



Boise Forest Coalition | Meeting Agenda

March 7, 2024 | 10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. MST

To participate in person: Idaho Department of Lands, 300 N 6th St., Boise, ID 83702

To participate virtually: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83098342875?pwd=M2MyU3cvRVVKV0NENE03S2JrWnB3QT09>

Meeting ID: 830 9834 2875

Passcode: BFC2024

Objectives

- To learn the status of several Forest Service projects
- To continue the dialogue between the Forest Service and BFC about the Sage Hen project

Time	Item	Speaker
10:00 a.m.	Welcome, Introductions, and Agenda Review	David Nichols
10:15 a.m.	Forest Service Information Sharing & Announcements	FS Staff
10:30 p.m.	2024 Warm Springs Fuel Reduction	Adrienne Holcomb
11:00 a.m.	Upper Mores Project Update For background information, please see the notes from our November 2023 discussion regarding Upper Mores (Attachment 1)	Brian Lawatch
11:30 a.m.	Southwest Idaho Wildfire Crisis Landscape Project Update For background information, please see: The notes from our December 2023 discussion regarding the SIL (Attachment 2) SIL Website: https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r4/landmanagement/?cid=FSEPRD1069279	John Riling
11:50 a.m.	Sage Hen BFC Letter Dialogue For background information, please see the BFC Sage Hen Project Comments: https://0201.nccdn.net/1_2/000/000/121/d83/bfc-comments-on-revised-sage-hen-ea-2024.pdf#RDAM55570144	Brant Petersen
12:25 p.m.	Closing Remarks & Next Steps	David Nichols
12:30 p.m.	Adjourn	David Nichols

Attachment 1

BFC Upper Mores Discussion Notes

Upper Mores Project Discussion

The group discussed the Upper Mores project, asking questions and sharing comments.

- Questions about the project
 - Question: What are the plans to evaluate trails and roads for recreation management?
 - Answer: Josh Newman shared that he is in the early stages of a project that looks at travel management for the Highway 21 corridor. The plan is to have this project include some of the issues and areas mentioned in the Upper Mores project. The rough timeline for scoping of this project is fall of 2024.
 - Question: How would this new travel management project overlap with the Upper Mores project, specifically the ability to make trail and road changes while there is fuel work being done in the area?
 - Answer: The fuel work in the area will be done over several years, offering the opportunity to have recreation-related work happen concurrently if the timing is right.
 - Question: Are there opportunities for trail offsets between the two projects?
 - Answer: Unauthorized roads do not contribute to offsets to build new roads. Josh said his project will look at where improvement and changes could be made based on abuse or lack of use.
 - Question: Will Whoop Um Up campground and parking area be included?
 - Answer: The parking expansion will be included but changes to the campground have not been included in any proposals at this time.
 - Question: How do we include people management for reaction projects?
 - Answer: Problem areas could be addressed through methods like turning areas into day-use only with hard barriers and creating identified dispersed camping sites that are visible from the road for enforcement purposes.
 - Question: Does the FS have the ability to partner to create solutions like campgrounds with hosts or county-managed parks?
 - Answer: The FS does have the ability to partner to create solutions and does in many cases, but many local governments do not want to sign the permit for liability reasons.
 - Question: Will shaded fuel breaks be a part of the Upper Mores project?
 - Answer: Josh shared that fuel breaks are taken into account during the prescription-writing phase through PODS analysis (Potential Operational Delineation).
- Comments from the group about the project
 - The group appreciated the Forest Service including the BFC early in the project process. This included FS participation in the BFC meetings and hosting a field visit for BFC members.
 - The group said this project aligns with many of the BFC objectives, making it a great opportunity for partnership between the FS and BFC.
 - People Management
 - The group discussed the importance of strategies to manage user behavior, citing that this project area is close to a major urban area and will continue to see high use.
 - The group would like to see “people management” addressed in the recreation portion of the project. This could be through trail location, off-road parking, and campsite locations,

all with the aim of steering behavior toward appropriate, designated areas rather than wherever users choose.

- A member mentioned that increased enforcement could help in this area too.

