Draft Environmental Assessment

Highlands Estates Wildfire Mitigation Project

Adams County, Idaho, Emergency Management Department

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Area of Potential Effect – the geographic area or areas within which an undertaking may cause changes in the character or use of historic properties, if such properties exist. The area of potential effects is influenced by the scale and nature of the undertaking.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) – innovative environmental protection practices applied to help ensure that projects are conducted in an environmentally responsible manner.

Fuels Reduction – removal of excess fuels through: thinning, limbing, or other methods, to reduce the potential for severe wildfires.

Limbing – removal of large tree limbs to reduce fuel load and the potential for crown fires.

Suppression – a response to wildland fire that results in curtailment of fire spread and elimination of all identified threats from the fire.

Thinning – removal of trees, branches, or shrubs to reduce fuel loads.

Wildfire – an unwanted wildland fire.

Wildland Fire – any non-structure fire, other than prescribed fire, that occurs in the wildland. This term encompasses fires previously referred to as both wildfires and prescribed natural fires.

Wildland/Urban Interface – line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with vegetative fuels in wildlands.

APE	Area of Potential Effect
BHS	Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BMP	Best Management Practice
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ESA	Endangered Species Act
EO	Executive Order
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
ICDC	Idaho Conservation Data Center
IDFG	Idaho Department of Fish and Game
IMNH	Idaho Museum of Natural History
IDVMD	Idaho Vertebrate Modeling Database
L-PDM	Legislative Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
PIN	Pacific and Idaho Northern (Railroad Depot)
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USDI	U.S. Department of the Interior
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION

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.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Part 1500 through 1508) direct FEMA and other Federal agencies to fully understand and take into consideration the environmental consequences of proposed federally funded projects. Under NEPA, Congress authorizes and directs Federal agencies to carry out their regulations, policies, and programs as fully as possible in accordance with the statute's policies on environmental protection. NEPA requires Federal agencies to make a series of evaluations and decisions that anticipate significant effects on environmental resources. This requirement must be fulfilled whenever a Federal agency proposes an action, grants a permit, or agrees to fund or otherwise authorize any other entity to undertake an action that could possibly affect the human environment. In compliance with NEPA and its implementing regulations, FEMA prepared this draft environmental assessment (EA) to analyze the potential environmental impacts of the project alternatives.

SECTION TWO PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the FEMA L-PDM program is to provide funding to assist States and local governments (including Indian Tribal governments) in implementing cost-effective hazard mitigation activities that complement comprehensive mitigation programs and reduce injuries, loss of life, and damage and destruction of property. The purpose of this action is to provide L-PDM funding to Adams County for wildfire mitigation activities in the Highlands Estates subdivision.

Although many very large fires, growing to over 250,000 acres, have burned in west central Idaho, fires in Adams County have usually been controlled at much smaller extents. This does not mean that wildfires are not a concern in this county, but reflects how well the wildland and rural fire districts cooperate in controlling fires. The Hall Fire of August 2003 burned a total of 1,886 acres before it was contained 1 week later. The cost of this fire was estimated at $4 million. One home and one outbuilding were reported lost during this fire. The Hall Fire exemplifies the need to provide for the protection of people, structures, the environment, and infrastructure during wildfire events. The average large fire size in Adams County is approximately 2,740 acres. The most recent fires of this extent include the Goodrich Fire of 2000 that burned 2,257 acres, and the Dam Fire of 1996 which burned 4,112 acres (Adams County 2004).

The geographic areas targeted for wildfire vegetation management under the Proposed Action were identified as high-risk in the *Adams County All Hazard Mitigation Plan* (Northwest 2006). Within the *State of Idaho Hazard Mitigation Plan* (Idaho Bureau 2007), Adams County is listed as 11th for existing wildfire risk and 10th for potential wildfire risk, out of 44 total counties. The need for this project was identified by the State Department of Lands because it facilitated a similar project on Meadow Creek, an adjacent subdivision with similar hazards and risks. The Meadows Creek project was awarded a $75,000 grant in 2002 to provide homeowner education and fuel treatment on 400 acres.

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 (USDA 1999). 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 (Adams County 2004).

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; 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*.

SECTION THREE ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

This section discusses the two alternatives considered in this EA: (1) the No Action Alternative and (2) the Proposed Action Alternative, to which FEMA funding would contribute.

3.1 ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildfire fuel loads in the target areas of Adam County's wildland/urban interface. Existing conditions would continue to deteriorate. People and nearby structures would continue to be at risk from catastrophic fire events. Current and ongoing activities to protect the open spaces and wildland/urban interface would continue, but not to the degree needed if a wildfire occurs. This alternative would not meet the project's purpose and need, nor the county's goals and objectives identified in the *Adams County All Hazard Mitigation Plan*.

3.2 ALTERNATIVE 2 – PROPOSED ACTION

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 (Appendix A - Figure 1). 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.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would take place using grant funds and Adams County funds to accomplish the following activities over a 2-year period:

1. create defensible structures and decrease the risk from wildfire to 16 residences through vegetation management (hand cutting)
2. increase the effectiveness of similar fuels reduction projects that have occurred in the Meadow Creek development adjacent and below Highlands Estates

The proposed tasks are consistent with the *Adams County All Hazard Mitigation Plan*, the *Adams County Wildland/Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan*, and the *State of Idaho Hazard Mitigation Plan*.

