

# Rainey Creek Vegetation Restoration Project

---

A report on the collaboration process.

**Flowers, Deborah M -FS**

**1/23/2014**

## Contents

Introduction.....	2
First Public Meeting – March 27, 2013 .....	2
Second Public Meeting – April 30, 2013 .....	3
Field Trip – May 21, 2013 .....	3
Third Public Meeting – June 6, 2013 .....	3
Proposed Objectives.....	4
Potential Treatments .....	5
Visual Simulation.....	5
Summary .....	5
Appendix A – Public Meeting Notes, March 27, 2013 .....	6
Appendix B – Questionnaire and Results .....	8
Appendix C - Public Meeting Notes, April 30, 2013.....	11
Appendix D – Field Trip Notes, May 21, 2013 .....	15
Appendix E – Public Meeting Notes, June 6, 2013 .....	19
Attachment 1 - Rainey Creek Proposed Treatment Map .....	22
Attachment 2 – Rainey Creek Collaborative Proposed Vegetation Treatments .....	23
Attachment 3 – Visual Simulation .....	24

January 23, 2014

## **Introduction**

The Rainey Creek Vegetation Restoration Project initial planning started in 2012. The Caribou-Targhee National Forest (CTNF) and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) entered into a cooperative agreement to work toward the restoration of the Rainey Creek area to address this valuable Terminal Winter Range to mule deer that has lost much of the mountain shrub component due to its use as an elk feed ground from 1978 to 2006 and the increased juniper canopy cover as a result of fire suppression. Elk reduced the shrub component through over browsing near the winter feed ground and the dense, mature Rocky Mountain juniper stands have reduced the shrub and the herbaceous vegetation component across this habitat type through shading and the use of water and nutrients. The mid-elevation winter range habitat still includes mountain shrubs but they are in diminished numbers because of the increase in juniper. The remaining shrubs are old and have lost their vigor and much of their nutritional value. The upland habitat is adjacent to the terminal and mid-elevation winter range and is important early in the winter and spring. This habitat allows deer and elk to delay entering the lower elevation winter range and provides an area with forage as soon as the snow recedes. This upland habitat is predominantly mature and has lost vigor and much of its nutritional value for the same reasons as the mid and terminal winter range. The early seral vegetation is declining and would benefit from treatment designed to increase shrubs, grasses and forbs, as well as aspen stands.

This project is needed to reestablish the health and productivity of the area. The reestablishment of the herbaceous and shrub community would provide forage, nesting sites and security for many animal species; among these species are deer and elk. Much of the project area has been identified by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game as important winter range for mule deer. Mule deer have been on the decline in recent years. This is due to several factors, including the decreasing quality of winter range habitat. This project would increase the quality of the area for deer by increasing the forage quality and quantity.

Rainey Creek is a prominent drainage within the view-shed of the public (from Swan Valley) and is a well-used recreation area by local residents due to the recreational opportunities provided from motorized and non-motorized trail access, dispersed camping, mountain biking, wildlife viewing and hunting. Approximately 70 to 100 years of fire exclusion in the lower drainage have resulted in some dense stands of juniper with interlocked canopy cover. Where these conditions are found along the Rainey Creek Road corridor and along the private boundary, they represent an increased threat of wildfire to private property and increase the risk of exposure to firefighters and the public in the event of a fire. A portion of this project area occurs within the wildland urban interface (WUI) as identified by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The Bonneville County, Idaho Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is currently under revisions with a draft WUI boundary depicting a portion of the project area within this identified WUI. Public and firefighter safety, homes, improvements and other values can be negatively affected by a wildfire that could burn through these areas when they are in close proximity to the WUI.

## **Collaboration**

### **First Public Meeting – March 27, 2013**

An invitation was mailed to 492 individuals, organizations, agencies and media inviting them to the first Rainey Creek Collaborative Public Meeting (February 25, 2013 and March 15, 2013). A news release was distributed to the local media on March 18, 2013 by Lynn Ballard.

The meeting was held at the American Legion Hall, in Swan Valley, Idaho from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Thirty-five individuals attended from the general affiliations noted below. The facilitator reviewed the NEPA process and Forest Service and Idaho Fish and Game staff provided a historical overview and current resource condition of the Rainey Creek area. Participants identified values deemed important and concerns/support for potential treatment types that would be used as the collaborative process continued. Complete notes are attached as [Appendix A](#).

Participants were provided a handout which contained the goals of the collaboration process and contact info for the Forest Service and Idaho Fish and Game specialists. Participants were also provided with a questionnaire so Forest Service specialists could better understand their current interest and assessment of the Rainey Creek area ([Appendix B](#)).

Attendees:

- 1 - State and county elected officials (or their representatives)
- 27 – Interested individuals
- 3 – County department officials
- 3 – Environmental interests
- 1 – Timber interest

### **Second Public Meeting – April 30, 2013**

A notification of the meeting was mailed to 115 individuals or organizations (April 19, 2013). A news release was also e-mailed by Lynn Ballard on April 22, 2013 to a local media contact list. A total of seventeen individuals attended the meeting (not including CTNF and IDF&G staff) at the American Legion Hall, Swan Valley, Idaho from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Forest Service staff continued to present the current resource condition and gather input from the group. See meeting notes in [Appendix C](#) for details.

Attendees:

- 2 – State and county elected officials (or their representatives)
- 11 – Interested individuals
- 3 – County department officials
- 2 – Environmental interests

### **Field Trip – May 21, 2013**

An invitation was mailed to 123 individuals or organizations (May 6, 2013). A news release was e-mailed by Lynn Ballard on May 16, 2013 to a local media contact list. A total of nine participants, 12 CTNF & IDF&G staff and a facilitator toured 5 sites in the Rainey Creek project area from 9:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Discussion included wildland urban interface, dispersed camping, treatment types, aspen ecology/restoration, prescribed fire, mountain mahogany, and juniper ([See Appendix D](#)). Discussion points were used as the CTNF and IDF&G prepared treatment options for the June 6 meeting.

Attendees:

- 4 – State and county elected officials (or their representatives)
- 1 – Interested individual
- 1 – County department official
- 2 – Environmental interests
- 1 – Timber interest

### **Third Public Meeting – June 6, 2013**

A notification of the final meeting was sent on May 29, 2013 to 123 individuals and organizations. A news release was sent to a local media contact list by Lynn Ballard on May 30, 2013. The meetings were announced as open to any member of the public regardless if they attended earlier meetings.

