Cragin Watershed Protection Project

Stakeholder Meeting February 11, 2016
Polly Haessig, CWPP Project Manager

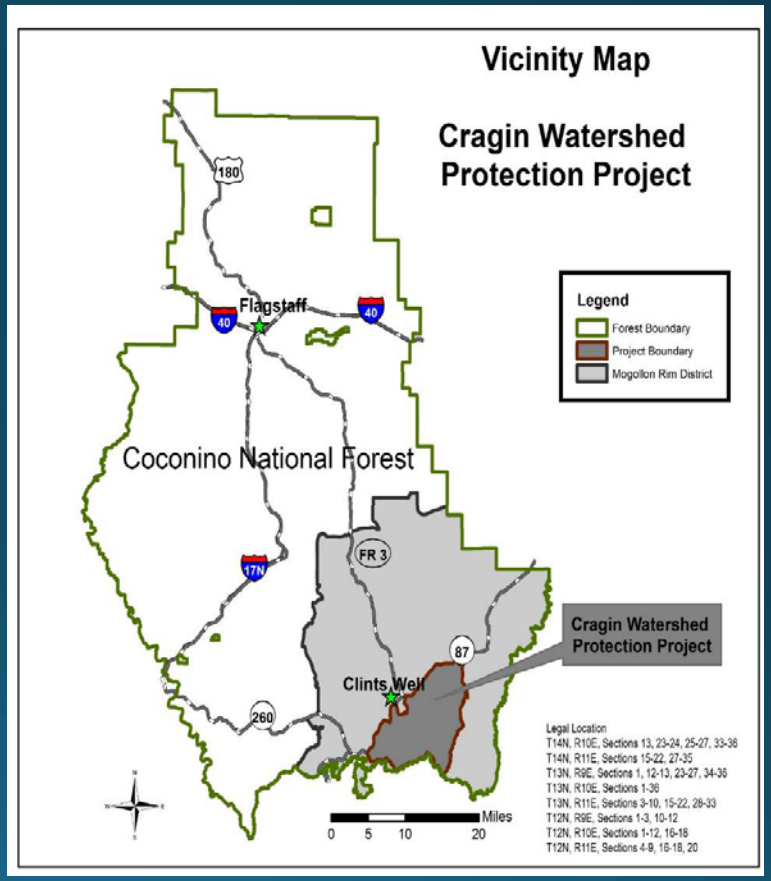
CWPP Project Pre-Scoping Draft Proposed Action

- Environmental Assessment (EA) under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) authority
- Proposed Action includes vegetation treatments using mechanical and hand thinning and prescribed burning
- Vegetation Thinning nearly 39,000 acres
- Prescribed Burning nearly 64,000 acres
- Reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire to wildland urban interface (WUI) and drinking water watersheds in and adjacent to the project area.

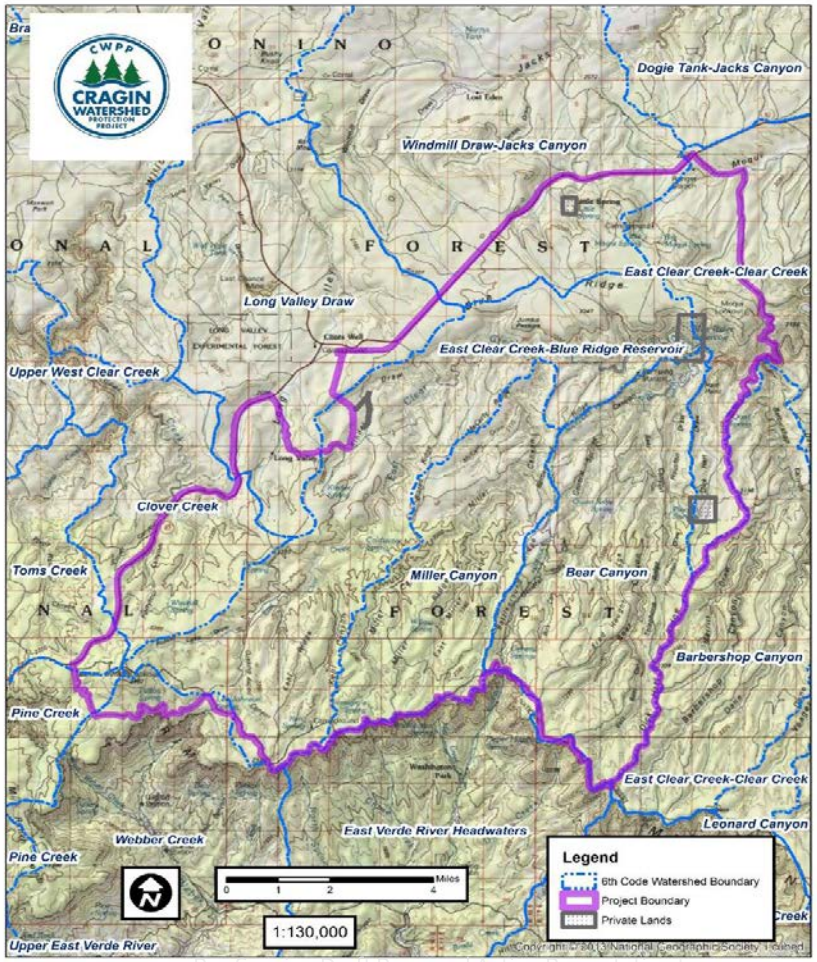
CWPP

- Mogollon Rim Ranger District
- 55 miles south of Flagstaff
- South of Highway 87 and north of the 300 road

