Wilderness Awareness Workshop

# Case Study Discussion Form

**HANDOUT #1**

**1. Issue:**. Dead standing trees line trail routes within wilderness as the result of recent fires.

**2. Situation:** A severe fire season created a situation along trail corridors where many dead trees have fallen across the trails and more are standing dead. The situation exists along all main trails leading into the wilderness and at times well over 30% of the wilderness is essentially ‘closed’ to visitor access due to fallen trees blocking the trails. In some places trees are ‘jack strawed’ and piled up 5-6 feet deep and they continue to fall across system trails faster than the trail crew can clear them. In other places trees have not yet fallen.

Management is faced with an enormous task of re-opening the trails and keeping them open. In addition, local media and others are portraying the situation as hazardous to visitors. The permitted outfitter/guides are pressuring the District Ranger to re-open the trails quickly to avoid loss of business. Some resource damage is occurring from users trying to go around the blowdown.

For the last several seasons, the local district trail crew has consisted of one paid crew leader and two SCA volunteers. Even without the fire effects, they are unable to keep up with the need fror clearing the fallen trees and each season they fall further behind. Some assistance comes from members of the local hiking and horse clubs who are trained and certified in the use of cross-country saws but it has not been enough to keep up with the task.

The issue of standing dead trees and the perception of immenent danger to forest visitors has become the biggest issue. Some say that the Forest Supervisor will be personally liable for any accidents that occur if the dead trees fall on visitors. A proposal has been made to clear fallen trees and drop all dead trees along trails using chainsaws. The trail crew supervisor believes that once the trails were cleared and the hazard trees removed, the district crew could possibly keep up on an annual basis, if they had approval for the use of chain saws.

**3. Management Question(s):**

**Is there a need to take action in wilderness regarding re-opening the system trails and dealing with the standing dead trees ?**

If so:

* Should the entire trail system be re-opened?
* What is the best way tore-open the system trails ?

**4. Direction/Guidance:**

1. **What does the Wilderness Act say?**

**DEFINITION OF WILDERNESS**

(c) A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

**PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN USES**

(c) Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act and except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.

**b. What is your agency manual direction?**

*NOTE – See FS Policy Handout for direction regarding use of mororized equipment, landing of aircraft, etc. in wilderness.*

2323.13f - Transportation System. Design, construct, and maintain the transportation system in wilderness to provide access to and within a wilderness, that meets the wilderness objectives described in the forest plan.

1. Trails. Trails are an acceptable improvement. Construct and maintain trails to standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook. National Recreation Trails are generally not designated within wilderness (FSM 2350).

a. Design and locate trails so that nonmotorized and nonmechanical equipment can be used for construction and management.

b. Design and locate trails to fit into the natural landscape as unobtrusively as possible.

c. Maintain trails by nonmotorized methods except for situations described in section 2326.

c. **What does your forest or wilderness plan say?**

Enter relevant forest plan standards and guidelines here, if any.

**5. What are your management options?**

Remember to split this minimum requirements decision making process into two parts:

Step 1 – Is any adminsitrative action necessary?

Step 2 – If action is necessary, what is the minimum tool/method that will cause the least

degradtion of the wilderness resource and character?

Step 1: Is administrative action necessary? \_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

**Is there a need to take action in wilderness regarding re-opening and maintaining**

**system trails?**

Why?

Step 2: If the answer to Step 1 is YES, administrative action is necessary, then discuss the following

alternatives and others that your group develops:

1.Re-open all trails using cross-cut saws

2.Re-open all trails using chain saws

3.Re-open the mainline trails using chainsaws and others using cross-cut saws

4. Any of the above, plus cut standing dead trees along trails using chainsaws

5. Alternative 1,2, or 3 plus cut standing dead trees along trails using cross-cut saws

**What other alternatives that are feasible?**

**6. What is your decision?**

Include mitigation measures here.

**7. What is the rationale for your decision?**

The rationale should link the decision made to wilderness management objectives, law, policy, forest plan standards and guidelines, etc. and exlain how this decision best protects the wilderness character while meeting the ‘minimum requirements teswt’ and addressing the problem in a feasible manner.

**8. What additional constraints are necessary to minimize disturbance to the wilderness resource and character?**

Timing, location, or frequency of activity?

Maintenance requirements?

Standards or design requirements?

Monitoring?

**HANDOUT #2**

**Actual Decision** (if made):

**Rationale for decision:**

The reationale would link the decision made to wilderness management objectives, law, policy, forest plan standards and guidelines, etc. and exlain how this decision best protects the wilderness character while addressing the problem in a feasible manner.