

Teton to Snake Fuels Management Project

Wilderness Study Area and Inventoried Roadless Area Facts



What is the Purpose and Need for the Project?

The Teton to Snake wildland-urban interface area is one of the highest fire risk areas on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The high risk is due to the combination of high density housing adjacent to the forest boundary, the forest fuel conditions in the area, and the prevailing winds that push wildfire toward residential areas. There are 1,597 private lots located within ½ mile of the Forest boundary.

The purpose of this project is to improve the Forest Service's ability to successfully manage fire within the high risk wildland-urban interface zone to meet our responsibilities under national law and policy and help meet Teton County goals under the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Homeowners have a responsibility to reduce fuels around their home but the Forest Service also has a responsibility to keep wildfire within the bounds of the National Forest. To be successful, managers must reduce the risk of fire escaping outside of national forest boundaries while at the same time ensuring firefighter safety, controlling cost, and avoiding adverse effects from suppression activities. Specific project objectives are to:

1. Improve firefighter and public safety; reduce expected fire flame length to less than 4 feet and reduce the potential for crown fires within the defense zone.
2. Reduce wildland fire spread potential to/from national forest system and state and private lands.
3. Increase the probability that managers can respond to natural fire starts using tactics that are lighter on the land and allow fire to operate more freely in contributing to natural ecosystem processes.

The purpose is NOT to restore a particular ecological or historic vegetation condition.

What are the Consequences of Doing Nothing?

- Increased risk of fires that could escape out of the Forest and threaten homes or the BPA powerline. Currently, an estimated 11% of the defense zone (area within ¼ mile of private lands) could experience active crown fire making control efforts very difficult and hazardous. There is no buffer between the WSA and private land.
- Reduced ability to control fire using ground forces; increased reliance on aircraft with associated high cost. For reference, the 2001 Green Knoll fire costed approximately \$12 million dollars to suppress with \$5 million of total cost associated just with aircraft use.
- Continued suppression of nearly 100% of wildfires with increasing negative consequence to wilderness character (loss of a natural process that is the key force that shapes plant communities and associated wildlife habitat). Fire modeling indicates that even under low severity burning conditions, an estimated 53,820 acres would have burned between 1971 and 2010 if natural ignitions had been allowed to burn. Instead, less than 5,000 acres have burned in this time period.
- Increased impacts to wilderness, wildlife and watershed values due to suppression activities. Suppression activities on the 2001 Green Knoll fire resulted in 16.4 miles of bulldozer line, 8 miles of which were in the WSA.
- Increased risk to firefighters tasked with suppressing wildfires that threaten homes due to snags and potential of fuels in the area to produce high flame lengths.

What are the Laws that Apply to these Special Areas?

The 134,500 acre Palisades Wilderness Study Area was designated by Congress under the Wyoming Wilderness Act. Congressional direction states that the area must be managed "to maintain its presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System". The 1964 Wilderness Act contains a number of special provisions for stewardship including a provision that "such measures may be taken as may be necessary in the control of fire, subject to such conditions as the Secretary deems desirable". This provision does not negate the requirement to still maintain wilderness character but does acknowledge that some flexibility in managing fire may be necessary. National Forest Service policy includes the following objectives for wilderness:

1. Permit lightning caused fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness.
2. Reduce, to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness.

The 12,900 acre Munger Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area and 9,900 acre Phillips Ridge IRA are subject to the requirements of the 2001 Roadless Rule. The Roadless Rule establishes prohibitions on road construction and reconstruction and on timber cutting, sale, or removal. No road construction or reconstruction is proposed within the IRAs. Removal of small diameter trees is proposed as part of the understory thinning, consistent with the Roadless Rule, specifically the exceptions identified under 36 CFR 264.13.

What is Proposed?

Palisades Wilderness Study Area.

	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Preferred Alternative
Acres of mechanical fuel treatment (understory thinning is needed to successfully implement the prescribed burns)	0 acres	825 acres (0.6% of area)	391 acres (0.3% of area)
Acres of prescribing burning including miles of fire-line	0 acres	12,042 acres (3.0 miles of fire line)	7,910 acres (1.6 miles of fire line)
% of defense zone that could generate flame lengths greater than 4 feet, thus forcing use of aircraft and more impactive suppression tactics	42%	27% (35% reduction in area)	34% (20% reduction in area)

Munger Mountain and Phillips Ridge Inventoried Roadless Areas.