3.3 OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Due to the expense and unwillingness of homeowners, acquisition of the properties was not considered a viable alternative. Prescribed burns are not a preferred alternative due to the concentrations of flammable fuels near homes. Vegetation management activities for this area described in the *Adams County Wildland/Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan* include:

- Remove weak, dying, and sick trees
- Thin standing trees to create crown openings spaced to approximately 20 percent of live tree height (for example, a 100-foot tree would be spaced to 20 feet between crowns)
- Prune trees of all branches to a minimum of 17 feet, or up to 50 percent of live crown, whichever is less
- Prune smaller trees to at least 6 feet above the ground, or half the crown height
- Remove ladder fuels that may carry fire into the crowns of larger overstory trees
- Dispose of all excess vegetative material by chipping or hand-piling and burning, when conditions are favorable

The Proposed Action is the only feasible alternative that would meet the purpose and need by effectively reducing or removing the risks of wildfire.

SECTION FOUR AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section discusses the existing conditions, by resource and the potential effects, of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives.

For each resource category, the impact analysis follows the same general approach. When possible, quantitative information is provided to establish impacts. Qualitatively, these impacts will be measured based on minor, moderate, and major impacts as outlined in the chart below.

Impact Intensity	Criteria
Small	Environmental effects would not be detectable or would be so minor that they would neither destabilize nor noticeably alter any important attribute of the resource.
Moderate	Environmental effects would be sufficient to alter noticeably, but not to destabilize, important attributes of the resource.
Large	Environmental effects would be clearly noticeable and would be sufficient to destabilize important attributes of the resource.

Impacts are disclosed based on the amount of change or loss of the resource from the baseline conditions. Impacts may be direct or indirect. Direct impacts are caused by an action and occur at the same time and place as the action. Indirect impacts are caused by an action and occur later in time or are farther removed from the area, but are reasonably foreseeable. Cumulative impacts are discussed in Section 5.

Resources that were not analyzed in detail include air quality and visual resources. No prescribed fire would be used for fuel reduction in this project, so no effect to air quality is expected beyond small amounts of dust and exhaust from short-term removal operations. No visual impacts are anticipated due to the minor loss of vegetation and small amounts of ground disturbance. These resources will not be analyzed to any further extent in this document.

4.1 CLIMATE, GEOLOGY, AND SOILS

4.1.1 Climate

Generally, the climate in Adams County can be described as cool with significant snowfall in the winter, and hot dry summers. The area around New Meadows, near the project area, is of higher elevation than the rest of the county and has cooler, wetter weather. The average precipitation is 12 inches annually, with approximately 84 inches of snowfall per year. Storms are frequent during the summer months, and a 4-year history of recorded lightning strikes indicates that almost any given location experienced between 0.25 and 10 strikes (Adams County 2004).

Temperatures range from highs in the 60s in the summer to the mid-20s in winter, and lows of 50s in the summer to the teens for the winter (USDA 2009).

4.1.2 Geology and Soils

During the Neoproterozoic era to the early Paleozoic era (251–1,000 million years ago), the western edge of the Laurentian North American continent was rifted. This event included heavy volcanic activity and resulted in deposition of rift-related volcanic and sedimentary rocks above sedimentary rocks from the Mesoproterozoic era that were 600 million years old. The project area is underlain by upper Paleozoic to lower Mesozoic island-arc volcanic and sedimentary rocks (Lund 2003). These rocks comprise four recognized island-arc terranes that were formed in the eastern Pacific Ocean and were transported on lithospheric plates to be accreted on the edge of the continent (IMNH 2009).

The project area is relatively steep. The topography is conducive to fire spread, with ground fuels and canopy fuels readily available.

Soils in the project area are predominantly sedimentary in origin, overlaying basalt bedrock with a volcanic origin. Soils are mostly referred to as loam, well-drained sediments transmitted downslope through gravity and water processes. This type of soil is vulnerable to accelerated erosion caused by disturbance of natural conditions through burning, excessive grazing, or tillage. These disturbances increase the potential for erosion by wind and water. Wind typically presents the greatest source of erosion under arid conditions. The soil is the project area is cobbly and very cobbly loam (USDA 2008).

4.1.3 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Adam County's wildland/urban interface. No impacts to climate or geology would occur. No impacts to soil resources within the project area would be expected, except for impacts associated with a catastrophic fire. These impacts may include loss of vegetation caused by uncontrolled fire and subsequent soil erosion. The impact intensity would range from small to large, depending on the size of the wildfire.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

No effect on climate and geology would be expected based on the small scale of the project and minor ground-disturbing activities. The impact intensity would be small. Future natural fires of varying intensities may alter the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the soil as a result of vegetation removal, organic consumption, and increased temperatures. In addition, the lack of fire may alter the soil properties as a result of limited nutrient cycling in fire-maintained habitat areas.

