

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**and**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**NORTHERN PRAIRIE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Bonners Ferry Ranger District  
Kaniksu Working Circle  
Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
USDA Forest Service  
Boundary County, Idaho

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Bonners Ferry Ranger District has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) examining alternatives for vegetation management in the Northern Prairie assessment area. The project area is located approximately seventeen air miles northeast of Bonners Ferry, Idaho. The assessment area (Figure 1) encompasses about 21,500 acres within all or portions of Sections 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 30, T65N, R2E; and Sections 13, 14, 24, 25, 26, and 34, T65N, R1E, Boise Meridian.

## **II. THE DECISION**

My decision includes implementation of all treatment units included in Alternative 3 as described in the Northern Prairie Environmental Assessment issued in January 2008, with the following exceptions:

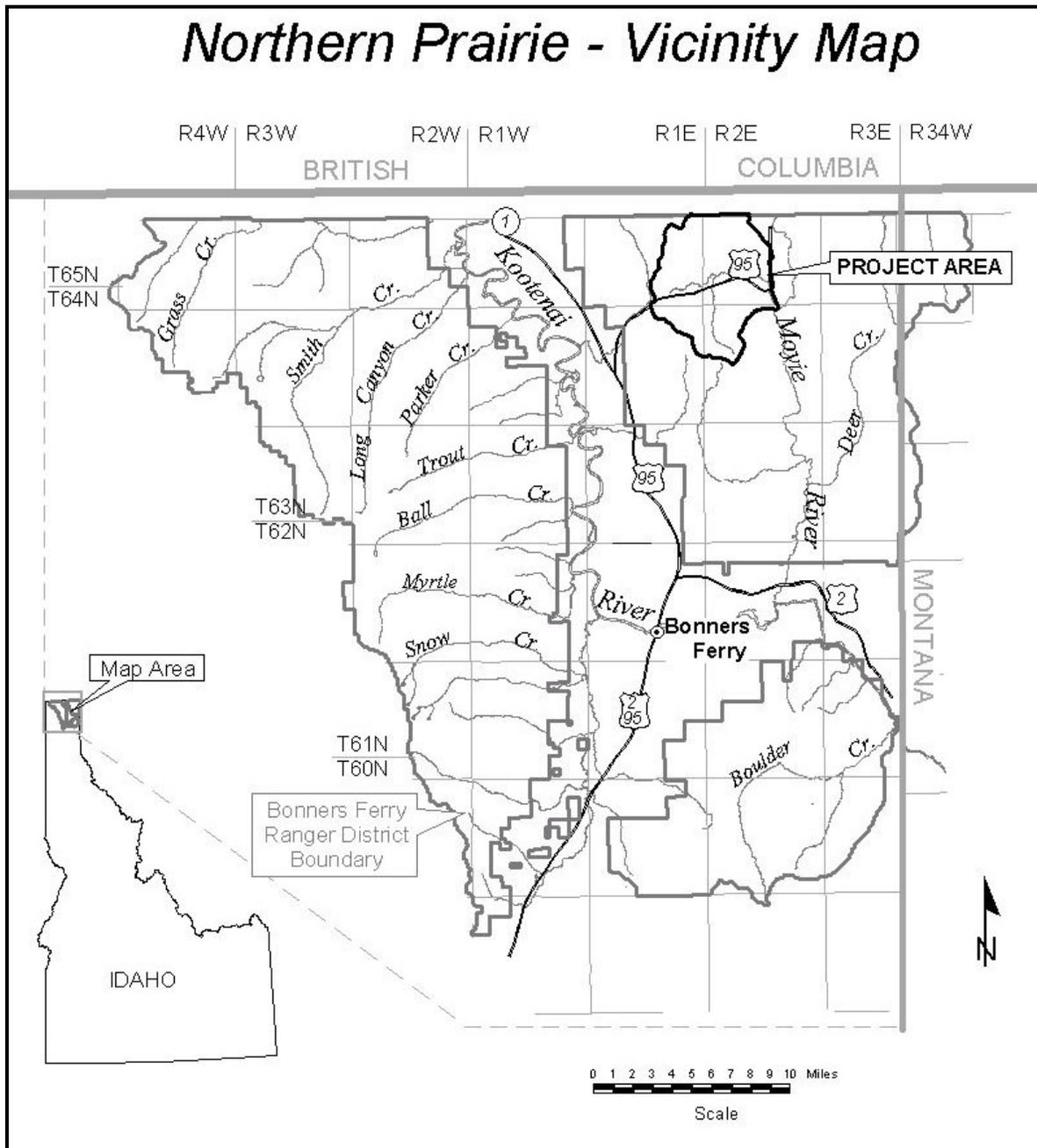
1. **Dry forest old growth** - Implementation of Units 76, 91, 92, 93, 94, 104, 121, 123 in their entirety, and four acres of Unit 90, will be deferred until the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals issues its decision based on *en banc* review of *The Lands Council vs. McNair* (i.e., Mission Brush). The results of this review are expected to provide clarification with respect to treatments in dry forest old growth. Deferring these treatments totals 501 acres.
2. **Multi-storied Lynx Habitat** – Implementation of Units 79 and 83 will be deferred until such time the IPNF completes formal consultation with the USFWS and Biological Opinion (BO) is issued with respect to the effects these treatments would have on Canada Lynx in the wildland urban interface. Deferring these treatments totals 52 acres.