- Project Acres = 64,433



Why Here, Why Now – reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire



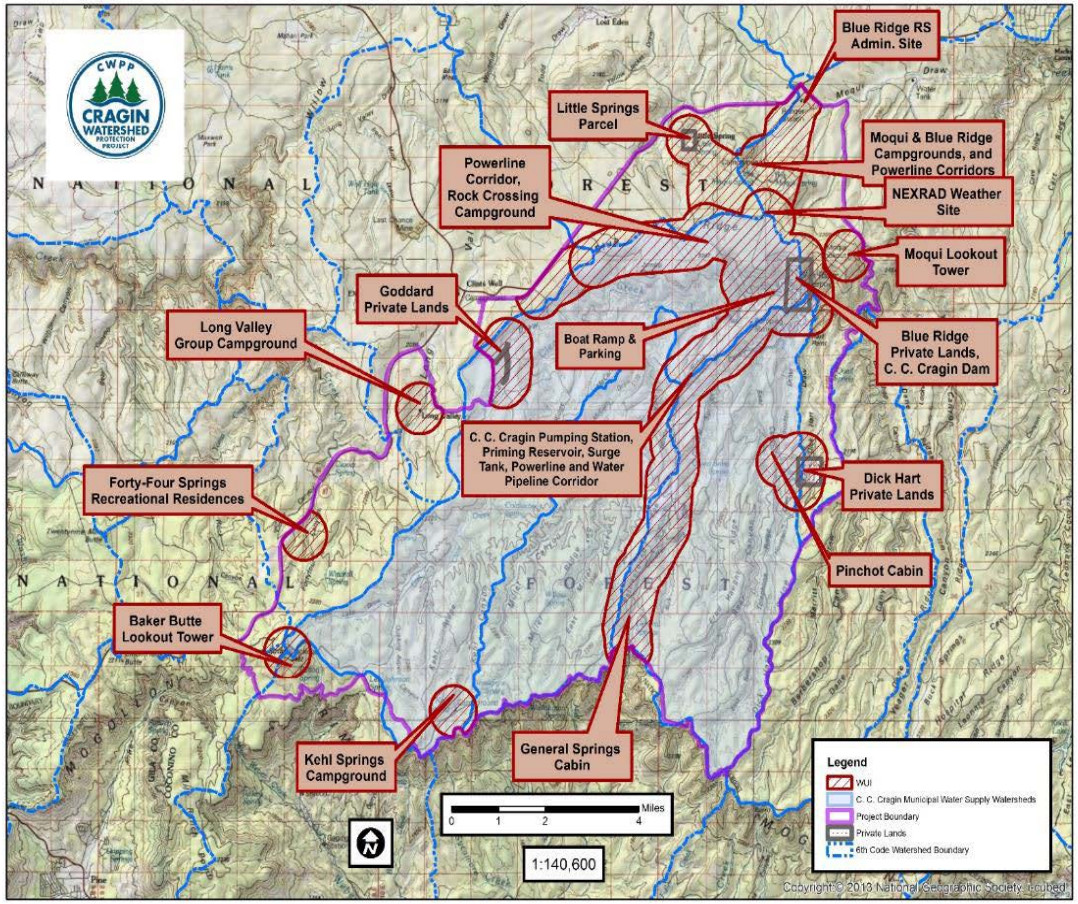
Pre-Scoping Draft Proposed Action Presentation to Stakeholders, 2-11-2016

Background and Partnerships

- Arizona Water Settlement Act 2004
- BOR, SRP, C. C. Cragin Reservoir, C. C. Cragin Project
- 3,500 ac ft for municipal and domestic uses including Town of Payson, northern Gila County communities, Tonto Apache Indian Community.
- Town of Payson pipeline and water treatment facility are under construction to utilize water from the reservoir 2018
- Western Watershed Enhancement Partnership – USDI and USDA 2014
- Coconino National Forest, Salt River Project, Bureau of Reclamation Phoenix Area Office, Town of Payson are working together to jointly improve the health and reduce wildfire hazards of the Cragin watersheds
- 4FRI and Rim Country EIS

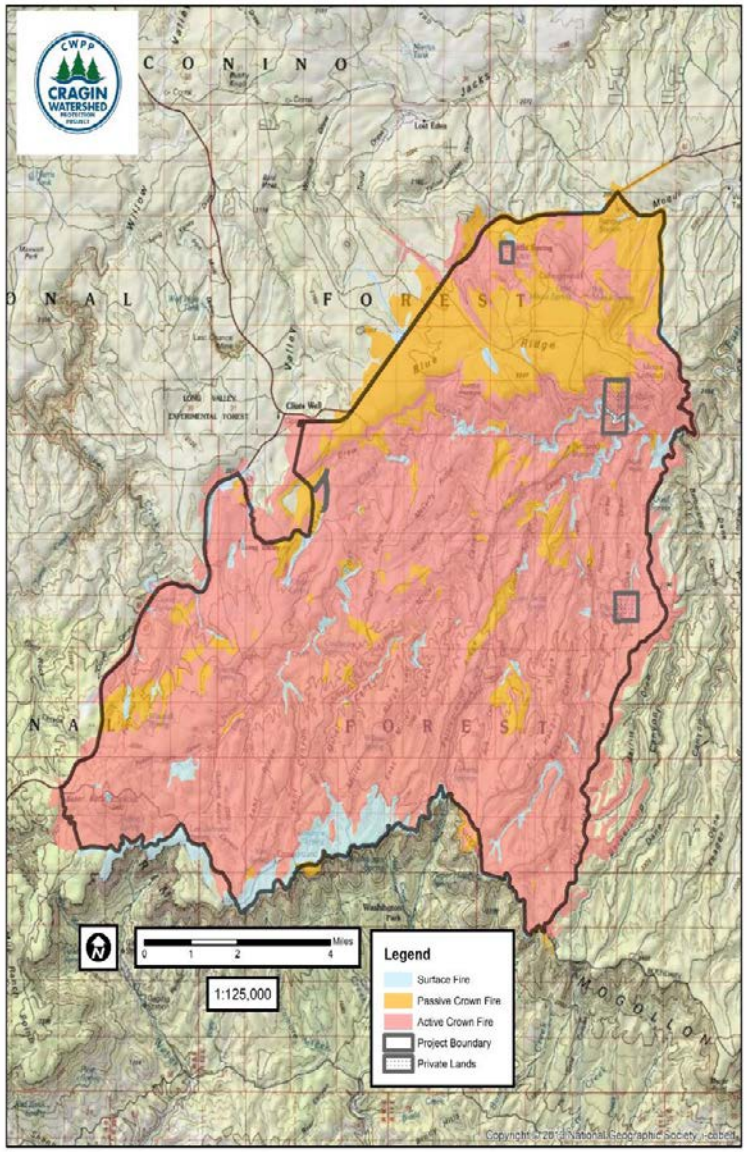
WUI Sites & Values at Risk

- WUI Sites –
- Cragin infrastructure
- Private lands
- FS facilities
- Campgrounds
- Lookout Towers
- Powerlines
- Communication sites
- TE wildlife – MSO, LCS



