

[poly] **Treatment/Project Area: Middle Fork/Williams**

Geographic Area

- bounded on west by Weminuche Valley (private), on north and east by Weminuche Wilderness, on south by East Fork of Piedra and private lands [see map];

Unique Characteristic(s)

- heavily used recreation area;
- high scenic qualities;
- moderate open road access;
- moderate closed road network;
- substantial roadless area;
- proximity and access to wilderness;

Management Challenges

- maintaining balance between the active management emphasis (timber/range) in one of the most heavily recreated areas on the Pagosa District;
- many closed system roads in fair to poor condition, needing reconstruction prior to any use;
- substantial area of roaded portion currently/incorrectly classified as "roadless";
- Fire Regime Condition Class 3 (high departure from reference conditions) in most warm-dry mixed conifer stands (and lower/adjacent ponderosa pine stands) – heavy fuel loading coupled with fire exclusion; generally FRCC 2 (moderate departure from reference conditions) in remaining w-d MC stands;
- forest health: spruce beetle epidemic; Douglas-fir epidemic; aspen decline;
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Management Emphasis/Desired Conditions

- current forest plan:
 - o timber mgt
 - o range mgt
 - o recreation, including wild/scenic river corridors (Middle & East Forks);
- proposed forest plan:
 - o active mgt (timber, range);
 - o natural landscapes/limited mgt;
 - o recreation.
- desired conditions:
 - o resilient forest conditions (bugs/crud at endemic levels; diversity in tree composition and size/age classes, etc...);
 - o reduced risk for wildfire in/near WUI;
 - o human-initiated disturbances mimic natural disturbances;

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Projects

- Approved
 - on-going range permitting (grazing, cattle)
 - Williams Divide Timber Sale:
 - status: sold in Sept, 2000; road reconstruction completed in '00-01; no other activity has taken place; sale expires in July 2012; Purchaser under bankruptcy proceedings;
 - acres = 1854;
 - treatment = restoration in warm-dry mixed conifer (mostly removal of white fir beneath ponderosa pine overstory; improvement cut in cool-moist mixed conifer, favoring Douglas-fir and spruce over white fir and aspen; also includes some group selection in c-m MC, favoring regeneration of D-f in groups averaging 2 acres in size;
 - [if includes Sally's Overlook & Ice Cave Ridge] Upper Piedra Fuels:
 - acres = 693;
 - treatment = restoration in w-d MC via mechanical or hand thinning of white fir and/or Doug-fir beneath PP overstories; also may include limited thinning of PP;
 - status: handthin units completed; mastication (or biofuels) units not implemented (waiting on roaded/roadless resolution);
- In planning
 - none

Resource Topics

- CWPP -- WUI in vicinity of reservoir, Palisade Lakes, Sportmans Supply and neighboring ranches; most prescribed burning would result in daytime smoke traveling away from residents; nighttime smoke would impact ranches and development area around Sportsman Supply;
- Vegetation types –
 - ponderosa pine, grading to mixed conifer (both phases) & aspen, then into spruce-fir;
 - significant white fir expansion – horizontally (area) and vertically (height, in stands) – in w-d MC;
 - suspect (needs ground truthing) past harvesting heavily weighted towards removal of high-value, large diameter Douglas-fir from mixed conifer stands; similarly, large/old ponderosa pine were removed from PP and w-d MC stands.
- Recreation –
 - area contains largest concentration of developed rec sites on District (Palisades, Cimarrona, Teal, Williams Ck, Bridges Campgrounds), plus Williams Ck Reservoir; plus several trailheads;
- Wildlife -- lynx habitat in cool/moist mixed conifer; key raptor nesting areas around Williams Ck Res (eagles, osprey); goshawks; migration corridors;

- Grazing – active allotments throughout;
- Watershed – highly erosive volcanics throughout, often leading to debris flows during monsoon seasons and resulting road or trailhead temporary blockages;
- Economic activity – rec use leads to cabin or site rentals on adjacent private; concessionaire mgt of campgrounds; outfitter guides; carryover to Pagosa Spgs/Archuleta County community from rec demand/use.

Opportunities

- prescribed burning smoke constraints not as great as when working closer to town of Pagosa Spgs;
- broaden Rx burning potential into roadless/wilderness;
- reset succession back to aspen (by cutting or removing conifers); [area reflects vigorous aspen response from disturbance]
- inventory road network and find road segments suitable for decommissioning;
- inventory and treat noxious weeds;
- biomass utilization of white fir in warm-dry mixed conifer stands;
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