All actions include provisions for snags, dead and down woody debris, visual quality, cultural resources and TES species, and would comply with the Bull Trout Conservation Agreement and PACFISH guidelines for water quality and fisheries.

This project would be accomplished through a salvage sale of burned timber on about 1,000 acres and commercial thinning of about 100 acres of western larch stands, using helicopter logging (no road construction or reconstruction); planting of conifer seedlings; and establishing owl and goshawk nest structures. The salvage sale proceeds would finance the other activities.

The project is approximately three miles northeast of McCall, in the Fall Creek drainage, a tributary to Payette Lake. It lies within the Secesh Roadless Area.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Linda Fitch, McCall District Ranger (208 634–0400); or Chris Brunner, Interdisciplinary Team Leader (208 634–0421).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: From July to October 1994, wildfires covered a total of about 290,000 acres of Payette National Forest. The Blackwell Fire was ignited in early August by lightning strikes three miles northeast of the city of McCall, and eventually covered about 56,000 acres until stopped by winter weather in mid-October. Within this perimeter, it burned in a mosaic pattern of fire intensities including some unburned areas.

In October, Payette National Forest convened three interdisciplinary groups of Forest resource specialists to assess the landscapes affected by the fires: one each for the Blackwell landscape, the Corral landscape, and the Chicken landscape. Each landscape was composed of two or more watersheds. The Blackwell landscape encompassed over 93,000 acres in the Upper North Fork Payette River and Payette Lake watersheds. The Forest also convened a team to assess the broad-scale area, which encompasses the three landscapes plus the Thunderbolt landscape to the south.

In January 1995, each landscape team produced a landscape assessment encompassing their analysis area. The teams used a ecosystem-based approach to assess the fires' effects and to propose target landscape conditions, based on the Forest Plan and the historic range of variation. Each team identified management opportunities that could be implemented this year and in the future to move their postfire landscape toward the target landscape design. The Forest leadership team selected a package of proposed actions for each landscape to bring forward into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis process.

The Proposed Action for Fall Creek described herein is one product of the Blackwell landscape assessment: it proposes the high-priority short term projects related to timber salvage and other postfire resource opportunities consistent with the target landscape design for the Blackwell landscape.

Burn intensities, as defined by degree of three mortality, in the Blackwell landscape varied from intensely burned to unburned. Within the Blackwell landscape, which includes portions of both the Blackwell and Corral fires, approximately 29,000 acres burned at high intensity (tree mortality greater than 90%), 12,800 acres at moderate intensity (tree mortality greater than 30% and less than 90%), and 6,400 acres at low intensity (tree mortality less than 30%). The remainder of the landscape did not burn.

An estimated 28,100 acres of the Secesh Roadless Area lie within the Blackwell landscape.

Simultaneous with this Notice of Intent, Payette National Forest is also publishing two Notices of Intent for other postfire proposals. The "Lower South Fork Salmon River Postfire Project" EIS will cover the Chicken landscape, and the "Main Salmon River Postfire Projects" EIS will cover the Corral landscape. The Forest Service will analyze the two projects concurrently with this "Fall Creek Postfire Project" proposal. It will also analyze in an environmental assessment (EA) the "North Fork Payette River Postfire Project" proposal covering another portion of the Blackwell landscape.

Purpose and Need

The need is to move toward the desired future conditions, goals and objectives as described in the Payette Forest Plan and the target landscape design in the Blackwell Landscape Assessment. The Blackwell Landscape Assessment was tiered to the Forest Plan and identifies a strategy to implement the plan in an exosystem management context. The proposed action is derived from management opportunities in the landscape assessment. The purpose of each element of the proposed action is:

Salvage: To recover economic value of burned timber for counties and timberrelated industries and provide wood fiber for society. Past experience with wildfire timber recovery in southcentral Idaho indicates that prompt harvest is needed to recover the economic value of fire-killed trees. The trees in the project area, mostly Douglasfir, grand fir, and lodgepole pine, are expected to lose an estimated 50% of their economic value by the end of 1996. Part of the salvage sale proceeds will finance the regeneration and wildlife habitat elements of the project.

Thinning: To perpetuate a larch stand for wildlife habitat and reduce fuel loading adjacent to State and private land. This harvest needs to take place concurrently with the salvage due to economic efficiency.

Regeneration: To promptly return to production those lands within the suited base that contribute to the allowable sale quantity.

Wildlife: To replace habitat components lost in the fire.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action has the following components:

1. Salvage harvest fire-killed and imminently dead trees on approximately 1,000 acres. Harvest by helicopter to protect domestic watershed conditions and fish habitat. Construct two helicopter landings: no road construction or reconstruction is proposed. Harvesting would comply with the Draft Bull Trout Conservation Agreement. The proposal would not harvest within PACFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas, which include riparian corridors along perennial and intermittent streams, wetlands, landslides, and landslide prone areas, where riparian-dependent resources receive primary emphasis. Site specific integrated prescriptions to provide for snags/large wood debris, visual quality, cultural resource protection, and TES plant and animal needs would be developed consistent with the Forest Plan, landscape assessment, and current policy/research.

2. Commercially thin unburned western larch stands on 100 acres. Harvest by helicopter only; no road construction or reconstruction is proposed.

3. Regenerate productive forest suited acres within the project area by planting conifer seedlings or ensuring natural regeneration.

4. Construct great gray owl and goshawk nest platforms adjacent to burned areas.

Forest Plan Amendment

Amendment to the Forest Plan may be needed to:

1. Allow plantation stocking levels below Forest Plan standards and guidelines to reflect natural stand conditions.