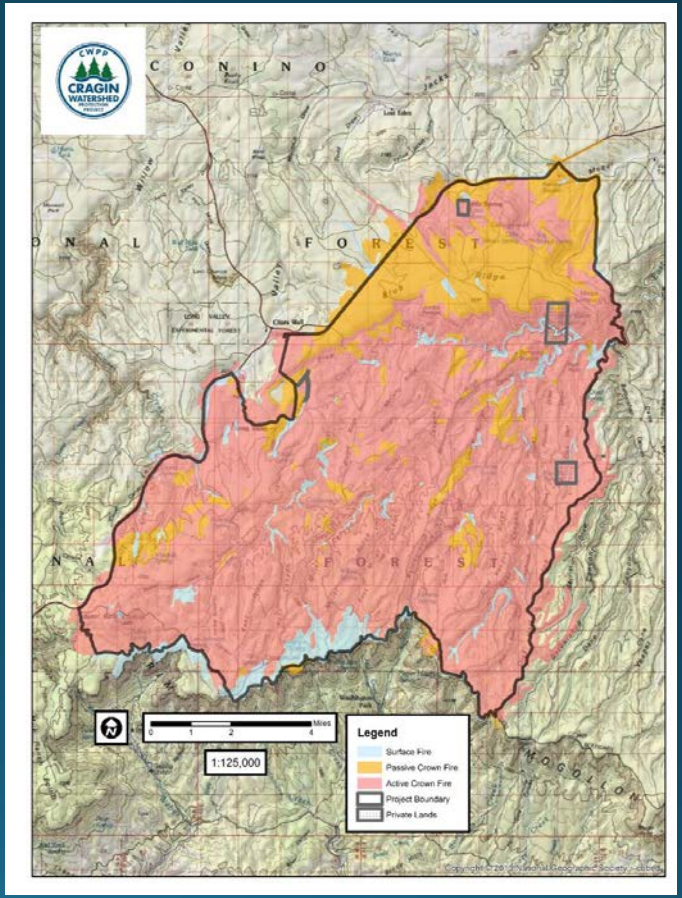
Purpose

- Reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire to WUI and drinking water watersheds
- Reduce the risk of post-fire erosion and/or flooding
- Begin to initiate the re-establishment of a fire-adapted resilient, diverse and sustainable forest ecosystem



Needs for Change

- Reduce active and passive crown fire (watersheds, MSO PACs)
- Reduce buildup of natural fuels (surface fuels, ladder fuels, and small trees) which has supported the shift to increasingly larger crown fires
- Remove trees that obscure the view from Baker Butte Lookout Tower
- Reduce dense thickets of small trees along forest roads and Highway 87
- Reduce ladder fuels adjacent to private lands and campgrounds



Existing Conditions – Fire Type

Summary of Fire Type within the CWPP Fire Type within the CWPP		
Surface Fire	Passive Crown Fire	Active Crown Fire
3,866 ac. 6%	11,598 ac. 18%	48,969 ac. 76%

94% of the Project Area is modeled for a crown fire type at the existing condition

Existing Vegetation Condition Class

Summary of Vegetation Condition Class within the CWPP		
Condition Class 1- low vegetation departure	Condition Class Level 2- moderate vegetation departure	Condition Class Level 3- high vegetation departure
179 ac. <1%	26,987 ac. 42%	37,267 ac. 58%

Vegetation Departure indicates the general level to which current vegetation is different from the simulated historical vegetation reference conditions. Vegetation departure is based on changes to species composition, structural stage, and canopy closure. Modeling program used is LANDFIRE.

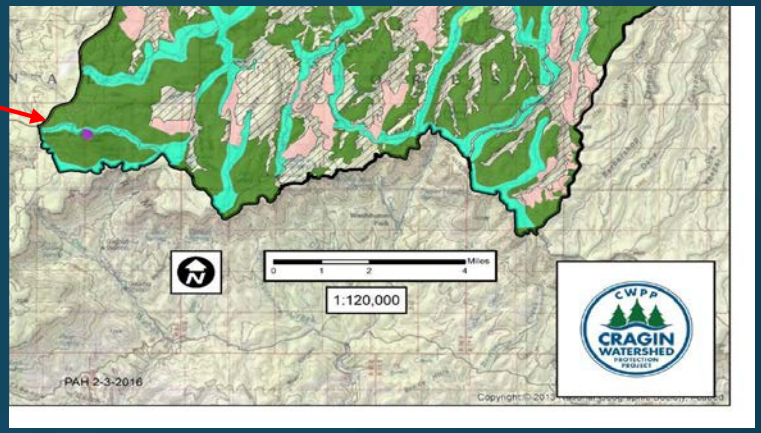
Desired Conditions

- Reduce passive and crown fire to mostly surface fire potential
- Shift the project area from mostly Vegetation Condition Class 3 to dominantly Condition Class 1, with minor components of Condition Class 2
- Sub-watersheds in a condition where fire can be safely returned to the landscape
- Reduced trees per acre across the landscape
- Forest structure that is similar and approaching historic conditions

Draft Vegetation Treatment Summary

Baker Butte Treatment

27 acres



Remove trees blocking views from the tower and reduce fuels

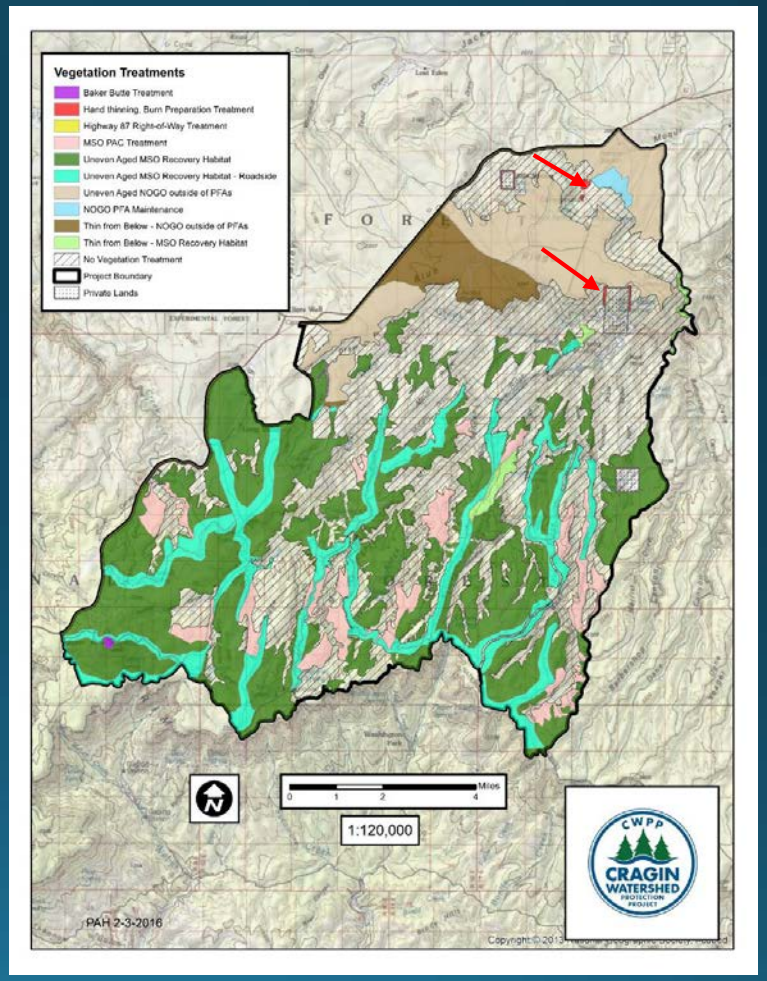
Residual basal area per acre: 80 to 100 ft^2

May cut up to 35 conifers > 24.0" diameter

Includes periodic maintenance treatment to remove trees blocking the view from the tower.