	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Preferred Alt
Acres of mechanical fuel treatment	0 acres	291 acres (2.9% of area) (all in Phillips Ridge IRA)	273 acres (2.7% of area) (all in Phillips Ridge IRA)
Acres of prescribing burning including miles of fireline	0 acres	6,857 acres (in both IRAs) (5.3 miles of fire line)	4,106 acres (in both IRAs) (4.0 miles of fire line)
Miles of road work	0 miles	1.5 miles (Phillips IRA) (All maintenance)	0.4 miles (Phillips IRA) (All maintenance)
Amount of commercial timber cut	0 board feet	0.2 MBF	0 MBF

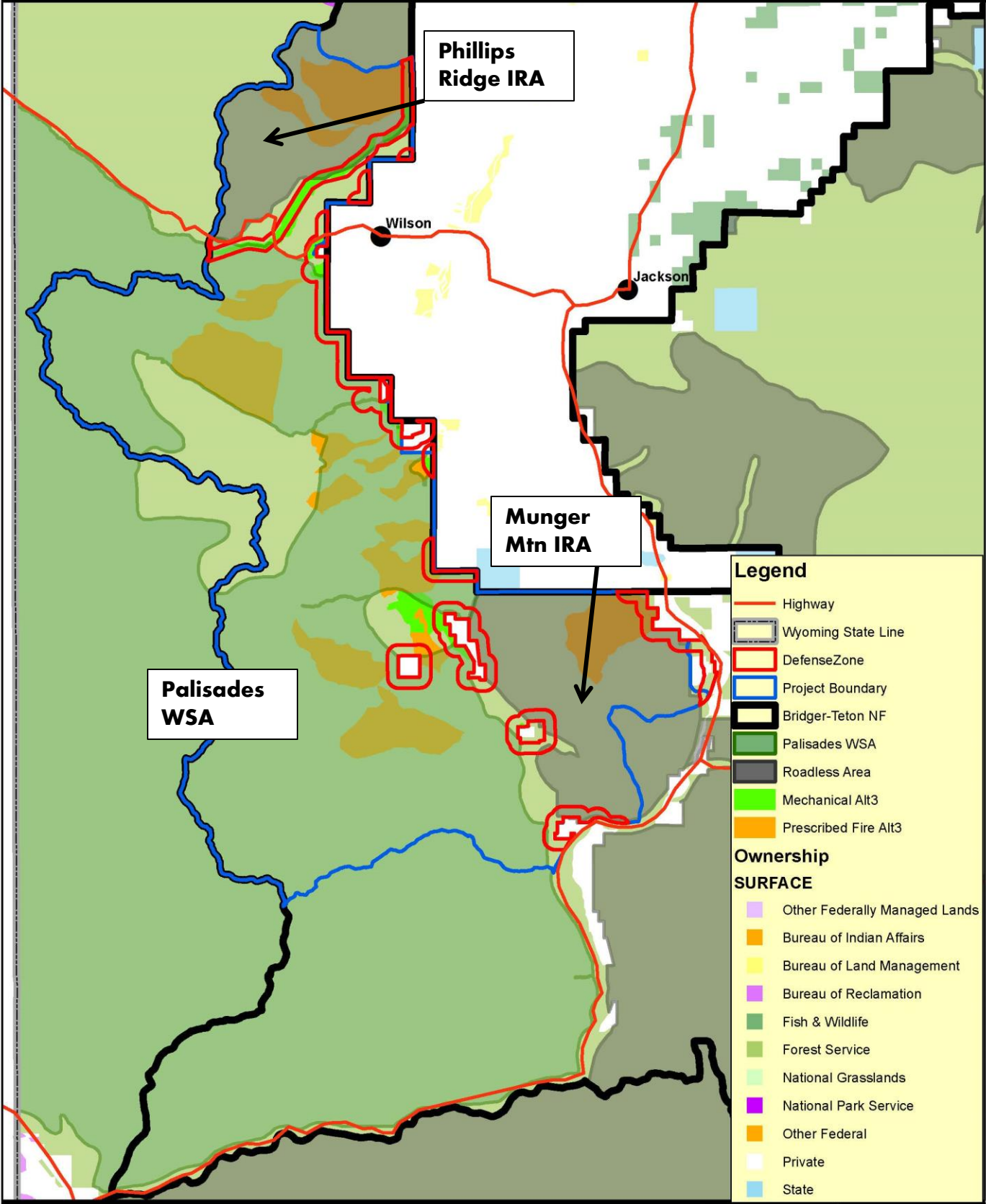
Summary

- **No permanent or temporary roads** are proposed to be constructed or reconstructed in the WSA or IRA
- **No commercial activity** is proposed in the Palisades WSA - No trees would be removed or sold
- All alternatives result in some impact to wilderness character within the WSA including No Action
- None of the alternatives would affect the eligibility of the Palisades for future wilderness designation
- Given the negative consequences associated with doing nothing, the key question is what is the minimum human interference possible that would still allow firefighters to prevent wildlife from crossing onto private lands and provide greater ability to use light-hand tactics to manage fire within the WSA?

Where to Get More Information and Provide Comment

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement is available for a 45 day public review and comment period. The full document as well as the executive summary and comment instructions is available at: www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=23638.

Teton to Snake Fuels Management Project



Legend

- Highway
- Wyoming State Line
- DefenseZone
- Project Boundary
- Bringer-Teton NF
- Palisades WSA
- Roadless Area
- Mechanical Alt3
- Prescribed Fire Alt3

Ownership

SURFACE

- Other Federally Managed Lands
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Fish & Wildlife
- Forest Service
- National Grasslands
- National Park Service
- Other Federal
- Private
- State