

TOWN OF BRECKENRIDGE
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMISSION
Monday, October 18, 2010
150 Ski Hill Road

- 5:30 Call to Order, Roll Call
- 5:35 Discussion/approval of Minutes – September 20, 2010
- 5:40 Discussion/approval of Agenda
- 5:45 Public Comment (Non-Agenda Items)
- 5:50 Staff Summary
- Cucumber Gulch Events and Josie’s Cabin Update
 - Gold Panning on Open Space
 - 2011 Budget
- 6:15 Open Space and Trails
- Hidden Gems
 - Cucumber Gulch Preserve Monitoring
 - Ophir Mountain Forest Health and Fuels Project
 - Mushing at Gold Run Nordic Center
- 7:40 Commissioner Issues
- 7:45 Executive Session
- 8:00 Adjourn

For further information, please contact the Open Space and Trails Program at 547.3110 (Heide) or 547.3155 (Scott).

Memorandum

To: Breckenridge Open Space Advisory Commission
From: Heide Andersen, Open Space and Trails Planner III
Mark Truckey, Asst. Director of Community Development
Scott Reid, Open Space and Trails Planner II
Re: October 18, 2010 meeting

Staff Summary**Cucumber Gulch Events and Josie's Cabin Update**

On September 28, Town Council weighed in on the Cucumber Gulch Preserve topics previously discussed by BOSAC. Council directed staff to not allow any special events to utilize the interior of the Preserve. This direction means that staff will continue to accept special event permits for the use of higher trails away from the wetlands (e.g. Troll Forest, Penn Lode and Shock Hill). Events such as the Breckenridge Crest Mountain Marathon will no longer be allowed to utilize Toad Alley, and future requests for such use will be denied for the foreseeable future.

Council also denied the request from the Breckenridge Nordic Center to connect gas and electric lines to Josie's cabin to allow for a gas-powered stove and lighting in the cabin. Council's goal is to keep the area as remote as possible.

Staff will keep BOSAC informed of the progress with the Black Loop/Shock Hill Trail realignment, still scheduled to occur in the next few weeks.

Gold Panning on Open Space

Town Council discussed gold panning on open space, as proposed by members of the public at BOSAC's September 20th meeting. Council directed staff to maintain the current prohibition on gold panning on Town or joint Town/Summit County open space. The intent of this prohibition is to protect the natural resource values of the open space parcels and prevent an additional administrative burden overseeing gold panning. However, Council opted to allow very limited gold panning for educational or demonstration purposes solely through the Breckenridge Heritage Alliance. This allowance can occur only on Town property, as the Summit County prohibition on mineral extraction remains. Staff will work to implement this clarified policy for future public requests.

2011 Budget

At its budget retreat on October 12, Town Council directed staff to proceed with the first phase of the Blue River Corridor Improvements, which will involve significant tree planting along the Blue River, as well as irrigation infrastructure, between Coyne Valley and Valley Brook Roads. Council specifically directed staff to draw the \$150,000

estimated cost for the landscaping from the open space fund. Staff will ensure that this added expenditure is included in the 2011 pro forma and will present the pro forma for discussion at BOSAC's November meeting.

Open Space and Trails

Hidden Gems

Congressman Jared Polis submitted the Summit and Eagle County Wilderness Preservation Act by the end of the Congressional session on October 1, 2010. The bill is derived from the Hidden Gems Wilderness project that has been previously discussed by BOSAC. More detailed information can be found at the following links:

<http://polis.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=209496>

<http://www.summitdaily.com/article/20101002/NEWS/101009978&parentprofile=search>

In looking at the two proposed wilderness areas in the Upper Blue, the Hoosier Ridge area has been presented in the legislation as it was supported by both BOSAC and Town Council. The Summit Fat Tire Society would like to work with Polis' office, the International Mountain Biking Association and the Hidden Gems Campaign to add an area in Pennsylvania Gulch (potentially over to Indiana Gulch) to the companion designation, largely to protect the Horseshoe Basin area. Otherwise, the boundaries for wilderness and the companion designation in this area are largely as envisioned by the Town.

The Tenmile area, however, is very different. The boundaries of the proposed wilderness and companion designations in this area as seen by BOSAC and Council were very different from that finally presented by Polis' office. The wilderness boundary shrunk significantly and no longer includes Mt. Quandary. The companion designation has also been significantly changed and does little to protect urban interface areas where mountain biking and forest health activities would occur. Staff plans to continue working with the above-mentioned entities to develop a map for this area that incorporates appropriate wilderness designation, protection of other areas from mining and other extractive uses, and provision of the non-motorized experiences except for the valley bottoms in drainages such as Blue Lakes, McCullough Gulch and Spruce Creek.

Cucumber Gulch Summer Impacts

BOSAC and Town Council have been interested in the different types of potential impacts to wildlife species in the Cucumber Gulch Preserve related to intensified use from the summer gondola operation, hiking tours, and the presence of the new lodges at the base of the Breckenridge Ski Resort.

Dr. Christy Carello has produced a final report (attached) evaluating the impacts of summer gondola operations on migratory bird species within the Preserve. Although this topic is primarily of interest to Council, who approved the extension of summer gondola

hours and directed staff to implement the attached evaluation, staff would appreciate BOSAC's feedback in preparation for the upcoming Council discussion.

Town Council was also interested in the difference between impacts to wildlife from the use in the Preserve versus the presence and operation of the gondola. Although this has not been a topic of specific research, staff has collected data from trail counters that can be used to look at strictly visitor numbers in the Cucumber area. Included in your packet is a graph depicting Cucumber Gulch use patterns from the trail counters located at various entrances around the Preserve. Staff requests BOSAC review the information in preparation for a discussion regarding Cucumber Gulch Preserve use patterns. It is critically important to note the shortcomings of the attached data. First of all, use counts can be very inaccurate due to individuals lingering at entrances or intentionally misleading the counters. Second, the data provides daily use counts for the summer season and is not randomly sampled data with a large sample size, an important prerequisite for making statistically significant determinations. Lastly, due to several outliers, or inconsistent data points, staff deleted several daily data points to indicate reasonable use patterns. Those data points are represented as zeros in the attached graph.

Given these limitations on the monitoring data, BOSAC should be extremely cautious extrapolating broader generalities from the attached data. However, the data can be useful for drawing some limited conclusions and raising additional questions. In summary, staff has identified the following general points that should be considered from the trail use monitor data:

1. The "Peaks Trailhead/Toad Alley" entrance (now "Peaks Connect") seems to receive the highest amount of use of the five counters, with the Overlook being the second most popular entrance. This may be, in part, because the use from the Peaks Trailhead access this area is largely out-and-back from the trailhead. Will the improvements to the Black Loop/Shock Hill Trail affect this pattern in the future?
2. Most of the summer use on these trails appears to occur later in June, then in July and August and up until Labor Day. This obviously has trail damage and wildlife impact implications. Did the "Trail Closed" signs affect this use pattern during the spring? (The Trail Closed signs were removed in the second week of June.)
3. The extended zero lines for both the Gold Digger and Sauna monitoring sites are due to discontinuation of data collection and do not indicate zero use.
4. The peaks and valleys shown in the data indicate that trail access use is cyclical in nature. Do the peaks generally correspond with weekends and holidays or are there other factors at play?

Ophir Mountain Forest Health and Fuels Project

On September 30, 2010 the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) released a comment request for the Ophir Mountain Forest Health and Fuels Project. The project proposal encompasses much of Ophir Mountain, as well as significant portions of the area around the Gold Hill/Colorado Trail Trailhead. The project identifies approximately 1600 acres that will be evaluated for vegetation management activities within the wildland urban interface of the Frisco area for the purposes of lowering the existing and accumulating fuel loads following the MPB epidemic and expediting regeneration of the forested areas.