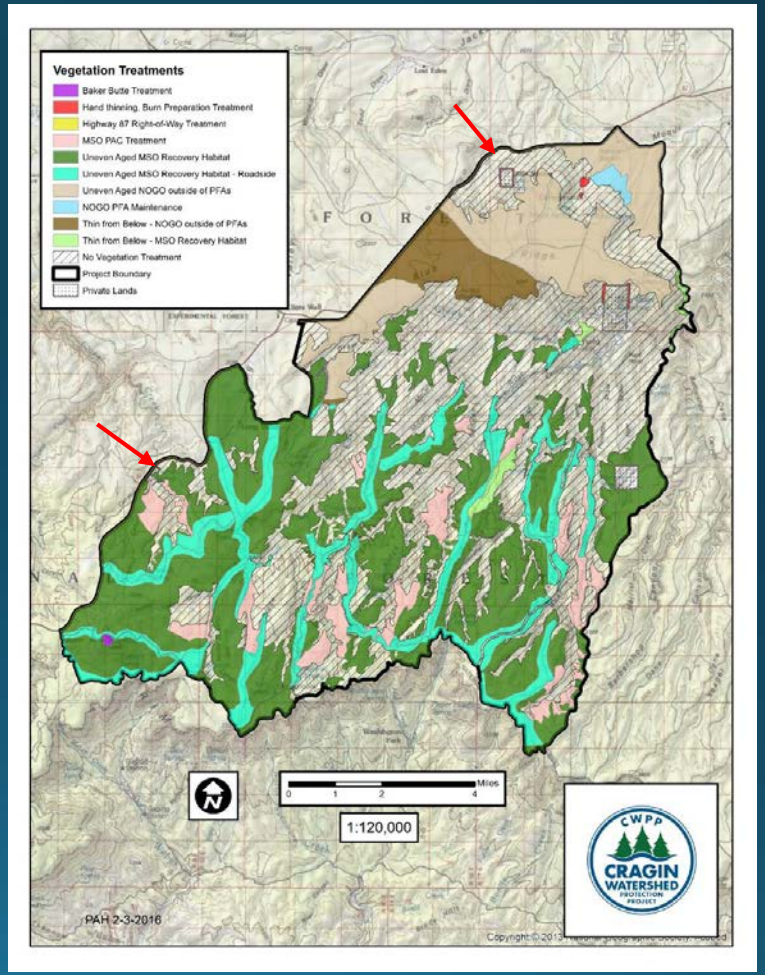
Hand Thinning, Burn Preparation

- 77 acres
- Reduce ladder fuels and areas of dense trees on steep slopes next to selected private lands and within and around Moqui and Blue Ridge Campgrounds to prepare the area for safe implementation of prescribed burning



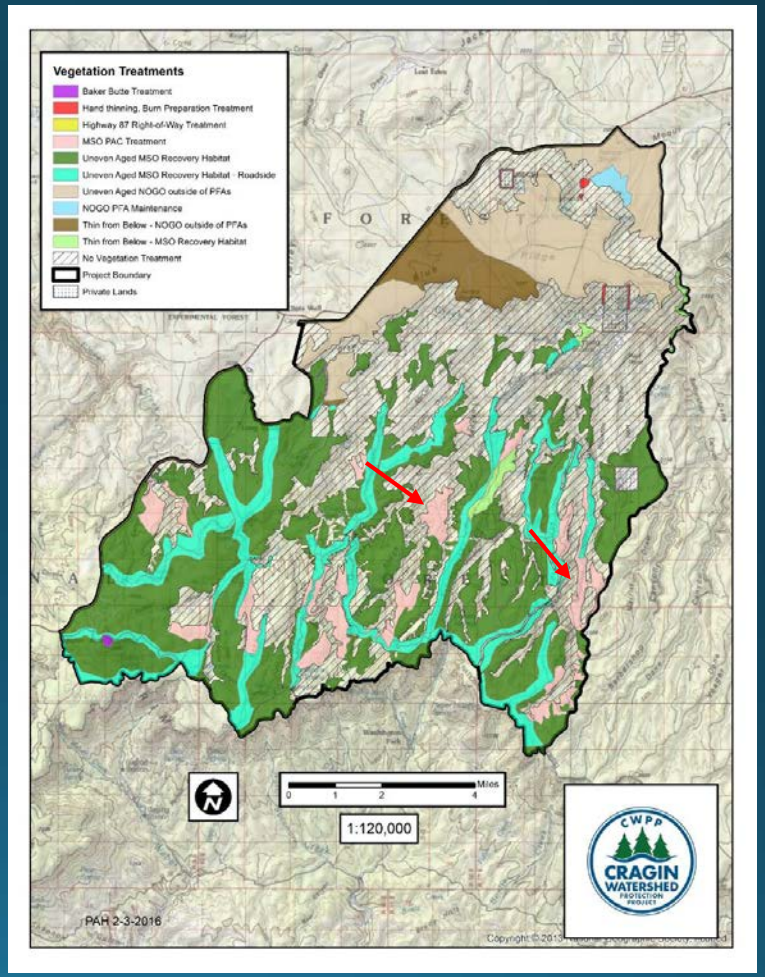
Highway 87 Right-of Way Treatment

- 200 acres
- Allow drivers increased time to stop or recover before hitting an obstacle
- Removal of trees and vegetation within the recovery zone (30 ft. from the white line)
- Fuel reduction within the remainder of the ROW (generally 100 ft. from the white line)