No environmental consequences to soils are expected from fuels reduction activities in the project area because the activities would not require leveling of the soil. The impact intensity would be small. Mechanical removal activities are not proposed due to the steep nature of the properties. All vehicles would use the existing infrastructure as a result of the steep terrain. Additionally, no fuels reduction by burning is planned for this project. While individual trees may be removed, vegetation removal in overly large areas at a given time would be avoided and

best management practices (BMPs) for erosion control, such as wood mulching or silt fences, would be employed.

Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soil productivity, fertility, stability, or infiltration capacity would be at or below the level of detection. Any effects on soil productivity or fertility would be slight, and no long-term effects to soils would occur.

4.2 FLOODPLAINS

The project actions would not occur within or near any floodplains (FIRM #16003C0240B).

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Adams County's wildland/urban interface. No impacts to floodplains would be expected as there are none within or adjacent to the project area.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

No environmental consequences related to floodplains are expected from fuels reduction activities because the activities would not occur within or adjacent to any designated floodplains or riparian areas. No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to floodplains are anticipated.

4.3 WETLANDS AND WATER RESOURCES

The project area is not near or adjacent to any wetlands. There is a dry draw (ephemeral drainage) running through the subdivision; however it does not carry water year-round. The Little Salmon River is located approximately 2 miles southeast of the project area.

Alternative 1 – No Action

No impacts to wetlands and water resources would be expected, as there are none within or adjacent to the project area.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

No impacts to wetlands and water resources would be expected, as there are none within or adjacent to the project area.

4.4 VEGETATION

Vegetation in Adams County is a mix of forestland and rangeland ecosystems. While vegetation can vary somewhat from one specific location to the next, the region generally features a mixture of ponderosa pine, mixed xeric forest, and perennial grass slopes. The project area contains mainly red fir, bull pine, shrubs, and grasses.

Alternative 1 – No Action

The high risk of vegetation loss from wildfires would remain the same. Factors contributing to the highest fire risk include combinations of steep topography, fuel loads, significant access

issues caused by steep roads and drives with no turnouts or turnarounds, and buildings lacking defensible space (clearings between wildland vegetation and structures). The impact intensity would range from small to large, depending upon the size of the wildfire. Increased invasive species creating a greater fuel load would be expected.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The impact intensity to vegetation would be moderate. Integrating thinning and manual vegetative treatment could result in a small loss of individual native plants. Various disturbances from work crews, removal of individual small trees, and hand pruning or limbing would result in localized, indirect, small effects to native plant communities. However, in these habitat types thinning is generally desirable and promotes reduction of overstocked understory trees and shrubs. The majority of the vegetation removed would be brush. A few small bull pines and red fir would also be removed.

Changes in the vegetative community or species population would be minor, with small and localized effects to a relatively minor proportion of any native species population. Many of these species are ecologically dependent on fire and fire cycles, and the effects are considered small in the short term and beneficial in the long term.

4.5 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Data from the Idaho Conservation Data Center (ICDC) was requested for known special-status species at and near the Highlands Estates Wildfire Mitigation project site (ICDC 2009). The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) was consulted for potential Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species in Adams County (IDFG 2009).

4.5.1 Federally Listed Species and Critical Habitat

Six listed species under the ESA are known to occur in Adams County: Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), northern Idaho ground squirrel (*Spermophilus brunneus brunneus*), and southern Idaho ground squirrel (*Spermophilus brunneus endemicus*).

Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout are all present in the Little Salmon River, which is 2 miles southeast of the project site. There is no direct surface water connection between the project site and the Little Salmon River, so these species will not be discussed further as there would be no effect to them. In addition, the southern Idaho ground squirrel will not be discussed further since the project site is outside the small known range for this species and no effect would occur to this species.

4.5.1.1 Canada Lynx

The Canada lynx is a Federal and Idaho State listed species. The Canada lynx is listed as Threatened under the ESA and is considered Critically Imperiled by Idaho State. In Idaho, critical habitat for lynx has only been designated in the extreme northeast corner of the State.

The Canada lynx occurs throughout Canada and Alaska, in the extreme northeastern and north-central United States, and in the northern and central Rocky Mountains. Within Idaho, populations exist north of the Salmon River in the west and north of the Caribou Range in the

east. The total population size in Idaho is unknown, but it is thought to be less than 100 individuals (IDFG 2005).

In Idaho, the Canada lynx inhabits montane and subalpine coniferous forests typically above 4,000 feet. Habitat used during foraging is usually early successional forest. Dens are usually in mature forests. Individuals are wide-ranging and require large tracts of forest. The Canada lynx preys on the snowshoe hare, particularly during the winter, as well as variety of birds and other small mammals (IDFG 2005).

A gap analysis originated in Idaho in the late 1980s as a system for assessing the distribution of native plant and animal distributions in relation to land stewardship. The gap analysis data was assessed for the predicted distribution of both Canada lynx and snowshoe hare in the vicinity of the project site (IDVMD 2009). This information was cross-referenced with species observations from the Idaho Conservation Data Center (IDFG 2005).

