

# Tribal members comment on fire protection project

By Bill Rhoades  
for the Spilyay Tymoo

An interdisciplinary team from the Forestry and Natural Resources branches has been collecting tribal member comments on Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) projects proposed for 2005. Responses to a number of comments and concerns are included with this article produced for Spilyay Tymoo readers.

The focus of WUI is to protect rural homes and communities from wildfire. This objective is achieved by thinning overstocked stands of timber and mowing underbrush throughout the urban interface where wildfire is a perceived threat.

The 2005 WUI projects will treat approximately 8,800 acres in the Sidwaller, County Line and Warm Springs community areas over the next five years. The process for planning this project officially began in March of 2005 when the project interdisciplinary team (PIDT) completed its second and final scoping meeting with the tribal public. Meetings were held for Agency, Seekseequa and Sinnasho districts, initiating the process to complete a draft plan. A field review of the proposed project areas will be scheduled with the annual Timber Tour this summer.

The PIDT, which presents information about the proposed project to interested tribal members, is comprised of individuals from the technical staff and committees. The team includes a fish biologist, forester, wildlife ecologist, hydrologist, fuels manager, forest engineer, silviculturist, archeologist, range conservationist, soil scientist, writer/editor, representatives from tribal committees, and a representative from Warm Springs Forest Products Industries (WSFPI). Presentations made during the scoping meetings contain general information regarding the project area and treatment objectives. All team members and members of the tribal public are encouraged to attend the meetings.

Comments from the scoping meetings are used to develop a planning document known as a project assessment. The assessment contains alternatives for implementing the project, a strategy to monitor the project after it has been implemented, and mitigation measures to offset negative impacts. The project assessment will include analysis of the affected environment, environmental consequences and cumulative effects. After considering input from the tribal public, the PIDT will develop at least two alternatives,



Example of trees in a wildland urban interface area.

one emphasizing a balanced approach to resource management and another focusing on the status quo, often referred to as the no action alternative.

The PIDT will present their assessment and recommended alternative to the Resource Management Interdisciplinary Team (RMIDT) and they in turn release the assessment for public review. Following a 30-day review, RMIDT approves one of the alternatives and attaches a decision document to the project assessment, which is then forwarded to the BIA superintendent for concurrence. Tribal member comments are accepted throughout the process at the main office of the Forestry

Branch. The entire process and all management activities related to the forested area must adhere to goals, standards and best management practices adopted under the Integrated Resources Management Plan (IRMP) for the Forested Area. The plan is reviewed and updated every five years.

The 2005 WUI project is being proposed to reduce the threat of catastrophic fire on communities and rural home sites in the planning areas. Treatment costs are offset through federal funding under the Wildland Urban Interface program.

Some of the harvested trees will be chipped to provide hogg

fuel for the Warm Springs Forest Products Industries boiler. A subcontractor capable of performing the job, which is bid by the mill, will do the chipping. This work is currently being done by Van Meter Ag.

### Forest Health

There was a great deal of interest in pine beetles and their impact on the forest, and tribal members wanted to know if cutting trees actually attracts the beetles. The Ips (pine engraver) insect will bore into recently cut low-elevation pine trees in the spring and summer to lay eggs. The adult insects bore out and move into green trees, girdling and killing them. Cutting and chipping in the summer and fall should prevent the insects from going into the young pine stands.

In regards to the size of trees being taken for chips, the silviculturist noted there has been an increase in the number of small trees over the past few decades, in part because the fires that once thinned these stands are now being suppressed. Under the WUI project, trees up to 11 inches in diameter will be removed to provide space for the remaining trees to grow. This treatment will reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and more closely mimic a natural setting.

Jobs will be created as a result of these projects. While the

chipping operation, which requires special equipment, may be awarded to an outside contractor, there will be jobs for tribal members. Hand felling juniper, clipping ponderosa pine, and jobs at the mill boiler will go primarily to tribal members.

One tribal member said the pine ground had been harvested too extensively in the past and he wanted to know what was planned for this area in the months ahead. The most recent edition of IRMP provides an average allowable cut of up to 2.5 million board feet per year from the pine ground. Treatments in this area call for thinning of overstocked stands, and harvests that target insect or disease control, as prescribed in the Forest Management Implementation Plan.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the threat of fire in juniper woodlands and in timber stands near the community such as lower Shitike Canyon. Areas being treated for juniper removal will not be replanted, so the threat of catastrophic fire will be reduced. Any restocking of juniper will occur through natural regeneration.

(Note: This article will conclude in the next edition of the Spilyay.)

## Fish scientists report pressure to alter science

(AP) - Many scientists at NOAA Fisheries, the federal agency responsible for balancing hydroelectric dams against endangered salmon, say they know of cases where scientific findings were altered at the request of commercial interests, according to a survey released Tuesday by two watchdog groups.

The survey was conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. The survey posed 34 questions and was sent to 460 NOAA Fisheries scientists across the country. Responses came back from 124, or 27 percent.

"The conclusion is that political interference is a serious problem at NOAA Fisheries," Lexis Schulz, Washington representative of the Union of Concerned Scientists, said from Washington.

Among the findings:

58 percent of respondents said they knew of cases where high-level Commerce Department appointees or managers inappropriately altered NOAA Fisheries determinations.

53 percent said they were aware of cases in which commercial interests inappropriately induced the reversal or withdrawal of NOAA Fisheries scientific conclusions or decisions through political intervention.

13 percent said they knew of cases where environmental interests inappropriately induced the reversal or withdrawal of NOAA Fisheries scientific conclusions or decisions through political intervention.

44 percent said NOAA Fisheries routinely makes determinations using its best scientific judgment, even when political pressure is applied, while 37 percent disagreed.

Steven Murawski, director of scientific programs and chief

science adviser for NOAA Fisheries, said from Washington that the survey represented about six percent of the nearly 2,000 scientists at the agency, and primarily represented the views of low-level staff who evaluate the work of others to develop management policy, not research scientists. Murawski would not say there was no political influence over science at the agency but said science is the foundation of policy decisions that must take into account social and economic factors.

"To say it is politicized is a cheap shot, really," he said. "These are complex decisions, and many times people don't like the outcomes for one reason or the other."

Schulz said one of the inspirations for the survey was a recent case where NOAA Fisheries adopted a policy that counts some hatchery salmon and wild salmon together when assessing

their status as endangered species. The policy was adopted despite advice from the Salmon Recovery Science Review Panel, made up of independent scientists, that they should adopt rules to keep hatchery and wild fish separate.

At the time, NOAA Fisheries Northwest Regional Administrator Bob Lohn said the hatchery policy was guided by a federal court ruling and staff scientists. Robert T. Paine, professor emeritus of biology at the University of Washington served as chairman of the review panel. He said from Seattle that NOAA Fisheries rejected the first part of their report when they saw it dealt with the 2001 ruling by U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan that the fisheries agency could not give Endangered Species Act protection just to wild fish if it had previously lumped hatchery fish into the same population.

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