WILLOW BASIN WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE FUELS TREATMENT PROJECT
Manti-La Sal National Forest
Moab Ranger District

Proposed Actions:

The Moab/Monticello Ranger District on 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:

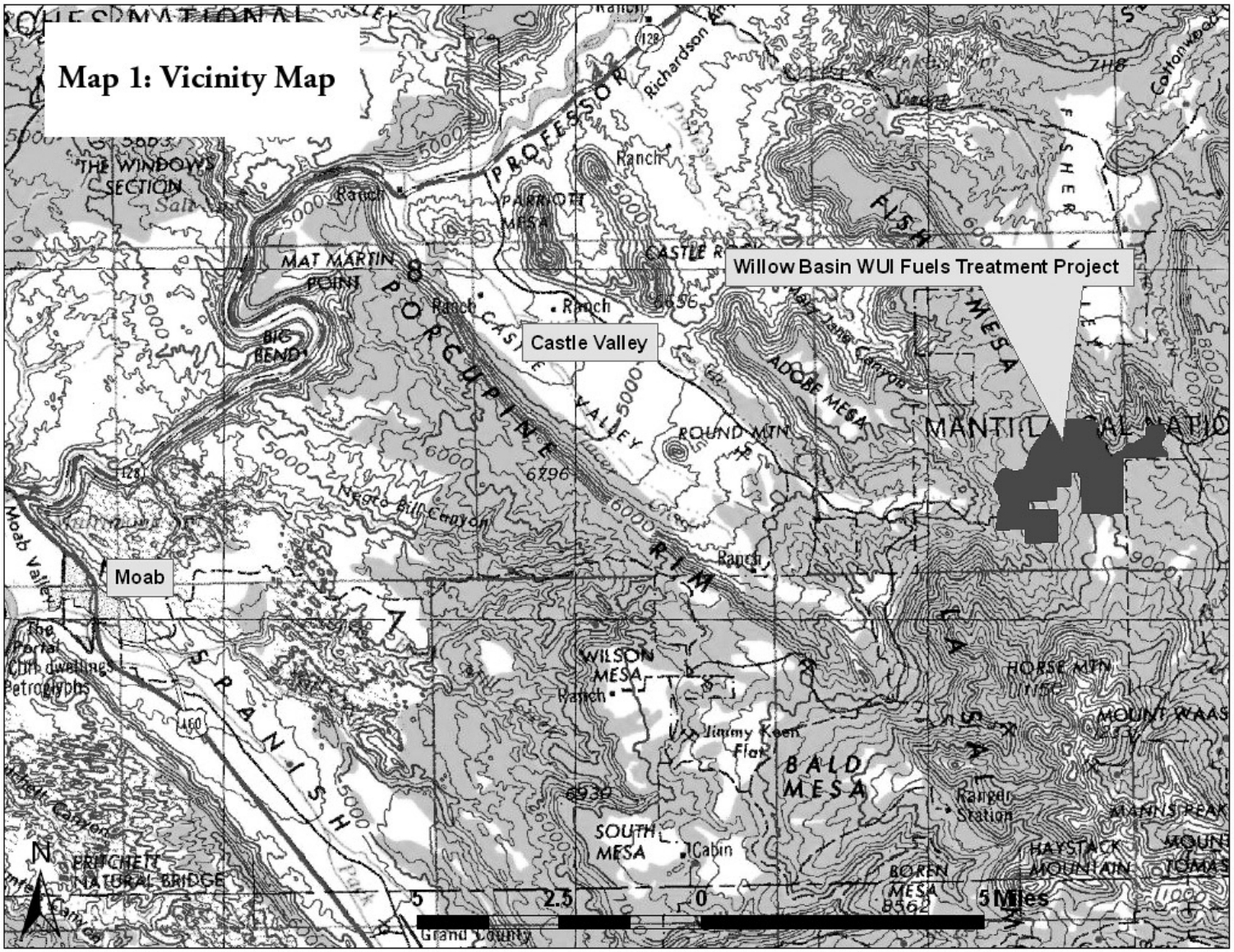
The purpose for this proposal is as follows:

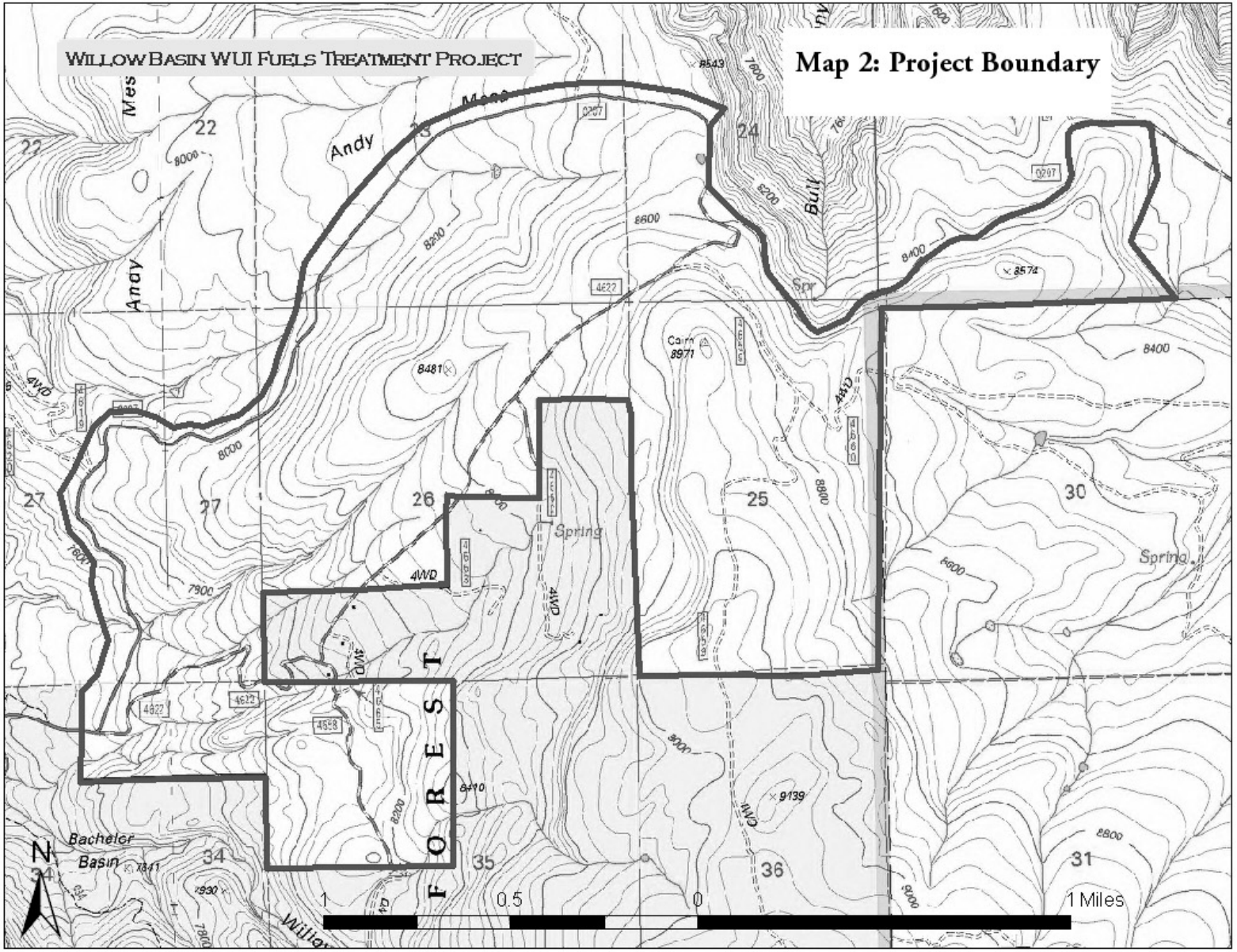
1. Reduce the risk of stand-replacing crown fire within the wildland-urban interface around Willow Basin private in-holdings (WUI area) which includes approximately 25 private homes and primary access routes.
2. Reduce the risk from wildfire to life (fire fighters and residents).
3. Reduce the risk of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

