



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Manti-La Sal  
National Forest

Moab/Monticello Ranger District  
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File Code: 1950

Date: July 3, 2007

Dear Stakeholder,

The Moab/Monticello Ranger District of the Manti-La Sal National Forest proposes to mechanically thin vegetation within the Willow Basin wildland-urban interface (WUI), which directly poses a threat to private property and public and firefighter safety. The intent of this project is to reduce hazardous fuels in strategic locations on Forest Service lands which will help with subsequent suppression efforts to control wildfires that start within and outside treated areas.

The project area is approximately 1,725 acres (see Maps 1& 2), of which, about 1,000 acres of mechanical fuels treatment would occur (see Map 3). Mechanical thinning would be employed to breakup the fuel continuity and ladder fuels in the Gambel oak, pinyon-juniper and other mountain shrub communities that surround private lands and critical access routes that will be utilized by private residents, firefighters and suppression equipment. Crown separation would be created by thinning between individual trees, groups of trees, or groups of hardwood shrubs to provide a more open, savannah-like appearance with reduced crown and fuel continuity. Some small openings or meadow areas would be widened to restore/increase the opening size. This will create defensible shaded fuel breaks and natural appearing openings in the landscape.

Generally, large overstory ponderosa pine trees and large snags will not be cut, unless they are identified as hazard trees. Some smaller ponderosa pines (less than 9 inches DBH) may be cut (thinned from below) to reduce ladder fuels that would promote torching and crown fire potential. Follow-up of pile/jackpot burning would occur in the thinned areas. Periodic maintenance treatments of similar nature to reduce litter, breakup fuel continuity, and reduce fuel accumulation would be required in the future to maintain fuels at post-treatment levels. Future treatments would begin about 3 years after the initial mechanical treatment and then continue on intervals of approximately 3 to 7 years. Treatments would be implemented by service contract or force account (Forest Service) crew. No commercial timber harvest is proposed.

The following actions would occur:

1. About 1,000 acres would be mechanically thinned. Of this area, about 600 acres will be treated utilizing a rubber-tired tractor with a Fecon head attachment (bullhog – chipper/shredder). About 400 acres will be treated by hand (chainsaw). Gambel oak (<6” DBH), pinyon-juniper, and mountain shrub communities would be cut or masticated to reduce ladder fuels and decrease fuel vertical and horizontal continuity. The treatments in the ponderosa pine communities would focus on masticating or cutting the ladder fuels (shrubs) that are growing directly under and 10’ beyond the driplines of the pines. Small



groups or stands of ponderosa pine may be underburned to reduce surface and ladder fuels. In areas that are absent of overstory ponderosa pine trees, the shrubs would be cut or masticated leaving clumps that would be retained in openings, especially clones with larger diameter stems.

2. Bullhog treatment areas are limited to slopes where the machinery can be utilized safely and effectively (~ <25% slope).
3. Thinning treatments will follow Forest Plan recommendations for management of northern goshawk and Abert squirrel, as well as other standards and guidelines applicable to this area.
4. Existing roads (classified and open, unclassified roads) will be used and no new roads will be created.
5. Prescribed fire – Within the hand treatment areas, cut vegetation will be placed in piles that are at least 10' away from overstory trees. The piles will be burned when weather and fuel conditions are wet and cool enough so that fire creep (spread) is minimized. The piles will be burned in accordance to a site specific, valid burn plan.
6. As determined to be appropriate, design features will be incorporated that include Forest Plan standards and guidelines and best management practices in order to reduce the impacts of thinning and, other treatments to implement this fuel reduction treatment.

**PURPOSE AND NEED:** *Identify why this project needs to take place*

The purpose for this proposal is as follows:

1. Reduce the risk of stand-replacing crown fire within the wildland-urban interface around Willow Basin private in-holdings (WUI area) which includes approximately 25 private homes and primary access routes.
2. Reduce the risk from wildfire to life (fire fighters and residents).
3. Reduce the risk of damage to private property from wildfire.