The project will seek to diversify the age classes and species diversity of the forest stands on a landscape scale for the purposes of forest health. It will also target the reduction of future fuel loading on NFS adjacent near the Wildland Urban Interface and expand treatments identified for areas identified as having an elevated risk in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The Proposed Action would include “mechanical and hand removal of trees over approximately 1600 acres, piling and burning of slash and debris resulting from proposed treatments, road maintenance, clearing brush, grading, widening, and replacing gravel along roads, construction and closure (including obliteration) of temporary roads once they are no longer needed for operations, and mechanical site preparation to enhance the establishment of seedlings.” The prescription that is being used for all of the units is “clear cut with leave trees.” This means that any dead, infested, or MPB susceptible trees will be removed and healthy trees (largely spruce, fir, and aspen) will be retained.

Approximately 11.3 miles of haul routes have been identified and 9.3 miles of temporary roads. Of the temporary roads, 5.3 miles would require new construction. All temporary roads will be obliterated upon project completion.

Please read the attached document and visit the USFS website at the link below to further evaluate the current proposal.

https://fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsinternet!/ut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gjAwhwtDDw9_AI8zPyhQoY6BdkOyoCAGixyPg!/?ss=110215&navtype=BROWSE BYSUBJECT&cid=STELPRDB5202982&navid=1800000000000000&pnavid=null&position=News&ttype=detail&pname=White%20River%20National%20Forest-%20News%20&%20Events

Staff seeks BOSAC’s feedback regarding this large forest health treatment proposal prior to discussing the topic with Town Council on October 26th.

Mushing at Gold Run Nordic Center

Bob Ducey of Rocky Mountain Dog Mushers (“*Dedicated to promoting the sport of sleddog racing in Colorado*”) has made a formal request to be able to conduct dog sled rides, and mushing and skijoring clinics at Gold Run Nordic Center on one to two weekends a month. He would also like the Town to consider a possible dogsled race. Bob is a longtime sleddog racer and would like for the mountain communities to be more

aware of and active in the sport. Good Times Adventures is largely a touring operation and has a different focus. Bob would like to share his love and passion for the sport with others that are interested.

Open Space staff has discussed the potential issues and opportunities with Golf Course and Recreation staff and will present some of the conclusions at the meeting.

Roll Call

Dennis Kuhn called the September 20, 2010 BOSAC meeting to order at 5:39 pm. Other BOSAC members present included Scott Yule, Devon O'Neil, Jeff Cospolich, Erin Hunter and Monique Merrill. Staff members present were Scott Reid, Heide Andersen, Peter Grosshuesch, and Scott Cline. Brian Lorch from Summit County was present, as was Jeff Westcott, Turk Montepare, and Gene Dayton. Larry and Shirley Weilnau and Jerry Balver of the Gols Prospectors of Colorado were also present.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes were approved as presented.

Approval of Agenda

An Executive Session was added to the agenda to discuss property acquisitions.

Public Comments

Larry and Shirley Weilnau: We ran into Scott Reid in French Gulch this summer and Scott informed us that it is illegal to pan on open space. Given the long history of mining in Breckenridge, we would like to suggest that open space provide a place where we can pan for gold recreationally. Panning, sluicing and metal detecting should be allowed in a limited area, with no motorized use. Please provide a place to allow that activity. It's pretty basic with just a screen and a bucket. You excavate some gravels with a shovel then pan the material by the creek or elsewhere. This is a growing recreational activity that would generate money to the town through sales tax. We are members of the Gold Prospectors of Colorado and have a code of ethics that we follow when we pan. We also set up a panning demo at the Riverwalk every year. We want to get people out exercising. This activity causes very little disturbance. Nothing shows after we're done. We can show you a place sanctioned by the BLM behind Granite, CO where this is allowed. We help set up rules for the location where we can pan, then we reclaim the area by filling holes etc. Jefferson County open space also allows it (even motorized). It has proven to not disturb the open space.

Mr. O'Neil: Is the intent to pass time or to get gold and sell it?

Mr. Weilnau: It's a hobby. We don't get much gold, but we keep what we get. Motorized sluicing can be damaging but the pans would not be.

Ms. Hunter: You seek a specific area. What's an example of an area that would work for you?

Larry: Just a specific area, like the B&B Trailhead area. We seek areas that have been mined before. The dredge was inefficient and we can find gold in the existing piles.

Jerry Balver: We would police the grounds under our code of ethics. We would restore properties. It is partially an education issue for gold panners.

Mr. Yule: How large an area do you need?

Mr. Weilnau: Five acres would be ideal. Or less, like 200 square yards. No commercial guiding or anything would occur. Once people know about a designated area, word will spread.

Mr. Balver: We don't really have a place to go here in the center of gold mining in Colorado. We seek an easier, legal access in the area. www.GPOC.com is the website for our organization.

Mr. Kuhn: Staff will bring this topic to Summit County and into the legal aspect of mining on open space. We will then get in touch with you all with any decisions or progress. Thanks for coming tonight.

Mr. Montepare: The Town and County may not own all of the mineral rights; some may be owned by the Saddlerock Society. More research is needed. We may also need to evaluate any requirements or limitations within the consent decree for the B&B acquisition.

Mr. Dayton: I am here to request permission to run a gas line and electricity to Josie's Cabin from the pump house. John Quigley suggested we do this before they finish landscaping in the area. We would rent a backhoe and run a 30'' trench to run power and gas to the cabin. We own a natural gas burning stove. There was a glitch in that you can't bury a tank in the PMA.

Mr. Kuhn: Cost would be borne by you, correct? (Yes) The reason is for the comfort of the guests, right?

Mr. Dayton: We are increasingly doing tours and we are looking for a warming hut that is not in the Nordic center. We need destination places to slow people down on the trails. We also currently serve hot chocolate there for tours. I would even be willing to replace the existing drafty window. We want to continue to use it and heat it for tours. We would like to offer dinners and other things down there as well.

Ms. Andersen: You would need to get a variance from the PMA to excavate there.

Ms. Hunter: Do you have any plans to allow use all the time?

Mr. Dayton: Yes, the cabins are never locked. We run tours 2-3 times per week at nights. I would like to see more. Winter is less impactful than summer. Our largest tours are eight people. We would install both gas and power while the ditch is open. It gives you future options.

Mr. Yule: We need a management plan for year round use in Josie's cabin. I am concerned about summer use in there. I am also concerned about human waste down there.

Mr. Dayton: I propose we take out the existing, dilapidated privy and replace it with an acceptable toilet system.

Mr. Kuhn: Can we even do this in the PMA?

Mr. Dayton: Chris Neubecker looked into this already.

Mr. Kuhn: Council has asked BOSAC to review use in the Gulch and impacts on wildlife. I will ask staff to take the lead and we will get back to you.

Staff Summary

Black Loop Realignment

Ms. Merrill: When will this work occur? (This autumn, prior to ski season.)

Open Space and Trails

Hidden Gems

Ms. Andersen provided an overview of the likely wilderness bill being proposed by Jared Polis. The Summit County Wildfire Council agreed to this proposal. The Tenmile area has changed dramatically. Large portions of the companion designations were reduced. The USFS staff advised Polis staff regarding the boundaries. Colorado Springs also has significant diversions and water rights in that area. Summit Fat Tire Society (SFTS) is still negotiating with Polis' staff. Polis has expressed a willingness to change the boundaries to address SFTS concerns.

Mr. Cospolich: Where is the money coming from to manage these wilderness areas if this bill comes to pass?

Ms. Andersen: The USFS is now involved in this discussion, and the funding discussion will occur at the Congressional level.

BOSAC expressed support for proceeding in support of the proposed wilderness bill and increasing the size of some of the companion designation areas, particularly along and above the Peaks Trail area.

Event Use in Cucumber Gulch

Mr. Reid provided an overview of the special event proposal for use on the route by Josie's Cabin.

Ms. Hunter: I do not support it. This is special event creep. Every year people ask for more. I want to keep this hard to reach.

Mr. Yule: I would like to look at this after the realignment is completed and the pump house has been finalized and landscaped. After the construction, I would look it. What types of events is the real question.

Mr. Cospolich: I am in favor of allowing special events. Using this area allows staging events in downtown. Using the gondola lots or Riverwalk makes sense to me.

Mr. O'Neil: How many races are we talking about? I am open to looking at what it looks like after the construction. I am open to the idea, but only after construction.