Eight individuals attended from various affiliations, plus an additional 7 CTNF & IDF&G planning team members and the facilitator from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. at the American Legion Hall in Swan Valley, Idaho. The facilitator briefly reviewed the process to date for any persons that had not been regularly involved. The Forest Service team leader presented a draft proposed treatment map and a list of proposed treatment areas. This draft proposal was based on discussion and tentative treatment designs from the previous meetings. The participants asked questions and the District Ranger or CTNF and IDF&G specialists answered. Discussion is included in the meeting notes ([Appendix E](#)).

- 1 – State and county elected official (or their representative)
- 3 – Interested individuals
- 2 – County department officials
- 2 – Environmental interests

## **Proposed Objectives**

These are general objectives which will be identified more thoroughly through the NEPA process.

### **Objective 1. Restore vegetation conditions in Rocky Mountain juniper, mountain mahogany, Douglas fir and aspen communities to improve/increase the forage quality for wildlife within the Rainey Creek area.**

This project is needed to reestablish the health and productivity of the area. The reestablishment of the herbaceous and shrub community would provide forage, nesting sites and security for a variety of animal species. Among these species are deer and elk. Much of the project area has been identified by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game as important winter range for mule deer. Mule deer have been on the decline in recent years. This is due to several factors, including the decreasing quality of winter range habitat. This project would increase the quality of the area for deer by increasing the forage quality and quantity across the project area.

This proposed project area has three types of winter range habitat. They are terminal winter range where deer congregate during the worst winters, mid-elevation habitat and uplands that provide early winter and early spring forage.

Terminal winter range- This habitat has lost much of the mountain shrub component due to its proximity to an elk feed ground and the increased juniper canopy cover. The elk reduced the shrub component through over browsing near the winter feed ground and the dense, mature juniper stands have reduced the shrub component across this habitat type through shading and the use of most of the water and nutrients. This area has lost much of the herbaceous vegetation (grasses and forbs) due to the shading and water use by the dense stands of juniper. By opening the juniper canopy there would be an increase in this herbaceous vegetation.

Mid-elevation winter range- This habitat still includes mountain shrubs but they are in diminished numbers because of the increase in juniper numbers. The remaining shrubs are old and have lost their vigor and much of their nutritional value.

Upland habitat- This upland habitat is adjacent to the terminal and mid-elevation winter range and is important early in the winter and early in the spring. This habitat allows deer and elk to delay entering the lower elevation winter range and provides an area with forage as soon as the snow recedes. This upland habitat is predominantly mature and has lost vigor and much of its nutritional value for the same reasons as the mid and terminal winter range. The early seral vegetation is declining and would benefit from treatment designed to increase shrubs, grasses and forbs, as well as aspen stands.

### **Objective 2. Reduce fire hazard by decreasing fuel loadings along the Rainey Creek Road, and along the Forest Service/private land boundary.**

Rainey Creek is a well used recreation area by local residents due to the recreational opportunities provided from motorized and non-motorized trail access, dispersed camping, mountain biking, wildlife viewing and hunting. Approximately 70 to 100 years of fire exclusion have resulted in some dense stands of juniper with interlocked canopy cover. Where these conditions are found along the Rainey Creek Road corridor and along the private boundary, they represent an increased threat of wildfire to private property and increase the risk of exposure to firefighters and the public in the event of a fire. A portion of this project area occurs within the WUI as identified by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Public and firefighter safety, homes and improvements and other values can be negatively affected by a wildfire that burns through these areas when they are in close proximity to the WUI.

Recommendations to reduce the wildfire hazard along the Forest Service boundary, within the dispersed campsites and improve access and egress along the Rainey Creek Road include:

- Reducing juniper crown densities, increasing crown spacing between individual trees and groups of trees to mitigate the potential for crown fires.
- Removing ladder fuels that provide horizontal and vertical continuity that promote crown fire.
- Reducing surface fuel loading to decrease the intensity of surface fires.
- Promoting aspen regeneration in existing aspen stands that have been encroached upon by conifer. Since aspen stands support more herbaceous vegetation than conifer stands, aspen stands are commonly used as fire breaks during wildfire suppression and are favored as leave trees during hazardous fuels reduction projects.

### **Objective 3. Support sustainable resource use by removing some Rocky Mountain juniper along the Rainey Creek Road and providing wood products to local community.**

Where possible provide for the sale of wood products to the public in the form of firewood permits, post and pole permits and small sale removal of timber.

#### **Potential Treatments**

- 1. Vegetation treatments** – Use mechanical and prescribed fire treatments to treat an estimated 3,000 acres within the 6,300 acre project area, see [Attachment 1](#) – Rainey Creek Proposed Treatment Map, and [Attachment 2](#) – Rainey Creek Collaborative Proposed Vegetation Treatments. Treatments are intended to improve the quality of the winter range by increasing the shrub, grass and forb component within the project area. Treatments will increase the age class and stand diversity of the species to decrease the potential for insect and disease infestations. Mechanical slashing will occur within portions of the juniper/mountain mahogany stands to broaden the window of the prescribed fire treatment and increase the potential for success to meet project objectives. Mechanical treatment and prescribed fire is planned within the WUI.
- 2. Aquatic Influence Zone (AIZ) Treatments** – Limit the mechanical treatment within the AIZ; a combination of hand cut/hand pile/burn and mechanized equipment (where possible) will be used to minimize the disturbance to the AIZ. Look for options to enhance aspen and cottonwoods within the AIZ. Leave visual screening within dispersed campsites and retain some juniper to maintain a buffer to the creek.
- 3. Aspen Regeneration** – Stimulate aspen regeneration through a combination of mechanical and prescribed fire treatments. Maintain aesthetics at trailhead; limit the treatments within this area. Design treatments to create stand and age class diversity, including snags, and stimulate aspen suckering.
- 4. Dispersed Recreation** – Enhance recreation opportunities and safety by improving camping sites (as needed), reduce fuel loadings in close proximity to the campfire rings, enforce camping in identified dispersed campsites, increase signage and block off access to AIZ.

#### **Visual Simulation**

It is anticipated at the end of treatment the project area will have approximately 30% - 50% of the vegetation treated. To provide a “picture” of what the area could like after treatment, the FS manipulated a couple of images from within the Rainey Creek drainage to provide this visual simulation, see [Attachment 3](#).