- Recreational Trails

- There are not many specifics about additional trails in the project. The BFC participants said that this project seems like an opportunity to evaluate the trail system for enhancement and greater connectivity. This could include evaluating non-inventoried trails and temporary roads for recreation potential.
- The group hoped that the forest service could use its understanding of the aquatic conservation needs and wildlife migration corridors to preserve that space and open new recreation trails in areas where those factors are less prevalent.
- The group also discussed whether the FS could use harvest methods that are conducive to recreationists being able to use the area. They also pointed out that the timing of equipment removal is important for recreation-related activities, such as snowmobile grooming.
- It would be helpful to have a map of the proposed road and trail changes in the future.
- John Robison shared that the group could offer specific suggestions or examples for trail connections or re-routes. BFC members with suggestions should email their thoughts to David Nichols at david@leadwithsisu.com by November 10th.

- Fire Management

- The group hopes the FS can increase the area treated for wildfire via fuel reduction. Morris Huffman said he thinks biochar could be an effective treatment because it reduces fuel and fosters carbon sequestration.
- The group suggested that the FS coordinate any non-commercial harvest with local communities to provide firewood.

- Comments specific to the BFC letter

- There was a suggestion to remove the reference to the Granite Goose project given the unknowns about that project.
- The group would like to ask the FS to evaluate the temporary roads for their recreation potential.

Attachment 2

BFC SIL Discussion Notes

Southwest Idaho Landscape Update

John Riling joined the BFC meeting to share information about the Southwest Idaho Wildfire Crisis Landscape (SIL). His presentation slides are included at the end of this summary. More information can be found on the project's website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r4/landmanagement/?cid=FSEPRD1069279>

The landscape includes the Payette and Boise National Forests. It is one of 21 priority landscapes identified across the United States. The Idaho City fire shed is ranked 11th out of 7500 fire sheds in the country.

The FS received approximately \$32 million this year for this project. There will most likely be additional funding but all of the monies must be obligated within the next three years.

Objectives for the project include:

- Reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire to communities
- Improve watershed health
- Sustain industry
- Reduce risk to recreation infrastructure
- Improve forest resilience

The project utilizes a variety of data and risk analytics to identify prioritized areas and develop a plan. The goal is to have a program management plan draft by the end of 2023. For more information about this process, you can view a webinar on this topic at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/research/rmrs/products/multimedia/webinars/prioritizing-landscape-treatments>

One of the biggest challenges is that many of the highest-risk areas are in complex, mixed-ownership locations. These areas tend to take more time and money to treat. Successful planning and implementation will take effective partnerships, like those fostered by the National Forest Foundation. The local-area FS has established some of the first county-level good neighbor authority agreements in the country to help with this work.

The FS has contracted with Vibrant Planet to utilize the Land Tender technology platform to analyze the multitude of data for this project and identify treatments down to more targeted areas. More information on this platform can be found at: <https://www.vibrantplanet.net/landtender>

The FS is also utilizing TREAT (Treatment for Restoration Economic Analysis Tool) to analyze the economic impact of treatment plans for the project area.



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Submitted electronically to:
<https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public//CommentInput?Project=56701>
and to john.d.wallace@usda.gov and brian.lawatch@usda.gov

February 9, 2024

RE: Boise Forest Coalition comments on the 2024 Sage Hen Environmental Assessment

Dear John,

On behalf of the Boise Forest Coalition (BFC), thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the Environmental Assessment for the Revised Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project. The BFC appreciates the continued discussions with the Forest Service throughout the environmental analysis process. We hope that these comments will be helpful in finalizing the project analysis.

In September 2010, the BFC was formed to bring together diverse interests to craft recommendations for multi-faceted forest projects. The citizen-led group is open to anyone with an interest in Boise National Forest management. The BFC has worked closely with the Forest Service on the Clear Creek, High Valley Integrated, Bogus Basin Forest Health, Sinker Creek-Boise Ridge, and Upper Mores, to name a few. The BFC seeks to provide consensus-based recommendations for these projects, track projects through Boise Forest Coalition implementation, and is committed to working with the Forest Service to achieve joint goals that improve, manage, protect and restore the Boise National Forest.

The Revised Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project encompasses 67,800 acres on the west side of the Emmett Ranger District of the Boise National Forest, and incorporates additional land owned by the Bureau of Land Management, Idaho Department of Lands, and private lands. This area is highly utilized by a variety of recreation user groups and visitors.