In addition, the Final EIS for the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction project was reviewed (USDA 2007). This document shows occupied lynx habitat as well as core areas, secondary areas, and peripheral areas. Core areas have persistent, verified records of lynx occurrence over time, and recent evidence of reproduction. Secondary areas have historical records of lynx presence with no record of reproduction, or with historical records and no recent population surveys. These areas may contribute to lynx persistency by providing habitat to support lynx during dispersal movements or other periods, allowing them to return to core areas. Peripheral areas have no evidence of long-term presence or reproduction, but may contain habitat that enables the sufficient dispersal of lynx between populations or subpopulations. Linkage areas are areas of movement opportunities. They are not "corridors," which imply only a travel route; they are broad areas of habitat where animals can find food, shelter, and security (USDI 2005).

The project site is within 0.5 mile of predicted habitat according to Idaho Gap Analysis data. In addition, the project site is within snowshoe hare habitat. According to the Final EIS, the project area is outside of all known occupied habitats, but is within 10 miles of secondary areas and within 10 miles of linkages areas. According to the Idaho Conservation Data Center information, two Canada lynx have been observed within 10 miles of the project area. While historical observations and potential habitat occur within 10 miles of the project area, the project area is outside of all predicted lynx use areas. The likelihood of the project area being utilized by Canada lynx is low.

4.5.1.2 Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel

The northern Idaho ground squirrel is a Federal and Idaho State listed species. The northern Idaho ground squirrel is listed as Threatened under the ESA and is considered Critically Imperiled by Idaho State. No critical habitat has been designated for the northern Idaho ground squirrel.

The northern Idaho ground squirrel is endemic to Adams and Valley counties in Idaho. Fewer than 40 colonies exist, and more than half of these colonies contain fewer than 20 individuals. The total population is estimated to be about 850 individuals.

The northern Idaho ground squirrel occupies dry montane meadows at elevations between 3,280 and 5,600 feet. Typical habitat includes meadows of grasses and forbs, and to a lesser extent,

sagebrush, surrounded by ponderosa pine or Douglas-fir forest. Most sites have a mixture of shallow and deeper soils to accommodate nest burrows.

The ICDC has recorded observations of northern Idaho ground squirrel within 0.25 mile of the project area. A site survey by wildlife biologists was conducted on April 23, 2009 to determine if potential northern Idaho ground squirrel habitat exists in the project area.

The site visit revealed that potential northern Idaho ground squirrel habitat does exist in the project area. Documented observations within 1 mile of the project area support the possibility of the species occurring there. The shallow rocky meadows on the site are not preferred habitat, but the species will occupy such sites when Columbian ground squirrels out-compete them for higher value habitats. High value habitat will often contain deeper soils, less rock, a sagebrush component and higher densities of perennial bunchgrasses.

No signs of northern Idaho ground squirrels, nor any other ground squirrel species, were observed in the project area during the survey. Columbian ground squirrel activity was seen adjacent to the project area, which indicates that activity would be visible in the project area if ground squirrels are present.

4.5.1.3 Migratory Birds

The project areas provide habitat for a variety of migratory birds, including songbirds and birds of prey. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Office of Migratory Bird Management maintains a list of migratory birds (50 CFR 10.13). The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended, provides Federal protections for migratory birds, their nests, eggs, and body parts from harm, sale, or other injurious actions. The act includes a “no take” provision.

4.5.2 Special Status Species

Two special status plant species are reported to occur in the vicinity of the proposed project. These plants are swamp onion (*Allium madidum*) and puzzling halimolobos (*Halimolobos perplexa* var. *perplexa*). These species are not listed under the ESA. While they have no formal protection in Idaho, they have been identified as somewhat rare and are tracked by the ICDC.

Although swamp onion has been recorded in the vicinity of the project area, it is unlikely to occur within the project area. This species grows in seasonally wet areas, which are not present in the project area. Puzzling halimolobos grows on rocky slopes, which are present in the project area.

4.5.3 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, no vegetation management activities would be conducted. As a result, no direct effects to wildlife, including ESA federally listed species, state-listed species, or special status species in the project areas are expected. However, the potential for losses of wildlife, including protected species, due to wildfire would remain. The impact intensity would range from small to large, depending on the size of the wildfire. Future uncontrolled wildfires could result in adverse impacts to wildlife, including protected species, through the loss of habitat or the mortality of individuals.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, wildfire fuel reduction activities may affect Federal and State listed wildlife species. The impact intensity would be small to moderate. Since the project site is outside of known and predicted Canada lynx habitat, it is unlikely that lynx reside or roam within the project area. The northern Idaho ground squirrel has been mapped in the vicinity of the project area and potential habitat does exist on the site. However, the habitat present is marginal and no signs of any ground squirrel species were observed.

Planned vegetation removal should have little to no effect on potential habitat within the project area. Vegetation types scheduled for removal do not occur within potential habitat of the northern Idaho ground squirrel. The use of established roads and driveways should greatly minimize any impact to potential habitat during fuel reduction activities. Fuel reduction activities may benefit potential squirrel habitat by removing young trees and brushy understory that inhibits movement of squirrels between colonies.