Implementing the remaining portion of Alternative 3 will include an estimated 778 acres using free selection (585 acres) and shelterwood with reserve trees (79 acres) prescriptions. Harvest related fuels will be treated on approximately 664 acres. Alternative 3 also includes a 114-acre underburn that will not involve the removal of commercial forest products. The vegetation treatments are designed to improve ecosystem composition, structure, and diversity of the landscape by providing for tree species and stocking levels similar to historic levels, which will

better resist insects, diseases, and wildfire. The amount of merchantable timber products removed will be a by-product of achieving the vegetation management objectives. A vegetation treatment summary is provided in Table 1.

My decision includes about 20 miles of road treatments or improvements. Eleven miles of roads will be decommissioned, 1.5 miles will be reconstructed, and 7.5 miles will be reconditioned. No new road construction is included in my decision. A comprehensive list of road treatments is provided in the Northern Prairie EA (Chapter 2, Table 2-10, p. 2-14).

**Figure 1. Proposed Project Area Boundary**



**Table 1. Northern Prairie Treatment Summary – Alternative 3 (units selected for immediate implementation)**

<b>Treatment Type</b>	<b>Acres or Miles</b>	<b>Treatment Units<sup>1</sup></b>
Free selection – Dry Forest Types	458	73, 74, 75, 89, 90, 96, 98, 99, 100, 103, 105, 136, 137, 138
Free selection – Moist Forest Types	127	72, 78, 80
Shelterwood w/ Reserves	79	71, 81, 82
Underburn (no harvest)	114	69
<b>Vegetation Treatments</b>	<b>778 (acres)</b>	
Underburn (with harvest)	216	74, 75, 81, 89, 98, 100, 103
Grapple pile (with harvest)	448	71, 72, 73, 78, 80, 82, 90, 96, 99, 105, 136, 137, 138
<b>Harvest-related Fuels Treatments (Total Acres)</b>	<b>664 (acres)</b>	

## **A. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION**

I have decided to implement Alternative 3, excluding the units that are deferred as part of this decision, after evaluating the alternatives using the following criteria:

- How each alternative meets the purpose and need for action as described in Chapter 1 of the Environmental Assessment.
- How the alternative provides consistency with the Forest Plan.
- How well the alternative responds to environmental issues identified by the public, other agencies, and the Forest Service.

The following is a discussion of my rationale for the decision based on these criteria:

### **1) Purpose and Need For Action**

The purpose and need for the Northern Prairie project were derived from the assessments described below in the “Overview of Scientific Findings”, and from field reviews and surveys of the resources in the Northern Prairie project area. Based on this information the purpose and need, or objectives, for entering the Northern Prairie project area are to:

1. Improve ecosystem composition and structure and landscape diversity by providing for tree species, stocking levels, and landscape patterns that better resist insects, diseases, and wildfire. More specifically:
  - Reduce the number of trees per acre of Douglas-fir, and favor the development of large diameter ponderosa pine and western larch on dry forest types. Additionally, create

<sup>1</sup> Unit 90 includes 50 acres that is NOT considered dry forest old growth.

forest openings that will allow for regeneration of ponderosa pine and western larch on dry forest types and western larch and western white pine on moist forest types.