Mr. Westcott: Two- the youth's circuit race and Fall Classic circuit race.

Mr. Cline: One from the Town's side- a Summit Trail Running Series race.

Ms. Andersen: Dr. Carello felt like a few races per summer would be alright, but too many could potentially affect wildlife.

Ms. Merrill: I like our current policy. It makes me uncomfortable to allow any more races than Westy's and Rec Center's. I would like to see the event promoter come to BOSAC on a case-by-case basis to use this. I would also like to see the new alignment.

Mr. Kuhn: I am OK with it as long as Toad Alley is excluded. I am OK with a limit to the number of events (3-4). South/north seems OK, but Toad Alley (east/west) is problematic to me.

Mr. Westcott: Winter versus summer use: Is that really as different as has been implied? I am limited in what I can do and how good it is right now. This section of trail would be a great help to me as an event promoter. This is a critical link.

Ms. Andersen: I see this as problematic from a cycling standpoint, but not for runners. You can currently get there on existing easements, but it is not ideal.

Mr. O'Neil: A case by case decision would make sense.

Mr. Cospolich: This area is heavily used. I don't see additional race traffic as causing damages here. Restrictions on early morning races should be considered. One year probationary period would make sense.

Mr. Yule: We only want low noise events. No spectator areas down there. Time of day is also important and should be limited.

Ms. Hunter: Case by case basis and probationary period makes sense to me.

Ms. Merrill: I am open to allowing use for special events on a case by case basis.

Mr. Kuhn: Let's evaluate the success or failure this time next year.

Mr. Westcott: Scott asked that we reduce the music and PA system for the kids' event. We used no PA system and used a megaphone. This is an easy way to keep our neighbors and the wildlife happy. In the Fall Classic, we used a PA and directed it away from the Gulch and the homes. 80-85 marathoners did the Breck Crest over four hours through the Gulch. Ski Hill Road use of the Peaks Trail time trail went really well in my opinion.

BOSAC agreed to allow a select number of events by Josie's cabin in 2011, and requested that staff inform BOSAC via email which events have been approved for that use. Efforts will be made to reduce the number, noise, type and impact of events. This discussion will now be undertaken by Town Council.

Commissioner Issues

Ms. Merrill: The extension from Betty's Trail is now closed and blocked. What can we do about this? (Staff is working on this issue.)

Mr. Yule: How is the B&B Trailhead going with the dog waste trash can? (It is going well, by most accounts.)

Mr. Cospolich: When will staff complete the new Peaks Connect trail? (It is completed.) I was disappointed with the way the USFS left the sites after they removed the dilapidated cabins.

Mr. O'Neil: There is a renegade trail coming into Barney Ford Trail. (Staff is aware of this and is trying to discourage its use and further development.)

Mr. Kuhn: Can we please get the Cucumber Gulch use numbers at the next meet? (Staff will provide these numbers at the next meeting.)

Executive Session

Devon O'Neil motioned to enter into Executive Session to discuss property acquisition. Mr. Yule seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. BOSAC entered into Executive Session at 7:36 pm. Ms. Hunter made a motion to exit Executive Session; Ms. Merrill seconded the motion. BOSAC came out of Executive Session at 8:12 pm.

Next Meeting

The next regularly scheduled BOSAC meeting is on October 18, 2010 at 5:30 pm in the Administrative Conference Room in the Breckenridge Town Hall (150 Ski Hill Road). A site visit was set for 3:30 pm to visit the Pennsylvania Gulch parcel.

Ms. Hunter motioned to adjourn the meeting and Mr. O'Neil seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Dennis Kuhn, Chair

Effects of summer gondola operation on avian populations in Cucumber Gulch, Breckenridge, Colorado

Submitted to the Town of Breckenridge on September 10, 2010

by

Christy Carello, PhD.

of

Emerald Planet Conservation Consulting, LLC



Image of wetland complex and gondola in Cucumber Gulch, Breckenridge, Colorado

INTRODUCTION

The Cucumber Gulch Wildlife Preserve (CGWP) contains 77 acres of a unique and fragile mountain wetland system in central Colorado. This fen wetland system is surrounded by mixed conifer forest and the town of Breckenridge. This preserve is a haven for wildlife in an area with high levels of human activity. It has been designated an Aquatic Resource of National Importance (ARNI) by the Environmental Protection Agency and is susceptible to damage by anthropogenic activities. Of the many species of animals that utilize the preserve, the wetland provides an ideal habitat for numerous species of migratory birds during the May to August nesting season (Carello et al 2009, p 10). Avian species that nest in the Cucumber Gulch area are an important part of the local ecosystem and act as indicators of change due to human activities in the area (Carello et al 2009; Mac Nally 1997).

This decade, extensive development has occurred around the perimeter of Cucumber Gulch and construction of a gondola was recently completed that crosses over the wetland and fragments the forest buffer around the preserve. Operation of this gondola has been limited to winter activities until the summer of 2010. The gondola began daily operation on July 1, 2010 from 8:00 am until 5:00 pm. This study was conducted for the purpose of evaluating the affect of gondola operation on the avian population located in close proximity to the gondola.

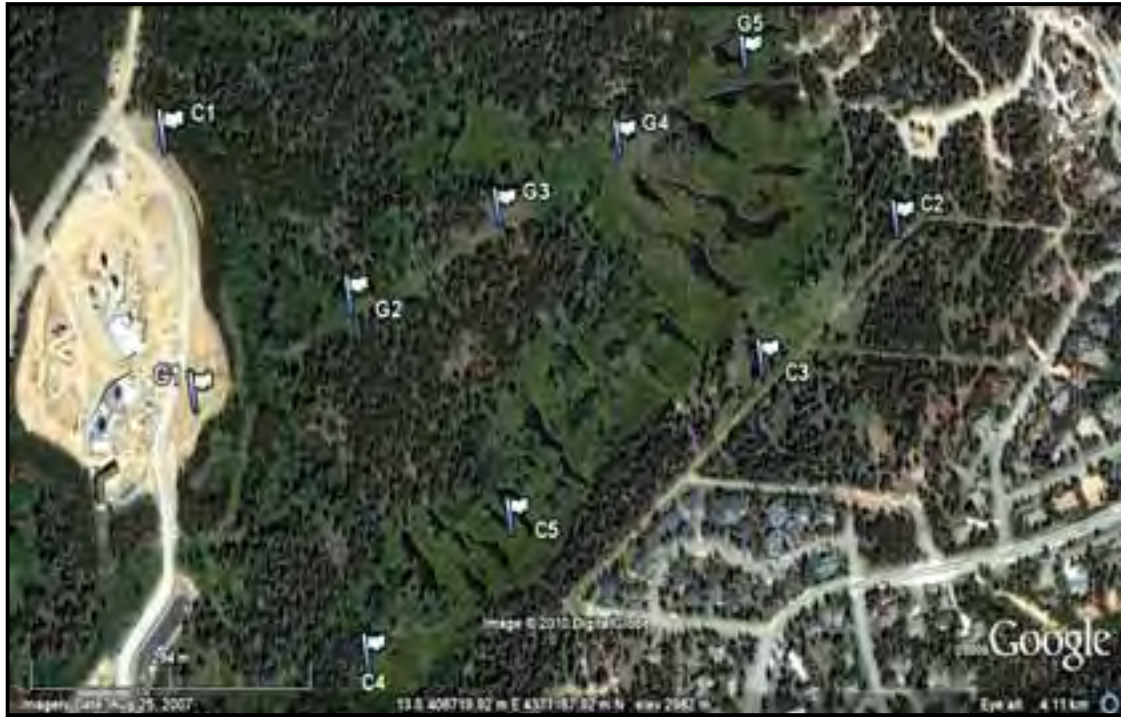
METHODS

We used a before-after/control-impact (BACI) design to conduct this study (Smucker et al 2005, p 1536). We conducted 50-meter radius point counts along the gondola path and along a control transect for seven days prior to and seven days following the first day of gondola operation. Five sites were selected randomly along the gondola path spaced a minimum of 200 meters apart. Five additional sites were selected as controls, matching habitat types to the gondola sites and spaced a minimum of 200 meters apart and away from the gondola path. The ten sites were in mixed conifer habitat, edge habitat and wetland habitat (see map).