Impacts to special-status species (puzzling halimolobos) could occur through vegetation removal. The impact intensity would be small to moderate. Prior to any vegetation removal activities, it is recommended that a biologist survey the project area for this species. If any are found in the project area, contractors should avoid vegetation clearing in the immediate vicinity of the plant.

Impacts to non-listed wildlife, including migratory birds, could occur through habitat modification. Various factors including changes in food sources, shelter, population density, and dispersal effort would determine the severity of impacts to non-listed wildlife.

4.6 HISTORIC, ARCHAEOLOGICAL, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resources consist of locations of human activity, occupation, or use identified through field inventory, historic documentation, or oral evidence. The term includes archaeological, historic, and architectural properties and sites or places of traditional cultural or religious importance to Native American tribes or other social or cultural groups. Management of Idaho's cultural resources falls under the jurisdiction and control of the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) according to their relative importance. Management objectives include protecting against impairment, destruction, inadvertent loss, and accommodating uses determined appropriate through consultation and planning.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires that activities occurring on Federal lands, or those that require Federal permits or use Federal funds, undergo a review process to protect cultural resources that are or may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The Area of Potential Effect (APE) for archaeological and cultural resources would include all areas where potential ground disturbance related to vegetation removal would occur within the 200-acre project area.

4.6.1 Historic Resources

Historically, Euro-Americans and other non-indigenous groups, including fur trappers and mountain men, entered the area during the mid-late 1800s following the Lewis and Clark and other early expeditions. After news was released from initial explorations as to the wealth of

resources found in the west, including those found in the region, fur-trappers traveled in and began dispatching large numbers of animals to supply the growing demand for fur, especially beaver, by eastern industrial society. Eventually the area, like many in the west was effectively trapped out, but with the continued influx of Euro-American immigrants, coupled with the scenic beauty of the area, settlement ensued (Schwantes 1991).

The town of New Meadows is located just south of the 45th Parallel and hosts the last surviving Pacific and Idaho Northern (PIN) Railroad Depot. The railroad ran from Weiser to an area about 2 miles from the original and still existent town of Meadows, thus creating the site of modern day New Meadows, founded in 1911. The railroad depot was built in 1910 and served as the northern end of the PIN Railroad. Though the efforts ultimately failed, the PIN Railroad served an important function as a "farm-to-market" railroad until 1940, and then as a timber railroad for local timber outfits. The Union Pacific Railroad acquired the line in 1936 and in 1979, unable to continue as a solvent business venture, abandoned the northern end of the line from the Tamarack sawmill site north of the town of Council, ID, to New Meadows.

4.6.2 Archaeological and Cultural Resources

Prehistorically, lithic scatters are the most common type of site found in the planning area. The lithic debitage, or processed stone flakes, represent activity areas of past peoples. These sites can also contain stone tools, projectile points, or solely lithic debitage waste flakes produced during the manufacture or maintenance of stone tools. The evidence left behind in the archaeological context is indicative of specific types of activities or sites. Examples include short-term hunting camps; butchering sites; and tool quarry, manufacturing, or repair locations. Other site types can include a variety of habitation or campsites, fishing locations, hunting blinds, rock alignments, cairns, ceremonial and rock art sites, and burials. As both the ethnographic and the archaeological records of the region conclude, although dependent on environmental variability, prehistoric lifeways saw a relatively high resource abundance of both vegetative plants and game for subsistence (Plew 2008, Steward 1970).

According to data received from the Idaho SHPO, eight surveys have been conducted within 1 mile of the project area, with no cultural resources being located:

Report No.	Title	Author	Year	Agency Name	Project No.	Intensive
2005/905	Steve Campbell EQIP[1] 05. NRCS[2].	Vrem. D.	2005	NRCS	NRCS-05-5787	2
2003/297	New Meadows Turn Bay Additional Widening. ITD[3].	Petersen, N.	2002	Idaho Transportation Department	ST-3110(628)	3
2003/297	New Meadows Turn Bay Additional Widening. ITD.	Petersen, N.	2002	Idaho Transportation Department	ST-3110(628)	3
1995/665	Tim Farrell Land Leveling and Structure. Boise National Forest.	San Juan, Sara	1995	Boise National Forest	NRCS-95-435	124
1995/660	Ted Jacobs Pipeline and Structure. Boise National Forest.	San Juan, Sara	1995	Boise National Forest	NRCS-95-458	1
2005/806	J.I. Morgan Rock Quarry. University of Idaho, Moscow, ID.	Sappington, L.	2005	Idaho Transportation Department	A350501	15
1995/628	Osborn Water Control Project. Boise National Forest.	San Juan, Sara	1995	Boise National Forest	SCS-95-380	1
1994/715	Jeanne Wallace Land Leveling. Boise National Forest.	Young, Robert M.	1994	Boise National Forest	SCS-94-0036	80

[1] EQIP - Environmental Quality Incentives Program, through the NRCS.

[2] NRCS - Natural Resources Conservation Service.

[3] ITD - Idaho Transportation Department.