#### **Summary**

This habitat has lost much of the mountain shrub component due to its proximity to an elk feed ground, fire suppression and the increased juniper canopy cover. To address this problem the Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game entered into an agreement to conduct a collaborative process to obtain public input for the management of this area on the Palisades Ranger District. The main points of the collaborative process:

1. The agency made extensive efforts at outreach via letter, e-mail, media announcements and personal telephone contacts to seek a balanced representation of interests.
2. The process included 3 public meetings and a field trip.
3. Over 50 interested persons and agency and organization representatives spent over 280 hours of learning, discussing and developing treatment types for the Rainey Creek project.
4. The Forest Service compiled the proposed treatment types and incorporated them into the collaborative summary.

**To review additional information about this project please link to: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ctnf>.**

## Appendix A – Public Meeting Notes, March 27, 2013

Vegetation Management in the Rainey Creek Watershed  
Public Meeting Notes  
Wednesday, March 27, 2013  
American Legion Hall, Swan Valley, ID

Facilitator: Martha Williamson

### Presenters:

Deb Flowers – General options for vegetation treatments  
(No questions)

Shane Roberts- Wildlife in the Rainey Creek area  
(No questions)

Jim Robertson- Existing vegetation in Rainey Creek  
Q- Would species be immediately be replanted if they are removed by fire?  
A- Not necessarily. Most species will regenerate by seed.

Greg Hanson- Cattle & sheep grazing in the Rainey Creek area; Noxious weeds & their treatment  
Q- Is there no spotted knapweed? There's some in Palisades Creek area.  
A- Not in the Rainey Creek area.

Deb Flowers- Fire history of the Rainey Creek area  
(No questions)

### Q&A Time

**Q:** What is the plan? What is it that you want to do?

**A:** This is a collaboration meeting to get ideas instead of seeking comments. We are here to see what this group would like to happen in this area. There are a lot of options for plans, and a lot of opinions on what should happen, so we are trying to find out what people in the area would like to see happen.

**Comment:** There are areas that could be burned, but there are also areas that could have marketable timber. There are concerns about smoke in the valley.

**Q:** What is the alternative to burning? How much of the timber is sellable?

**A:** There is biomass value. No saw timber. Some of it is in a roadless area.

**Q:** What kind of time frame are you looking at for completing this project? Spread it over several years, then there is less of an impact from smoke.

**A:** That is an option. There have been projects spread out like that.

**Q:** Will a lot of things be decided tonight?

**A:** We are looking at implementing at the earliest in fall 2014.

**Q:** What is the plan if a fire starts there now?

**A:** It depends on the specific conditions & location.

**Comment:** What about the area south of the Snake River? That area needs to be looked at for fuels treatment.

**Q:** Concerns about health issues from smoke impact.

**A:** That is one of the things we consider in planning. Smoke management is part of the burn plan. We don't light prescribed burns until we get the approval from the air management folks.

**Q:** Seems that the problem is the mahogany & juniper. What is the plan for the mahogany & juniper? How much will be left to feed deer & elk?

**A:** We'd make some openings so the sun can come in & support other vegetation, increase the diversity of the area. There used to be more fire, but now we have a lot more of those species than historically. We want to increase diversity, not eliminate any native species completely.

**Q:** Do you think you can get a fire to burn up there? Mahogany is hard to burn. Using just mechanical or just burning isn't going to work- it'll need to be a combination.

**A:** There might need to be some slashing done prior to burning.

**Comment:** We are in favor of improving winter range.

**Q:** How much money is there in the budget to do this?

**A:** We have opportunities to use collaboration with other groups to get funding. We will do a financial analysis of all alternatives.

**Q:** What sage brush dependent species use the area?

**A:** Probably no species that are completely sagebrush dependent. There are more species using all of the various other shrubs. The landscape is not really conducive to sage-dependent species. It's a mountain shrub community, not a sagebrush steppe.

**Comment:** Soil stability/ water quality is important for fisheries.

**A:** At the next meeting we will have a soil biologist & fisheries people.

**Comment:** We would like cost information for the different alternatives.

**Comment:** Aerial photos from the past showed a lot of grazing in the area. That probably suppressed some of the undergrowth. The junipers were harvested for fence posts in the past. That has changed in the past 50 years. That could be why things are different today.

**Spencer:** Smoke management trade-offs. We could leave things to mother nature & have the possibility of larger fires & longer durations of smoke. In RX or mechanical treatments, the smoke impact would be for a shorter amount of time.

**Tracy:** These collaborative process meetings are so we can get as many people involved as possible, and then hope to get a group to move ahead.

Next meeting April 30, same place/time.



## Appendix B – Questionnaire and Results

### Rainey Creek Vegetation Restoration Project

The purpose of these questions is to better understand your current interest and assessment of the Rainey Creek area on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

1. Are you a local resident or landowner in the Rainey Creek area?

- Permanent or Part-time?

13 permanent residents, 4 N/A

- How long have you lived or owned land in the area?

Range of 6 – 58 years

2. What activities do you participate in within the area?

Hunting	13	Fishing	13	Snowmobiling	3
Wildlife Viewing	12	Hiking	7	Firewood Gathering	1
Mountain Bike Riding	1	Picnicking	5	OHV	1
Horseback Riding	7	Trail Running	3	Rafting	
Paragliding		Camping	7	Scenic Driving	2

3. What is your opinion on the current vegetation and habitat conditions within this area?

- Conditions aren't optimal for wildlife
- Need rehab
- Probably not optimal for wildlife
- Mixed, needs improvement.
- Primarily there are too many junipers.
- Leave alone.
- Will learn more tonight.
- Camping in sensitive areas (next to creek) is damaging.
- Do not have one.
- Would like to restore native vegetation and end feeding grounds, grazing and OHV use where it is damaging resources.
- OK
- Overgrown
- It is OK.
- Bad

**Resource managers use a variety of treatments to restore wildlife habitat. For example prescribed fire, manage wildfire for multiple objectives, and a range of mechanical fuels treatments.**

4. In your opinion what is the preferred management treatment within the area, if one at all?

- Fire and mechanical
- Minimal thinning
- Small fires, some cutting (junipers), shrub planting
- Here to learn.
- Prescribed burns
- No fire, reduce livestock.
- Fire
- None-let the natural fire process burn.
- Log off junipers, then a control burn the next year, work on bitterbrush.