Point counts were conducted at each site were between 5:30 and 8:00 am by two technicians with more than a year of experience conducting avian point counts in the area. At each site the surveyors would pause for three minutes of silence followed by five minutes of recording avian species that could be identified by visual or auditory means. The data were recorded each day into a spreadsheet and abundance and species richness were recorded. In addition, the Simpson's diversity calculation was used to determine species evenness and species diversity.

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS. The data were modeled using a linear mixed effects model (Smucker et al 2005, p 1539) of the differences of the normalized data. Site pairs represented a random effect, period (before or after) and day nested within period represented fixed effects. In addition, a Student t-test was used to statistically analyze the effects of gondola operation on specific avian populations that are considered

management indicator species by either Partners in Flight: Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*), Cordilleran Flycatcher (*Empidonax occidentalis*), and Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) (Beidleman 2000); or the USDA: Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolnii*) (Stephens and Anderson 2003). In all cases significance was set at $P < 0.05$.



Map 1. Satellite image of Cucumber Gulch Wildlife Preserve showing gondola transect test points (G1-G5) and control points (C1-C5).

RESULTS

Impact on Avian Community

There was a statistically significant difference between the abundance of birds before the start of gondola operation and after (Table 1, Figure 1). Abundance for all control points remained consistent through both before and after periods and dropped by an average of 2.5 birds per site for gondola sampling points.

Table 1. Statistical results table. * indicates statistical significance.

Variable	F-value	P-value
Abundance	5.57	0.03*
Species Richness	3.57	0.07
Diversity	0.38	0.54
Evenness	0.79	0.38

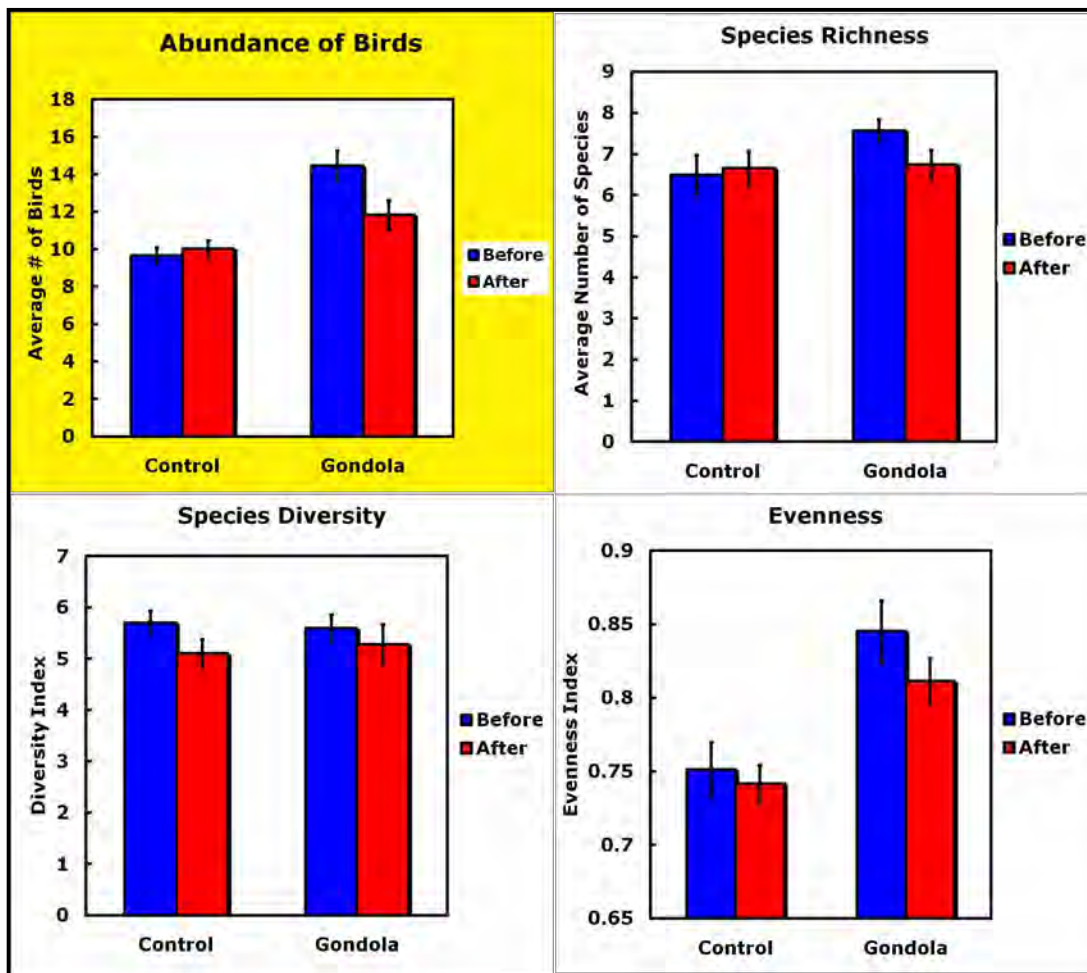


Figure 1. Graphical representation of data. A statistically significant decrease in avian abundance was found along the gondola corridor.

Impact on Avian Populations

There was a statistically significant decrease in Wilson’s Warbler populations (Table 2, Figure 2) in the gondola path after the gondola began operating. This decrease was not seen for other management indicator species.

Table 2. Statistical results table. * indicates statistical significance.

Species	Control (t-value, p-value)	Gondola (t-value, p-value)
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	1.363, 0.198	1.000, 0.337
Cordilleran Flycatcher	1.058, 0.311	0.700, 0.497
Lincoln’s Sparrow	0.051, 0.960	1.350, 0.202
Wilson’s Warbler	0.681, 0.509	3.452, 0.005*

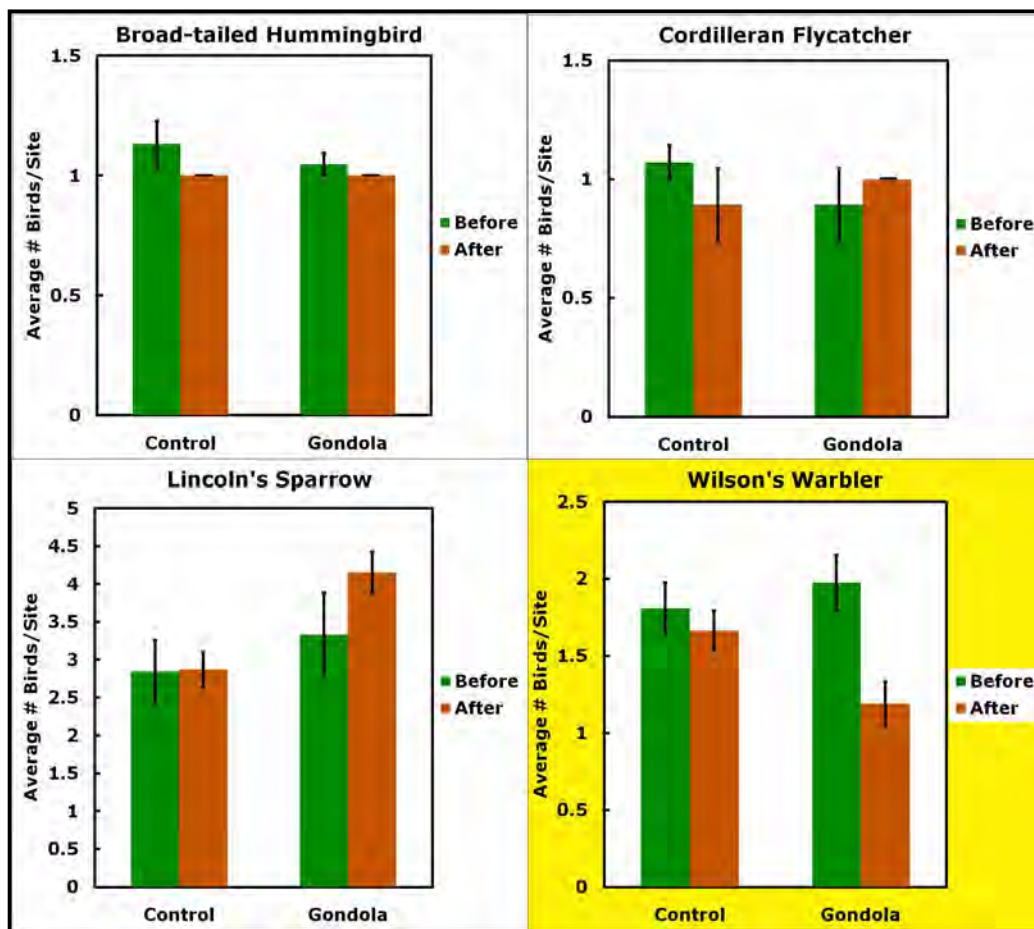


Figure 2. Graphical representation of data. A statistically significant decrease in Wilson’s Warbler numbers was found along the gondola corridor.