4.6.3 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Adams County's wildland/urban interface. Because no Federal activity would occur, no requirement for compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA exists.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The Proposed Action includes removal of vegetation from approximately 200 acres of private lands. Funding from FEMA would be provided to Adams County for the purposes of hiring contractors to conduct vegetation removal from private lands. Consequently, compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA is required.

The scope of the Proposed Action—reduction of fuel loading through removal of brush by private contractors using manual means such as hand thinning, brush cutting, and other low-impact measures—is generally limited in terms of potential to impact historic resources. No effect to historic structures would be expected, as the county would avoid aboveground structures. Since the project areas are located within already developed residential subdivisions

and no ground disturbance is anticipated, no effects to cultural resources are expected. The impact intensity would be small. In the event of an unanticipated discovery, and in compliance with various State and Federal laws protecting cultural resources, including Section 106 of the NHPA, all work shall cease in the immediate vicinity of the find until appropriate parties (including the SHPO) are consulted and an appropriate plan is established.

4.7 SOCIOECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EO 12898)

Executive Order (EO) 12898, Environmental Justice, directs Federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations in the United States resulting from Federal programs, policies, and activities. Socioeconomic and demographic data for residents in the project vicinity was reviewed to determine if a disproportionate number (defined as greater than 50 percent) of minority or low-income persons have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Action.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not provide funding to reduce wildland fuel loads in Adams County's wildland/urban interface. Because no Federal activity would occur, no requirement for compliance with EO 12898 exists.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

U.S. Census Bureau data for Adams County was used to identify the minority[1] and low-income[2] compositions of the study area, which is located in Block Group 1 (within Census Tract 9501). Census 2000 data at the county level and census block group level was reviewed. In Adams County and Block Group 1, the minority population ranges from 3.7 percent to 5 percent, respectively. The poverty level for Adams County was 15 percent, while the poverty level in Block Group 1 was 14 percent.

The areas selected under the Proposed Action are areas determined high-priority based solely on their need for fuel reduction. As the project vicinity has a similar percentage of minorities and residents below the poverty level, the Proposed Action would not cause adverse economic impacts and would comply with EO 12898. The impact intensity would be small. The intended result of the Proposed Action is general safety for the surrounding local populations. The ability to decrease the potential for catastrophic fire would be a social and economic beneficial impact to the community as a whole.

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[1] A minority person is "a person who is: (1) Black (a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa); (2) Hispanic (a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race); (3) Asian American (a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands); or (4) American Indian and Alaskan Native (a person having origins in any of the original people of North America and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition)."

[2] Low-income is identified as "one whose median household income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines." Income data based on Department of Health and Human Services guidelines are difficult to gather, so Census Bureau data are often used for environmental justice analyses.

SECTION FIVE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA require an assessment of cumulative effects during the decision making process for Federal projects. Cumulative effects are defined as "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions" (40 CFR 1508.7). Cumulative effects were determined by combining the effects of these alternatives with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

The Proposed Action and other wildland/urban interface activities that are planned in the fire management plans by the county are not expected to have adverse cumulative impacts to climate, geology, and soils; floodplains; water resources; wetlands; vegetation; historic, archeological, and cultural resources; or socioeconomics and environmental justice, as no project impacts are anticipated. Impacts to biological resources, including listed wildlife, special status species, and migratory birds could occur through habitat modification; however these impacts would not result in permanent adverse impacts.

The Proposed Action includes an educational element to allow the private land owners to maintain these fuel reduction practices over time, and to promote an understanding of the fire-related risks as development increases in the wildland/urban interface.

SECTION SIX PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

FEMA is the lead Federal agency for conducting the NEPA compliance process for the proposed vegetation management project. As the lead agency, FEMA expedites the preparation and review of NEPA documents, responds to the needs of residents surrounding the treated lands, meets the spirit and intent of NEPA, and complies with all NEPA provisions.

A public notice is required for this draft EA. The public will have the opportunity to comment on the EA for 30 days after the publication of this notice. The notice identifies the action, location of the proposed site, participants, location of the draft EA, and who to write to provide comments. FEMA will review all written comments submitted for identification of any significant issues that need to be addressed, and will incorporate them into the final EA, as appropriate.

Public involvement is ongoing and had begun before the initiation of this EA. Many communities in Idaho organized or increased their public education efforts to reduce hazardous fuels on public and private forested lands by making plans in accordance with the National Fire Plan's 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and the Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan. The plans outline priority areas, strategies, and action plans for wildfire fuel reduction treatments, and educate their respective communities on living in a fire-adapted ecosystem.

The following three plans are relevant to public involvement efforts supporting this EA.

6.1 ADAMS COUNTY ALL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

Adams County, local cities, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Idaho Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Idaho Department of Lands, and four local fire departments were involved in the development of the *Adams County All Hazard Mitigation Plan*. Public workshops and meetings were held at various locations throughout the county, based on the specific issues in those locations (including varying terrain and fire-fighting capabilities). The Highlands Estates subdivision was identified as a high risk area (Northwest 2006).