**Why this treatment rather than the other treatment methods?**

- No Fires!
- Worried big fires will get out of control and will be followed by weeds and mudslides.
- I think it needs multiple treatments, not just one.
- Mother Nature's way.
- Fire works
- To uphold natural processes and sustain biological diversity.

**Would you consider allowing access to the National Forest System lands over your land for management treatments?**

- Yes - 3
- Maybe - 2
- No - 2
- N/A

**Would your recreational use be affected by this treatment?**

- Could for a period of time.
- Yes, but only in the short run, I hope.
- Yes - 4
- No - 1
- Possibly – concern of unstabilized ground in the treatment area. Sediment concerns within the creek.

**5. Do you feel that your home or subdivision is at threat from wildland fire?**

- No – 9
- Yes – 1
- More from grass fire.
- Fairly low threat, but we do get the occasional grass fire.

**If so, what subdivision or area of Swan Valley do you live?**

- Pine Creek Bench
- Elk Ridge - 2

**Are you adjacent to Forest Service or BLM lands?**

- No - 6
- Yes - 7

**Do you need information about protecting your home from wildland fire?**

- No - 11

**6. Is there any issue or concern within the area that you would like to comment upon?**

- Limit grazing, end elk feeding, limit OHV use near streams.
- Yes
- Public access, winter impact.
- Wolves – concerned about that.
- Continue to try to control camping in designated area.
- Continue to try to keep 4-wheelers, on roadways only.
- Want to make sure fishery and mule deer habitat is enhanced.

- Success of the project.
- Mule deer in particular are struggling in the area. I support efforts to improve conditions for deer. The elk are doing fine, maybe too fine.

7. **Is there anyone else in the area that you think we should talk to about these or other issues?**

- Yes

8. **Do you know, or do you know someone who knows, any history about the Rainey Creek area? Specifically: wildfires, historic deer or elk population trends, or other events that were not identified? Please share this information!**

- Yes
- Grazing

#### **Contact information**

Contact information is given at your discretion and will be used to assist us in contacting you for subsequent meetings or events.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please provide us with any other comments you feel are relevant to this project. Your comments are greatly appreciated.**

- Like to see it select logging one year. Next year burn it off. Put in Bitterbrush.
- What do you think you are going to accomplish.

## Appendix C - Public Meeting Notes, April 30, 2013

**Rainy Creek Collaboration Meeting**

**April 30, 2013**

**Swan Valley, ID**

**Welcome** –Tracy Hollingshead

**Introductions** – See sign-up sheet

**Recap of last meeting** – Martha

- Basic project
- Idea of collaboration
- Review last meeting
  - Historic overview- wildlife perspective
  - Existing vegetation conditions
  - Grazing history, current allotments
  - Vegetative Response to fire

**Tonight's meeting Goals**

- Input from specialists
- Input from residents

**Targhee Revised Forest Plan** –Deb Flowers

- Standards and Guides
- Subsection Direction
- Management Prescriptions
  - 2.7 Elk and Deer Winter Range – Goals/Standards and Guidelines
  - 4.1 Developed Recreation Site – Goals/Standards and Guidelines
  - 4.3 Dispersed Camping Mgt – Goals/Standards and Guidelines
- Additional Management Direction
  - Idaho Roadless Areas
    - Most Restrictive to Least Restrictive
    - Backcountry/ Restoration encompasses most of project (delineated on map)
    - Guidelines associated with Backcountry/Restoration
  - Lynx Habitat
    - Identified on map (outside of project area)
    - Explanation of Snowshoe Hare/Lynx Habitat
- Opportunity for questions
  - One question regarding lynx habitat – does that mean that there are Lynx there?
  -

**Wildlife Information for the Swan Valley Winter Range Restoration** – Dave Ovard

- Project Direction and Constraints for Elk and Deer Winter Range (2.7a)
- Wildlife focus
  - Forest Hawks and Owls
    - Limited use of project area by these species
    - Could increase with more open area/higher herbaceous cover and therefore small mammals
  - Forest Carnivores
    - Use of area year round
    - Increased small mammal population likely to attract carnivores
    - Occasional sighting of Grizzly Bear, could increase in the next ten years
    - Treatments increasing diversity of biological components attract carnivores

- Migratory Birds
  - Creating diverse vegetation community will attract a diverse mix of songbirds
  - Diversity = resiliency
- Game Animals
  - Some grouse, treatment likely to have neutral effect to grouse/fowl
  - Big Game – Winter fawn survival may improve with increased herbaceous forage
  -
- Recent Past
  - Map display of increased Juniper from 1950s to now
  - Photo examples of Juniper and Mohogany
    - From afar depicting lack of diversity
    - Close in depicting lack of ground cover
  - Photo example of post burn in Darby Canyon
  - Photo example of Rx burn in Bear Trap Unit
  - Photo example of herbaceous response
  - Photo example of Aspen Stand in Rainey Creek
- Conclude
  - Habitat improvement is needed
  -

#### Soils – Kara Geen

- Forest Plan Direction
  - Goals -Guidelines
    - Fine Organic Matter
    - Woody Residue
  - Explanation of Ecological Unit
    - Unit 1106 Complex/Non Homogenous unit
      - SW aspects – thin fuel load, rocky soils, more productive soils at toe of slope supporting increased numbers of Juniper
      - N aspects supporting conifer stands
  - Field assessments completed to verify conditions match the E/U description
  - Modeling can be done to assess potential impacts of treatments
    - Inputs described
    - Defaults described
    - Output comparison for undisturbed forest vs. with wildfire, mechanical thinning, creation of access roads
  - Question from participants regarding support of project, Ph level , thinning specifics in model

#### Hydrology – Louis Wasniewski

- Explanation of Upper/Lower Rainey Creek Watersheds
  - Lower RC WS 16K FS lands
  - Snow dominated system
- Relevant Direction
  - Standards and Guides
    - Stream Function/Water Quality
    - Limitations for Disturbance
      - 30% Disturbance Guideline
      - Spring Canyon Disturbance equates to 11.2% disturbed acres
      - 18.8% room for additional disturbance(approx. 3000 acres)
  - Subsection Direction
  - Management Prescriptions

- AIZ Protection
  - 2.83 provides direction for buffering certain characteristics of AIZ features
- Water Quality Act, Idaho Water Quality Standards
- Idaho DEQ Guidance
  - Established Water Quality Standards
- Rainey Creek is listed as Impaired for
  - E-Coli
  - Combined Biota/Habitat assessment
- Best Practices
  - AIZ buffering
  - Avoid neg effects of hazmat
  - Maintain disturbance maximums
  - Projects designed to improve water conditions
    - R.C. Trail Improvement – reroute ATV trail out of drainage
    - Upper R.C. Trailhead improvement
- Questions from participants regarding source of E-Coli, water sampling questions