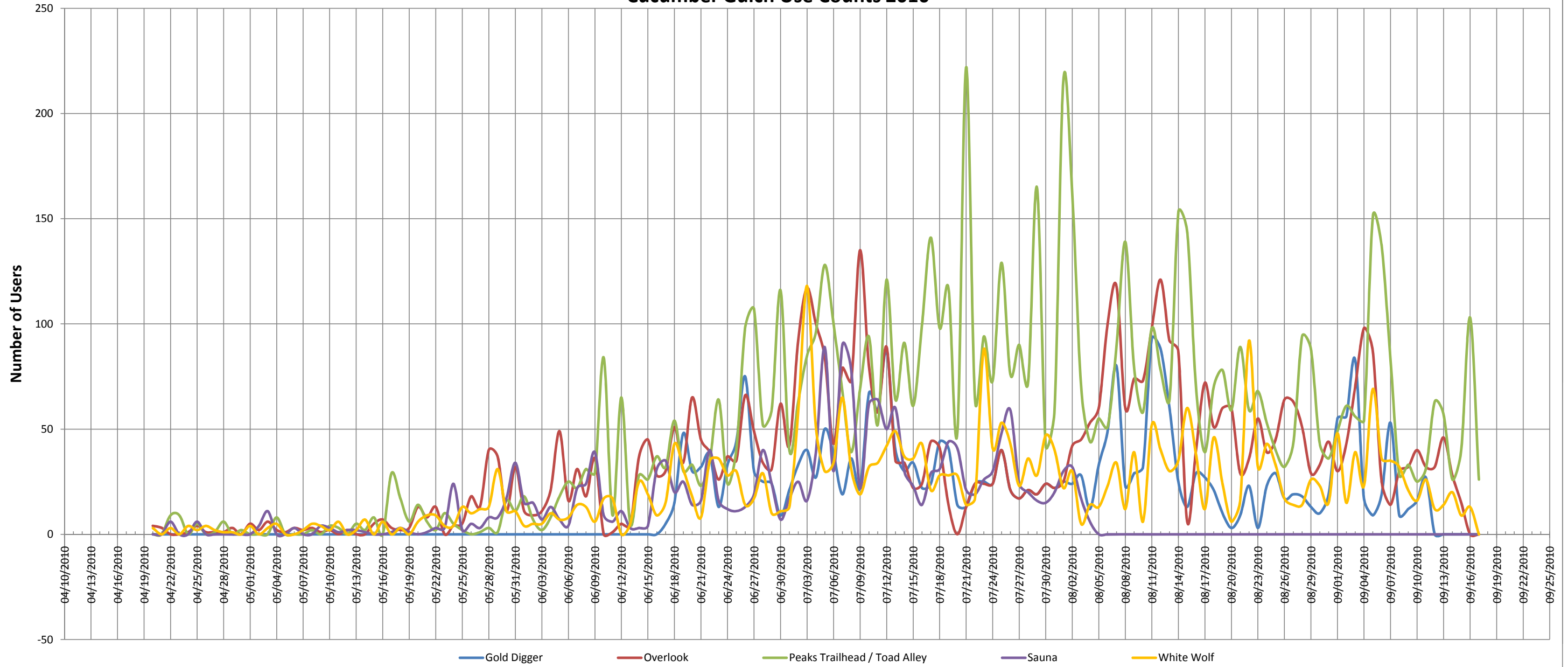
CONCLUSIONS

- The total number of birds found along the gondola path decreased when summer gondola operation began by 2.5 birds per sampling site or a total of 12.5 birds over the whole sampling area. There were no significant changes at the control sites.
- The Wilson's Warbler population was negatively impacted by gondola operation. Overall, there was 1 less warbler per site or a total of 5 less birds over the whole sampling area. Other management indicator species were not affected by gondola operation.
- Although our results did not show a direct impact to the Violet-green Swallow population, we did observe behavioral alterations. Swallows were observed perching on the gondola wires and entering cavities in the bottom of the gondola cars before operation. When the gondola was turned on the swallows became agitated and flew in erratic patterns around the gondola cars and wires attempting to land or enter the cavities. On more than one occasion swallows flew into the gondola cars and did not exit when the gondola was turned on.
- The impact of gondola operation on birds may have been greater than the results of our study revealed. Operational tests were conducted on the gondola on three separate days during the week prior to gondola operation. These tests may have caused some birds to relocate during the week prior to consistent gondola operation.

REFERENCES

- Beidleman CA. 2000. Partners in Flight Land Bird Conservation Plan Colorado. Version 1. 80-146.
- Carello C, Hoffa A, Galloway B. 2010. Cucumber Gulch Annual Conservation Monitoring Report 2009. Breckenridge, CO. 7-12, 56-70.
- Mac Nally R. 1997. Monitoring forest bird communities for impact assessment: the influence of sampling intensity and spatial scale. *Biological Conservation* 82: 355-367.
- Smucker KM, Hutto RL, Steele BM. 2005. Changes in bird abundance after wildfire: importance of fire severity and time since fire. *Ecological Applications*. 15(5): 1535-1549.
- Stephens RM, Anderson SH. 2003. Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolnii*) a technical conservation assessment. USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, Species Conservation Project.

Cucumber Gulch Use Counts 2010



File Code: 1950/2410

Date: September 30, 2010

Dear Interested Party,

The Dillon Ranger District of the White River National Forest is proposing a forest health and fuels reduction project in the vicinity of Ophir Mountain, south of Frisco, Colorado. The project would focus on treating forests within and adjacent to the wildland/urban interface that have been severely affected by the mountain pine beetle epidemic. The Forest Service has identified approximately 1,700 acres of forest that extend from Summit County Commons to the north, along Highway 9 the east, Coyne Valley Rd. on the south, and along the base of the Ten Mile Range on the west that could benefit from some kind of treatment.

The Forest Service has been collaborating with representatives from the cities of Frisco and Breckenridge, the Breckenridge Fire Department, the Lake Dillon Fire Protection District, Summit County Wildfire Council, Summit County Open Space, homeowners' associations and private landowners to develop this project. If you are interested in this project or possibly affected by it, your input would be appreciated. This letter also serves to notify and invite public comment on the proposal as stipulated in 36 CFR 800.3 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Enclosed is a description of the purpose and need, the proposed action and a location map. For a more detailed description of the proposed action and more detailed maps, you may go to the White River National Forest website at www.fs.usda.gov/whiteriver (navigate to 'Land and Resources Management' then 'Projects'). If you would prefer a hard copy of the project description and maps, you may request them from the Dillon Ranger District at 970-262-3495.

The decision to be made is one of the following: whether to implement the proposed activities on National Forest lands as described, to modify the proposed location or design of the project, to use some other combination of activities to meet the purpose and need for action, or to not implement this project at this time.

Our team of resource specialists, called an Interdisciplinary Team, is in the process of conducting an environmental analysis in order to identify issues and estimate potential impacts of this proposal. We will be using the authority set forth in the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and anticipate completing the analysis and having a decision by May 2011. To make a fully



informed decision, I need to know whether you have any issues with this proposal, and if so what they are and how they could be addressed. It's important to understand that issues in this context are concerns with this proposal based on some effect you believe it would cause. In order for your input to be most useful, it should be specific to this proposal rather than generic to all projects of this type.

