



Fact Sheet

For Release: NOT SCHEDULED

Questions and Answers on the Portneuf Fuels Project

The White House announced several projects today aimed at reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland-urban interface. The President made the announcement under the Healthy Forests Initiative, which he introduced last August. One such project is the Portneuf Fuels Reduction Project on the southern edge of Pocatello, Idaho. The BLM will take the lead on the project, which will include a mixture of BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and private land.

Q: What is the Healthy Forests Initiative?

A: The President announced the Healthy Forests Initiative in August 2002. The initiative focuses on hazardous fuels reduction and completion of environmental analyses. More information can be found on the White House's web site: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/healthyforests>

Q: How do fires affect the ecosystem?

A: Fire is a part of nature. In a healthy ecosystem, fires burn periodically to remove dead plants and promote healthy growth of natural grasses, shrubs and trees. In forests where all fires have been suppressed, a lack of fires can cause vegetation to build up unnaturally, adding larger amounts of *fuel* to fires than would otherwise occur. This can lead to other natural resource problems:

- Damage to fish habitat and watersheds caused by soil erosion.
- Soil sterilization, sometimes to depths of several inches, because the intense heat kills off beneficial organic material and microbes.
- Invasive species, including cheatgrass and noxious weeds that can choke out native plants and increase future fire severity.
- Air Quality concerns from large fires that increase particulates to dangerous, unhealthy levels.

By implementing this project, BLM and its partners hope to reduce some of the associated problems, in addition to better protecting local homes.

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Fact Sheet: Q&A on Portneuf Fuels Project

Q: What can we expect on the Portneuf Project?

A: The project is just south of Interstate 15 and straddles the Ft. Hall Mine Road. It will include about 6,064 acres of BLM land, 13,400 acres of USFS land, and a small amount of private land. The intention is to thin out overgrown stands of juniper to restore a healthy understory of grass and shrubs. By doing so, the participants hope to protect hundreds of homes in the Mink Creek area and increase the health of deer winter range. Some parts of the USFS land include stands of Douglas fir, some of which may be commercially thinned. The project area also includes a large recreational trails system for hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing.

BLM intends to treat the area on the west side of the Ft. Hall Mine Road with mechanical thinning, expanding a previous treatment area done in 1993. The area on the east side will be treated with a mixture of thinning and prescribed burning. The USFS project area, immediately adjacent to BLM land, will be treated through mechanical and prescribed burning treatments over the next few years. Another 1,200 acres of state land may be involved in the project as well. The agencies will also work with local private landowners to establish fuel breaks to help protect private property.

Q: How long will the environmental study take?

A: That's one of the things this pilot project will help answer. The normal environmental analysis process can take months or years, depending on concerns from the public or objections from interest groups. A team from the Department of the Interior will work on this project to see where efficiencies may be gained to shorten the process.

Q: Besides private landowners, who will you be talking to?

A: We have been talking also with local city and county officials, and with members of Idaho's Congressional delegation. We also hope to involve Tribal fire fighters from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in this project, in coordination with BLM and Forest Service crews. One BLM grazing allotment is located in the project area, and the permittees are being notified that prescribed burning may temporarily affect their grazing permits.

We also want to hear from you! Although the analysis is abbreviated, this is still a public process, and we would like to hear how the public feels about this project.

Q: How can I send in a comment, or get more information?

A: Please send your comments or questions to Bill Swann, BLM Pocatello Field Office, 1111 N. 8th Avenue, Pocatello, ID 83201. You can also call 478-6340 for more information.