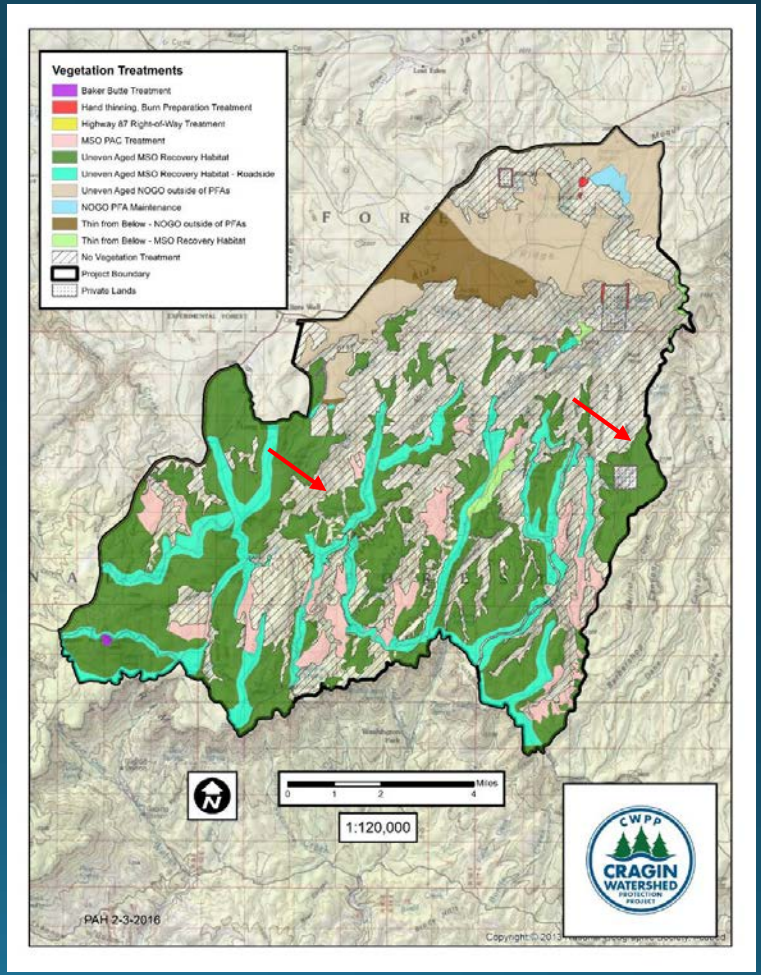
MSO PAC Thinning

- 3,018 acres
- Fourteen PACs identified for treatment to reduce fire hazards while maintaining habitat conditions
- Mechanical thinning and prescribed fire
- Minimum basal area 120 ft²/acre in mixed conifer and 100 ft²/acre in pine-oak
- Maintain 60% canopy cover in dry mixed conifer and 40% in pine-oak
- Created openings would range from 0.1 to 2.5 acres



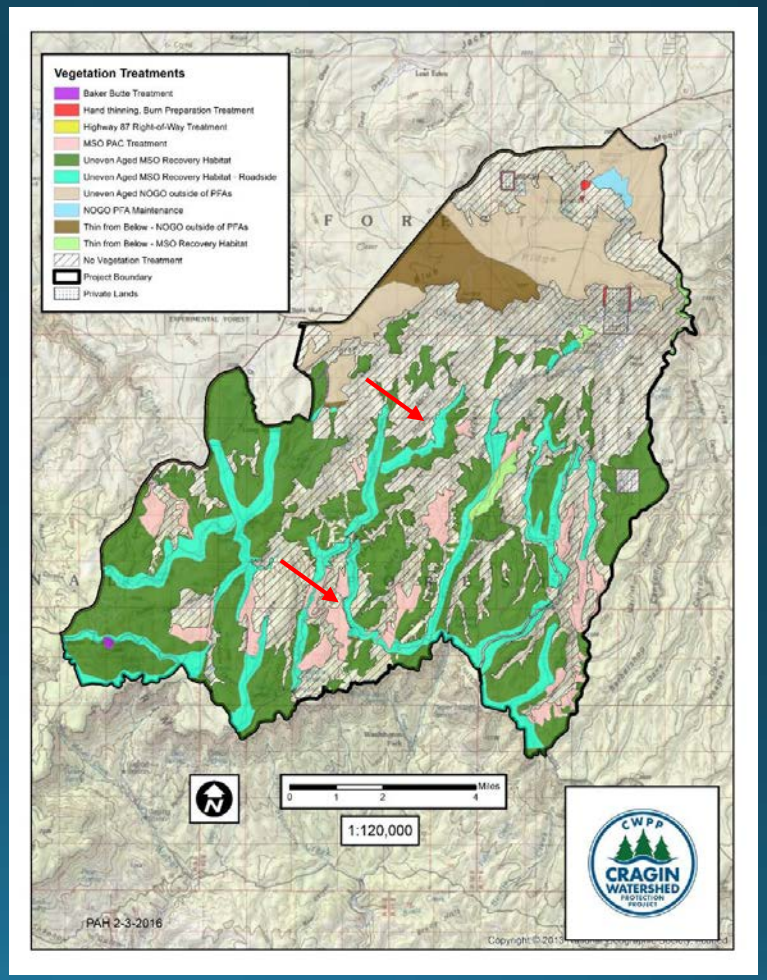
MSO Recovery Habitat, Uneven Aged Management

- 19,637 acres
- Retain key habitat elements while reducing fuels
- Develop an uneven-aged structure, with a mosaic of openings and tree groups of variable size
- Openings would be less than 2.5 acres
- Basal Area/acre: 80-120 ft^2



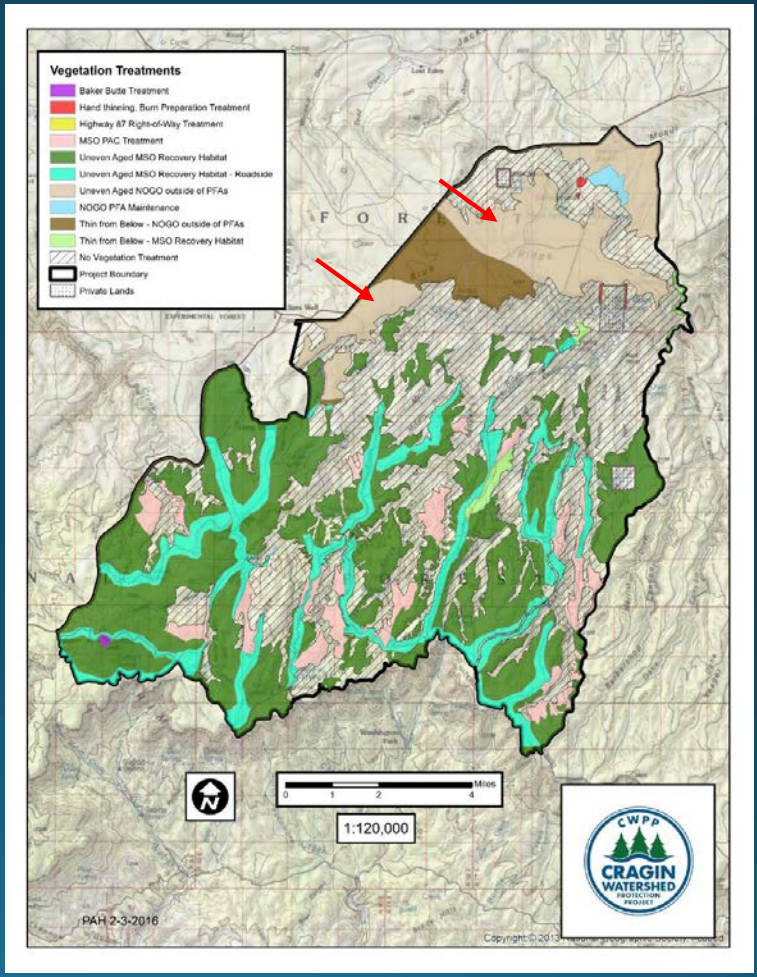
MSO Recovery Habitat, Uneven Aged Management - Roadside