2. Restore normal slope hydrology where it has been altered by roads. This includes:

- Reducing the sediment risk associated with stream crossing failures.
- Reducing the potential for roads to create or contribute to landslide occurrence.
- Reducing the production and delivery of sediment from road surfaces and ditches.

Discussion: Prescribed treatments included under Alternative 3 will trend treated stands toward more open grown stands of large-diameter ponderosa pine and western larch. Where forest openings are created, regeneration will feature ponderosa pine, western larch, and white pine.

- As stated in the 1987 Forest Plan (II-1), "The Idaho Panhandle National Forests will continue to provide a significant timber raw materials base to support the local and national economies and social needs." Meeting the vegetation management objectives of the Northern Prairie EA will help meet the Forest Plan goals related to a providing a sustained flow of timber products (Forest Plan II-2) from the IPNF. However, since the inception of the Forest Plan the social and political climate on the Forest has changed considerably and the amount of timber sold from National Forest system lands has decreased by more than 80% (project file - VEG042). Therefore, the purpose and need is focused more on the ecosystem components that will be retained rather than those that will be removed; i.e., the amount of merchantable timber products removed will be a by-product of achieving the vegetation management objectives stated above.

Discussion: An estimated 3 million board feet (MMBF) of timber will be harvested with the units that are *included* under this portion of Alternative 3 as a result of meeting ecosystem composition and structure objectives

## 2) Consistency with the Forest Plan

The IPNF Forest Plan provides direction for all resource management programs and resource activities on the IPNF. Some of the directions that apply specifically to the vegetation resources within the Northern Prairie Project Area are listed below:

- Provide for a diversity of plant and animal communities.
- Provide efficient fire protection and fire use to help accomplish land management objectives.
- Manage the forest resources to protect against insect and disease damage.
- Timber management activities will be the primary process used to minimize the hazards of insects and diseases and will be accomplished primarily by maintaining stand vigor and diversity of plant communities and tree species.

Discussion: As described in the EA (Chapter 3, pages 3-8, 3-9, and 3-13) long-lived seral species, ponderosa pine, western larch and white pine have been replaced by Douglas-fir, grand fir, western hemlock, and western red cedar, species that are less resistant to fire and

more prone to insect and disease occurrences. Prescribed treatments will begin restoration of more open grown stands of long-lived seral species that are more resistant to stand-replacing fires and insect and disease occurrence. Timber management will be the tool used to meet these objectives on over 664 acres.

There are many Forest Plan Standards that are applicable to the general design of the proposed action. Specific Forest Plan Standards (USDA 1987, pp. II-32-34, II-38-39) that apply to vegetation resources are listed below:

- Reforestation will normally feature seral tree species, with a mixture of species usually present. Silvicultural practices will promote stand structure and species mix that reduce susceptibility to insect and disease damage.
- Project design will provide for site preparation and slash hazard reduction practices that meet reforestation needs of the area.
- Encourage utilization of forest products to reduce biomass, which must be disposed of otherwise.
- Activity fuels will be treated to reduce their potential rate of spread and fire intensity so the planned initial attack organization can meet initial attack objectives.
- Vegetation management [through fire] will favor the use of fire, hand treatment, natural control, or mechanical methods whenever feasible and cost effective. Direct control methods, such as chemical or mechanical, may be used when other methods are inadequate to achieve control.

Discussion: Both uneven-aged (free selection) and even-aged (shelterwood with reserves) regeneration systems will be prescribed. Free selection prescriptions will create forest openings on 1/4 to 1/3 of the treated acres (approximately 195 acres) and shelterwood prescriptions will create openings on 79 acres. Seral species will be retained in the overstory and regenerated in created openings. Both prescribed fire and grapple piling will be implemented for fuels reduction and site prep. These treatments will improve conditions for natural and artificial regeneration, while reducing the potential of severe fire. The timber sale contract will include provisions to remove non-sawlog volume, which will improve utilization.