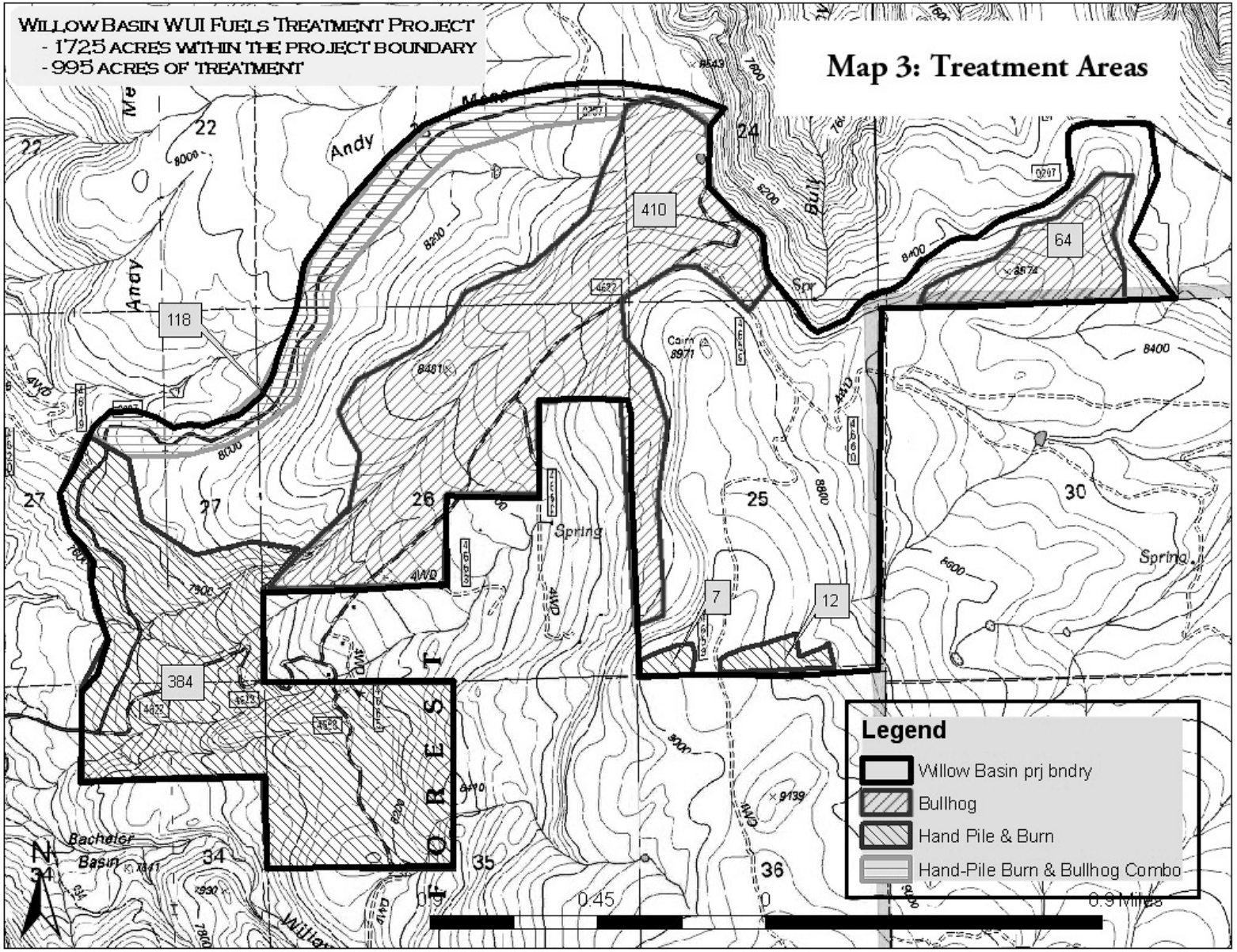
Need: The need for this project is to reduce existing live fuel loads, vertical and horizontal fuel continuity, and ladder fuels within the Willow Basin WUI area. Inherent is the desire to provide a safe environment for both firefighters and residents in the Willow Basin private in-holdings.

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.


Map 1: Vicinity Map
Willow Basin WUI Fuels Treatment Project
Castle Valley
Moab
THE WINDOWS SECTION
MAT MARTIN POINT
BIG BEND
PORCUPINE RIM
PROFESSOR
Richardson
PARIOTH MESA
CASTLE VALLEY
ROUND MTN
ADOBE MESA
MESA
MANTIL
Negro Bill Canyon
Moab Valley
The Portal
Cliff dwellings
Petroglyphs
SPANISH
WILSON MESA
Jimmy Keen Flat
BALD MESA
SOUTH MESA
Cabin
Ranger Station
HORSE MTN
MOUNT WAAS
MANNS PEAK
HAYSTACK MOUNTAIN
BOREN MESA
8562
FISHER
Cottonwood
PRITCHETT NATURAL BRIDGE
Grand County
N
5
2.5
0
5 Miles


WILLOW BASIN WUI FUELS TREATMENT PROJECT
Map 2: Project Boundary
Andy
Bull
Spring
Bachelor Basin
FOREST
N
1
0.5
0
1 Miles


WILLOW BASIN WUI FUELS TREATMENT PROJECT
- 1725 ACRES WITHIN THE PROJECT BOUNDARY
- 995 ACRES OF TREATMENT
Map 3: Treatment Areas
410
64
118
384
7
12
Legend
Willow Basin prj bndry
Bullhog
Hand Pile & Burn
Hand-Pile Burn & Bullhog Combo
0.45
0.9 Miles