### **Fisheries – Lee Mabey**

- Introduction
- Example of Exclosure in Rainey Creek – browse conditions
- History of projects since 2000
  - Improvements, diversions, etc.
- 1999 Yellowstone Cutthroat and Sculpin
- 2009 Brown Trout in addition to 1999 species
  - Brown Trout feed on Cutthroat
- Life History Patterns
  - Resident Fish live solely in Rainey Creek
  - Fluvial Fish – migrate from S.Fork into drainages like Rainey Creek to spawn
  - Patterns driven by food needs, flow regimes,
  - Natives are resistant to replacement by non-natives with help from fluvial populations
    - Characteristics of Cutthroat
    - Characteristics of Rainbow
    - Characteristics of Brown Trout
- Impacts – Recreation
  - Decrease in woody vegetation in high rec. use areas
  - ATV use off trail
- Possible Treatment Impacts
  - Could increase rec. impacts with removal of Juniper in valley bottom
  - Potential for nutrient release
  - Methods for decreasing or avoiding impacts
    - Leave riparian buffer
    - Leave mosaic
    - Leave junipers to act as a screen for rec. overuse
- Participant questions
  - What is being done now to keep rec. users from damaging streambed
  - What are the numbers associated with spawners in R.C.

### **Smoke Concerns – Deb Flowers**

- Concerns about Smoke
- Regulations, Montana/Idaho Airshed Group
- Smoke emissions compared (prescribed vs. wildfire)
- Rx. – Planning and mitigations for reducing smoke impacts

- Wildfire – impacts from last year’s large fire occurrence
- Smoke Dispersion- coordination with NWS for outlook
- How can we best communicate a planned or unplanned fire?
  - Post office local bulletin board
- Questions from participants
  - Clarify the benefit of having some emissions controls with a prescribed burn vs. wildfire

### **Recreation – Greg Hanson**

- Winter travel map depicts regulations regarding recreation
- Main Recreation Uses
  - Antler hunting, trail use, fishing, hunting, etc.
- Trail system – depicted on map
- Dispersed camping, barriers
- Interpretive signage
- Participant questions – regarding rules for antler hunting

### **Wrap Up/Summary – Martha Williamson**

- Opportunities for field trip to look at the project site
- Tuesday May 21<sup>st</sup> show of hands voted as preferred date for field trip.

### **Participant questions**

**Q:** Will the restoration project increase the problem with Elk moving into the valley for wintering

**A:** F&G (Shane Roberts) - Hard snow years will create problems no matter what but on easier years the treatments will improve the opportunity for wintering elk to remain higher and out of the valley.

**Q:** Why this project area?

**A:** Tracy – The past history of feeding elk in the drainage and the lack of shrub component (Dave Ovard). Very little Bitterbrush

**Q:** In the last meeting a suggestion made was to cut Juniper for commercial use.

**A:** Yes, definitely an option to consider even though access will limit this treatment type. This is the reason we are looking for input from participants.

**Q:** What would they like to see during the field trip?

**Q:** Is Sequestration affecting the F.S.

**A:** Tracy – Described how the FS receives a budget.

**Q:** Where is the closest home / private? Is there opportunity for residents to get information regarding Firewise?

**A:** The FS is very willing to provide Firewise information to residents.

**Q:** What is the timeline for the project?

**A:** The very earliest to begin prep would be next summer (2014)

Flat Iron – Tracy mentioned Flat Iron Decision and the opportunity for questions and information share. Maps and personnel available for answering questions.

## Appendix D – Field Trip Notes, May 21, 2013

### Rainey Creek Field Trip May 21, 2013



#### 0900 Meet at Swan Valley American Legion

Introductions and review agenda/route

Safety briefing regarding driving, slips/trips, allergies, communications, etc..

1 EMT identified in group (H. Henry)

#### Stop A

The group got a broad overview of the project area, a description of western boundary, and view of current fuels.

#### Stop B – East of the FS boundary.

- Example of closed canopy and description of how this creates challenges for suppression activities
- Description of potential fuel treatments which would increase spacing between canopies either amongst individual trees or groups of trees
- Mechanical options described - Hand thinning, mastication
- Request for information on Juniper encroachment - Jim described the vegetative history of the watershed with an emphasis on the age of the Juniper/Mahogany stands
- Discussion about fire suppression and that the result is a lack of age class diversity and that treatments could increase the opportunities for natural fire to be managed for resource objectives and kept out of the recreation area and off of private land





**Q:** What are the opportunities for private land owners to get help treating their boundary properties?

**A:** Idaho Department of Lands administers funding opportunities for private landowners who are willing to treat boundary areas in concurrence with agency projects.

- Shane R. – Review of history of feeding program
  - F&G would like to see an increase in vegetation diversity and improve habitat value for ungulates
  - Viable forage encourages elk and deer to remain on upper slopes and out of valley and on private lands
  - Description of terminal range and variability related to winter severity
  - Question regarding the end of the feeding program – 2005 was the end of the program but it was sporadic leading up to that depending upon the winter severity

### **Stop C – Dispersed Camping**

- Dave - Area with multiple dispersed campsites has pushed closer and closer to the riparian area. Vegetation has been disturbed; soils have been compacted, all resulting in less over story /shade for streambeds.
- Lee made a comparison of impacts if there were to be a stand replacing fire in the drainage vs. prescribed Fire resulting in mosaic burn pattern. A stand replacing fire would result in a flush of sediment into the valley bottom (stream) where a mosaic pattern will have vegetation remaining to buffer the sediment as is ‘slows’ the water flow.

**Q:** Are there plans to increase the number of dispersed camp sites?

**A:** No, not at this time.

**Comment:** There is a need for a public toilet at the W. end of the camp area for the dispersed campsite users.

- Deb – additional info on fuels in the area - thoughts on Mahogany and difficulties with achieving regeneration. Slashing on the edges of the Mahogany stands may allow for regen. and diversify the age class of those stands.
- Post treatment vision: Canopy spacing on lower slope, fire ‘resistant’ and improved access/egress along roadway. On middle and upper slopes, polygons of slashed and burned juniper/Mohogany intermixed with unburned patches for cover and forage.
- Slashing creates fuelbed that will carry fire under cooler conditions.
- Mark- noted that the amount of water utilized by juniper community would allow for many other species to flourish.