### **3) Environmental Issues**

The following issues were used to develop the action alternatives. These issues were identified through the scoping process, both internally and externally. The effects on each resource issue were evaluated based on a set of “Issues and Indicators.” The “Other Resource Concerns” listed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3) of the EA were treated by changing the design of the alternatives, or by avoiding areas. They did not warrant development of a separate alternative. These “Other Resource Concerns” are discussed in Appendix A of the EA.

#### **a. Vegetation**

The North Zone Geographic Assessment (NZGA) defines forests in the Northern Prairie project area as “Low Integrity/High Risk Landscapes.” These landscapes have changed the most across

the North Zone from historic conditions due to major losses of long-lived seral species (ponderosa pine, western larch, and western white pine). These landscapes are the most heavily altered from historic conditions and contain the greatest need and opportunity for large-scale forest vegetation restoration. In the Northern Prairie project area the most significant changes have occurred in dry forest types. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many stands in these forest types were burned frequently by low- or mixed- severity fire; occasional stand-replacing fire occurred as well. Where fires occurred at relatively short intervals (less than 25 years), they were mostly non-lethal. Actual fire history data (EA, pages 3-6 and 3-7) taken in the mid-1990's (project file – VEG023) in the project area estimated historic fire-return intervals in these dry forest stands at 23 years prior to the modern fire suppression era. Cross-sections of one western larch stump recorded at least six fire events from circa 1780 to 1919. It was estimated that this tree died around 1990 and there was no evidence of fire from the previous 72 years. With another 15 years past since the data was collected the effective fire-free interval is now in approaching 90 years. Prior to this 90-year fire free interval, the longest interval between fires was 34 years and the shortest was 14 years. This means the current fire free-interval is nearly three times the previous *longest* interval and nearly 4 times the *average*. This data correlates well with fire history data (project file – VEG002) taken from other dry forest types on the District where frequent (less than 50 years) historic intervals were noted. Table 2 summarizes how the treatments *included* in this decision Alternative 3 responds to these principle issues.

**Table 2. Principle Issues and Indicators: Forest Vegetation<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Principle Issue</b>	<b>Principle Issue Indicators</b>
Forest Composition	Acres trended towards restoration of long-lived seral species; i.e., ponderosa pine, western larch and western white pine. In particular, restoration of ponderosa pine in dry forest types is a primary concern.  <u>Discussion:</u> Acres reforested with a combination of PP and WL (153), WP and WL (121).
Forest Structure	Acres trended towards restoration of historic forest structures. Dense stands of immature Douglas-fir and grand fir now dominate the landscape. Historically, open-grown stands of large-diameter ponderosa pine, western larch, and white pine were a much more significant component of these forests than they are currently  <u>Discussion:</u> 458 acres of dry forest structure restored to open conditions featuring large diameter ponderosa pine
Forest Openings	Increase in the size of forest openings compared to historic estimates  <u>Discussion:</u> No measurable increase in forest opening size.
Risk of Stand-Replacing Fire in Dry Forest Types	Estimated changes in stand-replacing fire risk on dry forest types relative to no action.  <u>Discussion:</u> Risk of stand-replacing fire on dry forests reduced by 78%
Insects and Diseases	Estimated changes in root disease risk on dry forest types relative to no action  <u>Discussion:</u> Risk of root disease on dry forests reduced by 66% Acres of moderate and high hazard bark beetle stands treated (661); shelterwood (49) and free selection (612)

<sup>2</sup> This estimated reduction of stand-replacing fire and root-disease risk are based on the SIMPPLLE model and assumes implementation of all treatment units in Alternative 3.

## b. Wildlife

The distribution and abundance of wildlife is primarily a function of habitat conditions (i.e., vegetation type and successional stage). These conditions reflect inherent potential (i.e., capable habitat) and current ability (i.e., suitable habitat) of a site to provide essential habitat requirements for a given species as well as disturbance types (i.e., fire, windthrow, landslide, and insect outbreaks) and frequencies. Fire suppression and timber harvest have been the predominant factors affecting habitats in the project area.