- 7,099 acres
- Reduce fire hazards along roads by reducing the number of small trees or thickets of small trees
- Create defensible fuel profile along roads
- Priority treatment along roads
- Develop an uneven-aged structure, with a mosaic of openings and tree groups of variable size
- Openings would be less than 2.5 acres
- Basal Area/acre: 80-120 ft^2



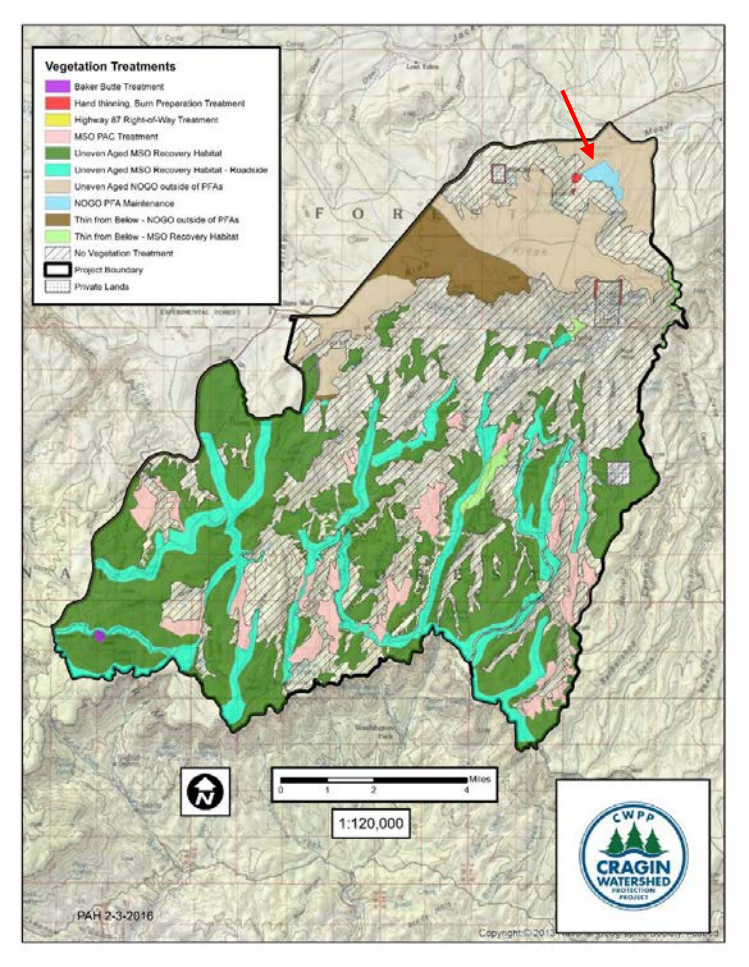
Uneven Aged Management, Northern goshawk habitat outside of PFAs

- 6,136 acres
- Achieve/maintain a balance of uneven-aged structure in terms of the vegetation structural stages (VSS)
- VSS 1 (openings) 10%
- VSS 2 (seedling/sapling) 10%
- VSS 3 (young forest) 20%
- VSS 4 (mid-age forest) 20%
- VSS 5 (mature forest) 20%
- VSS 6 (old forest) 20%
- Basal area/acre: 60-90 ft^2



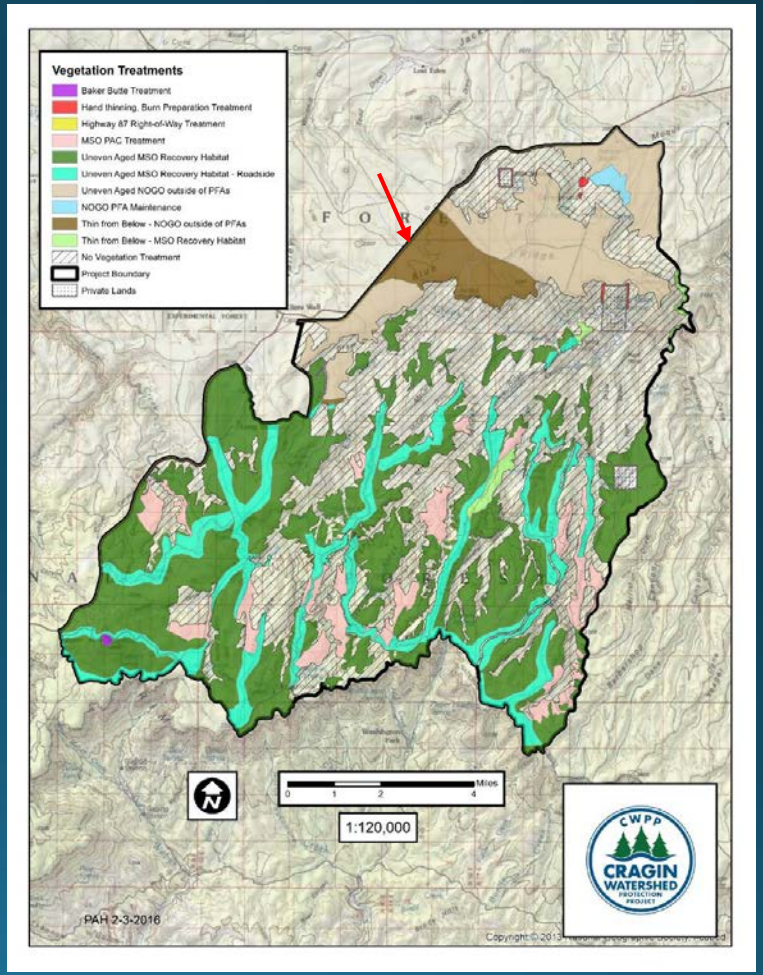
Northern goshawk PFA Maintenance

- 211 acres
- Manage for uneven-aged conditions
- Higher Canopy Cover and smaller openings (less than 2.0 acres) than goshawk habitat outside of PFA
- Basal area/acre: 100-120 ft^2



