

trees that contribute to the fire ladder. The desired condition within the DFS is to effectively prevent a ground fire from climbing into upper tree crowns.

**Element 3—Retention of Fire Tolerant Species.** Aspen is naturally regenerated by wildfire, and therefore is considered a fire-tolerant species. Aspen stands within the watershed are being encroached upon by tree species such as spruce and fir, which are fire intolerant species. Stands with a high density of aspen act as natural firebreaks or areas where fire activity is slowed. Aspen is a short-lived species that requires disturbance in order to regenerate; without disturbance, these stands will eventually be taken over by conifers, eliminating the aspen from the area. Conifer encroachment increases fire susceptibility and fire behavior within these stands. Maintaining aspen stands would help slow the spread of fires that may occur. The desired condition is to regenerate and maintain aspen stands.

**Proposed Action:** The Forest Service proposes to treat fuels in timber stands located in Kane County, Utah, Salt Lake Base Meridian, T38S R8W, T38S R7W, T39S R8W, T39S R7W and T38S R6W. The specific fuels treatments are as follows:

1. **Defensible fire space treatments.** Establish a defensible fire space (DFS) in National Forest lands from 500'–2000' wide immediately surrounding private lands with subdivisions. The area to be treated in the DFS is approximately 2,724 acres. To reduce the risk of a wildfire reaching or spreading through tree crowns within the DFS, intensive fuels removal treatments will be conducted by cutting all conifer trees under nine inches in diameter and pruning limbs under eight feet high on conifer trees to reduce ladder fuels. Limbs, existing ground fuels and slash will be disposed of by piling/burning or chipping.

2. **Mixed conifer treatments.** Reduce fuel loads and favor the establishment of ponderosa pine on approximately 7,352 acres of mixed conifer stands in National Forest lands south and west of the private subdivisions. Mixed conifer stands have major components of ponderosa pine, white fir and Douglas-fir with minor components of subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce and Colorado blue spruce. Fuel loads will be reduced by cutting white fir, Douglas-fir, subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce and Colorado blue spruce trees under nine inches in diameter. Limbs, existing ground fuels and slash will be disposed of by piling/burning or chipping.

3. **Spruce/fir treatments.** Reduce fuel loads on approximately 947 acres of spruce/fir conifer stands in National

Forest lands south and west of the private subdivisions. Spruce/fir stands have major components of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir with minor components of ponderosa pine, Colorado blue spruce, Douglas-fir and white fir. Fuel loads will be reduced by cutting subalpine fir, white fir and Douglas-fir under nine inches in diameter. Engelmann spruce, Colorado blue spruce and ponderosa pine trees under nine inches in diameter will be retained in this area in order to maintain a spruce component into the future. Limbs, existing ground fuels and slash will be disposed of by piling/burning or chipping.

4. **Aspen treatments.** Regenerate and maintain stands dominated by aspen in approximately 2,366 acres of National Forest lands south and west of the private subdivisions by cutting Engelmann spruce, Colorado blue spruce, subalpine fir and white fir trees under nine inches in diameter and underburning fuels. Slash will be pulled away from mature (over 18" diameter) ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees to provide partial protection from prescribed fire. Aspen, a short-lived species that acts to slow the spread of wildfire, requires periodic disturbance to induce new growth. Underburning will result in stimulating and regenerating the aspen. A prescribed fire plan will be developed prior to underburning. The plan will outline appropriate burning conditions and fire control methods to be implemented to insure the prescribed fire is confined to the area to be treated.

Fuels and slash piling may be done by machine, except where Forest Plan standards for soils or slope dictate otherwise. Piles will be burned. The transportation system required to treat or remove fuels is in place. No new roads would be constructed with this project. Riparian areas along perennial streams would be protected with a 300-foot no-treatment buffer along the edges. Riparian areas along ephemeral streams would be thinned, but piling and burning would occur at least 50 feet away from the channel. No treatment would occur within 100 feet of springs in order to protect water sources, soils that are wet and sensitive to compaction, and riparian habitat. The project will be implemented in accordance with direction in the Dixie National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

**Possible Alternatives:** Three or more alternatives will be considered in the analysis.

No action. Under this alternative, the proposed fuels treatments will not be completed. The current forest fuels

conditions would not be substantially changed and natural processes would continue. This alternative will be fully evaluated and described.

**Proposed Action** (as described above).

**Additional Alternatives—**Additional alternatives may be developed in response to issues and resource conditions evaluated through the analysis.

**Responsible Official:** The responsible official for this EIS and the Record of Decision is: Robert A. Russell, Forest Supervisor, Dixie National Forest, 1789 Wedgewood, PO Box 627, Cedar City, Utah 84720–0627; FAX: (435) 865–3791.

**Nature of Decision To Be Made:** The Responsible Official will decide whether forest fuels treatment would be conducted to reduce risks from wildfires to the National Forest and to private lands held within the National Forest; and, if so, what extent and types of treatments should be done.

**Scoping Process:** Public participation was initiated through scoping in October, 2001. A scoping notice was sent to 2,796 individuals and organizations who are potentially affected parties and those currently on the Dixie National Forest mailing list that have expressed interest in natural resource projects. Two public meetings were held (October 27, November 1). Comments and issues were received in response to these public contacts.

Scoping will continue. Public participation is especially important during scoping and review of the draft EIS. Individuals, organizations, federal, state, and local agencies who are interested in or affected by the decision are invited to participate in the scoping process. This information will be used in the preparation of the draft EIS.

**Preliminary Issues.** The following issues were identified through public scoping and internal resource analyses:

1. The proposed fuels treatments would reduce travel corridors for big game (e.g. elk and deer) and birds and small mammals (e.g. turkey, grouse, red squirrels and flying squirrels) by substantially fragmenting habitat throughout the project area.

2. The proposed fuels treatments would remove understory trees and limbs, which are used by juvenile goshawks within nest areas and flammulated owls as roosting habitat.

3. The proposed fuels treatments would create openings in the forest and increase sight distance from the homes within the subdivision into the forest. This would change the visuals/aesthetics of the area by reducing or eliminating the "vegetative screening" that many residents value.