6.2 ADAMS COUNTY WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE WILDLAND FIRE MITIGATION PLAN

Adams County community members involved in the development of their plan include members of fire agencies, local businesses and organizations, and individuals. Seven local fire protection districts, the Idaho Department of Lands, USFS, and BLM all were involved in the effort to develop the plan and continue to be involved in the ongoing process of revision and improvement of the plan (Adams County 2004).

Public involvement in this plan was made a priority from the inception of the project. Using various outreach methods, such as news and radio notices, mailed surveys, committee meetings, and public meetings, a diverse group of citizens and local agency representatives were involved. The final plan was presented to the Adams County Commissioners at a General Meeting of the County Commissioners on January 26, 2004, where it was accepted.

Eleven communities were identified in the 2001 Federal Register as "Urban Wildland Interface Communities within the vicinity of Federal Lands that are at high risk from wildfires" (Adams County 2004). These communities consist of Council, Cuprum, Evergreen, Indian Valley, Meadow Creek, Meadows, Mesa, New Meadows, Pinehurst, Starkey, and Tamarack.

6.3 STATE OF IDAHO HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

The *State of Idaho Hazard Mitigation Plan* was prepared by the Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security (BHS) to reduce disaster assistance costs and preserve disaster assistance eligibility for the State, counties, and cities. The plan is the comprehensive, statewide mitigation planning effort conducted in Idaho. It identifies hazards and associated vulnerabilities within the State and provides a comprehensive statewide strategy to reduce future disaster losses through sound mitigation projects.

The four public involvement objectives in the plan are to develop a statewide fire public education/outreach program to promote individual fire mitigation and wildfire prevention, provide fire training to public officials and representatives, increase the number of communities participating in the Firewise Program, and to train fire corps volunteers and Community Emergency Response Team members in assessing wildfire hazards in the home ignition zone (BHS 2007).

Public education elements that individual counties would be responsible for include:

- increasing public knowledge regarding safety while building in wildfire-prone areas
- developing local programs which provide education to local homeowners on becoming a Firewise Community
- increasing elected and appointed official knowledge regarding land use practices in wildfire-prone areas
- promoting participation in the Keep Idaho Green Program
- incorporating wildland/urban interface/home ignition zone information into the Citizen Corp and Community Emergency Response Team Programs (BHS 2007)

SECTION SEVEN REQUIRED PERMITS AND COMPLIANCE

Adams County is required to obtain and comply with all local, State, and Federal permits and approvals prior to implementing the Proposed Action Alternative. Development at the Proposed Action Alternative project areas shall comply with the scope of work in the project application. In the event that historically or archaeologically significant materials or sites (or evidence thereof) are discovered during the implementation of the project, the project shall be halted immediately and all reasonable measures taken to avoid or minimize harm to property. The county would then be required to consult with FEMA and the SHPO for further guidance. In the event that Canada lynx or the northern Idaho ground squirrels are found within the project area after obligation of funds, Adams County would be required to notify FEMA and consult with IDFG and USFWS prior to any vegetation removal activities. In the event that puzzling halimolobos are found in the project area, contractors would be recommended to avoid vegetation clearing in the immediate vicinity of the plant.

SECTION EIGHT CONCLUSION

The draft EA evaluated potentially significant resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action. The evaluation resulted in identification of no significant impacts associated with the resources of climate, geology, and soils; floodplains; wetlands and water resources; vegetation; biological resources (ESA); historic, archaeological, and cultural resources; and socioeconomic and environmental justice. Obtaining and implementing permit requirements along with appropriate BMPs will avoid or minimize any effects associated with the action. It is recommended that a finding of no significant environmental impact to the human or natural environment be issued for the Proposed Action Alternative.

SECTION NINE REFERENCES

Adams County Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan Committee, and Northwest Management, Inc. *Adams County Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan*. 2004. January 26.

