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Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Dixie National Forest, Utah, Duck Creek Fuels Treatment Analysis

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to implement fuels treatments in the Duck Creek area, within the Cedar City Ranger District, Dixie National Forest, Utah. A Notice of Intent for this project was published in the **Federal Register** May 23, 2002. This Notice of Intent is a revision to change the dates of the EIS and minor corrections of acreages. The agency gives notice of the full environmental analysis and decision-making process that will occur on the proposal so that interested and affected people may become aware of how they can participate in the process and contribute to the final decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received within thirty days after publication of this Notice Of Intent in the **Federal Register**. The draft environmental impact statement is expected in September, 2003. The final environmental impact statement is expected in December, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to: Duck Creek Fuels Treatment Analysis Coordinator, Cedar City Ranger District, Dixie National Forest, 1789 Wedgewood, Cedar City, Utah 84720.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Duck Creek Fuels Treatment Analysis Coordinator, Cedar City Ranger District, Dixie National Forest, 1789 Wedgewood, P.O. Box 627, Cedar City, Utah 84720.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed treatments will implement direction in the National Fire Plan, a USDA/USDI effort to reduce impacts of wildfires on people and resources. In August, 2000 President Clinton directed the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to reduce the impacts of wildland fires on rural communities. The Secretaries subsequently developed the National Fire Plan. This direction was followed by congressionally-

approved plans that funded "hazardous fuel reduction" near urban interface areas.

The National Fire Plan directs Federal agencies within USDA/USDI to engage states and local communities in reducing forest fuels, using a variety of fuel reduction treatments (mechanical, prescribed fire and intensive manual treatment). Hazardous fuel reduction is a critical investment necessary to reduce fire risk and fire suppression costs into the future and is focused on areas near communities and interface areas that the States have judged to be in harm's way of a wildfire.

The analysis area of 25,741 acres of National Forest System lands is located thirty miles east of Cedar City, Utah. The analysis area includes six tracts of private lands which are surrounded by National Forest lands. The tracts are subdivided into residential lots and contain an estimated 1,900 homes and 10 businesses. The specific subdivisions are as follows:

Subdivision	Legal location (approximate) Salt Lake Base Meridian
1. Meadow View Heights.	T38S R7W Sec 6.
2. Mirror Lake	T38S R7W Sec 5, 8.
3. Movie Ranch	T38S R7W Sec 7.
4. Movie Ranch South.	T38S R7W Sec 7.
5. Color Country	T38S R7W Sec 8, 17.
6. Timber Trails	T38S R7W Sec 7, 17, 18.
7. Ponderosa Villa	T38S R7W Sec 16.
8. Strawberry Valley	T38S R7W Sec 20, 21.
9. Swains Creek	T38S R7W Sec 26, 2.
10. Blackman Hill	T38S R7W Sec 26, 27.
11. Harris Springs	T38S R7W Sec 26.
12. Swains Creek Pines.	T38S R7W Sec 33, 34.
13. Ponderosa Ranch	T38S R7W Sec 24; T38S R6W Sec 19.
14. Zion View Mtn Estates.	T38S R8W Sec 2.
15. Duck Creek Pines	T38S R7W Sec 7.

The private lands were designated an "urban interface community at risk from wildfires on National Forest lands" by the Chief of the Forest Service (**Federal Register** / Vol. 66, No. 160 / Friday, August 17, 2001 / Notices). This designation meant that Federal funds from the National Fire Plan could be spent to reduce fuels on National Forest lands adjacent to the private lands.

Historic prevention and suppression of wildfire has resulted in ever-increasing accumulations of forest fuels. These buildups of forest fuels increase the risk of high intensity fires to the National Forest and to large private

subdivisions within the forest boundary. The extensive development and high recreation use have also increased the threat of human-caused fires. A high intensity fire occurring within this area would cause significant damage to property and natural resources. Reducing the risk of wildfires in these areas would provide the best opportunity to protect National Forest lands and adjacent private properties. The Forest Service has determined that the fuels treatment objectives will be met without harvesting trees over nine inches in diameter.

Purpose and Need for Action. The purpose of this project is to modify existing, high fuel loads that influence fire behavior in National Forest lands adjacent to private lands in the Duck Creek area. There is a need to reduce minute, hour, ten-hour and hundred-hour fuels adjacent to private property and in the defensible fire space zone. There is a need to change the structure and composition of the fuels throughout the project area, especially in aspen-dominated sites. There is a need to change the characteristics of the residual trees by removing ladder fuels from the ground to eight feet high. Changing these fuels characteristics and reducing the fuel loads would help reduce the risk of property damage and allow sufficient time for firefighters to directly attack and control a wildfire before housing and other developments are threatened or destroyed. The fuel elements that need to be treated are as follows:

Element 1—Ground Fuels Reduction. Current fuel loads adjacent to private lands range from 20–50 tons per acre. The desired condition of the area immediately surrounding the subdivisions, Defensible Fire Space (DFS), is to have fuel loads reduced to 5–10 tons per acre, a level that would not sustain a high intensity wildfire.

The current fuel loads range from 20–50 tons per acre in the general forest area outside of the DFS. Reducing the fuel loads in the general forest area to 10–15 tons per acre would slow the spread of fire and would reduce the potential for a fire to spread into the crowns of the trees.

Element 2—Ladder Fuels Reduction. Lower branches and small trees currently extend from the ground upward, creating the ladder a fire would climb to reach higher crowns. Ladder fuels have increased dramatically as ponderosa pine trees with small crowns and few lower branches have been replaced by fir and spruce that have large crowns and branches extending to the ground. Fire suppression has also resulted in a dense understory of young