The purpose of the Sage Hen Project is to:

- Manage and restore vegetation conditions to improve landscape resiliency and resistance to natural disturbances (insects and diseases, wildfire, etc.) occurring at uncharacteristic scope and scale.
- Conserve or restore habitat for wildlife species that depend on low-elevation, old forest habitats within the nonlethal and mixed 1 fire regimes.
- Maintain or improve aquatic habitat and watershed conditions.
- Improve and manage recreation opportunities; and
- Support local and regional economies and livelihoods.

Sage Hen objection and revised proposal

The Boise National Forest first initiated discussions with the BFC about the Sage Hen area in 2012. The BFC submitted scoping comments on the Sage Hen project to District Ranger Katherine Wood on May 14, 2020. Over 80 objections were received during the objection period. During initial project development and the objection period, the BFC and other stakeholders had asked for the consideration of additional alternative(s) and a public comment period on the Environmental Assessment.

Following settlement discussions, the Forest Service developed an additional alternative:

Additional alternative being developed. Purpose of the project is to improve vegetation conditions to improve resiliency to uncharacteristic disturbances and restore watershed function to improve aquatic resources. (Sage Hen revision proposal, 2023).

Alternative B incorporates the same management actions as Alternative A, except Alternative B eliminates a ford on Chief Eagle Eye Creek, reduces associated commercial harvest acres, and eliminates associated temporary roads. Alternative B also eliminates additional acres adjacent to Chief Eagle Eye Creek. These changes were made based on comments and objections to the rescinded decision...This alternative is responsive to concerns raised in objections and litigation related to potential impacts to watershed function and bull trout habitat. (2024 EA p. 13).

This decision is also consistent with suggestions by the BFC in December 2020 to reduce adverse impacts of the project to wildlife species and reduce sedimentation. **As such, the BFC recommends that the Forest Service select Alternative B as it accomplishes the majority of the original treatments while being more protective of bull trout and watershed conditions.**

Support for comment period on the revised Environmental Assessment

We appreciate the Forest Service hosting an additional public comment period and open house (April 27, 2023) on the revised Environmental Assessment and hope that this review period will help further refine and improve the project. Appreciate public meeting (all BFC members could not attend)

Support for landscape level approach

The BFC is in strong support of the forest health and watershed improvement goals associated with this project and agrees that in order for proposed activities to have a meaningful impact, treatments must be analyzed and implemented at the landscape level.

Use of additional tools

The BFC continues to encourage the BNF to use all the tools and authorities available to increase the pace and scale of treatments, such as the Good Neighbor Authority, Shared Stewardship agreements and Wyden Authority.

Condition Based Management

The BFC has no direct experience with condition-based management but is generally supportive of adaptive management strategies to address changing conditions caused by insect, disease and fire. Some BFC members that were concerned about the original condition-based management plan are appreciative that the Forest Service was able to complete three seasons of additional field surveys (Appendix). It would also be helpful for the Environmental Assessment to have a summary of which additional baseline surveys have been conducted since the original Decision Notice was signed.

We hope these surveys will be sufficient to meet the NEPA requirements to take a “hard look” at existing conditions before project activities commence and that condition-based management as outlined in the Activity Cards will be used to tailor project activities as needed moving forward. If conditions change beyond the range of the original Environmental Assessment and Activity Cards, the Forest Service can conduct a Determination of NEPA adequacy or Supplemental Information Report and perform a site-specific analysis if needed.

Related projects

During the period when Sage Hen was being litigated, several original project activities in the original decision were either accomplished independently or were agreed to during settlement discussions. These include the Shady Pines and Cartwright and Reservoir Campgrounds Reconstruction Projects and salvage timber sales Antelope Swale, Joe’s Creek and Southside GNA that were impacted by tussock moths. The EA should include an update on these as part of the cumulative effects analysis.

EA details

The Sage Hen EA includes a summary of potential treatment activities and photographs showing examples of existing conditions and desired conditions following treatment. These examples are very informative. The maps in the 2024 EA showing the sequence of prescribed burn blocks and hazardous fuels reduction, vegetation treatments, timber sales, and transportation changes across the project area are particularly informative.

It would also be useful to show additional treatment types on the maps in the appendix such as meadow restoration, aspen enhancement, whitebark pine, group selection regeneration, and post-treatment culvert removals. The final EA could then refer to the appropriate map in the appendix.