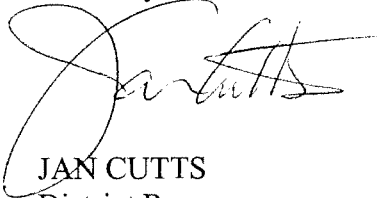
In addition, the Forest Service will be hosting an open house at the Summit County Senior and Community Center at 83 Nancy's Place CR1014, Frisco, CO, on October 21st, 2010 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Resource specialists will be available to answer your questions and help foster public understanding of this proposal. Detailed descriptions of the proposed action and maps will be available at that meeting. Because it is difficult to reach all those who may be interested or affected by the proposal, we ask that you inform your neighbors who may not have received this information, of the opportunity to provide input and /or attend the open house.

In order to keep this planning effort on schedule, we would like to have your response by November 1, 2010. Please address your comments to Jan Cutts, Dillon District Ranger, c/o Peech Keller, P.O. Box 620, Silverthorne, Colorado 80498, or email wrfn_scoping_comments@fs.fed.us. Please include: (1) Your name, address, telephone number, organization represented, if any; (2) Name of the proposal on which the comment is being submitted; and (3) Specific facts and supporting reasons for your issues.

If you submit written input related to this proposal, you will be notified of the objection period (to be held later in this process). Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act. If you wish to be removed from our mailing list, please let us know. If we do not hear from you, we will not follow up with any further correspondence.

If you need any further information about the project you may call Brett Crary at 970-827-5182 or Peech Keller at 970-262-3495. Thank you for your interest in the management of your public lands. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



JAN CUTTS
District Ranger

cc: Jan Cutts, Jan Burke, Scott Fitzwilliams, Brett C Crary, Cary Green, Cynthia P Keller

Enclosures

White River National Forest Dillon Ranger District Ophir Mountain Forest Health and Fuels Project

Purpose and Need for Action And Proposed Action Description

Introduction

The USDA Forest Service (USFS), White River National Forest (WRNF), Dillon Ranger District, is proposing to implement vegetation management activities on National Forest System (NFS) lands within and adjacent to the wildland-urban interface (WUI)¹ of Frisco, Colorado and surrounding communities. These activities are designed to lower the existing and accumulating fuel loads following the mountain pine beetle (MPB) epidemic and expedite regeneration of the forested areas located in the Ophir Mountain area. This project would also be expected to result in improvements for other forest resources, such as scenery and recreation over the long term (30+ years) following the ongoing mountain pine beetle (MPB) epidemic. The salvage of dead and dying lodgepole pine would also provide for some cost recovery to help offset the cost of treatment. The proposed project is referred to as the *Ophir Mountain Forest Health and Fuels Project* (also referred to as “Proposed Project”, “project”, or “proposal”).

Project Location

The *Ophir Mountain Forest Health and Fuels Project* area extends from the Summit County bike path on the south side of Frisco, eastward beyond Saint Anthony’s Summit Medical Center to its northernmost point being the bend of CO Highway (Hwy) 9 next to Dillon Reservoir; then south immediately adjacent to the private and county lands along the western side of CO Hwy 9 and behind Summit County High School, beyond Lakeview Circle and the Gold Hill neighborhood and south to the northern edge of North Barton Gulch. The western boundary of the proposed project area is located on the east side and upslope approximately 1,000 ft. from Miner’s Creek, south from Rainbow Lake to North Barton Gulch (see Figure 1-1, *Ophir Mountain Forest Health and Fuels Project* Vicinity Map). Within this project area the units proposed for treatment total approximately 1,600 acres.

Purpose and Need for Action

The MPB epidemic has been affecting Summit County for several years. Forests in the vicinity of Ophir Mountain have experienced an increase in tree mortality as the MPB continues to travel into higher elevation forests. Mortality rates of mature lodgepole pine in some areas are over 80% of the basal area². Within 5-20 years most dead lodgepole pine trees are expected to deteriorate and fall to the ground. As a result, heavy fuels accumulations will create conditions that could support large-scale wildfire characterized by high severity/high intensity fire behavior. Extreme fire behavior and the consequent high fire severity would threaten private property, community infrastructure, fire fighter safety and forest resources. The HFRA calls for the preparation

¹ Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) – an area within or adjacent to an at-risk community identified in recommendations to the Secretary in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (The Healthy Forests Initiative and Healthy Forests Restoration Act, p. 51 USDA, FS-799, February 2003).

² Basal Area is the cross-sectional area of all stems of a species or all stems in a stand measured at breast height and expressed per unit of land area (Society of American Foresters, 1998).

of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) or comparable plans to define the WUI and establish locally based strategic priorities for wildfire preparedness and hazardous fuels reduction work in these areas. Several areas of Summit County have been identified as potential areas of elevated risk from the negative effects of wildfire. Much of the Proposed Project is within the areas identified in the Summit County CWPP, including the Iron Springs and Gold Hill areas as well as the town of Frisco. The USFS has incorporated the recommendations of the Summit County Community Wildfire Protection Plan in the development of the Proposed Action.

As the dead trees fall over they will create an impenetrably deep pile of debris. A new forest will regenerate under these jackstraw conditions, but the forest structure will be a single age of lodgepole pine with a layer of heavy fuels underneath. This condition will be found on hundreds of thousands of acres across Colorado. In the absence of fire, the new forest across those hundreds of thousands of acres will be an even-age forest, just as we have now, and will be just as susceptible to another MPB epidemic in the future.

It is desirable to have a forest with a range of age classes and species diversity on a landscape scale to maintain forest health³. Until the large woody debris deteriorates (30+ years⁴), there will be no opportunity for any kind of forest management since it would be nearly impossible to move people or equipment into such a jackstraw situation. We have our last opportunity to manage for forest health while there is still merchantability in these dying stands of lodgepole. Removing the dead trees now, where we can, would accelerate regeneration and create a forest structure different from the adjacent unmanaged stands (a kind of diversity) as well as allow for future forest management, such as pre-commercial thinning and creating age class diversity. (Age class diversity is one way to assure future resiliency of a forested landscape to a threat such as MPB. Creating a variety of age classes across a landscape reduces the potential for severe bark beetle outbreaks by having less suitable host available. Pre-commercial thinning improves growth in an overstocked, potentially stagnant stand by reducing competition for light, water and nutrients.)

The purposes for the Proposed Action are:

- To break up the continuity and reduce the accumulation of future heavy fuel loading over the long term on NFS lands adjacent to communities in the WUI. Fuel reduction would reduce the impacts of potential wildfire to forest resources and infrastructure (roads, trailheads, utilities) within NFS lands.
- To expand treatments within the community protection zone (CPZ⁵) on NFS lands adjacent to communities in the WUI that have been identified as having an elevated risk due to hazardous fuel accumulations resulting from the bark beetle epidemic. To create conditions that would increase lodgepole pine and aspen regeneration following the MPB epidemic and provide an environment that would maximize growth rates for regeneration in the short term.
- To create conditions whereby the forest may be manageable for future objectives such as age class diversity and density management.

³ Forest health is a condition wherein a forest has the capacity across the landscape for renewal, for recovery from a wide range of disturbances, and for retention of its ecological resiliency, while meeting current and future needs of people for desired levels of values, uses, products, and services. (An Assessment of Forest Ecosystem Health in the Southwest USDA Forest Service, Southwestern Region General Technical Report RM-GTR-295.)
http://www.rmrs.nau.edu/publications/rm_gtr_295/index.html

⁴ Brown et al. (1998) in Colorado found that lodgepole pine logs on the ground persisted for many decades with a majority of their volume intact. Busse, 1994 found that a minimum of 26 years residence time was required for 50% of the wood biomass to decompose, and that decomposition was not evident in elevated boles (boles not touching the ground).