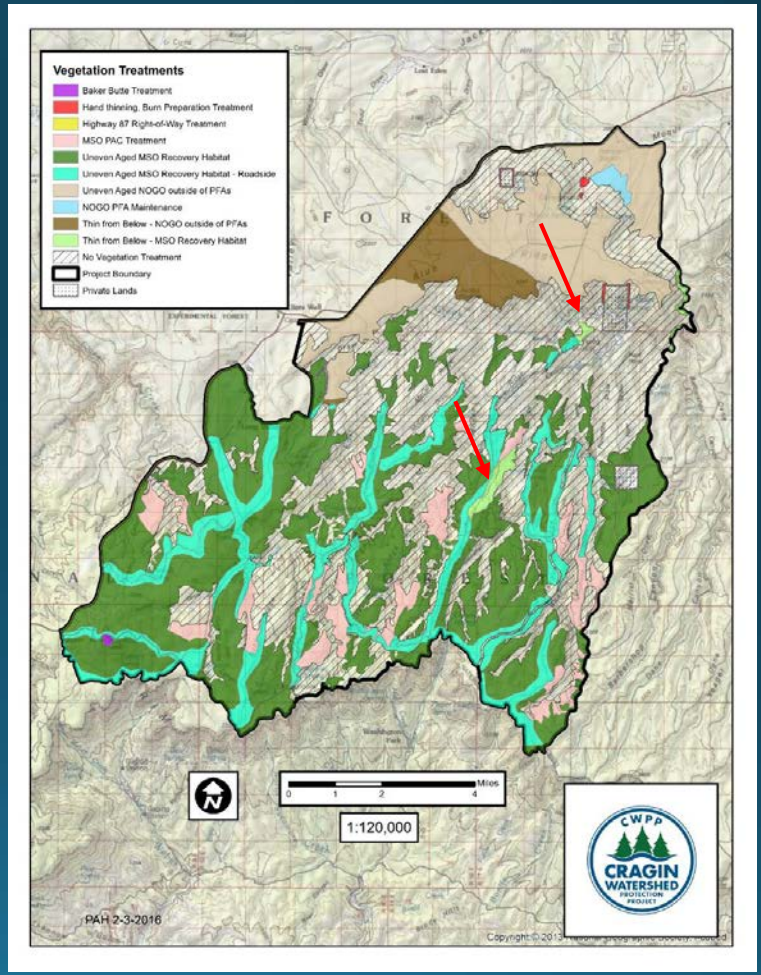
Thin from Below, Northern goshawk habitat outside of PFAs

- 2,081 acres
- Thin conifers less than 9.0" diameter
- Irregular tree spacing
- Basal area/acre: 40-80 ft²



Thin from Below, MSO Recovery Habitat

- 394 acres
- Thin conifers less than 9.0 diameter
- Irregular tree spacing
- Basal area/acre: 100-120 ft^2



Prescribed Burning and Activity Fuels Treatment

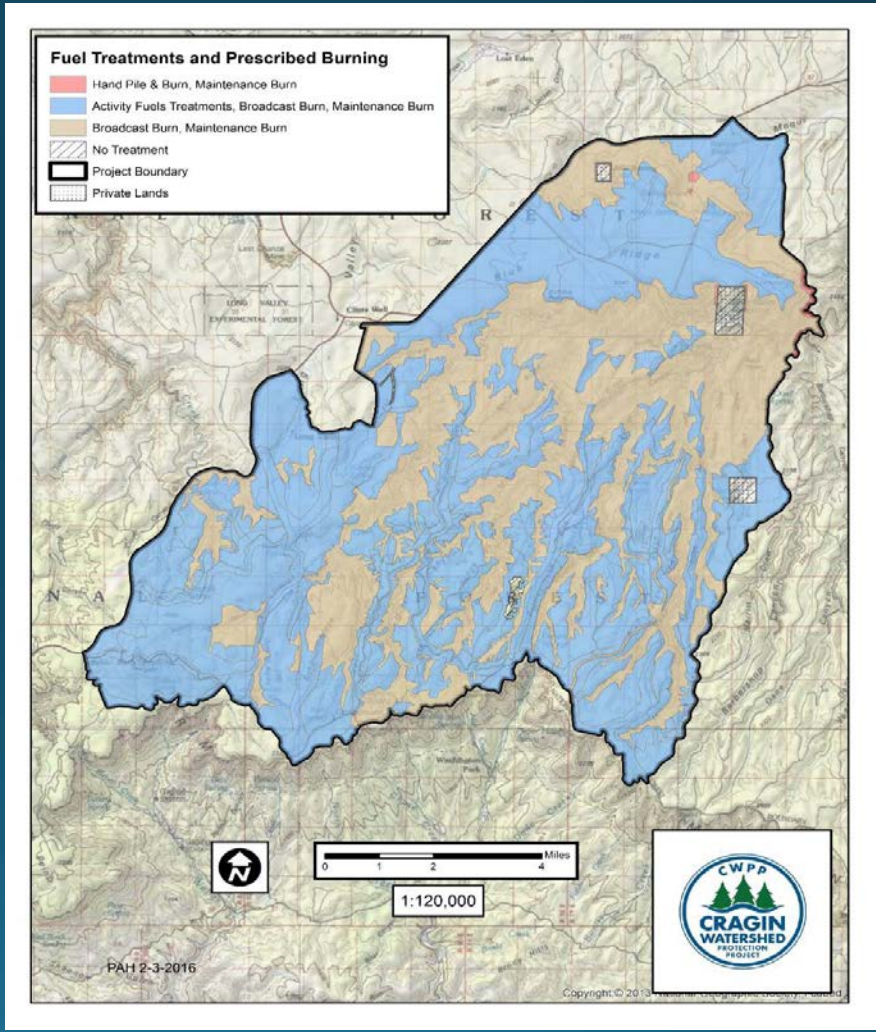
Treat natural and activity-generated fuels

Three general stages:

1. Initial entry broadcast prescribed burn
2. Machine pile or hand pile and burn
3. Maintenance Prescribed Burn

Activity Fuels Treatments Preferences

1. Whole-tree yarding & removal of all biomass from units
2. Piling of slash, burning piles



Design Features

- Design Features Appendix is our best compilation at this time of resource protection measures to mitigate impacts of implementing the project.
- They come from the Forest Plan or are modified from the Forest Plan guidelines or come from Forest Manual and Handbook direction and law and regulation.
- These Design Features may be modified, changed or new measures added in response to public comments and the environmental analysis process.

Conservation of Old and Large Trees

- Project Old Tree Implementation Plan
- Project Large Tree Implementation Plan
- Old trees, ~ > 150 years and with typical bark and branching form/characteristics, would be retained with a few exceptions
    - Exceptions: human health and safety hazards; operational considerations; Baker Butte Treatment
- Large trees less than 150 years old (post-settlement) and > 16 " diameter. These would be retained with a few exceptions --
    - Exceptions: human health and safety hazards, operational considerations, Baker Butte Treatment, community protection goals; to create within stand openings and regeneration openings; to remove a limited number of 16-17.9" diameter trees within heavily stocked stands in MSO PACs.

