

**BUCKSKIN FUELS MANAGEMENT PROJECT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Environmental Assessment No: ID-075-2002-014

Prepared by:
Department of the Interior
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Chapter 1. Introduction:

1.1. Brief Description of Proposed Action.

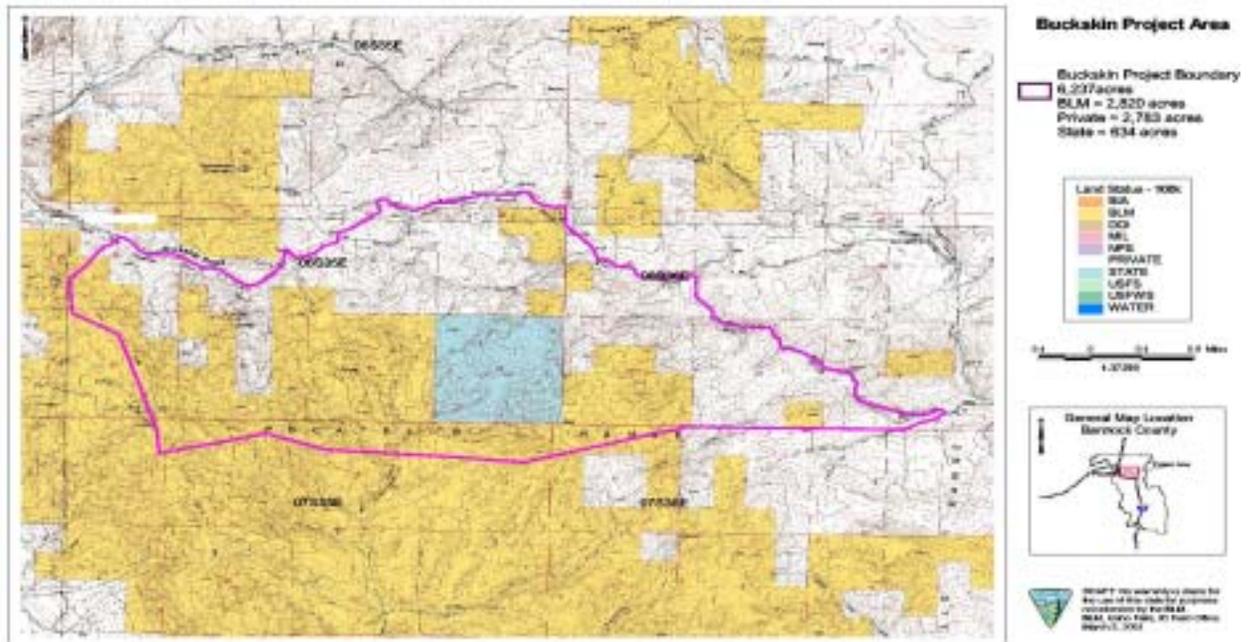
Utilizing combinations of thinning, pruning and prescribed fire; the Gateway Interagency Fire Front (GIFF), Eastern Idaho Supervisory Area of the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) and the Pocatello Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to reduce fuel accumulations on private, state and public lands located south of Buckskin and Hoot Owl Roads, East of Pocatello Idaho. The objectives of this project are:

- 1.) Enhance Firefighter and Public safety by reducing fire intensity.
- 2.) Reduce wildfire suppression costs.

Within a project area of 6,237 acres the project proposes to treat approximately 1,070 acres of public land, 145 acres of state land and an as yet undetermined (not to exceed 2,782 acres) amount of private lands.

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have ancestral rights to uses of public lands. This project falls within “ceded lands” for which special rights have been retained by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The Fort Hall Indian Reservation was created pursuant to an Executive Order dated June 14, 1867 and the 1868 Fort Bridger Treaty signed by the U.S. Government and the Shoshone and Bannock Tribes. The Shoshone and Bannock peoples agreed to make the Fort Hall Reservation their permanent homeland, and to reserve the right to hunt, fish, and gather off reservation. A series of land cessations occurred over the next few years, which ultimately resulted in the present day reservation boundaries established in 1900. The Treaty retained rights including, but are not limited to, wood gathering, hunting, fishing, harvesting plant resources, livestock grazing, and practicing tribal cultural activities on unoccupied Federal lands, which include all BLM lands. As a Federal agency, the BLM has trust responsibility to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes for the management of Federal lands. Trust responsibility is related to traditional/cultural uses, as well as the health of the land and water resources or the socio-economic needs of the Tribes. These trust responsibilities supercede all actions associated with the Buckskin Fuels Management Project. The BLM will continue to uphold their trust responsibility to protect, conserve and manage those trust resources

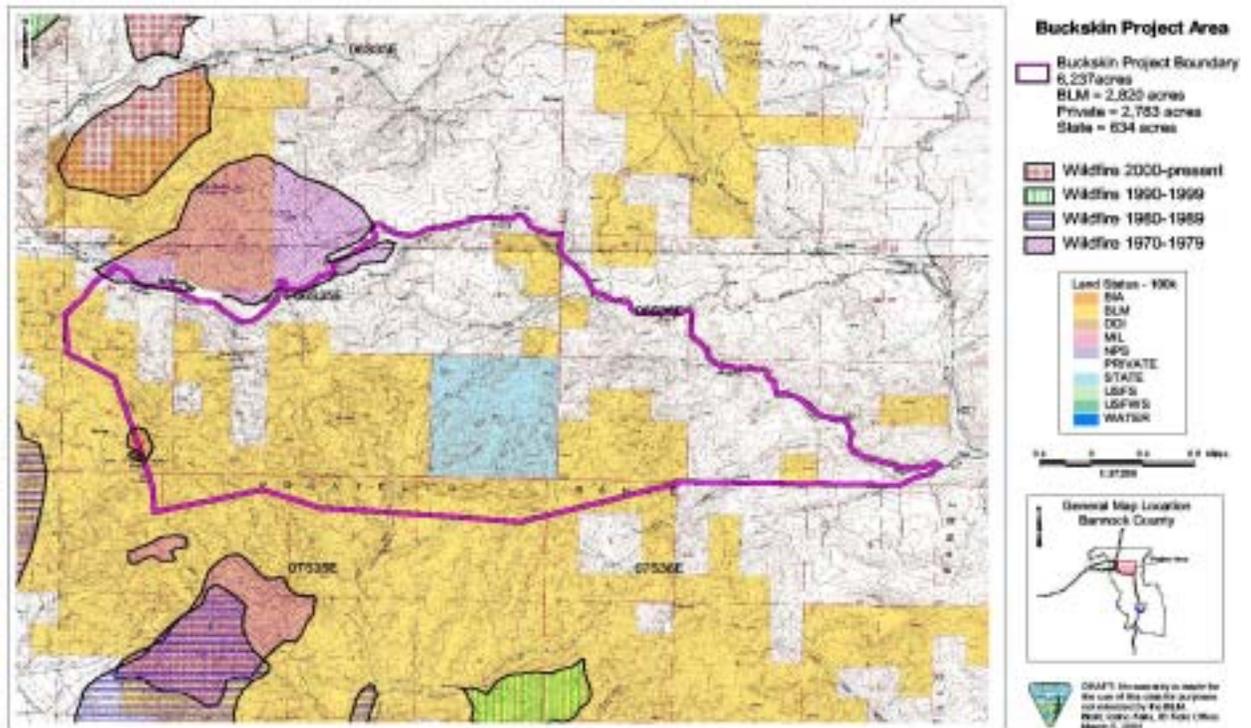
Map 1 (Larger Maps Attached)