### **Stop D - Rainey Creek Road, west of Road Canyon.**

- Comparison made between Spring Canyon fire and Road Canyon fire and reminder that a stand replacing event is less likely with fuel treatments and managed fires creating age class diversity in the stands.
- Kara – description of general soil types on upper, mid, and lower slopes.

**Q:** What is the duration of an Rx burn?

**A:** Deb described 2-3 days for ignitions, continued monitoring and mop up until a precipitation event.

**Q:** What is the timeframes for regeneration?

**A:** With Spring Canyon as an example- Jim described the long term vs. short term results.

- Deb – Continued explanation of treatment options and answered questions regarding cost comparisons between treatment options

- Dave- Show example of aspen stand near roadway. Provided information on Aspen succession and impacts of fire, conifer encroachment, wildlife, insects/disease, etc. Also provided information regarding the benefit of healthy aspen stands—provides habitat for an ecologically diverse flora/fauna.

**Q:** Have you seen a need to plant aspen after a treatment?

**A:** Dave responded with information regarding little to no need to plant new clones but rather ‘support’ existing clones that are viable in this specific project area.

- Dave and Jim provided examples of local Aspen regeneration projects across the Palisades and Teton Basin Districts.

### **Stop E – Rainey Creek Trailhead Parking Area**

- Dave W. provided overview of authorized trails in the Rainey Creek area. Dave described concern from citizens and agency that trails are continually being expanded and created by users.

### **Mapping Exercise and Discussion**

Martha and Deb describe mapping exercise for opportunity to share ideas for treatments, opposition to specific treatments, any other feedback from group, etc.

- Legislative Rep- Expect constituents to have concerns if implementation were to impact recreation
- Gary- Mechanical treatment can be totally selective. Can pinpoint treatment exactly to specs.
- Marv- Does not want to see an emphasis on biomass. This could create an unwanted demand that is not sustainable.
- Tracy- Referenced cutting in roadless under restoration goals and not for merchantable product.
- Gary- Mentioned interest from local community regarding desire for biomass operations but wondering where the sources are. Also mentioned projects which the public could go in initially and take fuel wood prior to the specified mechanical treatment.
- Marv- Concerned with talk of ‘buffer’ along road. Opposes thoroughfare type clearing as we have seen in other areas within the forest. Determining specs along road should be site specific.
- Lee- Pleasantly surprised at lack of ATV damage/use in the riparian area.
- Howard- There is a need to educate people on designated trails.
- Marv- Voiced concern as to whether or not 2 rest periods is adequate after Rx burning and the need for monitoring to be part of project design.
- Deb- Described monitoring plan for zone projects
- Ed- Expressed that he feels adequate campsites exist, does not want to see additional dispersed camping added to Rainey Creek drainage. Expressed support of treatments, both mechanical and with fire, all done with selectivity and caution.
- Howard- In favor of Rx burns. Knows that air quality is an issue for the valley residents. Noted that if additional campsites were added it may take lessen the impact to the existing sites.
- Marv- Wants to know if analysis will be done that incorporates climate change scenarios. Concerned with regeneration especially in the Aspen.
- Andrea- Would like to see more/continued direction to not suppress wildfire and lessen the need for projects to create habitat/age class diversity... also a proponent of education for private land owners to treat bordering properties. Concerned that any juniper removal in the riparian area be very selective
- Paul- would replacing Juniper w/ brush inhibit ATV use near the riparian area?
- Tracy/Deb- How to take this information to next meeting?? Fuel treatment options and all concerns from each meeting and the field trip presented.

- Marv- Importance of communicating that any lines on the map at this point are proposed/tentative.
- Ed- Not a lot of talk about the treatment potential other than very near the roadway...
- Deb- Described ideas for creating mosaic amongst each fuel type and on different aspects and slope locations.
- Marv- Please add ortho-photo maps to website for review.
- Jim/Spencer- Noting that when treatment polygons begin to take shape, they must be feasible from an operational standpoint.

Next meeting, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 630PM, Swan Valley American Legion Hall

## Appendix E – Public Meeting Notes, June 6, 2013

**Rainy Creek Collaboration Meeting**

**June 6, 2013**

**Swan Valley, ID**

**Welcome** –Martha Williamson

**Introductions** – See sign-in sheet

**Recap of last meetings/field trip** – Martha

- Review of collaborative process and identify Rainey Creek area to focus the process
- District wanted to receive input prior to starting the NEPA process
- Overview of existing conditions in first two public meetings
- Field trip-looked at project area with feedback from group

