



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Medford District Office
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504
<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford>

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DEC 07 2016

Dear Interested Public:

The Medford District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is beginning a planning process to expand and update its existing District-wide integrated noxious weed management program. The purpose of this letter is to give you an opportunity to share any information or concerns you may have about the proposal.

The District currently controls noxious weeds following existing BLM policy and a District-wide 1998 *Integrated Weed Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA)* and Decision Record, using a range of methods including manual (hand-pulling), seeding and planting, and herbicides (primarily 2,4-D and glyphosate, but also limited amounts of dicamba and picloram). The District proposes to update and expand this program by:

- Increasing the kinds of plants controlled from noxious weeds¹ to all invasive plants²;
- Using additional non-herbicide methods like mechanical, prescribed fire and biological control agents (mostly insects) and,
- Making additional herbicides available for use.

The additional herbicides, and their use on all invasive plants, were addressed in the 2010 Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for *Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in Oregon*, the 2007 Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for *Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides in 17 Western States*, and the 2016 Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for *Vegetation Treatments Using Aminopyralid, Fluroxypyr, and Rimsulfuron*. A 1984 / 87 court injunction had limited the BLM to using only four herbicides and restricting their use to noxious weeds only. This injunction was amended following completion of the 2010 Oregon FEIS and Record of Decision to permit the use of additional herbicides and targeting additional species once site-specific environmental assessments were completed. This planning effort will result in that site-specific analysis for invasive plants on the Medford District.

Purpose and Need for Action

¹ Invasive plants that are county-, State-, or federally-listed as injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or any public or private property.

² Nonnative aggressive plants with the potential to cause significant damage to native ecosystems and / or cause significant economic losses.

The Medford District has over 80 species of invasive plants present on over 15,000 acres³ of the District that continue to spread. Some plants have no effective control methods available. Adverse effects caused by these invasive plants include the loss or degradation of ecosystem function including displacement of native vegetation; reduction in habitat and forage for wildlife and livestock; loss of federally listed and other Special Status species' habitat; increased soil erosion; reduced water quality; reduced soil productivity; reduced wilderness and recreation values; and/or, can injure humans, pets, or livestock.

More selective herbicides are now available to the BLM to treat a wider variety of invasive plants. These herbicides can be used in lower quantities, are more effective at treating target species, and pose less environmental and human health safety risk than the four herbicides currently in use. The purpose for action is to:

- Control invasive plants to protect native ecosystems and the flora and fauna that depend on them.
- Cooperatively control invasive plants so they do not infest or re-infest adjacent non-BLM-administered lands.
- Prevent control treatments from having unacceptable adverse effects to applicators and the public, to desirable flora and fauna, and to soil, air, and water.
- Improve treatment effectiveness, so resource and economic losses from invasive plants are reduced.

What Action is BLM Proposing?

The Proposed Action is similar to the current invasive plant management program (the 'No Action Alternative') except it is expanded to allow herbicide use on nonnative invasive plants (not just noxious weeds), and it is expanded to include the use of additional herbicides District-wide. In addition to herbicides, treatment methods would also include manual methods such as pulling and grubbing, mechanical methods such as weed whackers and mowers, prescribed fire, seeding, biological control agents (generally insects), and targeted grazing using sheep and goats (see Attachment 1: Invasive Plant Treatment Methods).

Under both the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives, all treatments are constrained by Standard Operating Procedures and other mitigation measures designed to prevent adverse effects from invasive plant control treatments, including those using herbicides. Treatments would be set in a management context of prevention, detection, education and awareness to prevent invasive plants from colonizing new areas to the greatest extent possible. The majority of herbicide treatments will be done via backpack sprayers, which allow for very precise application. Herbicides would not be aerially sprayed.

The District will prioritize invasive plant treatments to maximize effectiveness and protect sensitive resources. Treatment priorities would include small infestations, treatments in special

³ 15,950 gross affected acres and 899 net infested acres.

management areas, those with a high likelihood of successful treatment, and where reinvasion can be prevented.

How to Be Involved:

We would like to hear from you regarding any issues or concerns you feel should be analyzed to help ensure the completeness of the EA. The input you provide will help an interdisciplinary team of BLM natural resource specialists to develop design features for the project and to assess the potential environmental effects. Comments helpful to the analysis process are those that identify new scientific or technical information, determine the scope of issues to be addressed, and express concerns related to the proposed action. The BLM will refine the draft proposed action and/or develop alternatives for inclusion in the EA, based on the issues raised during the public scoping period. **Please submit your comments by January 9, 2017.**

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment letter, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask to have your personal identifying information withheld from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Ways to Submit Scoping Comments:

- **ePlanning:** https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do (use text or mapsearch)
- **Email:** blm_or_invasive_plant_ea_comments@blm.gov Subject: Medford Invasive Plant Management EA (OR 932)
- **FAX:** (503) 808-6021 Attn: Medford Invasive Plant Management EA
- **Mail:** Medford District BLM, Attn: Tony Kerwin, Medford Invasive Plant Management EA 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504

Once an EA has been prepared, the public will be notified of the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed action and analysis. Documents will be posted on the BLM's NEPA Register and notification will be sent via mail or email. If you do not have comments at this time but would like to be kept informed as planning progresses, please send us your name and email or address, and your name will be maintained on the mailing list for this project.

Questions about the project may be directed to Bryan Wender, Project Lead, bwender@blm.gov, (541) 471-6672, or Tony Kerwin, District Environmental Planner, (541) 618-2402.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth R. Burghard
District Manager

Enclosure