1.2 Need for the Proposed Action:

Fire regimes in the forest and woodland types within Southeast Idaho have been significantly altered by past management actions and fire exclusion. The resultant fuel loadings have created conditions which support the development of high intensity wildfires which can result in unacceptable public and private property loss and occasionally human injury and death. The fire frequencies and vegetative conditions within the Pocatello Wildland Urban Interface have departed from historical conditions by multiple return intervals.

Map 2



A fuels survey conducted by the BLM during field season 2002 has identified the Buckskin Project area as having “High” fuel accumulations. The National Fire Plan (<http://www.fireplan.gov>) has directed the federal land management agencies to reduce, where possible, the unnatural fuel accumulations which exist on public lands.

The Douglas-fir beetle has infected Douglas-fir stands within the project area. This infestation was first identified in the late 1980's and continues to this date.

High densities of bug killed timber are present on private, state and federal lands within the project boundary.



1.3 Project Location:

The Buckskin Fuels Reduction Project lies in Bannock County Idaho approximately 2 miles east of the community of Pocatello Idaho.

Fuel load modification would be conducted on those private, state and public lands located in Township 6 South, Range 35 East, Sections 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35 and 36. Township 6 South, Range 36 East, Sections 30 and 31. Township 7 South, Range 35 East, Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4. Township 7 South, Range 36 East, Section 6.

1.4 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans:

The proposed action is in conformance with the goals and objectives as stipulated in the Pocatello Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved January 1988.

1.5 Relationship to Policies, Plans and Programs

This environmental assessment (EA) was prepared in accordance with the *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* (NEPA) and is in compliance with all subsequent and applicable laws and regulations, including the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.), Parts 1500-1508), U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI) regulations and requirements (Departmental Manual 516) and guidelines established in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1). The proposed action is in conformance with the goals and objectives as stipulated in the Chinese Peak/Blackrock Canyon Resource Activity Plan approved in 1995 and the Pocatello Field Office Programmatic Forestry Environmental Assessment approved in 2000.

1.6 Scoping and Development of Issues:

During Calendar Year 2001 the Upper Snake River District (USRD) contracted the Dynamac Corporation to conduct fuels and public surveys to ascertain the scope of the Wildland-Urban Interface problem within the District. During the public scoping phase the Buckskin and Mink Creek areas adjacent to Pocatello were identified as areas of immediate concern to the public.

During March 2002, scoping documents and newsletters (copies attached) were mailed to 287 interested parties and adjacent landowners describing the "Buckskin Project" and soliciting comments and input. Verbal comment was received from eight (8) adjacent landowners. Written comment was received from seven (7) interested parties, government agencies and adjacent landowners. Written scoping responses are attached.

2. Description of Proposed Action:

2.1 Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action applies only to federal and state managed lands. Other landowners within the project analysis area would be invited by GIFF to participate in fuel management reduction projects, but are under no obligation to do so. To simplify presenting the proposal and to better convey potential foreseeable actions for environmental consequences assessment, the maps and discussion generally do not distinguish between land ownership. For analysis purposes, the assumption is that about 70% of private landowners would participate at some level, and would use only hand-thinning techniques. Public scoping responses indicate a broad level of interest.

The proposed treatments on federal and state lands are the minimum necessary to effect a change in the intensity of wildfires within the Pocatello WUI. The fire departments within GIFF would coordinate with private landowners to identify and implement appropriate fuels management treatments on private lands. The proposed treatments are not intended to eliminate wildfire from the project area, but to reduce fire intensity. The project area would be treated to reduce the build up of fuels and create areas of “defensible space” in and around the Pocatello WUI. Adoption of the proposed action satisfies the NEPA requirements of the National Fire Plan for private lands within the project area.

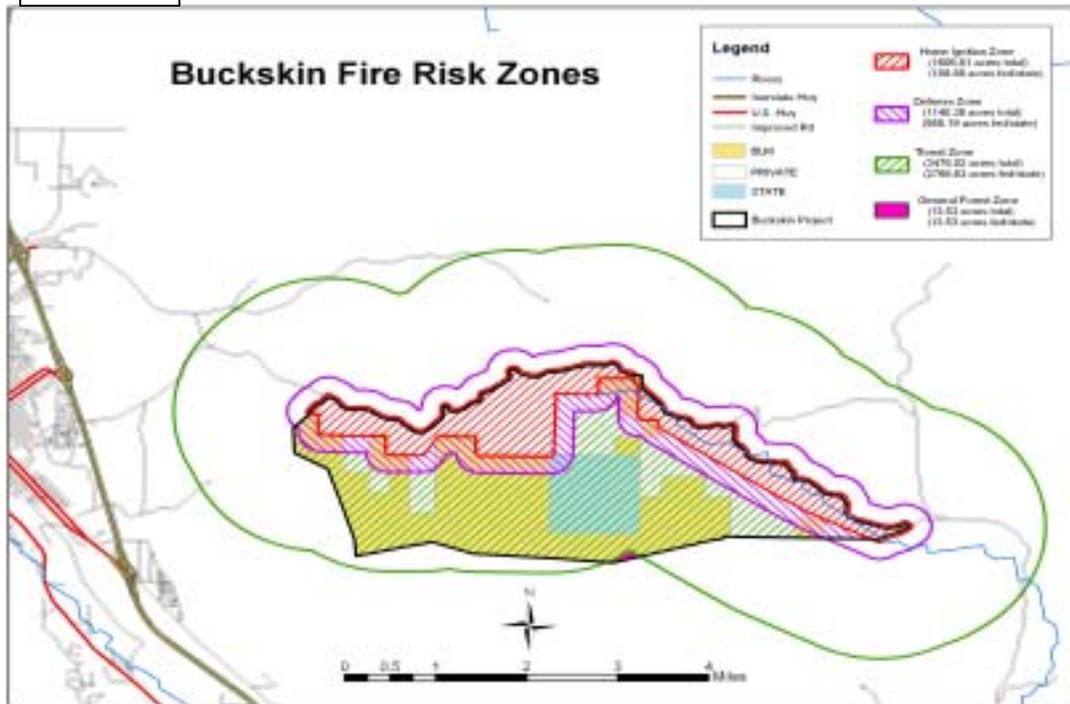
2.2 Objectives:

- 1.) Reduce Crown Bulk Density (CBD) to a level insufficient to support crown fires (Agee 1996. Reinhardt 2002).
- 2.) Increase the crown base height to 6 feet or greater (Agee et al. 2000. Omi.2002).
- 3.) Create “Aspen Firebreaks” (Bartos 1998., Brown and Simmerman 1986., Fechner and Barrows. 1976).