A list of threatened, endangered, Forest Service sensitive species, MIS, and other species and habitats of special interest was developed from the Forest Service Region 1 list and from known species occurrence on the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. The species list was reviewed to determine each species' relevance to the Northern Prairie project, based on known species distribution and habitat availability. The species (or their habitats) that were analyzed in detail are listed below in Table 3:

**Table 3. Effects of Selected Alternative on Relevant Wildlife Species**

<b>Relevant Species</b>	<b>Effects of Selected Alternative</b>
Canada lynx	0.5% increase in stand initiation structure;
Gray wolf	Prey availability is expected to increase, and mortality risk would not change
Grizzly bear	No change in linear road densities; restricted and reconstructed roads would be unavailable for general public use, and timber harvest would not be allowed during the grizzly bear spring season
Black-backed woodpecker	Less than 1% of the potential nesting habitat on the IPNF would be impacted. More untreated habitat retained in portions of units than Alt 2.
Flammulated owl	General trend toward unsuitable habitat conditions reversed. Inconsequential decrease in suitable habitat acres. Short-term habitat losses offset by longer-term habitat stability
Fisher	Reduction of 3.5% suitable habitat in the project area will not result in a loss of viability. Habitat maintained on a landscape scale
Western toad	May slightly elevate the risk of direct toad mortality, no breeding habitat affected
Northern goshawk	No reduction of suitable habitat. Units harvested by free selection prescription would contain adequate trees to remain in the same VSS category. Post-harvest VSS percentages more closely resemble Alt 1. No change to structural components of the PFA
Pileated woodpecker	Inconsequential changes to pileated woodpecker nesting habitat; viability of all seven hypothetical homeranges retained.
Forest Land Birds	No effect on forest land birds associated with riparian habitats. Long-term trend toward increased habitat quality for dry-forest species.

## c. Aquatics

The goal is to maintain and improve the aquatic ecosystems in the Gillon Creek and Round Prairie Creek watersheds. Specifically, this will involve restoring normal slope hydrology and riparian function where it has been altered by roads. Table 4 contains the indicators that would be used to measure the response and expected changes to the watershed and fisheries resources related to this project.

**Table 4. Principle Issues and Indicators: Watershed and Fisheries**

<b>Principle Issue</b>	<b>Principle Issue Indicators</b>
Hydrologic Function	Would not be adversely affected. No new permanent roads would be constructed. Decommissioning would reduce road density to 3.4 miles per square mile in the CEA
Riparian Function	No changes in ECAs within RHCAs; decommissioning would reduce roads within RHCAs from 3.7 miles to 3.4 miles in the CEA
Soil Erosion And Mass Wasting	The area of detrimentally impacted soils would increase by 5.8 percent; increases in sediment delivery would be negligible.
Water Yield	1.8% short-term increase in ECAs from 9.8% to 12.2%
Fisheries	No short-term risk of loss; long-term reduced risk of loss due to of severe fire

### **III. OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

#### **A. NO ACTION**

The no action alternative is required by NEPA and NFMA. Implementation of this alternative would defer all treatment activities at this time. Other activities such as fire suppression and routine road maintenance would continue. Under the no action alternative none of the proposed road treatments would occur. No silvicultural treatments, prescribed burning, or other mechanical treatments would be implemented to restore vegetative composition and structure, improve wildlife habitat, or maintain hydrologic function. Stands would naturally thin themselves out as the competition for water and soil nutrients continues and natural fuels would continue to build up with continued fire suppression, leading to increased risk of stand replacing fire over time.

#### **B. REASONS FOR DISMISSING THE NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

As stated earlier the NZGA defines forests in the Northern Prairie project area as “Low Integrity/High Risk Landscapes.” These landscapes have changed the most across the North Zone from historic conditions due to major losses of long-lived seral species (ponderosa pine, western larch, and western white pine). These landscapes are the most heavily altered from historic conditions and contain the greatest need and opportunity for large-scale forest vegetation restoration. The no action alternative would not meet the stated purpose and need and would continue to trend these forests in a direction where the ability to meet desired forest composition and structure objectives would be increasingly difficult.

#### **C. REASONS FOR DISMISSING ALTERNATIVE 2**

The following discussions provide a comparison of Alternative 2 and the portion of Alternative 3 that is *included* under this decision.