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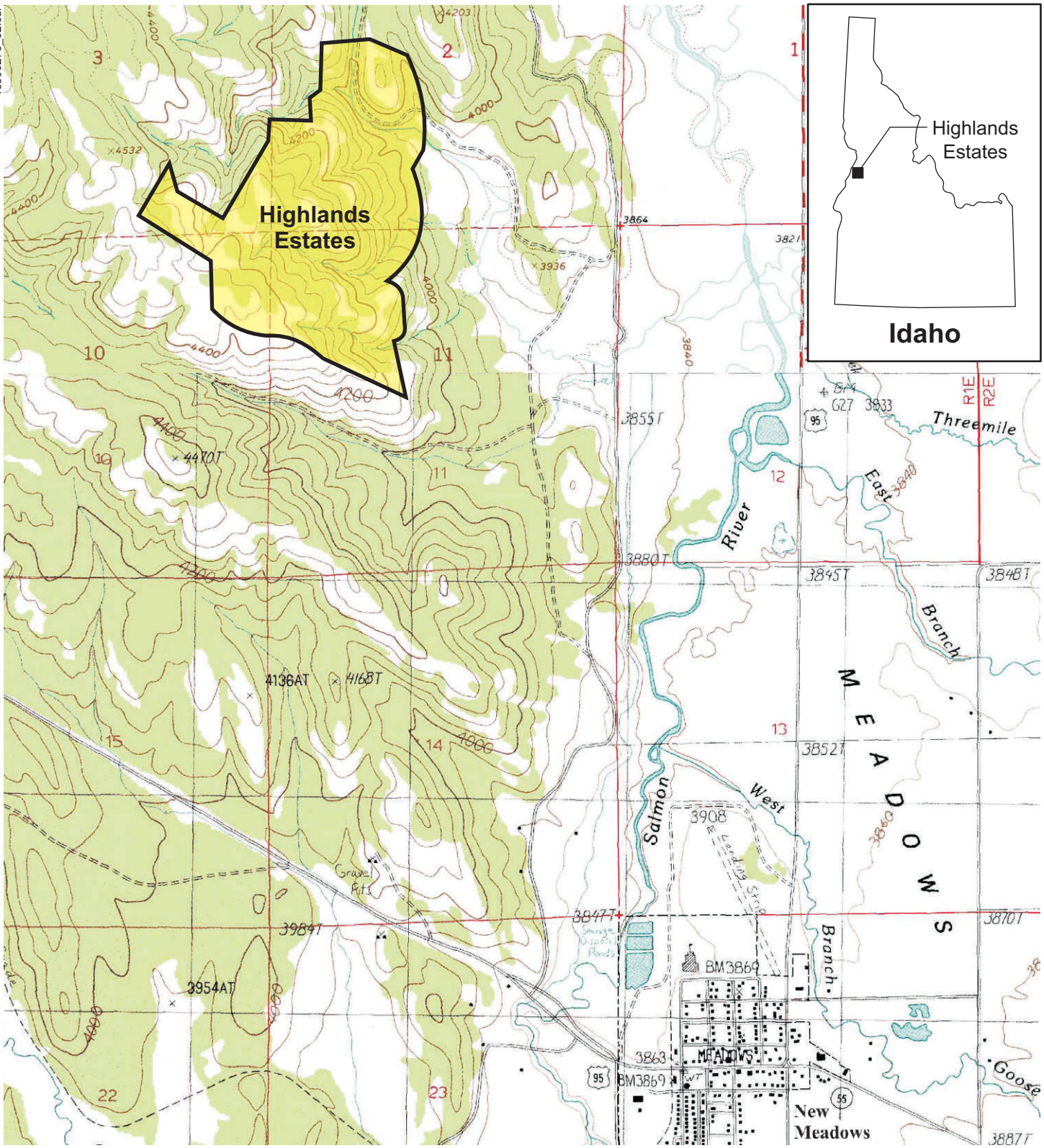
U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI) US Fish and Wildlife Service. Recovery Outline: Contiguous United States Distinct Population Segment of the Canada Lynx. Montana Field Office, Helena, MT. 2005.

Appendix A

Figures

Figure 1 - Project Vicinity

15300278_02.cdr



Source: USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle maps, New Meadows and Bally Mountain, Idaho, dated 1986 and 1963 respectively.

0 0.5 1

Approximate Scale in Miles

Job No. 15300278

Figure 1

Project Vicinity

Highlands Estates
Adams County, Idaho

Appendix B

Project Conditions and Conservation Measures

The Proposed Action would comply with the following conditions and conservation measures:

- 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, IDFG and USFWS would be notified.
- In the event that puzzling halimolobos are found in the project area, contractors should 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.

Appendix C
Public Notice

PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Emergency Management Agency
Draft Environmental Assessment
Wildfire Fuels Reduction in Adams County, Idaho

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) proposes to provide funding to Adams County for a wildfire fuels reduction project in central Idaho. Funding would be provided as authorized by §203 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Assistance and Emergency Relief Act (Stafford Act), 42 USC.

FEMA prepared a draft environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed project pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and FEMA's implementing regulations found in 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 10. The EA evaluates alternatives for compliance with applicable environmental laws, including Executive Orders #11990 (Protection of Wetlands), #11988 (Floodplain Management), and #12898 (Environmental Justice). Many alternatives were evaluated during the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans and the Hazard Mitigation Plan for Adams County. The alternatives evaluated in the EA are the (1) no action; and (2) reduction and management of fuel loads through manual means in the Highlands Estates subdivision. Other alternatives were considered but discounted as being viable.

The EA is available for review online at the FEMA environmental Web site at: http://www.fema.gov/plan/ehp/envdocuments under Region X. If no significant issues are identified during the comment period, FEMA will finalize the EA, issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and fund the project. Unless substantive comments are received, FEMA will not publish another notice for this project. However, should a FONSI be issued, it will be available for public viewing at http://www.fema.gov/plan/ehp/envdocuments under Region X.

The draft EA is also available for review on May 7, 2009 at the Adams County Courthouse at 201 Industrial Avenue, Council, Idaho.

Written comments on the draft EA should directed no later than 5 pm on June 8, 2009 to Mark G. Eberlein, Regional Environmental Officer, FEMA Region X, 130 228th Street SW, Bothell WA 98021, or by e-mail at mark.eberlein@dhs.gov. Comments also can be faxed to 425-487-4613.