2.3 Fire Risk Zones

The design of the alternative and resulting treatment acres is based on a concept of three strategically placed zones centered on residential and business structures or developed recreation sites (Cohen 1998, Sierra National Forest, 2001 pg. 5, Nowicki, 2001 pg. 1-2). These zones are a home ignition zone, a defense zone, and a threat zone. Treatment goals and vegetation / fuel reduction treatment prescriptions vary for each. A fourth zone, the general forest zone, encompasses the remainder of the project area.

Map 3



The **home ignition zone** (defensible space) is centered on residences, businesses, and important structures, and extends outward for 50 to 200 feet, depending on topography. Fuel treatments are most intense in this zone with the objective of creating fuel conditions that allow firefighters to safely and effectively defend the structure from a wildfire, to increase the chance that the structure can survive a wildfire on its own, or to keep a structure fire from igniting the adjacent forest vegetation. Providing for safe ingress and egress to structures is integral to successfully defending structures. Many firefighting agencies have publications describing treatments to accomplish this goal. Creating a defensible space is largely dependent on the property owner. Homeowners working in cooperation with GIFF would be the primary emphasis for fuels reduction activities within this zone. There are approximately 1600 acres within this zone. Approximately 110 acres of Federal and/or State owned property lie within this zone.

The **defense zone** extends outward from structures for approximately 0.25 mile. The fuel treatment objective is to protect loss of life and property by creating defensible space and reducing fire intensity. Federal and State agencies working in cooperation with GIFF would be primarily responsible for fuels reduction activities within this zone. There are approximately 1140 acres within this zone. Approximately 560 acres of Federal and/or State owned property lie within this zone.

The **threat zone** extends beyond the defense zone approximately 1.25 miles for a total of 1.5 miles. Fuel treatments in this zone would be strategically located to interrupt fire spread and reduce fire intensity. Treatments would be designed to modify behavior of wildfires approaching the defense zone, thereby allowing firefighters to take advantage of reduced spotting, lower rates of spread and intensity, to more effectively contain the fire approach to the defense zone. The

analysis area includes approximately 3500 acres in this zone. Approximately 2700 acres of Federal and/or State owned property lie within this zone.

The **general forest zone** encompasses the remainder of the project area. Vegetation and fuel treatments in this zone would be primarily to provide some protection to the adjacent lands. The project area includes approximately 14 acres of Federal and/or State owned property within this zone.

2.4 Proposed Treatments by Zone and Vegetation Type

2.4.1 On public lands within the **Home Ignition Zone** the CBD within the Dry Conifer type (approximately 14 acres) and Aspen/Conifer type (approximately 14 acres) would be reduced to levels below which crown fires can exist. Thinning with chainsaws would be used to affect this goal. Not less than ninety (90) percent of all dead (standing and down) material (primarily bug killed Douglas-fir) not previously identified as wildlife habitat would be felled, piled and burned. Most live trees of 16 inch diameter at breast height (DBH) and greater would be retained to maintain a mature forest structure (Morgan 2000). Some live trees greater than 16" DBH may be removed to obtain the required crown bulk density.

Crown base height would be raised to not less than 6 foot to reduce the potential for surface fires to "ladder" into tree crowns. Pruning would be accomplished with chainsaws and other hand tools.

Pile burning and Air Curtain Destructors (ACDs) would be used to eliminate treated material. No broadcast burning would be applied.

Aspen clones (*Populus tremuloides*) within the Aspen/ Aspen-Conifer Mix would be treated with thinning and pruning to encourage their growth and regeneration. Douglas-fir less than 12 inch DBH and all juniper less than 16 inch DBH would be removed to create "Aspen Fire Breaks"

2.4.2 On public lands within the **Defense Zone** the CBD within the Dry Conifer type (approximately 52 acres) and Aspen/Conifer type (approximately 82 acres) would be reduced to levels below which crown fires can exist. Thinning with chainsaws would be used to affect this goal. Not less than seventy-five (75) percent of all dead (standing and down) material (primarily bug killed Douglas-fir) not previously identified as wildlife habitat would be felled, piled and burned. Most live trees of 16 inch diameter at breast height (DBH) and greater would be retained to maintain a mature forest structure (Morgan 2000). Some live trees greater than 16" DBH may be removed to obtain the required crown bulk density. On public lands, three to five pre-identified snags per acre would be retained as wildlife habitat (Pocatello Programmatic Forestry EA 2000).

Crown base height would be raised to not less than 6 foot to reduce the potential for surface fires to "ladder" into tree crowns. Pruning would be accomplished with chainsaws and other hand tools.

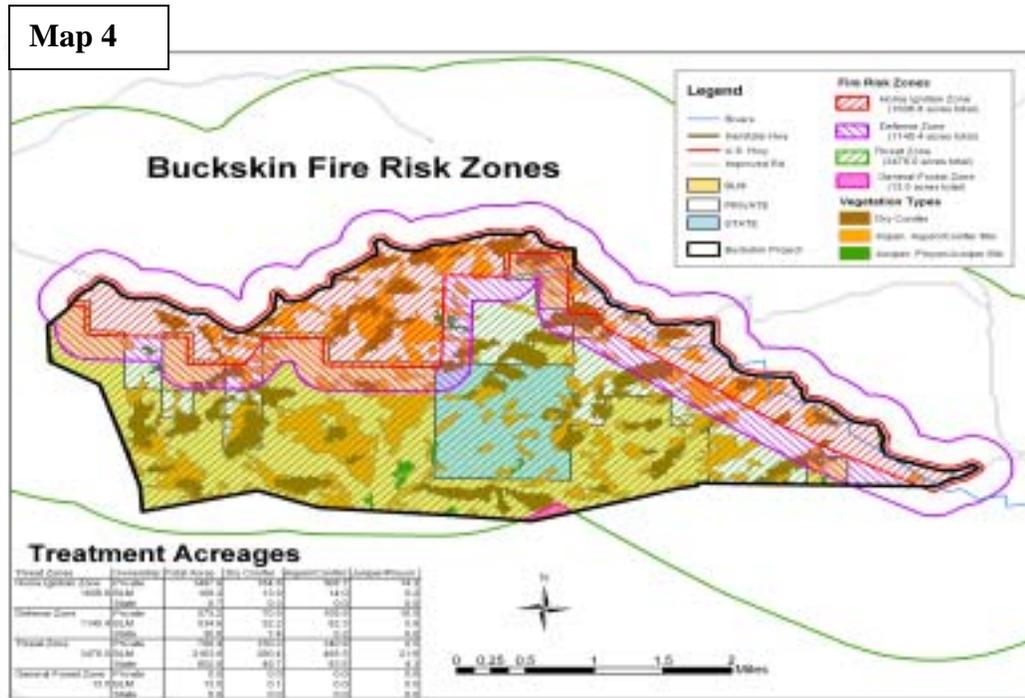
Prescribed fire, both pile burning and low intensity broadcast burning, and Air Curtain Destructors (ACDs) would be used to eliminate treated material. Broadcast burning would only be applied after significant fuel reductions had taken place.

