



FEMA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Highlands Estates Wildfire Mitigation Project
Adams County, Idaho
FEMA-LPDM-PJ-10-ID-2008-001

The Adams County Emergency Management Department applied to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Legislative Pre-Disaster Mitigation (L-PDM) program for funding assistance with a wildfire fuel load reduction project in Central Idaho. The Highlands Estates Wildfire Mitigation project will reduce risk from fire to people and property on 200 acres of Adams County's wildland/urban interface.

Wildland fire suppression and timber harvesting have altered the natural plant community succession and have resulted in dramatic shifts in the fire regimes and species composition. As a result, forests and rangelands in Adams County have become more susceptible to large-scale, high-intensity fires posing a threat to life, property, and natural resources including wildlife and special status plant populations and habitats. High-intensity, stand-replacing fires also have the potential to seriously damage soils and native vegetation. Highlands Estates is considered to be a high-risk area for fire within Adams County. This high risk is created by a high fuel load within and outside of subdivision boundaries; remote locations of residential structures for fire suppression responses; steep terrain, where all 16 residences average at least 10 percent slopes; and a location adjacent to U.S. Forest Service property with either ineffective or nonexistent structural fire suppression.

The need for this action is to reduce or eliminate the risk to people and to property from wildfires in Adams County, particularly the Highland Estates area. From this need, Adams County identified the preferred alternative (vegetative fuel management and removal) as a high priority in the Adams County All Hazard Mitigation Plan.

The Proposed Action would remove excessive vegetation through hand thinning, pruning, limbing, sawing, or brush cutting by private contractors on approximately 200 acres of privately-owned lands. The geographic area targeted for wildfire vegetation management is the Highlands Estates subdivision, located approximately 4 miles northwest of New Meadows, ID. The vegetation to be removed would be mainly brush, with limited amounts of small trees (red fir and bull pine) less than 12 inches in diameter. Vegetation removal would occur around the perimeter of and within the subdivision. The existing infrastructure would be used to remove any vegetative debris. The debris from these activities would be chipped and mulched for homeowner use, or otherwise disposed of in a permitted facility. Large debris may be used as firewood, and chips would be used by homeowners as mulch. No burning would occur.

The local homeowner's association and property owners would maintain the work, and an Adams County forester would inspect the properties for compliance. The county has passed an ordinance stating that all new subdivisions must take into consideration any unique environmental features or hazardous concerns associated with the subject property, such as areas that have been designated by the State or county as areas of critical environmental concern, including fire susceptibility.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and FEMA's implementation regulations, FEMA prepared a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to identify and evaluate potential environmental impacts resulting from the alternatives presented in the EA and to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impacts Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Alternatives evaluated in the EA include: 1) reduction and management of fuel loads through manual means in the Highlands Estates subdivision (Preferred Alternative) and 2) No Action. Other alternatives were considered but not carried forth and are described in the EA. The Draft EA was submitted for public review and comment on May 7, 2009. FEMA did not receive substantive comments on the Draft EA.

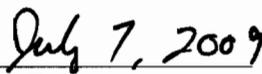
FINDINGS

Based upon the attached Mitigation and Conservation Measures and Final EA, and in accordance with FEMA's regulations in 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 10 for environmental consideration, including Executive Orders (EO) addressing floodplains (EO 11988), wetlands (EO 11990), and environmental justice (EO 12898), FEMA determined the proposed project will not significantly affect the quality of the natural and human environment. As a result of this FONSI, an EIS will not be prepared (44 CFR Part 10.8) and the project as described in the attached Final EA may proceed.

APPROVAL



Mark G. Eberlein
Regional Environmental Officer
FEMA Region X



Date

Attachment A:

MITIGATION AND CONSERVATION MEASURES

Mitigation and conservation measures refer to actions that would minimize or eliminate potential adverse environmental impacts that could result from the Proposed Action. Measures include:

- The applicant shall obtain all required local, State, and Federal permits and approvals prior to implementing the Proposed Action Alternative and comply with any and all conditions imposed.
- The applicant is responsible for selecting, implementing, monitoring, and maintaining best management practices to control erosion and sediment, reduce spills and pollution, and provide habitat protection.
- Any change to the approved scope of work will require re-evaluation for compliance with NEPA and other laws and Executive Orders.
- In the event that archaeological or historic materials are discovered during project activities, work in the immediate vicinity should be discontinued, the area secured, and the State and FEMA notified.
- In the event that Canada lynx or northern Idaho ground squirrels are discovered during project activities, work in the immediate vicinity would be discontinued and FEMA, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be notified.
- In the event that puzzling halimolobos are found in the project area, contractors shall avoid vegetation clearing in the immediate vicinity of the plant.
- Established roads and driveways should be utilized as much as possible for all project traffic.
- Avoid crossing meadows with vehicles that may cause burrow disturbance. If meadows must be traversed with vehicles, machinery or heavy loads, a single path for traffic should be utilized to minimize disturbance.