



File Code: 2400; 3400
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Date: MAY 04 2018

Subject: Request for Additional Insect and Disease Treatment Areas for the Boise National Forest

To: Leslie Weldon, Deputy Chief, National Forest System

Region Four is requesting additional designations of landscape-scale areas on the Boise National Forest to address insect or disease threats under Section 602 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6591a), as added by section 8204 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the 2014 Farm Bill.

In March 2014, the Idaho Governor requested and received initial designation of 50 proposed treatment areas, covering approximately 1,815,864 acres across the Boise, Caribou-Targhee, Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Salmon-Challis and Sawtooth NFs. The Boise NF designated approximately 161,868 acres in 2014. These initial areas were proposed for designation because they met the criteria for designation and they covered areas already proposed for restoration activities/projects on the Forest.

Federal forests cover over 20 million acres in Idaho, representing about 75 percent of the forested landscape and 38 percent of the entire State. Approximately 12.6 million acres of federal forest land is identified as suitable for some level of management. Of the suitable land base, 8.84 million acres (70 percent of the suitable land base) is at high risk of mortality and fire as defined by the criteria in the 2014 Farm Bill. The magnitude of the issue in Idaho requires action.

The initial designation of 1.8 million acres represented a modest effort to begin addressing the forest health issues across the entire landscape of the National Forest System in Idaho. Since the initial designations, other forests in Idaho – such as the Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater and Payette – have taken steps to review and request additional designation opportunities. These follow-up requests resulted in 3 plus million additional acres in Idaho being designated as part of the national insect and disease treatment program. The Boise NF has conducted a more thorough evaluation of the insect and disease issues across the Forest and is requesting additional designations as described.

Forest's Experience with HFRA/Farm Bill authorities to Date

On the Boise NF, two Farm Bill/Insect & Disease (I&D) CE projects are currently being implemented. Five additional I&D CE projects were initiated in April 2018 with decisions anticipated in the 1st and 2nd quarters of FY2019. A Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) Environmental Assessment (EA) is also in the analysis phase with a decision anticipated in the 4th quarter of FY2018. Finally, a project in one of the initially designated areas is in the early development stages and likely to use the HFRA EA/EIS provisions if scoping can begin before



September 30, 2018. Completion of these projects will accomplish treatment in nearly all of the initially designated areas.

The Boise NF is committed to active restoration using tools available under the Farm Bill. Their initial success with existing projects and commitment moving forward with partners and the community serves as a strong foundation for success in restoring our forested lands. Designation of additional areas on a landscape-scale will be an integral part of their efforts to focus restoration work and add additional capacity to the vegetation restoration actions on the Forest. It will also allow the Forest to more efficiently and effectively utilize other implementation tools, such as stewardship contracting and Good Neighbor Authority.

Coordination with the Boise Forest Coalition

On April 5, 2018, the Boise NF presented information about opportunities for additional I&D designations to the Boise Forest Coalition (BFC). The Forest did not specifically identify areas to designate, but rather displayed information about areas that met at least one of the three criteria for designation. The Forest clarified that no wilderness, wilderness study areas, research natural areas or wild and scenic river corridors were being proposed for designation. The Forest was also transparent about considering areas in inventoried roadless areas and also clarified that while roadless acres may be designated, this did not imply that all acres within a roadless area would be treated and any proposed treatments would have to comply with the Idaho Roadless Rule.

Feedback from the BFC was mixed, with some supporting designation of maximum acres and others questioning the need for any additional designations, especially any designations in roadless. Because of the timeline for moving this designation request forward, the BFC did not feel there was adequate time for them to provide a more detailed response. Based on this feedback, the Forest opted to constrain the number of roadless acres being requested to those in the backcountry/restoration management classification – as described below.

Description of Areas Requested for Designation

All additional proposed areas/acres meet one or more of the criteria outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill. These areas are experiencing declining forest health based on annual surveys; are at risk of substantially increased tree mortality over the next 15 years due to insect or disease infestation, based on the National Insect and Disease Risk Map; and/or contain hazard trees that pose an imminent risk to public infrastructure, health and safety. After consultation with Forest staff, entomologists, pathologists and the local coalition group, the Forest identified acres where there are additional opportunities for designation. No projects are currently proposed in these areas but they will be considered during development of the Forest's 3-5 year program of work.

The total number of acres requested for designation is 803,898 acres (see Map A, B, C). A total of 625,851 acres requested for designation are located in the roaded front country and only include management areas where active vegetation management for restoration and maintenance is permitted in the Forest Plan (MPC 4.2; 5.1; and 6.1). A total of 178,047 acres of the proposed designation are located in Idaho Roadless Area designations with a backcountry/ restoration management classification, which also allows for vegetation management under limited conditions and as approved by the responsible official or regional forester (This comprises only 16 percent of all roadless acres on the Forest.). The backcountry/restoration roadless areas being requested for designation are adjacent to non-roadless areas being requested for designation, in

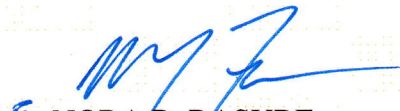
or close proximity to wildland urban interface/community protection zones (see Map C), already have roaded access, and/or are suitable for non-timber harvest treatment options (e.g. prescribed burning, hand thinning). Areas excluded from consideration include designated wilderness areas, recommended wilderness, wilderness study areas, research natural areas, wild & scenic river corridors and all roadless areas outside of the backcountry/restoration management classification, as well as some backcountry/restoration areas.

Areas within these landscapes are experiencing increased bark beetle activity, root disease and tree mortality and are subsequently increasing the potential for uncharacteristic wildfires, as have been experienced in recent fire seasons on the Forest. Map B includes information from the Insect & Disease Risk Map (IDRM). The Forest Silviculturist and local Forest Health Protection staff indicate that basal area loss is likely higher than depicted on the IDRMs based on observations on the ground. The IDRMs models tend to underestimate mortality in these drier ecosystem types and do not account for all insect and disease related disturbances observed to be occurring.

For the reasons above, I am recommending these additional areas be included for designation under the 2014 Farm Bill.

For additional/clarifying information please contact Mike Dudley, Director State and Private Forestry, at 801-625-5253 or mdudley@fs.fed.us or Tera Little, Boise NF Forest Planner at (208) 373-4157 or teralittle@fs.fed.us.

The shapefiles associated with this request can be found on the T: at the location specified below or [here](#). If you have questions about the shapefiles or need additional data, please contact Steve Kovach, Boise NF GIS Database Manager at (208) 373-4203 or sdkovach@fs.fed.us.


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Regional Forester

Enclosures

cc: D. Gwaze, L.Chappell, D.Rosenkrance, K.Lee

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