Aspen clones (*Populus tremuloides*) within the Aspen/Aspen-Conifer Mix would be treated with low intensity prescribed fire, thinning and pruning to encourage their growth and regeneration. Douglas-fir less than 12 inch DBH and all juniper less than 16 inch DBH would be removed to create “Aspen Fire Breaks”.

2.4.3 On public lands within the **Threat Zone** the CBD within the Dry Conifer type (approximately 290 acres) and Aspen/Conifer type (approximately 495 acres) would be reduced to levels below which crown fires can exist. Thinning with chainsaws would be used to affect this goal. Not less than sixty (60) percent of all dead (standing and down) material (primarily bug killed Douglas-fir) not previously identified as wildlife habitat would be felled, piled and burned. Live trees of 16 inch diameter at breast height (DBH) and greater would be retained to maintain a mature forest structure (Morgan 2000). On public lands, three to five pre-identified snags per acre would be retained as wildlife habitat (Pocatello Programmatic Forestry EA 2000).

Prescribed fire, both pile burning and low intensity broadcast burning would be used to eliminate treated material. Broadcast burning would only be applied after significant fuel reductions had taken place.

2.4.4 No treatments are planned for the **General Forest Zone**.



2.5 Mitigation Common to All Actions:

- 1.) The mid-elevation shrub steppe and mountain shrub communities within the project boundary are deemed essential for deer winter range and sage grouse. No areas are targeted for treatment.
- 2.) Slope and soils prevent the use of large mechanical treatment apparatus (i.e. slash busters, hydro-ax, bull-hogs etc). All treatment activities would be implemented with hand crews with chainsaws and other hand tools.
- 3.) Where accessible, all treated material would be made available as commercial and non-commercial fuel-wood .
- 4.) Piling of material would be regulated to reduce scorching of leave trees. Pile size would be restricted to reduce fire intensity. Ground scorch may occur immediately under pile locations.
- 5.) Prescribed burn plans would be created for fuels treatments within the project area.
- 6.) No road construction would occur from these activities.
- 7.) No “Firebreaks” or dozer fireline would be constructed during the execution of this project. Hand line would be constructed to facilitate prescribed burning. All hand lines would be closed to eliminate off-road vehicle use.
- 8.) All OHV’s used to transport treatment crews and equipment would conform to existing rules, regulations and guidelines as described in the Blackrock Canyon Resource Activity Plan.
- 9.) Roads, trails and ways will maintain their character as described in the Blackrock Canyon Resource Activity Plan.
- 10.) No activities would be conducted within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA).
- 11.) No modifications to livestock forage allocations would result from these activities. Post treatment grazing restrictions as described in BLM Manual Handbook H-1742-1 Chapter 3 section C would be adhered to.
- 12.) Pre and post treatment and pre and post burn inventory would be conducted as described within the USDI National Park Service *Fire Monitoring Handbook* (2001).
- 13.) All slash disposal operations would conform to the rules, regulations and stipulations

as described within the Idaho Administrative Code for Title 38, Chapter 13 (Forest Practices Act).

14.) If any cultural objects or sites of cultural significance are discovered (i.e. historical or prehistoric ruins, graves or grave markers, fossils, or artifacts etc.), operations shall be immediately suspended in the vicinity of the cultural value and the Field Manager would be notified.

15.) All surface disturbance (hand lines) would be hand reseeded with an appropriate mix of grasses to reduce erosion and reduce the establishment of undesirable (weed) species.

16.) A field survey for special status wildlife and plants has been conducted. No species of concern have been identified.

2.6 No Action Alternative:

Under the “No Action Alternative” fuels will continue to accumulate until removed by human caused or naturally ignited wildfire.

Fuel management work to manipulate vegetation structure, composition and patterns that could alter fire behavior to provide better protection for private and public lands and firefighter safety would not occur. Full wildfire suppression activities would occur in the project analysis area. It is unlikely that thinning activities would occur on adjacent private land. General maintenance of roads and trails would continue; recreation activities would continue at present or higher levels as the Pocatello area population increases over time; infestations of noxious weeds would be treated; grazing on BLM land would continue under the Standards and Guides.

The Pocatello WUI would remain the highest priority suppression area within the BLM’s East Zone of the Upper Snake River requiring large numbers of suppression resources (engines, crews and air tankers) for all wildfire responses. Wildfire rehabilitation efforts would continue per agency policy. No federal monies would be available to private landowners via the Buckskin Project /National Fire Plan.

2.7 Alternatives Considered But Not Proposed

2.7.1 Original Proposal as Scoped:

Comments received from the public and other interested parties have resulted in significant modifications of the original proposal. Those comments have been incorporated into the “Proposed Action”. No further analysis of the “Original Proposal” will be provided within this document. See Attachment 2 for a copy of the original scoping document and comments.

2.7.2 Prescribed Fire without Prior Mechanical Treatment:

There are over 100 permanently occupied residences in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project site. The fire intensities which would result from igniting the untreated fuels prevents the use of prescribed fire without prior mechanical treatment. Due to the magnitude and severity of the safety issues associated with prescribed fire without mechanical pre-treatment no further analysis of this alternative will be provided within this document.

2.7.3 Chemical Treatments:

The list of currently approved herbicides for application on public lands does not contain chemicals suitable for this purpose and need. Chemical application could have long term adverse effects upon non-targeted species resulting in undesirable impacts. No further analysis of this alternative will be provided within this document.

2.7.4 Chaining

Topography, vegetation types, amount of soil disturbance and other undesired consequences preclude the use of chaining for this proposal. No further analysis of this alternative will be provided within this document.

2.7.5 Construction of firebreaks immediately adjacent to homes without fuels reduction:

The construction of firebreaks on public lands directly adjacent to private lands containing residences will result in unacceptable surface disturbance at negligible benefit. Existing fuels, weather patterns and topography within the project area would require that fire breaks be constructed that were not less than 50 feet wide (Green 1977) to be marginally effective. This amount of surface disturbance on an annual basis would be environmentally and economically unacceptable. No further analysis of this alternative will be provided within this document.

2.7.6 Fuel Reduction with “Commercial Harvest”

Limited readily available material, poor access, low volume and poor quality of available material, the scattered nature of the timber stands, limited harvest options (helicopter only), lack of predictable markets, and the urgency of treating the wildland urban interface make commercial harvest non-viable. No further analysis of this alternative will be provided within this document.