Forest Plan Amendments

- 1. Mexican Spotted Owl Amendment
  - Adoption of language from the 2012 Revised Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery Plan
  - Mechanical treatment up to 17.9 " dbh in Select PACs (3,018 acres)
  - Removal of trees > 24" dbh in MSO Restricted Habitat (Recovery Habitat)
  - Prescribed Fire within 26 PAC Core Nest Areas (about 2,600 acres)
  - Monitoring Changes in MSO Populations and Habitat

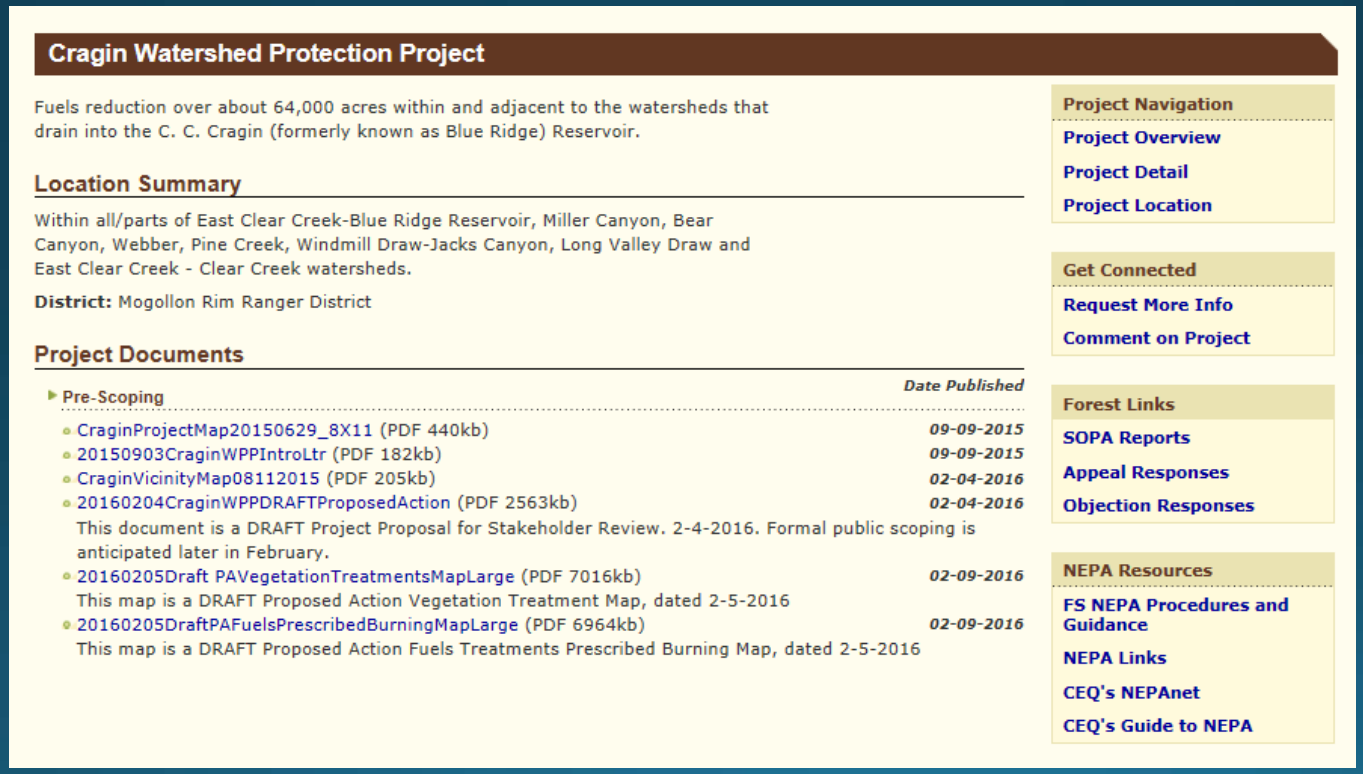
- 2. Management of Canopy Cover and Ponderosa Pine with an Open Reference Condition within Goshawk Habitat
  - Clarifies existing direction related to managing canopy cover and interspace in Northern goshawk habitat

Issues & Concerns Discussed with Stakeholders

- Treatment in MSO PACs
- Baker Butte Treatment
- Biomass removal versus piling and burning
- Scenery with respect to recreation sites & roads
- Arizona National Scenic Trail, General Crook National Recreation Trail and System Trail Protection
- Hazardous Fuels Reduction Focus
- Restoration opportunities brought forward for consideration by 4FRI Rim Country EIS or other District focus projects

Cragin Watershed Protection Project Planning Page

http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46075



Cragin Watershed Protection Project

Fuels reduction over about 64,000 acres within and adjacent to the watersheds that drain into the C. C. Cragin (formerly known as Blue Ridge) Reservoir.

Location Summary

Within all/parts of East Clear Creek-Blue Ridge Reservoir, Miller Canyon, Bear Canyon, Webber, Pine Creek, Windmill Draw-Jacks Canyon, Long Valley Draw and East Clear Creek - Clear Creek watersheds.

District: Mogollon Rim Ranger District

Project Documents

Pre-Scoping	Date Published
CraginProjectMap20150629_8X11 (PDF 440kb)	09-09-2015
20150903CraginWPPIntroLtr (PDF 182kb)	09-09-2015
CraginVicinityMap08112015 (PDF 205kb)	02-04-2016
20160204CraginWPPDRAFTProposedAction (PDF 2563kb)	02-04-2016
This document is a DRAFT Project Proposal for Stakeholder Review. 2-4-2016. Formal public scoping is anticipated later in February.	
20160205Draft PAVegetationTreatmentsMapLarge (PDF 7016kb)	02-09-2016
This map is a DRAFT Proposed Action Vegetation Treatment Map, dated 2-5-2016	
20160205DraftPAFuelsPrescribedBurningMapLarge (PDF 6964kb)	02-09-2016
This map is a DRAFT Proposed Action Fuels Treatments Prescribed Burning Map, dated 2-5-2016	

Project Navigation
- Project Overview
- Project Detail
- Project Location

Get Connected
- Request More Info
- Comment on Project

Forest Links
- SOPA Reports
- Appeal Responses
- Objection Responses

NEPA Resources
- FS NEPA Procedures and Guidance
- NEPA Links
- CEQ's NEPAnet
- CEQ's Guide to NEPA

Comment on Project

http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/coconino/CWPP

Comments may also be sent by e-mail to: FS-comments-southwestern-coconino-mogollon@fs.fed.us.