The need for this project is to reduce existing live fuel loads, vertical and horizontal fuel continuity and ladder fuels within the Willow Basin WUI area. Inherent is the desire to provide a safe environment for both firefighters and residents in the Willow Basin private in-holdings.

Ponderosa pine stands with dense areas of closed canopy pinyon-juniper, Gambel oak and mountain shrub woodlands have proven susceptible to fast moving and intense fire due to live fuel layers (gamble oak and other shrub species) that have increased with lack of natural fire activity. The majority of this project is in an area where shrubs and ponderosa pine are common and representative of Fire Regime I and are in Condition Class 3; descriptive of an area of frequent historic fire return interval, with a significant departure from the historic condition, and a corresponding high risk of ecosystem damage as well as a serious risk to public safety attached to fires started or burning under extreme fuel and weather conditions. A risk of loss of key

ecosystem components and high risk of damage to private property or interior improvements exists in Condition Class 3 lands. Therefore a need has been identified to implement practices that will reduce fuel hazard and associated fire risk in order to protect life, property and associated values within the WUI area.

The expected outcome of this project would be to effect an immediate change in fire behavior, to reduce rate of spread and intensity, to maintain Condition Classes that support desirable fire behavior and that the wildland-urban interface within the project area would be less susceptible to excessive damage from wildfire. Also, firefighters, public and private users and developments adjacent to the project area would have a reduced risk of adverse affects from wildfire.

The Forest Service has made a preliminary assessment that this proposal falls within categories of actions listed in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of the categories (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31). Specifically, for fuel reduction treatments FSH 31.2, Category 10 – Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire, not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing, not to exceed 1,000 acres (Amendment No: 1909.15-2004-3).

#### **NOTICE & COMMENT:**

The Forest Service is seeking information and comments from Federal, State, and local agencies as well as individuals and organizations that may be interested in, or affected by the proposed action. The Forest Service invites written comments and suggestions on the issues related to the proposal and the area being analyzed. Information received will be used in the preparation of an environmental analysis as required under the National Environmental Policy Act and to determine if this project meets the criteria for Categorical Exclusion. A decision as to whether the project will be categorically excluded is expected to be made by September 2007.

This decision is anticipated to be subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Only those who submit timely comments during this comment period will be accepted as potential appellants. Each individual or representative from each organization, submitting comments must either sign the comments or otherwise verify identity in order to attain appeal eligibility. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, and will be available for public inspection. Comments should include the information required pursuant to 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3), as published in the Federal Register on June 4, 2003.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of the Legal Notice of Proposed Action in The Times-Independent, Moab, Utah. The publication date in the newspaper-of-record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. You should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Comments should include your name, address, telephone number, organization represented (if any), title of the proposal, and specific facts and supporting reasons for us to consider in the analysis.

The Responsible Official is Lee Johnson. Written comments must be submitted to Lee Johnson - District Ranger or Brenda Dale – Team Leader, Moab/Monticello Ranger District, PO Box 820, 432 East Center Street, Monticello, UT 84535. The office business hours are: 8:00 am – 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Officials office during normal business hours via telephone (435-587-2041) or in person; or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments. Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf) or Word (.doc) and should be e-mailed to [comments-intermtm-manti-lasal-moabmonticello](mailto:comments-intermtm-manti-lasal-moabmonticello) or [bdale@fs.fed.us](mailto:bdale@fs.fed.us). Faxed comments may be sent to 435-587-2637. Comments must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6. Only those who submit timely comments will be eligible to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215.