3. Affected Environment

The affected environment for the Buckskin Fuels Reduction project is described within the Blackrock Canyon Resource Activity Plan (EA # ID-030-95051). Please refer to that document for a full description.

Elements as described within the following table are subject to requirements specified in statute, regulation, executive order or policy. All elements have been considered and analyzed. Those issues which are affected by the proposed actions are described in detail within this document. The remaining elements which are **not** affected by the proposed actions are not analyzed in detail.

Element	Present in the Environment		Proposed Action		No Action Alternative	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Air Quality	x		x			x
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern		X				
Cultural Resources*		X				
Environmental Justice		X				
Farmlands (Prime or Unique)		X				
Floodplains		X				
Fuels	x		x			x
Livestock	x			x		x
Native American Concerns*		X				
Noxious/ Invasive Plants	x		x		x	
Socioeconomic Considerations		X				
Soils		X				
Threatened & Endangered Species						
Fish*		X				
Plants*		X				
Wildlife*		X				
Wastes, Hazardous and Solid		X				
Water Quality*		X				
Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X				
Wild & Scenic River Corridors		X				
Wilderness		X				

* Sensitive issues not affected but described in detail.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES/IMPACTS

4.1 Proposed Alternative

4.1.1 Air Quality:

National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) are defined in the Clean Air Act (CAA) as levels of pollutant above which detrimental effects on human health and welfare may result. The EPA has established NAAQS for six air pollutants including: carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, and particulate matter. Particulate matter (PM) is the pollutant of most concern in smoke created by prescribed fire. PM₁₀ stands for particulate matter less than 10 micrometers in aerodynamic diameter (i.e. 1/25,000 of an inch). The annual standard for PM₁₀ is 50 ug/m³ and the 24-hour standard is 150 ug/m³. Idaho's most dominant air pollutant is particulate matter due to impacts from residential wood combustion, industrial emissions, automobile exhaust, agricultural activities, fugitive road dust, and open burning. Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) operates an extensive ambient air monitoring network to monitor for NAAQS. The average annual PM₁₀ emissions from 1995 through 1999 for Bannock County was 11,742 tons per year (EPA 2003).

A non-attainment area is a portion of an air shed (usually the portion directly above an urban center) where a NAAQS violation has occurred for any of the above mentioned air pollutants. The Portneuf Valley/Fort Hall Indian Reservation area has been designated a PM₁₀ non-attainment area by IDEQ and EPA.

Violations are primarily due to an exceedence of the 24-hour standard during winter months when strong inversions trap pollutants (IDEQ 2002). The western third of the Buckskin project falls within the Portneuf Valley/Fort Hall PM₁₀ non-attainment area boundary.

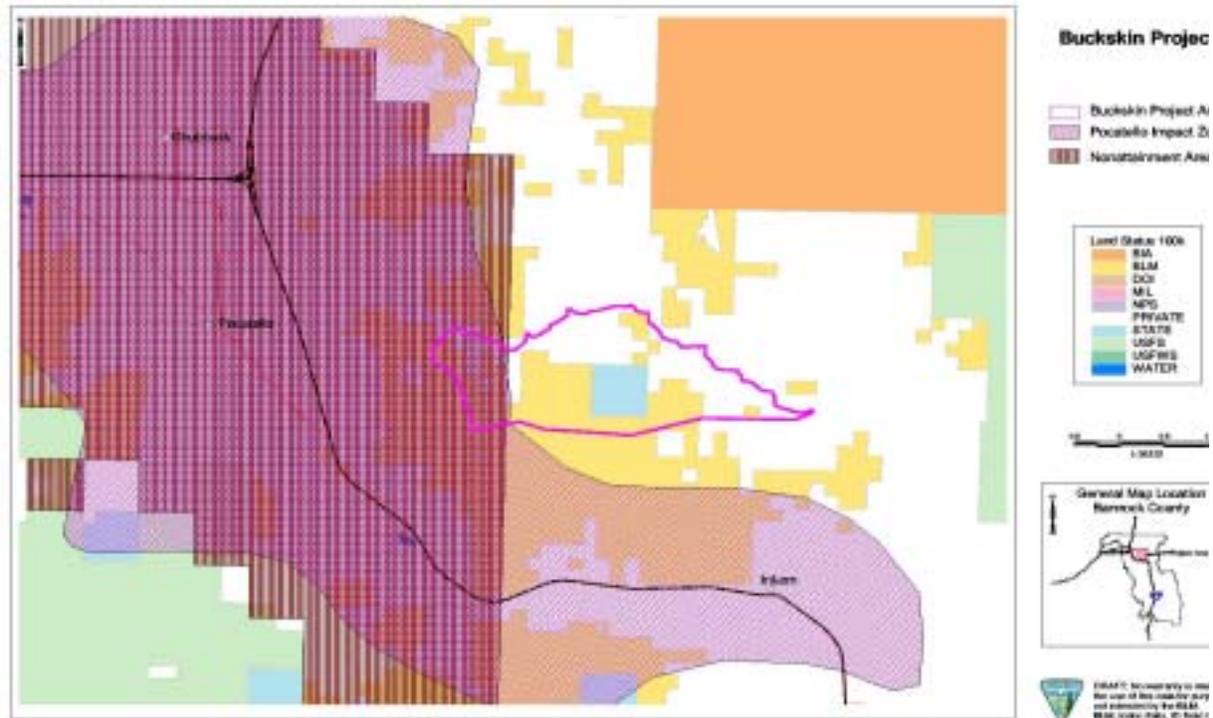
EPA's General Conformity rule (1993) applies to non-transportation related federal activities such as prescribed fire. It prohibits federal agencies from taking any action within a non-attainment area that causes or contributes to a new violation of air quality standards. A conformity determination is required for each pollutant where the total of direct and indirect emissions caused by an agency's actions would equal or exceed conformity de minimis levels, or are regionally significant. The general conformity de minimis level for PM₁₀ is 100 tons per year. Regionally significant is defined as emissions representing ten percent or more of the total emissions for the area.

Montana and Idaho are currently managing smoke emissions from forest and range prescribed burning under the Montana/Idaho Joint Smoke Management Program. Participants include landowners and managers (federal, state, tribal, and private), Idaho DEQ, and the National Weather Service. Burn plans written under

this program must include actions to minimize fire emissions, a smoke dispersion evaluation, public notification and exposure reduction procedures, and an air quality monitoring plan. Burners submit planned burn lists at the beginning of the calendar year and individual burns are reported one day prior to ignition. A full-time meteorologist uses burn activity, weather, and air quality information to make daily go/no go recommendations. Participants of the Smoke Management Program have divided the state of Idaho into 16 airsheds. An air shed is a geographic area with similar topography and meteorology within which the airflow is contained the majority of the time. The Buckskin project is located within airsheds 19 and 20.

