FINAL

Recommendations for Consideration in Preparing the
UPPER NORTH FORK FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT
Salmon-Challis National Forest

October 24, 2010

This memo is intended to provide recommendations from the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group (Collaborative) to the Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) as they begin analysis and prepare a proposed action for the Upper North Fork Forest Restoration Project. Our collaborative group realizes that this is an iterative process, and that as the SCNF undergoes the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process, and develops options for activities and treatments, the group will have additional opportunities to further contribute to the project.

The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group has reached consensus on the following for the Upper North Fork Forest Restoration project:

Purpose and Need

Purpose*:* The primary purpose for the Upper North Fork Forest Restoration project is to reduce hazardous fuels, restore plant communities, and improve habitat diversity for fish and wildlife.

Need: Existing forest stand structure and forest vegetation have created the potential for large-scale, high-intensity wildfires that threaten human life, property, and natural resources. Quaking aspen stands provide substantial habitat value for wildlife and contribute to landscape habitat diversity. However, many historic aspen stands in Central Idaho have been lost, and many others are either regenerating poorly or are otherwise in decline. Likewise, whitebark pine is being considered as the first tree species in the Northwest to be listed as endangered because of a lethal combination of blister rust and mountain pine beetle. Historic logging practices and fire suppression have contributed to a decline in ponderosa pine, known to be more fire resilient. In essence, the rich biodiversity in the project area is at risk.

Project Objectives

The group understands that the proposed project will be shaped largely by availability of appropriated funds and revenue generated by commercial activity. With such considerations in mind, the group has identified the following project objectives:

- Create a resilient forest and vegetative structure (fuel profile) immediately around private property, travel routes and other community values that will not sustain crown fire or flame lengths greater than those that can be suppressed by hand crews. Establish strategic fuel breaks and safe areas for communities and values at risk and improve firefighter safety.
- Modify fuel loads and forest conditions to restore ecological integrity and function, especially in regard to natural fire regimes.
- In the dry forest ecosystems, the desired future condition will be a more open forest structure/stand composition, dominated by large diameter ponderosa pine and to a lesser degree large diameter Douglas-fir. Understory vegetation will consist of mostly native herbaceous plants, including naturally regenerated shrubs and scattered ponderosa pine seedlings and saplings. This could be accomplished through commercial and non-commercial thinning and/or prescribed burning. Insect and disease impacts and trends should be considered when designing treatments.

- In the cold forest ecosystems, the desired future condition will be a more diverse forest structure/stand composition dominated by lodgepole pine. This ecosystem should be comprised of stands of different age classes, producing a diverse range of tree species, sizes and stocking densities. Whitebark pine should be one of the primary overstory trees in the higher elevations. This could be accomplished through commercial and non-commercial thinning and/or prescribed burning. Insect and disease impacts and trends should be considered when designing treatments.
- Existing roads will be used for access to treatment areas wherever feasible.
- In Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), the collaborative recommends developing two alternatives for analysis:
    1. Analyze the use of temporary roads within the community protection zone (CPZ) in order to achieve management objectives. This would include creating a strategic fuel break inside the Anderson Mountain IRA within approximately one half mile of private property by constructing a temporary road system.
    2. Analyze all fuel reduction and forest restoration opportunities that could be accomplished without building temporary roads in IRAs.
- De-classify or de-commission roads where duplicate routes exist, the need for the route is no longer valid, no historic public access exists and/or resource damage or impairment is present.
- Initiate a landscape approach to scenery management that provides a framework for the orderly inventory, analysis, and management of visual and scenic values.
- Design appropriate restoration and preservation treatments for quaking aspen and whitebark pine stands, as well as high elevation meadows.
- Minimize vulnerability to uncharacteristic fire intensities in riparian and old growth areas and help restore natural ecological function to those areas. Treatment within old growth stands and aspen clones may be acceptable where such treatments will clearly maintain or enhance the natural function and characteristics of these communities.
- Assess and treat old growth stands if such treatments are warranted to move the stand toward a state that resembles old growth characteristics as described by Hamilton, (Hamilton, Ronald G. 1993. Characteristics of old-growth forests in the Intermountain Region, USDA, USFS).
- Contain existing invasive species occurrence and incorporate the four key elements of invasive species management in project planning and implementation (prevention, early detection and response, control existing infestations and reestablishment of desired plant communities).
- Ensure that vegetation treatments retain sufficient habitat connectivity to support wildlife security, local movement and regional migration patterns.
- Enhance recreational settings, and improve travel routes and interpretive opportunities for recreation.
- Indentify and implement interpretive and educational opportunities within the project highlighting forest restoration and health.

Standards and Methods

Standards: The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group believes that the following basic principles should apply to every collaborative project including the Upper North Fork Project:

1. Monitoring and documentation of project results
    a. Tell the story so successes can be replicated, mistakes avoided

b. Specifically highlight wildlife, tree and plant habitat enhancements
c. Establish independent, multiparty monitoring within the project area

2. Economic development
   a. Identify opportunities for material utilization
   b. Encourage local economic development through utilization and restoration jobs
   c. Use stewardship contracting and agreements, and best value contracting tools

Methods: The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group endorses an emphasis on long term prescriptive treatments that will maintain desired conditions and allow for sustainable forest health. The following methods are important tools to achieve and maintain the desired results for the Upper North Fork Project:

- Mechanical thinning along major ingress/egress routes, such as Highway 93 North, in consideration of WUI and the CPZ according to Lemhi County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- Commercial and non-commercial harvest in order to meet forest restoration and fuel reduction objectives.
- Prescribed burn treatments and implementation throughout the project area (approximately 41,000 acres) understanding that maintenance of these treatments (multiple entries) may be necessary.

Areas of consensus for the Upper North Fork Project

- An "all lands" approach will be taken with regard to project objectives. Collaborative members agree to help coordinate activities and assist with fundraising for non-National Forest, as well as National Forest lands. The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group agrees that this project should be submitted as part of a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program project.
- No commercial harvest will occur in designated old growth areas.
- Permanent road construction could be acceptable along the proposed shaded fuel break above Lost Trail Ski Area to achieve project objectives. This corridor was constructed originally during the 2000 fires. If maintained, it would provide for a strategic fuel break for wildland fire as well as a safety route for fire fighters. It would also enhance scenic and recreational values while providing access for restoration treatments. The environmental analysis should also include an alternative without permanent road construction for comparison.
- Temporary road construction is acceptable if it provides the only means to achieve desired project results.
- Any commercial harvest in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) would be tied to aspen regeneration objectives or other vital habitat improvements.
- Commercial harvest may be acceptable in portions of IRAs in order to meet specific fuel reduction objectives that cannot be accomplished otherwise.
- Treatments along transportation corridors and other community assets (e.g. private property and special use areas such as Lost Trail Ski Area) will be designed to meet community protection needs as the highest priority and forest restoration objectives when feasible.
- The SCNF will analyze potential environmental effects using the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and applicable sections of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The SCNF will coordinate planning and treatment activities with adjacent land management agencies and private land owners whenever possible.

We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the SCNF on this important project and look forward to continue working together as this project advances.