Design features

The Environmental Assessment notes that even Alternative B is still likely to adversely affect bull trout and critical habitat. The EA describes a series of project design features to mitigate these effects. Big game security cover will also be negatively affected. The Forest Service could consider some additional design features to mitigate these effects.

Design features SW-14 will be used to limit sediment impacts from project activities, specifically in the Third Fork watershed. The BFC recommends that these same design features be used in other areas where bull trout may be adversely affected by project activities. The EA notes that bull trout Environmental DNA (eDNA) was collected in the lower reaches of Chief Eagle Eye, 3rd Fork, and 2nd Fork Creeks.

One of the design features says that "temporary roads will be closed for three full growing seasons to allow recovery before additional temporary roads are opened." It is unclear if these roads will be opened up only every three years and additional clarification would be appreciated.

Table 8 shows the estimated amounts of temporary roads needed throughout the life of the project. Even with concurrent road restoration, there will be over 50 miles of roads present on the landscape during the peak of project activities. We encourage the Forest Service to consider additional design features to decrease the total amount of roads impacting the landscape at any one time.

Road improvements such as cross-cut ditches, resurfacing, and other sediment management efforts should be completed before any upslope work is started so that sediment can properly be managed.

The EA uses the terms "temporary," "short term," and "long term" to describe the duration of different effects. The Forest Service should define these terms. Some of the effects are anticipated to last up to 3-5 years and take 3 years for recovery as the temporary roads revegetate.

Project activities appear likely to have some positive and negative effects on Chief Eagle Eye Creek. We recommend that the EA include a summary about how water quality in Chief Eagle Eye Creek will be affected throughout the duration of the project. Even though the logging and road work is being staggered through the project area to reduce local impacts, it appears that Chief Eagle Eye Creek may receive sediment for the entire 12 year + duration. Chief Eagle Eye Creek and the resident fish should also benefit from the work on the transportation system and fish passage improvements. The EA notes that Chief Eagle Eye Creek currently does not have conditions suitable for bull trout for much of the year due to high water temperatures and sediment loads. We recommend that the EA also account for any improvements in water quality as a result of project activities.

Since the Sage Hen Project was originally proposed, there is additional funding for fish passage improvements and we recommend that the Forest Service examine if there are additional opportunities to assist bull trout as part of this project.

Harvesting techniques

Cable yarding technology has developed significantly and it would be helpful to know where this tool might be implemented along with other harvesting strategies.

Cross-boundary work

We encourage the Forest Service to engage with adjacent land managers on proposed cross-boundary vegetation management and watershed restoration work. The west side of the project area is adjacent to BLM, state and private lands. The public meeting handout also noted that surface fuel loadings, ladder fuels, and denser canopies are greater than desired within the wildland-urban interface (WUI).

We ask that the final EA provide a map of the WUI area and show the location and types of treatments to protect these areas.

Recreation components

As mentioned in our previous comments, the Sage Hen area of the Boise National Forest is a highly visited destination and receives heavy recreational use. ORV riding, camping, hiking, and hunting are all popular activities within the project boundary. This use has put a strain on resources. Although the primary reason for the project is vegetation management, the BFC encourages the Forest Service to identify additional opportunities to improve recreational opportunities, as well as better manage both authorized and unauthorized recreation within the project area. Specifically, the Forest Service should fully analyze the impacts of dispersed camping and identify opportunities for increasing designated camping areas and enforcing closures to dispersed camping in areas experiencing resource degradation.

For example, when temporary roads are rehabilitated, the Forest Service could consider if short spurs off the permanent roads could be retained for drive-in or walk-in dispersed camping sites, provided they do not have resource issues such as close proximity to bull trout streams. The

new temporary roads that get closed in certain drainages that are getting the most dispersed use could be priorities for providing these new dispersed camping locations.

The Forest Service should also consider signing of designated dispersed sites similar to what the Lowman Ranger District did up Clear Creek for the first 12 miles. The Forest Service could also assess if any of the three gravel pits can be reclaimed and redesigned in such a way that they are suitable as hardened dispersed camping areas once the gravel sources have played out.

Thank you again for considering our comments on the revised the Sage Hen Project.

On Behalf of the Boise Forest Coalition,

Arthur Beal, Steering Committee Member
Morris Huffman, Steering Committee Member
John Roberts, Steering Committee Member
John Robison, Steering Committee Member
Rachel Vandenburg, Steering Committee Member