

II. Management Issues

This document provides an initial Vegetation Management Strategy for selected vegetative communities in the Ironhorse Analysis Area (IAA). Prior to developing the vegetation management actions, several goals were established. Several of the goals are identical to the overall goals of UP Project Plan (2003), and others are more specific to the IAA.

A. Issues

The plant communities in the IAA have been disturbed and altered by a combination of past land use practices, natural succession and fire exclusion. As a result of these alterations, there is reduced plant community function in its primary plant communities. There are also forest stand conditions that create the potential for stand replacing wildfires and increased insect and disease activity. Invasive plant species occur in and around the area, and there is a threat of invasive plant species colonizing and spreading following a large disturbance. These vegetative conditions threaten homes and property in the area, wildlife habitat and the populations that depend upon that habitat, and the societal expectations for goods and services from that landscape.

While helpful in the short-term, the long-term solution is not simply more fire suppression and weed control treatment. The long-term solution suggests operational landscape restoration. For the purposes of the IAA, restoration is defined as: a set of actions that promotes plant community diversity and structure that allows plant communities to be more resilient to disturbances and invasive species over the long-term.

B. Priorities

1. Provide for public and firefighter safety.
2. Protect residences, private property and powerlines located in the WUI.
3. Protect, to the extent practicable, the current forest, woodland, rangeland and riparian communities from severe and extensive wildfire and insect and disease disturbance.
4. Restore the forest, woodland, rangeland and riparian communities to a closer approximation of their historic range of variability (HRV) to enhance their resiliency and maintain ecological integrity.

C. Landscape Objectives

1. Reduce disruption to residents and users.

- a. Prevent loss of property and life.
 - b. Reduce future firefighting and rehabilitation costs.
2. Restore biodiversity and ecosystem function.
 3. Protect ponderosa pine and its dependant species. Ponderosa pine is an at-risk species for potential stand replacing wildfire events and/or in combination with an insect and disease outbreak.
 4. Protect sagebrush and its dependant species. Sagebrush communities are an at-risk species for potential stand replacing wildfire events.
 5. Return the area to more normal fire intervals and fuel loading.
 6. Slow the spread of invasive weeds.
 7. Promote economic stability that supports the landscape objectives.

D. Goals

Ecosystem Health and Resiliency:

1. Promote ecosystem health and conservation using a collaborative approach.
2. Restore the landscape and vegetation as a whole so that managed and natural processes are sustainable for the benefit of people and the ecosystem.
3. Restore the diversity (species and age classes) and the quality/productivity of native plant and animal communities.
4. Change the distribution of plant age classes to match a more natural distribution and to increase resiliency to insects, disease, drought, and fire.
5. Improve watershed health and water quality.
6. Improve habitat quality for many wildlife species.
7. Improve the distribution and quality of big game winter range.
8. Improve the quality of sage grouse habitat.
9. Improve the quality of Abert's squirrel habitat.

Socioeconomic Benefits:

1. Provide a variety of uses, values, products, and services by managing within the capability of sustainable ecosystems.
2. Improve the capability of the forest, woodland and rangeland to provide desired sustainable levels of uses, values, products, and services.

Agency Benefits:

1. Develop new or hybrid data and spatial analysis applications for use in decision support for management of public (BLM and USFS) and adjacent private lands where appropriate, utilizing current software and data sets.
2. In the absence of unambiguous documentation regarding past landscape conditions, develop a working hypothesis of the HRV of the major cover types and mosaic drivers for use in comparison with the existing vegetative cover condition.
3. Document departures and identify trends, implications and recommendations.
4. Support the National Fire Plan.
 - Develop spatial analysis techniques and methodologies to identify wildfire threats on public land to reduce the risk to public safety and property beginning in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The methodology will consider fire regime and condition class. Site-specific application will include consideration of fuel type, slope, aspect, prevailing wind direction, previous fire starts and proximity to residences, structures, municipal watersheds, and powerlines and exposed utilities. Apply, validate and document this methodology for further refinement and application on other watershed analysis areas.
 - Make recommendations on the use of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to modify fire behavior in the identified risk areas and areas with significant departures in historical fire frequency. Make recommendations to modify fire behavior in these areas by reducing fuel availability and continuity as a means of reducing fire intensity, rates of spread and enhancing suppression capability.