⁵ Community Protection Zone (CPZ) – fuel break areas to provide for public and firefighter safety on NFS lands adjacent to private property or community infrastructure. Four hundred feet is considered a safe width for a crown fire free zone under high to extreme weather conditions (Scott, 2003).

- To generate salvage revenues while the trees are still merchantable to help offset the costs of treatment, fuel mitigation, and reforestation.
- To provide a supply of forest products and/or biomass to local industries over the next three to ten years.

Proposed Action

Implementation of the Proposed Action would involve mechanical and hand removal of trees over approximately 1600 acres, piling and burning of slash and debris resulting from proposed treatments, road maintenance, clearing brush, grading, widening, and replacing gravel along roads, construction and closure (including obliteration) of temporary roads once they are no longer needed for operations, and mechanical site preparation to enhance the establishment of seedlings. Mechanical site preparation may include exposing bare mineral soil or disturbing existing vegetation that may out-compete seedlings. Species other than lodgepole pine may be used for fill-in planting on a case-by-case basis if deemed appropriate.

The type of treatment prescribed is the same for all of the proposed units. This type of treatment, or prescription, is identified as “clear cut with leave trees” and would allow for the removal of dead trees, trees currently infested with MPB, trees susceptible to being infested with MPB, or windthrow-prone trees while retaining the healthy living trees within a given stand. In general, all stands proposed for treatment are composed solely of or dominated by lodgepole pine trees; however, some inclusions of aspen, spruce, and fir exist as well. These inclusions would be excluded from cutting as much as practical. Due to the retention of live or non-infested trees many areas proposed for treatment would not be clearcut entirely; instead, clearcuts would at times be smaller than the larger unit boundary on the maps and would also retain individual trees of various species within their boundaries.

In order to accomplish the proposed treatments a number of road management activities would have to be undertaken. The majority of roads which would be used for the Proposed Project are currently in a usable condition; however, all roads would require some level of maintenance before, during, and after completion of the project. All truck hauling would be managed through four access points. The first haul route would be located along the trail next to the County Commons area on the south side of the Town of Frisco (NFSR 1000.1). The second route would be located through the Iron Springs USFS gate north of Summit County High School (NFSR 986.1). The third route would be located through an access point adjacent to private lands and southwest of Summit County High School off of County Road 980. The fourth haul route would be located through the Gold Hill USFS gate off of County Road 950. These routes were selected in order to provide the lowest impact to the surrounding resources while providing the most direct route available to CO Hwy 9.

In total there are 11.3 miles of haul routes that have been identified, with the majority (9.1 miles) located within NFS lands. Of those portions that are located adjacent to NFS lands 0.1 mile is located in the Gold Hill neighborhood, 1.0 mile is located through the County Road 980/Lakeview Circle area, 0.1 mile is located outside of the Iron Springs gate, and 1.0 mile is located along the trail north of the NFS lands in Frisco.

Temporary roads are being proposed in order to access treatment sites. In total there are 9.3 miles of proposed temporary roads. Of those roads, approximately 4.0 miles currently are old or unused roads persisting from previous management activities. As such, these roads would not be expected to require any extraordinary effort in order to prepare them for use. Furthermore, the use of an already existing road would help to minimize the areas of disturbance and compaction to soils throughout the proposed treatment area.

The remaining 5.3 miles of proposed temporary roads would require new construction. These temporary roads would be used to access proposed treatment sites which occur beyond any reasonable access from existing roads. These temporary roads would be developed strategically and such that the overall equipment use and associated soil disturbance would be minimized. All temporary roads would be developed such that skid distances would be minimized and none would be greater than approximately 1,200 ft in length.

The temporary roads used for the project would be obliterated⁶ upon completion of their use unless their continued persistence would be supported by the WRNF Travel Management decision. This condition would only be considered for portions of haul routes and for those temporary roads that currently are unused roads. The 5.3 miles of temporary roads requiring construction would be obliterated entirely and they would not be allowed to persist into the future.

The Proposed action was developed with site-specific directions for implementation, called design features, to mitigate or avoid negative effects of activities associated with implementation. These design features become an integral part of the proposed action. They come from the White River Forest Plan standards and guidelines, the Forest Service Watershed Conservation Practices Handbook, or can be project-specific instructions developed by the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT). The following are some of the design features developed for this proposal. A more comprehensive list of design features for this project can be found on the White River National Forest website at www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver under Land and Resources Management/Projects.

- Temporary roads would be rehabilitated by using techniques such as ripping and seeding the road surface, placing stumps, rocks, slash and logs on the road with a density and depth that mimics the surrounding forest floor areas, and dropping trees across the road to block motorized travel.
- Openings in the canopy should have a natural appearance with uneven edges rather than straight lines where possible. Natural landscape features such as natural meadows or openings and rock outcrops would be used to help the cutting blend in where possible. This will create free form vegetative shapes that mimic natural patterns. Clearing edges would be irregular and freeform, feathering and undulating edges where possible.
- Logs would not be skidded on sustained slopes steeper than 40%. Skid trails will be designated by Forest Service employees.
- Live and dead trees would be retained within 100 feet of perennial and intermittent streams, lakes, and ponds, except within designated stream crossings.
- The average per-acre levels of coarse woody debris (CWD) would be retained as prescribed in the Forest Plan standards and guidelines.
- Road density as a measure of elk habitat effectiveness would not be increased.
- Known active and inactive raptor nests would be protected within the project area.
- To minimize disturbance to elk calving, no logging operations (cutting, skidding, yarding, loading, and hauling) would occur from April 15 to June 20 within Management Area 5.43.
- A minimum of snags would be maintained for each affected cover type according to Forest Plan standards and guidelines.
- Lodgepole pine advanced regeneration (<5"DBH with >60% crown) would be retained to the extent feasible.
- Slash would be lopped and scattered to within 18 inches of the ground. Where the total fuel load is greater than 15 tons per acre the excess slash would be burned or otherwise removed from the site. Hand piles would be restricted to 300 cubic feet (10'x10'x7' and conical in shape) and landing piles to 7068 cubic feet (smoke permit limits efficient burning to a maximum pile size of 45'x20'x15' and conical in shape). Piles would be burned with ≥ 2 " of permanent snow pack to reduce residual damage to soils.
- Machine-made slash piles would be located at least twice their diameter from residual timber so damage will not occur during burning operations.
- Existing noxious weed infestations would be pre-treated within, near, or along travel routes prior to implementing the proposed project. The harvest units would be monitored for a minimum of four years after project completion and any new infestations would be treated in a timely manner.

The White River Forest Plan assigned management prescriptions for specific areas of land in the WRNF that provide the emphasis and requirements used in project implementation to help achieve Forest Plan goals and objectives. Proposed vegetation treatments for this project fall within four management areas (MAs). Table 1-1 identifies the