**Meeting tonight**

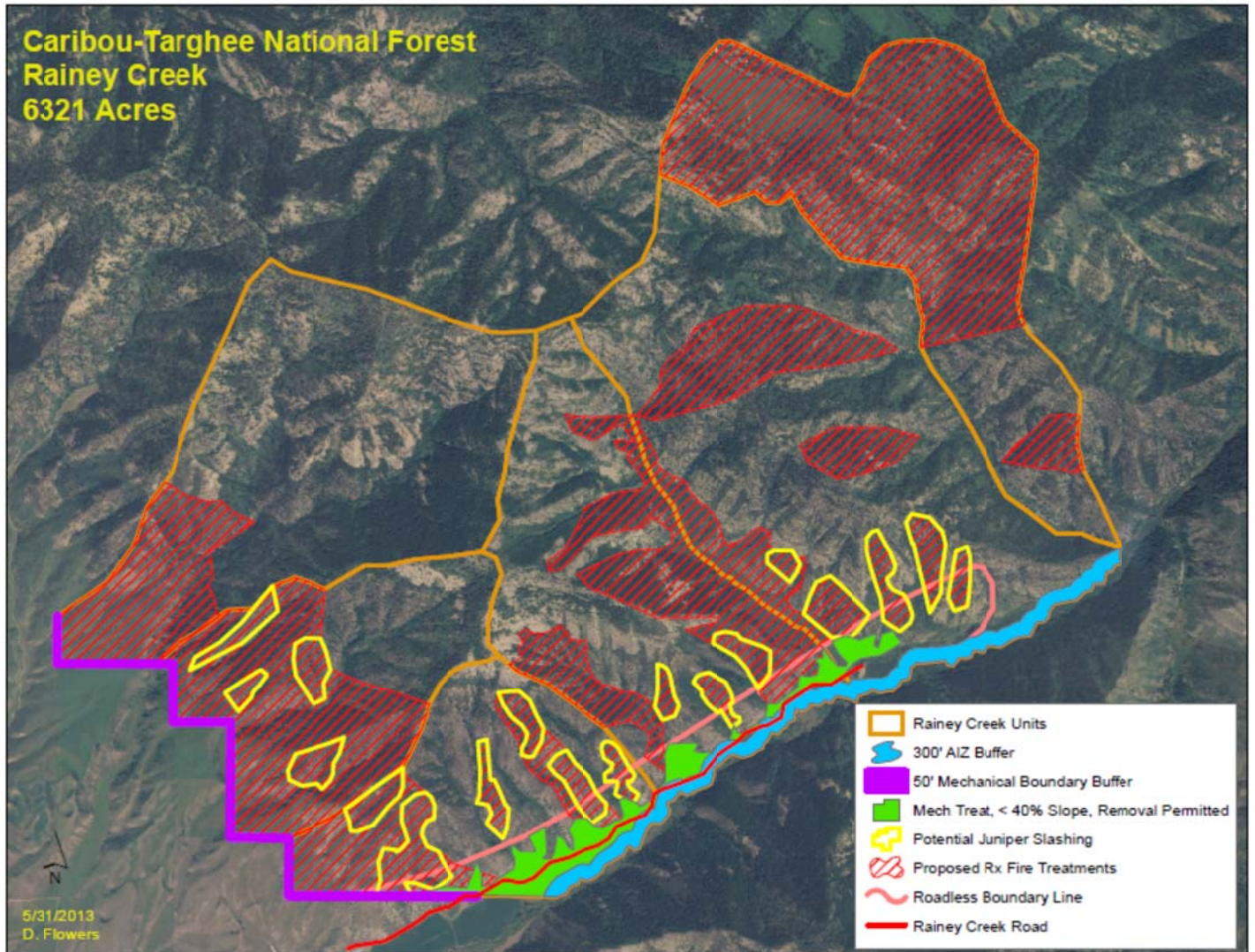
- Review maps and google earth display on proposed treatments and seek input on the proposed treatments
- Dave Ovard-Reviewed objectives for the project
  - Restore various habitat types back to “average conditions” or historic conditions
  - Habitat conditions have changed over the years
  - Reduce fire hazards by decreasing fuels along road and FS boundary
  - Restore sustainable resources for public- specialty lumber and products that may be desirable
  - Three habitat types-terminal winter range-end of migration (address mountain shrub area in decline and planting), mid elevation winter range habitat (decline of mountain brush/increase in juniper-restore understory species), late winter/early spring habitat (regeneration of aspen, higher nutritious value in early seral aspen that wildlife is drawn to and desire).
- Tracy-Product/purpose from meeting and intent of use in the NEPA process
  - Agreements from the group on objectives and treatments and where the treatments should occur
  - Take the above and start the NEPA process, project may shrink through the process and findings by specialist
  - Marv Hoyt-comment on hydrologic disturbance-currently 11% and 18% remaining for treatments and indicating 30% is max for disturbance within watershed and recommends we shouldn't aim to 30% disturbance
  - Tracy commented specialist will determine if the area has recovered
  - Marv Hoyt-grazing concern-recommends it to be specific in the NEPA analysis-if grazing occurs after that it is not detrimental to the implementation and project objectives-wants to see side boards in the NEPA analysis-ensure appropriate rest after implementation
  - Concern landowner-cows only graze so high up the hillside
  - Greg-written out description of how area will recover prior to grazing use in NEPA document
- Martha-reviewed project objectives-see handout
  - Obj 1-Question-Marv-what is restore vegetative conditions to what? What are you looking to get out of the project? Answer-mix of age classes-restore also means regenerate, more specific to describe seral stages
  - Obj 2-Question-Andrea-reduce fire hazard to what? Answer given and Okayed- Tracy-describe the fire hazard better-probably good on this but ensure objective is clear and concise
  - Obj 3-probably very little interest in this but some comments have been mentioned in regards to use of the wood products-sale area test out (firewood)-see response-issue permits to cut green juniper. This is only

applicable along the road. Suggest an alternate option if this does not work out and may need to be assessed during analysis.

- Suggest including a wildlife objective and the vegetation manipulation will meet this-suggest adding this to the first objective
- Deb-review treatment areas-took comments from meetings and field trips to identify potential treatments. Worked from creek bottom up to identify how treatments fit together across the landscape. Described units within the project area. These can be adjusted (bigger smaller etc.). Described how these units would be implemented across the project area perhaps starting on the east side. Slashing would be followed by prescribed fire one year later. May take two years to accomplish objectives of one unit. Project may be finished in 5-6 years barring environmental or internal limitations. Describe what vegetation follows after prescribed fire-question asked by Andrea-Dave answer. Explained post vegetation response the next year. Two years post implementation shrubs and aspen will be responding well 1-2 tall. Five years later forbs, grass, shrubs etc, grass may of expanded in areas of juniper suppression.
- AIZ treatments-300' buffer from creek. See handout/map for description. Explained forest plan standards and guidelines that limit the mechanized and prescribed fire treatments in this area. Possible treatments in this area targeting juniper-see handout description. What opportunities are there to enhance aspen regeneration in this area? Resource specialist still needs to collect more data to field verify potential treatments (deb). No opposition to this treatment readily identified. Recommend FS to complete this work and not a public use area due to FS multiple guidelines etc. Is there a benefit of retaining dense stands of juniper to keep people from creek-buffer? (Andrea) Dave answer-yes there is benefit to having some. Andrea-something should be done but closely look at how much should be treated to avoid negative effects.
- Dispersed camping area-see handout/map-comment received adding 2 toilets that are needed-no opposition to the actions described in handout.
- Juniper-south side of road-see handout/map for description-perhaps include this into the road corridor treatments and/or treat the south side of the road as if it is in the AIZ-focus canopy opening tree removal on north side of road-no opposition mentioned
- Road corridor-see handout/map for description-treatments or removal of vegetation are limited by roadless boundary and areas greater than 40% slope-no opposition mentioned for this treatment area and possible treatments within. Would this mechanical treatment negatively affect the ground and tear things up? Hate to see things torn up. Recommend minimizing negative affects the ground and soil resources. Masticator may be used. Mitigation actions would be a part of the design features to avoid these negative effects. Ensure a mosaic of juniper thinning. No real opposition to the prescribed fire treatments. Comment received prescribed fire would be better than mechanical-more cost effective-mothers nature way. Comment-prescribed fire may affect more juniper than desired. Comment received that slashing may be needed to meet objectives. Old prescribed fire mentioned that was not successful.
- Aspen-see handout/map for description-split it up between road corridor/trailhead and roadless area-Road Corridor/trailhead-Comment received leaving the trailhead aesthetics and no treatment of aspen there but treat further up the canyon. Comment received leaving diversity in structure (age class diversity) including snags. Aspen Roadless-see handout/map for description-no real concerns or opposition identified
- Juniper/mahogany <25% Canopy cover-roadless-see handout/map for description-no opposition to this treatment identified

