

Treatment/Project Area: Upper San Juan

Geographic Area

- Bounded on the north by Weminuche Wilderness, the west by Fourmile Creek, the south by the town of Pagosa Springs, and the East by the East Fork of the San Juan River.

- Unique Characteristic(s)
- high scenic qualities;
- low levels of road access;
- fairly heavily used recreation area;
- fairly substantial roadless area;
- geographic area bisected by major highway (160);
- Area contains two of the largest private ranches on the district;
- Highly demand for blue spruce seed specific to this area;
- Contains East and West Fork of the San Juan;
- Intake for pipeline that provides water to town of Pagosa Springs originates in the West Fork of the San Juan, has been affected by the East Fork landslide, and if damaged by future slides, could affect half of the water source for the Pagosa area;

Management Challenges

- Vegetation management needed;
- Aspen decline is evident throughout geographic area, particularly on southwest facing aspects;
- Many stands in the area are 50/50 mix of conifers and aspen, which is problematic in sales;
- prescribed burning smoke constraints greater when working closer to town of Pagosa Springs as well as the highway 160 corridor;
- forest health: spruce beetle epidemic; Douglas-fir epidemic; in addition to aspen decline;
- private inholdings become problematic for prescribed burning particularly San Juan River Resort;
- Lack of road access, RX burning becomes only tool for vegetation management;
- Much of the area is in the Roadless Area (see map);

Management Emphasis/Desired Conditions

- current forest plan:
 - o timber mgt/wood fiber production and utilization;
 - o range mgt;
 - o recreation, including winterized sport sites, semi-primitive motorized and non-motorized recreation, and rural and roaded natural recreation opportunities;
- 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, aspen restoration);

- reduced risk for wildfire in/near WUI;
- human-initiated disturbances mimic natural disturbances;

Projects

- Approved
 - Little Jackson
 - Sold September 29, 2008 to Intermountain Resources, LLC;
 - Termination date March 31 2012;
 - acres = 861;
 - Treatment =ponderosa pine; create/enhance conditions that favor the establishment of a multi-cohort structure with clumps and openings resembling pre-settlement conditions;
 - Treatment=warm-dry mixed conifer; thin to improve overall forest health, emphasis on removal of post-settlement white fir;
 - Treatment=aspen and/or aspen/cool-moist mixed conifer cover type is to thin or patch-cut (coppice) to promote or maintain aspen dominance and health;
 - Second entry;
- In planning
 - West Fork Restoration
 - Finishing NEPA, tentative sign date of May 1 2011;
 - improvement cut, non-uniform spaced thinning to reduce overall stand density, reduce ladder fuels, and reduce the relative numbers of white fir, blue spruce and Douglas-fir trees in the understory while favoring larger ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and southwestern white pine WD MC that have began to develop CM MC characteristics due to fire exclusion;
 - Small patch cuts (up to 3 acres in size) will be created in the canopy to stimulate aspen suckering;
 - Acres=246;

Resource Topics

- CWPP – Mineral County is still working on their CWPP, not a large concern in our area for Mineral county, higher concern around Creede, CO;
- Fire History- based on slope and aspect; Fires in the West Fork valley area were fairly frequent as to maintain for aspen, pine and Douglas fir; In the Jackson Mtn area fires were fairly frequent, fire regime 1 and 2, with low intensity; Fuel loading has increased via insect outbreaks (i.e. budworm, beetles, and fir engravers);
- Vegetation types –
 - ponderosa pine, grading to mixed conifer (both phases) & aspen, then into spruce-fir;
 - aspen stands in a state of decline, with encroaching conifer, particularly on southwest slopes south of HWY 160 and East of HWY 84;
 - significant white fir expansion – horizontally (area) and vertically (height, in stands) – in w-d MC;

- 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 –
- Current Issues:
- Heavy summer recreation use along East and West Forks, with typical issues such as crowding, resource impacts to veg. and wildlife, trail impacts/conflicts;
- Lower elevations receive heavy big-game hunting pressure;
- Large network of non-system trails in Jackson Mtn area;
- West Fork/Turkey Creek primary Weminuche Wilderness access points; heavy summer/fall use at trailheads;

Projections/Potential Changes:

- Will conduct travel management analysis in greater Jackson Mtn area to address non-system trail issues, OHV opportunities;
- Possible expansion of Wolf Creek Ski Area onto SJNF;
- Interest in heli-skiing operation in Nipple Mtn/Treasure Mtn/Fall Creek vicinity;
- Beetle-kill may drastically affect FS ability to clear/maintain Wilderness trails, which will have implications on use, though exactly how is unclear (could focus use on certain passable trails, or could result in decreased visitation overall, or combination of both, e.g.);
- Wildlife -- lynx habitat in cool/moist mixed conifer , East Fork Goshawk nest, grazing allotments associated with Pagosa Sheep EA present (Treasure, Bonito Crater, portion of Sand Creek), major big game migration corridor, geographic area contains a pure strain of Colorado River cutthroat trout, recovery work for this species has been done in the area, many important fisheries including the West and East Fork of the San Juan are present;
- Grazing – active allotments throughout; Portions of several allotments, mostly satisfactory conditions, weed issues throughout area ;
- Contains two forage reserve areas (Treasure and Bonito Crater) that may be stocked on a temporary basis after further analysis in order to reduce risk to Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep on other Forests or Ranger Districts.
- Watershed – proposed wild and scenic rivers corridor, municipal watershed present, general erosion and sedimentation issues with certain soils particularly in the East Fork where mining occurred, landslides have occurred in the area;

Opportunities

- broaden Rx burning potential ;
- reset succession back to aspen (by cutting or removing conifers); [area reflects vigorous aspen response from disturbance];
- inventory and treat noxious weeds;
- biomass utilization of white fir in warm-dry mixed conifer stands possibly limited by access and roadless area;
- use RX burning as a tool to reduce erosion and sedimentation;
- An option for treatment is with managed fires for resource benefit;