Alternative 2 meets the objectives of the Northern Prairie EA by restoring forest composition and structure and would contribute more than five times the short-term supply of timber (15 MMBF) to help meet the national demand for wood products and employment opportunities, as compared to Alternative 3 (3 MMBF). However, it is my determination that Alternative 3 would provide for better integration of the issues identified in the Northern Prairie EA.

Alternative 2 would regenerate more than 1,110 acres of long-lived seral species, which is more than three times the acreage in Alternative 3 included with this decision, and would trend the size of forest openings in a direction that more closely resembles historic conditions. However, the shelterwood prescriptions in dry forest types would create fairly uniform stand densities which would be closer to the lower level of conditions that existed historically. These prescriptions would also create stand densities in dry forest types that would be at the lower level of suitability suggested in the scientific literature for species such as flammulated owl.

In terms of water yield, an equivalent clearcut acreage (ECA) of over 30 percent may be used as an indicator that more intensive field surveys are warranted to determine if a watershed is at a threshold for hydrologic impacts (Belt 1980). Current ECA values for the Round Prairie Creek watershed is 9.8 percent and neither action alternative would increase peak flows to a level where adverse impacts to water quality, channel stability, and aquatic habitat are expected to occur. However, Alternative 2 would increase ECAs by 4% as compared to an estimated 1.8% increase with the treatments included under this decision.

## **IV. Findings and Consistency with Laws, Regulations and Policies**

### **A. NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT**

The following discussions with respect to Alternative 3 reflect the treatments *included* under this decision. Those included treatment units are consistent with NFMA requirements:

- *Maintaining diversity*: Alternative 3 is designed to be implemented in a manner that will protect wildlife and fisheries resources in the Northern Prairie project area (EA, Chapter 4, and Appendix B). There will be no significant impact to any species, and no loss of viability to populations or species. The long-term benefits will outweigh the short-term disturbance to species during project activities.
- *Suitability for timber production (16 USC 1605[k])*: Harvest will not occur on sites identified as not suitable for timber production (project file VEG074).
- *Stands of trees are harvested according to requirements for culmination of mean annual increment (CMAI) of growth (16 USC 1604(m))*: Prescriptions written for this project will implement sound silvicultural practices including free selection and shelterwood harvests that have been approved by a certified silviculturist. These prescriptions are driven by resource objectives and desired conditions other than timber production, i.e., CMAI.
- *Soil, slope or other watershed conditions (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][i]) and protection for streams and other bodies of water (16 USC 1604[g][3][E][iii])*: Features of the selected alternative described in this decision and the environmental assessment will ensure that soil, water, and watershed resources will be protected (Chapter 2, pages 2-22 to 2-23). Soil surveys were conducted by the IPNF Forest Soils Scientist and other

Forest Service personnel to evaluate existing soil conditions (results are part of the Northern Prairie project file).

- *Restocking (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][ii]):* Technology and professional knowledge were applied to assure that adequate stocking will occur within five years after final harvest (Chapter 4, pages 4-25 and 4-26).
- *Economic factors (16 USC 1605[g][3][E][iv]):* Management practices were governed by ecosystem restoration objectives not strictly economics. Two action alternatives were studied in detail that would produce considerably different outcomes in terms of economic efficiency. Alternative 2 would produce the higher economic return, but for reasons discussed earlier I believe Alternative 3 better addresses the resource issues identified in the EA, while also remaining economically viable
- *Clearcutting and even-aged management (16 USC 1605[g][3][F]):* Even-aged management (shelterwood harvest) would occur on 79 acres (Units 71, 81, and 82) under Alternative 3. These treatments meet the appropriate timber management standards and vegetation management objectives outlined in the Forest Plan. No units will exceed the 40-acre opening size. Design of treatments included features to protect water, soils, and fisheries.
- *Temporary roadways (16 USC 1608[b]) and standards of roadway construction (16 USC 1608[c]):* NFMA requires that the necessity of roads be documented and that road construction be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources (16 USC 1608). The Roads Analysis Process (RAP) was used to identify the condition of and recommendations for each road system in the project area (project file – ENGR001). Chapter 2 of the EA (p. 2-10, Table 2-6; p. 2-14, Table 2-10; p. 2-15; Table 2-11) provides documentation with respect to proposed road treatments.