- Douglas Fir-see handout/map for description-F&G preferred less treatment within the north facing slope of Shurtliff Canyon for security cover for elk. What is the purpose of treating the Douglas fir stands? (Marv) Group answer-some stands are healthy...focus of treating is to promote mountain brush regeneration. Add age diversity and create mosaic. Diversity as a whole for the greater landscape. Not a large area of Df being treated. No opposition identified only questions.
- FS Boundary-see handout/map for description-30-50' buffer (37 acres)buffer can be adjusted (less) according to fuel types/changes on FS/private-no opposition identified, no opposition for 300' treatment, prescribed fire-smoke concerns, concern having fire adjacent to private property and using fire in aspen/chokecherry
- Miscellaneous Comments towards the end of meeting
  - Smoke was a concern with any prescribed fire treatment
  - Must be willing to take the bad with the good
  - Tracy-take this information, condense it and send in a format to everyone who has participated in the public meeting. Still have the opportunity to comment prior to NEPA process.
  - Next public meeting later in fall during the scoping period

# Attachment 1 - Rainey Creek Proposed Treatment Map



## Attachment 2 – Rainey Creek Collaborative Proposed Vegetation Treatments

These are proposed treatments. Through additional analysis, treatment types and areas may increase or decrease in size.

Treatment Name	Treatment Type	Acres
<b>AIZ Buffer</b>	Hand cut/Hand pile/Pile burn Some Mechanized equipment	50
<b>50' FS Boundary Buffer</b>	Hand thinning or Masticator	37
<b>Mechanical Treatment &lt; 40% Slope</b>	Hand thinning, Small Sale, Firewood	127
<b>Juniper Slashing</b>	Hand Thinning – pre prescribed fire	340
<b>Prescribed Fire</b>	Prescribed Fire	2905



## Attachment 3 – Visual Simulation

### CURRENT CONDITION

### VIEW FROM WITHIN THE RAINEY CREEK DRAINAGE ALONG RAINEY CREEK ROAD

Lower photo was modified to depict the potential mechanical and prescribed fire treatments. Approximately 30 – 50% of the juniper and mountain mahogany was removed from the photo. Conifers were removed from the aspen and cottonwood stands at the toe of the slope.



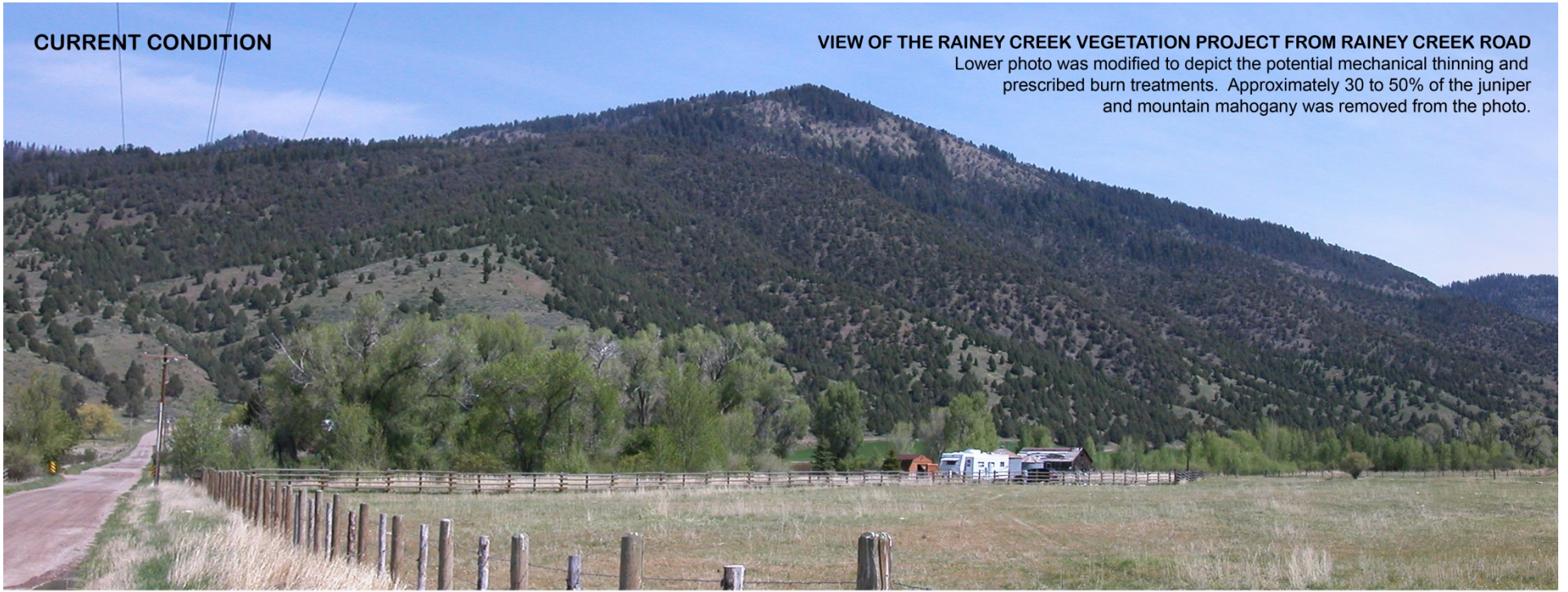
### PROPOSED CONDITION



**CURRENT CONDITION**

**VIEW OF THE RAINEY CREEK VEGETATION PROJECT FROM RAINEY CREEK ROAD**

Lower photo was modified to depict the potential mechanical thinning and prescribed burn treatments. Approximately 30 to 50% of the juniper and mountain mahogany was removed from the photo.



**PROPOSED CONDITION**

