phone calls, e-mails or personal conversations with members of the public during the Fall and early Winter of 2002. These comments and the concerns they reflect (called "Issues") have been used as focal points in developing new, **alternative proposals** that offer differing means to accomplish the stated purpose of the project.

Issues are centered on:

- Fuels Management - What are the most effective strategies to deal with the current and projected fuels conditions that would result should no action be taken?
- Wildlife Habitat – What is the optimum balance of providing habitat to cavity nesting bird species and in the long-term effective habitat for all wildlife in light of the need to proceed with an extensive fuels treatment and commercial recovery program?
- Public Access – The area is currently roaded at a level of approximately 3.7 miles of open per square mile. Resource protection and the limited funding that is available for road maintenance both point to the need to reduce the density of the road system. The spectrum of public opinion includes the desire to leave open all current access to public lands.
- Economics – Are there logging systems (helicopter) that would meet some resource objectives while rendering timber sales uneconomical and therefore unattractive to industry?
- Passive Recovery vs. Active Recovery – Is it better to actively manage an area recovery through fuels treatments, including commercial salvage and re-planting, or to "let nature take its course"?

General Range of Alternatives - The range of alternatives includes: "no action" and five "action" alternatives. Proposed commercial salvage acres range from approximately 6,500 acres to 14,500 acres. Proposed fuels treatments outside of salvage areas varies by alternative in response to the above issues.

This is where we are NOW in the planning process

Those alternative proposals (“Alternatives C, D, E, G and H”) are displayed around the room. They have been designed by a team comprised of timber and reforestation specialists, wildlife and fisheries biologists, cultural resource specialists, and other team members in the fields of soils, recreation, botany engineering and range.

The purpose of this Open House is to offer you a first look at those Alternatives and to gather your initial reactions to them.

What Happens Next?

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared that examines the current conditions, the purpose and need for the project, the key issues and the environmental effects of the various alternative strategies for achieving the purpose and need. A Draft EIS will be available by late August 2003, with Final EIS and Decision issued by late December 2003. Comments may be submitted to Carolyn Wisdom, District Ranger, Silver Lake RD, P.O. Box 129, Silver Lake, OR 97638, or by emailed to relston@fs.fed.us. For more information, contact – Carolyn Wisdom at 541-576-7501 or Rick Elston at 541-576-7569, or view the WWW at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/winema/management/analyses/toolbox/>