Impact zones are areas considered to be smoke sensitive by Idaho DEQ and are given additional air quality protection as needed. There are two impact zones (Pocatello and Idaho Falls) within a 100 kilometer buffer zone surrounding the Buckskin project

Map 5. (Larger version in Attachment 1)



The 1977 CAA amendments set a national goal to “preserve, protect, and enhance the air quality in national parks, national wilderness areas, national monuments, national seashores, and other areas of special national or regional natural, recreational, scenic, or historic value”. Stringent air quality requirements were established for areas designated as “Class I” attainment areas.

There are no Class I attainment areas within a 100 kilometer buffer zone around

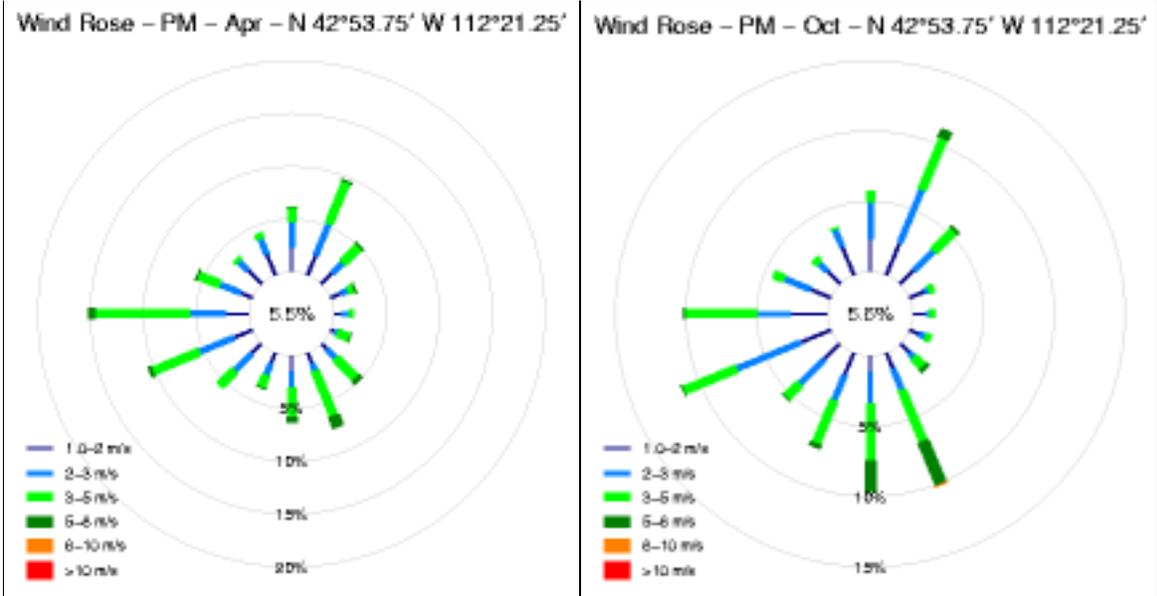
the Buckskin project, however, Craters of the Moon National Monument (a Class I area) sits just outside this boundary towards the northwest. Interstate 15 and Interstate 84 are major transportation corridors in the vicinity of the Buckskin project area. In addition, there are several county roads in the vicinity of the project including Pocatello Creek Road, Americana Road, Buckskin Road, Rapid Creek Road, and Hoot Owl Road. There are two branches of the Portneuf Medical Center in the city of Pocatello.

Weather

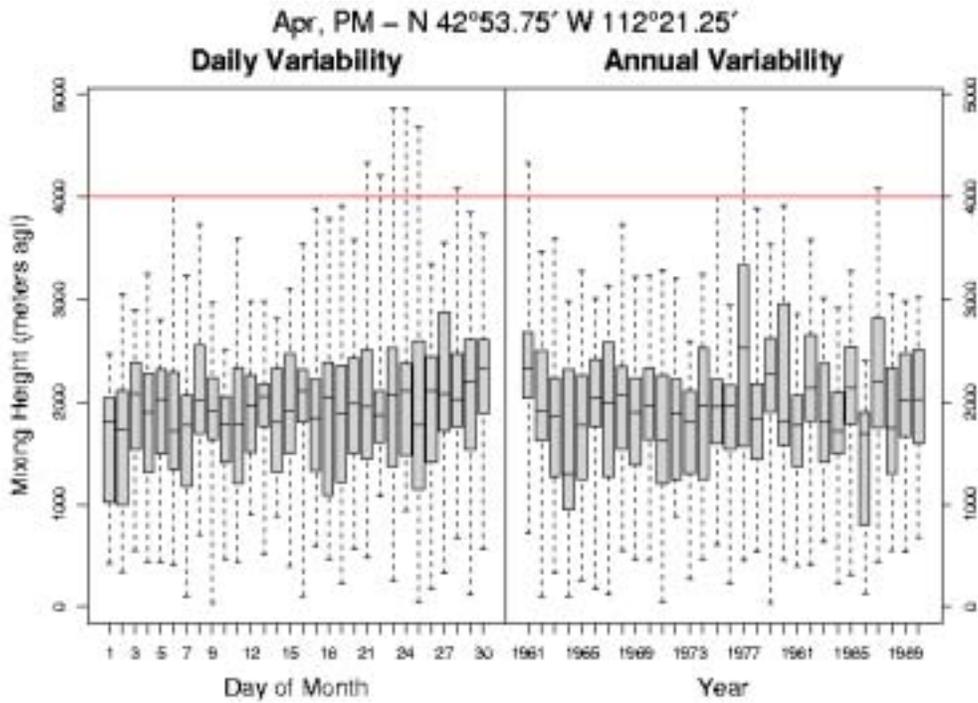
The weather parameters reported in this section pertains to the geographical location: latitude 42°53’30” North and longitude 112°21’30” West. Data came from the Ventilation Climate Information System (available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/fera/vent>)

During April afternoons surface winds can blow from all cardinal directions but come predominantly out of the west (15% of the time), the north northeast (10% of the time), and the south southeast (7% of the time) at wind speeds of 11 to 18 mph. In October in the afternoons surface winds can blow from all cardinal directions but come predominantly from the north northeast (12% of the time), the west southwest (12% of the time), and the south/south southwest (10% of the time) at wind speeds of 11 to 18 mph (see Figure 1).