**A public meeting (open house) regarding this proposed project will be held at the new Moab Senior Center (182 west 500 north, Moab, Utah) on July 26, 2007 from 4:00-7:00 pm.**

If you have any questions regarding this proposal please contact Brenda Dale or Lee Johnson at 435-587-2041. Thank you for your interest and participation in the management of the Manti-La Sal National Forest

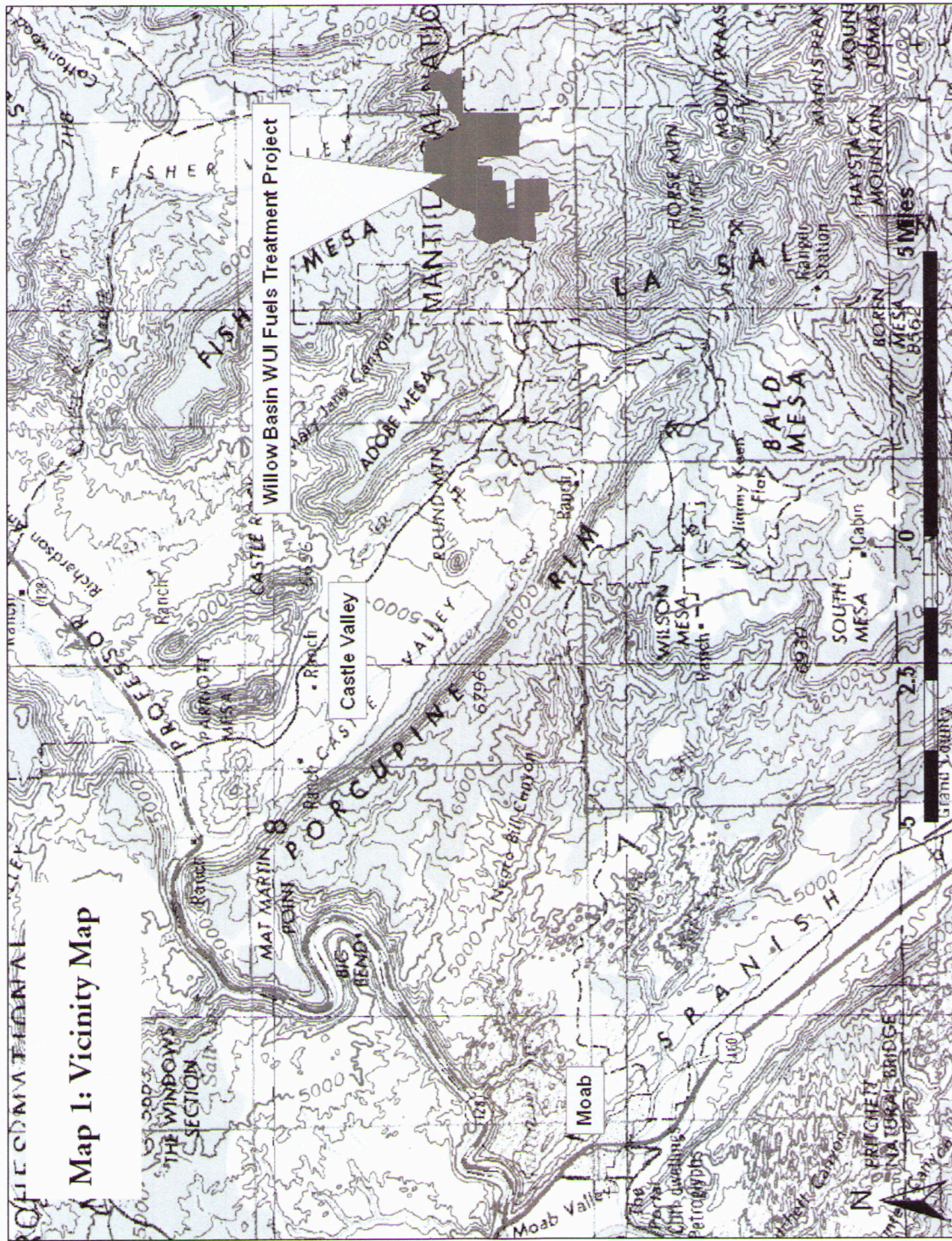
Sincerely,



LEE D. JOHNSON

District Ranger

Enclosures - 3



Map 1: Vicinity Map



