If Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative) is chosen, the risk of catastrophic wildfire occurring across the project area will increase with time. In the absence of fire, aspen, maple, and mountain shrub communities will continue to become decadent and die-off creating increased fuel loads. Little to no vegetative reproduction in these vegetation types will occur. Juniper and Douglas-fir trees will continue to expand their range into surrounding plant communities. When an ignition does occur, effects to the vegetation resource will likely be severe. Wildfire will be widespread and destructive, burning a large portion of the project area in a few days time and producing even-aged plant communities interspersed with patches of weeds. The root systems of sprouting species could be irreparably harmed due to lengthened residence time of fire. Re-establishment of mountain big sagebrush across burned areas could be problematic due to increased distances from seed sources.

If Alternative 2 is chosen and implemented, changes in the structure and productivity of the vegetation complex will occur. Treatments applied over the life of the project will create a mosaic of early, mid, and late seral plant communities across the landscape. Prescribed burning will improve the vigor and long-term sustainability of the herbaceous, aspen, maple, and mountain shrub communities by promoting vegetative reproduction (re-sprouting). These vegetation types will increase in size and distribution especially where encroaching conifers are removed. A temporary reduction in the canopy cover and density of mountain big sagebrush is expected. However, because the project area falls within an 18-20 inch precipitation zone and treatments will be conducted in a mosaic pattern leaving seed sources in tact, swift re-establishment of mountain big sagebrush into treatment areas is anticipated.