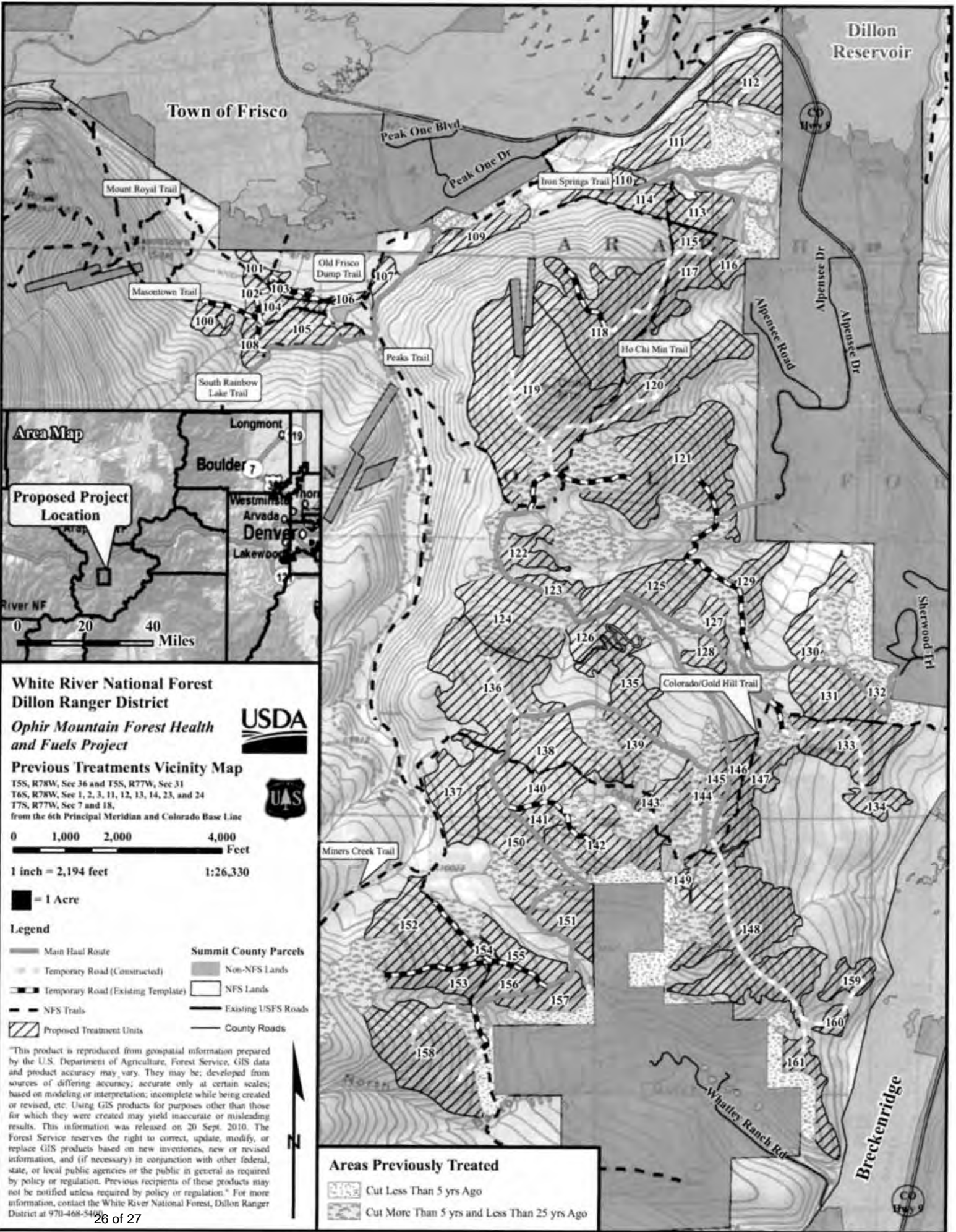
⁶ A form of road closure that refills cut areas, removes fill and drainage structures, restores natural contours, revegetates the area and ultimately attempts to restore the natural ground shape and condition. Thus, most adverse environmental impacts are eliminated.

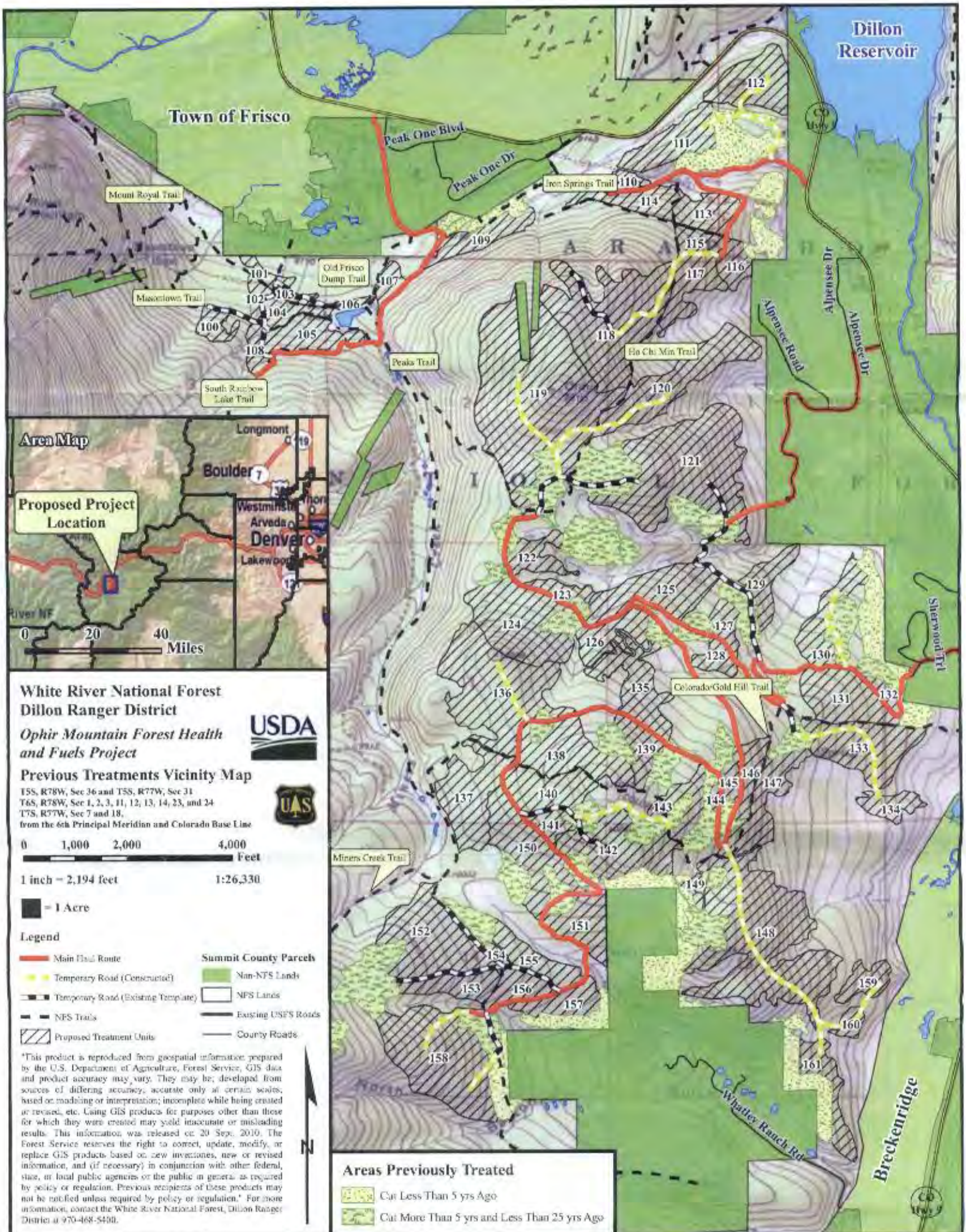
unit numbers of the Proposed Project that occur within each Management Area that is present on and around Ophir Mountain. Specific direction for these MAs can be found in Chapter 3 of the LRMP, pages 1-89.

Table 1-1– Management Areas within Proposed Project Area

MA Number	Management Area	Unit Numbers* Modified Proposed Action
4.3	Dispersed Recreation	100-110 and 113 - 116 (124.6 acres)
5.43	Elk Habitat	108 and 113 - 161 (1,402.8 acres)
8.21	Developed Recreation Complexes	110 - 112 (57.1 acres)
8.25	Ski-Based Resorts, Existing and Potential	158 (1.5 acres)

* Unit numbers may occur in more than one row if they occur in more than one MA.





**White River National Forest
Dillon Ranger District**
*Ophir Mountain Forest Health
and Fuels Project*



Previous Treatments Vicinity Map
T5S, R78W, Sec 36 and T5S, R77W, Sec 31
T6S, R78W, Sec 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 14, 23, and 24
T7S, R77W, Sec 7 and 18,
from the 6th Principal Meridian and Colorado Base Line

0 1,000 2,000 4,000
Feet

1 inch = 2,194 feet 1:26,330

■ = 1 Acre

- Legend**
- Main Road Route
 - Temporary Road (Constructed)
 - Temporary Road (Existing Template)
 - NPS Trails
 - Proposed Treatment Units
 - Non-NFS Lands
 - NPS Lands
 - Existing USFS Roads
 - County Roads

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- Areas Previously Treated**
- Cut Less Than 5 yrs Ago
 - Cut More Than 5 yrs and Less Than 25 yrs Ago