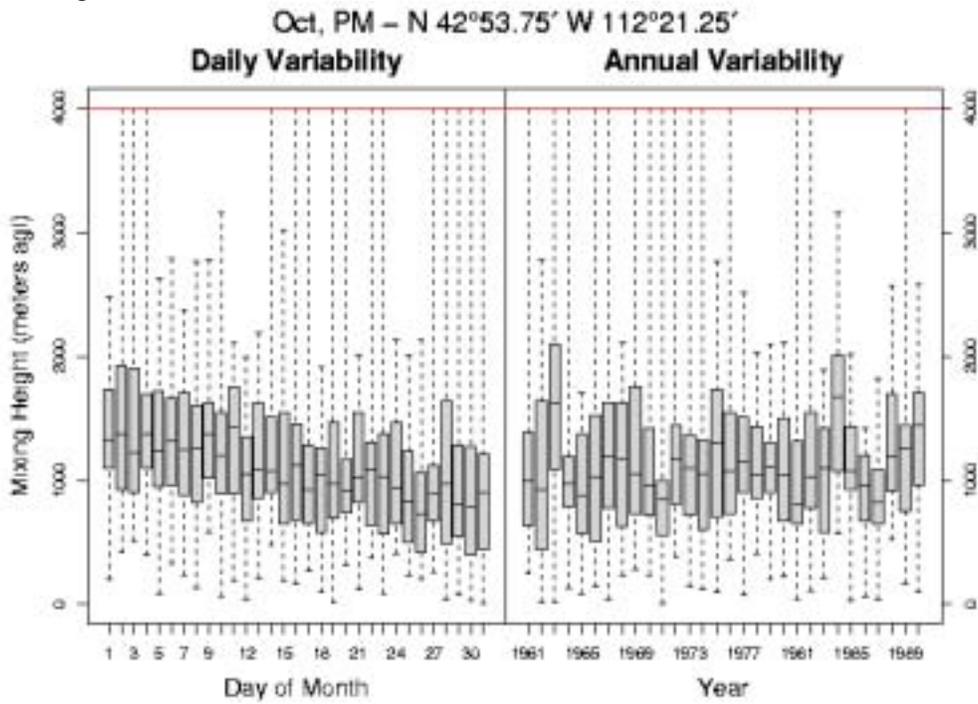
Figure 1. Surface winds for the Buckskin Project – spring and fall wind roses for morning and afternoon. Wind speeds are shown in meters per second (m/s); 1 m/s = 2.24 miles per hour.



Figures 2 and 3. Daily and Annual Variability in Afternoon Mixing Heights - April and October



Mixing heights during April afternoons is commonly between 1,000 and 3,000 meters above ground.



Mixing heights during October afternoons is commonly between 500 and 1,700 meters above ground.

4.1.2 Cultural/ Paleontological Resources

A cultural resources review was conducted by the Idaho Falls Field Office Archaeologist. No cultural properties have been recorded in the Buckskin Fuels Management Area.

Direct impacts to cultural resources could include the following:

1. Soil disturbance and compaction from on and off road vehicle traffic, vegetation removal and staging areas.
2. Loss and alteration of artifacts through heating. Fires used to remove brush and grass can generate high temperatures and affected the composition of stone tools, ceramic artifacts and perishable, organic materials.

Potential indirect effects on cultural resources include the following:

1. Archaeological and historical site integrity could be lost through post-fire re-vegetation activities. Wind and water erosion could be increased. Sites could be buried.
2. Archaeological and historical sites could be subjected to discovery, and unauthorized use through increased visitor traffic to fuel reduction areas.
3. If vegetation is completely removed from selected areas, archaeological sites could be more readily discovered and illegally collected and looted.

Class III, or intensive, cultural resource inventories would be completed prior to any surface disturbing activities. Standard Archaeological Survey of Idaho (ASI) inventory forms will be completed for each cultural property and submitted to the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Boise, Idaho. Cultural resource inventory reports will also be submitted to Idaho SHPO for review and comment. These reports will identify properties eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and determine the potential effects of a specific fuel reduction project. If direct impacts on NRHP properties cannot be avoided, appropriate mitigating measures would be developed, approved and implemented prior to authorizing any fuels reduction project.

4.1.3 Native American Concerns:

Scoping for this project included the Superintendent (BIA) of the Fort Hall Agency, Environmental Coordinator for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Archaeologist for the NW Band of the Shoshoni Nation. Subsequent follow-up coordination was conducted on January 15th, 2003. No Native American Concerns were identified during the coordination and scoping process.

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have ancestral rights to the uses of Public Lands. The relationship of the United States Government with American Indian tribes is based on legal agreements between sovereign nations. The Fort Bridger Treaty signed on July 3, 1868 provided for the establishment of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. It also granted hunting, fishing and gathering to tribal members on “all unoccupied lands of the United States”. This right applies to all public lands within the project area.

4.1.4 Wildlife including T&E Species

There are no listed or sensitive species found in the project area. The parcels of public land proposed for the work are small and don't have the vegetation and isolation that we'd expect to find supporting goshawks. For the most part, the habitat is typical dry Douglas-fir and aspen which supports a complex of common animals and birds such as deer, coyote, chickadees, juncos and robins.

4.1.5 Vegetation including T&E Plants

Overall, common plant species dominate the Buckskin project area. Mountain shrub and mountain sagebrush can be found in abundance within the area with lesser amounts of aspen and Douglas-fir. A small amount of Juniper and a few isolated riparian areas can also be found within the project area. Removal of encroaching Douglas-fir in aspen/maple stands would likely increase the species richness of the project area while reducing the potential of catastrophic fire. Removal of Utah juniper would have a similar affect in the sagebrush/grass communities. If not controlled, disturbances associated with the proposed treatment could also increase noxious and exotic weeds.

No special status plant species were found during field surveys of the Buckskin Project area, nor are they known to occur within the area. Therefore, the proposed project should not impact any special status plants or their habitat types. A complete list of the plant species encountered during surveys for special status plants is attached (Table 1).

4.1.6 Fisheries, Riparian Habitat and Water Quality

The West Fork of Pocatello Creek and South Fork of Rapid Creek are perennial watersheds. Rapid Creek is known to contain fisheries. No activities would be conducted within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA) as described in the Inland Native Fish Strategy Environmental Assessment (IN FISH-EA). The project area is characterized by steep terrain containing numerous secondary drainages which are hydrologically connected to leaving waters (SFK Pocatello Creek and WFK Rapid Creek). All project activities would conform to the State of Idaho Best Management Practices for Stream Protection Zones.

4.1.7 Livestock:

The majority (2,555 acres) of the Proposed Action lies within the Black Rock allotment, # 06097 and approximately 220 acres are within the China Peak allotment, which is no longer authorized for livestock grazing. One permittee (McNabb Farms) runs sheep in the allotment under a section 3 grazing permit. The grazing preference is 726 AUM's with a season of use of 4/16 to 6/04 for 2,454 sheep, (dates and numbers may vary from year to year).

According to the Pocatello Resource Management Plan (1988), of the allotments 11,141 acres of BLM land, 9,059 acres are in good condition with a static trend and 2,166 acres are in fair condition with a static trend. There are also 640 acres of State land and 4,630 acres of Private land in the allotment.

Management status is "T" (Improve), because the area is critical deer winter range, has soils that have a high potential for erosion and is highly susceptible to catastrophic wildfire.

The implementation of the Proposed Action will not only reduce the probability of catastrophic wildfire, it will have a positive affect upon the rangeland/livestock component of the treated area. This is because as a result of thinning a portion of the existing vegetation (Douglas-fir and Juniper), moisture that sustained that vegetation will be released to the remaining plants, therefore improving plant health, vigor and reproduction.

Traditional grazing patterns may be slightly affected if the implementation of the project coincides with the season of use by livestock. To minimize disruption to grazing, the permittee will be consulted in order to find ways to reduce the projects impact(s) to his sheep flocks.

4.1.8 Fuels

Crown fuel reduction, as proposed, would expose the residual fine fuels to increased solar radiation, which could be anticipated to lower fuel moisture content and promote production of additional fine fuels. This increase in fine fuels could increase the ignition potential and result in increased rates of spread (ROS) of any subsequent wildfires. Remaining fuels may also be exposed to intensified wind fields, accelerating both dessication and heat transfer which could result in increased energy release components (ERC). Prescribed burning will increase nutrient availability and further stimulate production of fuels with high surface to volume ratios which could result in an additional increase in fine fuel loading within the project area (Omi 2002).

4.1.9 Noxious/Invasive Weeds

The treatment area has various noxious/invasive weeds that have been identified within or adjacent to the project area. These weeds are: Spotted Knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), dyers woad (*Isatis tinctoria*), whitetop (*Cardaria draba*) and Canadian thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). All of these plants are on the Idaho Noxious weed list and are currently under treatment by either Bannock County, under an assistance agreement, or by the BLM.

During the implementation of this project, care would be taken to ensure that all equipment, trucks, ATVs, and other mechanized equipment would be cleaned after each entry into the site to reduce the potential for spread outside the work area.

After the project is completed, project monies would be allocated to treat and either eliminate or confine the above weeds to the project area. Treatment of these weeds can be done by either allowing the county to continue the existing treatment or by have BLM crews treat the weeds for a minimum of five (5) years after completion of the project.

4.2 Impacts of the “No Action” Alternative:

4.2.1 Air Resources

In the event of a stand replacement wildfire significant deterioration of air quality can be anticipated. Diurnal wind patterns could be expected to transport wildfire smoke directly into the community of Pocatello. A regional hospital and two long term elder care facilities are located adjacent to the mouth of the Pocatello Creek drainage. These facilities house numerous patients who can be anticipated to be adversely affected by significant quantities of wildfire smoke. In the absence of wildfire no adverse impacts are anticipated.

4.2.2 Livestock

The adoption of “No Action” Alternative would allow the heavy accumulation of vegetation to remain and continue to increase, elevating the areas susceptibility to and probability of wildfire. It is possible for very hot fires to severely damage rangeland vegetation and soils, negatively affecting the rangeland resource. In addition, if a stand replacing wildfire occurred in the area, livestock grazing would be not be allowed for at least two years to allow plants to recover from the fire. The grazing closure would have a negative economic effect on the permittee.

Dense stands of Douglas-fir, Juniper and Maples use large amounts of water to sustain themselves, water that would otherwise be available to rangeland plants and contribute to improving their health, vigor and reproduction. The selection of the “No Action” Alternative would have a negative affect because dense stands of Douglas-fir and Juniper would continue to use water that would otherwise be available to benefit more desirable rangeland plants. As a result, the Rangeland/Livestock resource would remain static at best and at worst, decline.

4.2.3 Wildlife including T & E Species

In the absence of wildfire no adverse impacts to wildlife are expected to result from a no-action alternative. Should a stand replacement wildfire occur, the wildlife species found after the fire would be greatly different from the current mix and would be animals associated with early seral condition.

4.2.4 Vegetation including T & E Species:

Douglas-fir would continue to encroach into aspen/maple stands, potentially lowering the species richness of the area over time. Utah junipers are also likely to increase in sagebrush areas causing a similar affect. In the absence of a stand replacing wildfire this alternative would not affect any special status plant species or their habitat types. Dependent upon environmental conditions present at the time of ignition, a wildfire could severely impact many of the species listed in Table 1.

4.2.5 Soils and Water Quality

In the absence of wildfire no changes to soils and water quality are expected to occur. Dependent upon environmental conditions present at the time of ignition, a wildfire could result in short term degradation of water quality. Loss of vegetation, particularly on the Ririe or Watercanyon soil series would lead to high erosion loss and lifetime scars.

4.2.6 Fuels

Under the “No Action” Alternative fuels would continue to accumulate until removed by human caused or naturally ignited wildfire. Dependent upon environmental conditions present at the time of ignition, a wildfire could result in severe fuel reductions and a significant degradation of the natural and human environment.

4.2.7 Noxious / Invasive Plants

With this alternative, there will continue to be noxious weeds within the treatment area, they will just remain confined to the area and any spread outside the proposed project area will be much slower than with any treatment of the area. In addition, money which is needed to treat the areas will be much reduced, thus, weeds within the area would continue to remain on site much longer than without the project.

4.2.8 Cultural Resources

No cultural properties have been recorded in the Buckskin Fuels Management Area. No direct, or indirect effects are anticipated under the No Action Alternative.

5. Cumulative Impacts:

5.1 Proposed Actions

No commercial timber sales or other fuels reduction type activities have occurred in the past within the project area. The proposed action is the first of its type within the project area. The predominant uses within the project area are recreation (primary), wildlife use and livestock grazing (minor). Past fire suppression standards have allowed tree and brush species to increase in numbers and density resulting in an increasing fire hazard. Implementation of the proposal will result in reduced fuel loadings in an area subject to extensive human habitation. This reduction of fuel loading is anticipated to reduce crown fire behavior resulting in more manageable wildfires and increased safety to the public and firefighters with minor impacts to air quality, soils, wildlife and grazing.

5.2 No Action Alternative

There would be no additional cumulative impacts with the no action alternative in the absence of wildfire. Should wildfire occur with the present fuel loading serious and unacceptable impacts may result.

6. Consultation and Coordination:

6.1 List of Preparers

Ray Brainard, Zone Forester, Upper Snake River District (PFO).
Cleve Davis, Botanist, Pocatello Field Office.
Nancy Fetterman, GIS Specialist (fire), Upper Snake River District.
Richard D. Hill, Archaeologist, Upper Snake River District
Sarah Heide, Fire Ecologist, Upper Snake River District (PFO).
Geoff Hogander, Wildlife Biologist, Pocatello Field Office.
Darwin Jeppesen, Soil Scientist, Upper Snake River District.
Rick Martin, Natural Resource Specialist, Pocatello Field Office.
Matt Rendace, Rangeland Management Specialist, Pocatello Field Office.
William Swann, Fire Use Specialist, Pocatello Field Office. Team Lead

6.2 Coordination

Gateway Interagency Fire Front (GIFF)
Shoshone Bannock Tribes
Idaho Fish and Game, Southeast Region
Idaho Department of Lands, Eastern Idaho Supervisory Area
Chubbuck Fire Department
US Fish and Wildlife Service, S.E Idaho Refuge Complex
US Forest Service, Caribou National Forest, West Zone
Bannock County Commissioners
Livestock Permittee

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