NFMA also requires that roads are planned and designed to re-establish vegetation cover on the disturbed areas within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed 10 years unless the road is determined necessary as a permanent addition to the National Forest Transportation System (16 USC 1604, Sec. 8). No new roads, permanent or temporary, are planned with this project.

- *Consideration of best available science (36CFR219.35(a)):* The need to employ the best science is not new, since agency decisions have always required a sound technical basis. What constitutes best available science might vary over time and across scientific disciplines. The Northern Prairie project file demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty and risk, as appropriate. The EA also includes 21 pages of scientific literature citations that were used to support the analysis.

## **B. IPNF (1987) FOREST PLAN**

I have evaluated the alternatives and compared them to the Forest Plan standards, goals and objectives within the Northern Prairie Project Area. I have determined that the selected alternative will meet the Forest Plan standards and will contribute to meeting the goals and objectives of the Management Areas within the Northern Prairie project area. The selected alternative is consistent with Inland Native Fish Strategy standards and guidelines.

## **C. CLEAN WATER ACT**

Alternative 3 is consistent with the requirements of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1251). Sediment and water temperature, the pollutants of concern, will not permanently increase in the waters of the Northern Prairie Project. These pollutants to water quality will be prevented through implementation of BMPS and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. The riparian protection components of the project (INFS RMOs, Forest Service BMPs) are designed to improve condition. Risks to beneficial uses will not be changed by this project. There will be no detrimental increase in sediment or stream temperature through management activities in the Northern Prairie Project Area.

By following site specific BMPs, INFISH guidelines, and RHCA buffers, there will be no detrimental cumulative effects to the streams, or net increase in siltation, suspended solids, or thermal changes, thus no violation to the TMDL regulations or Clean Water Act (EA. p. 4-107 through 4-108).

## **D. CLEAN AIR ACT**

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group, which is composed of members who conduct a “major” amount of prescribed burning and the regulatory and health agencies that regulate this burning. The intent of the Airshed Group is to minimize or prevent smoke impacts while using fire to accomplish land management objectives and/or fuel hazard reduction (EA, Appendix D). The monitoring unit of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group coordinates burning and smoke emissions to minimize smoke accumulation and provides smoke dispersion forecasts and air quality monitoring support for burners in the Airshed Group. Daily during the burning season, burners post proposed burns before 11:00 am; the monitoring unit considers proposed burns together with expected ventilation or smoke dispersion conditions and existing air quality to determine burn recommendations for the following day (with concurrence from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality). These procedures limit smoke accumulations to legal, acceptable limits. The District strictly complies with these procedures, and has had no air quality violations. Alternative 3 is consistent with Forest Plan air quality standards.

## **E. NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT**

Currently, there are no known districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places that will be affected by the

selected alternative. As such, the actions should not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (Appendix A, pages A-18).

#### **F. ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

It was determined that the proposed actions will not affect any Threatened, Endangered or candidate wildlife, fish, or plant species which may occur in the area (Chapter 2, pages 2-2, 2-4, 2-28, 2-29, and 2-31; Chapter 4, pages 4-30 through 4-43 and 4-107; Appendix A, pages A-2 and A-4; Appendix B). Complete Biological Assessments are provided within the Project Files for additional information.

On April 9, 2008 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided the Bonners Ferry Ranger District with an updated listing of threatened and endangered species that may be present within the evaluation area (FWS Ref. #1-9-08-SP-0067). Changes from the previous list include: the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) has been delisted, effective March 28, 2008 (73 FR 10514); the slender moonwort (*Botrychium lineare*) has been removed from candidate status (72 FR 69047); and revised critical habitat for Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) has been proposed (73 FR 10860). There is no proposed Canada lynx critical habitat within the Northern Prairie project area. Slender moonwort is addressed as a Sensitive species, and no populations are expected to occur in the project area. Upon removal from the list of threatened and endangered species, gray wolf is automatically added to the Region 1 Sensitive species list for five years, or until a status review is conducted. It was determined that the Northern Prairie project *may affect*, but was *not likely to adversely affect* gray wolf. As a Sensitive species, the effects determination is changed to *may impact gray wolves or their habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species*. Conservation requirements for protection of gray wolf remain in force. No further analysis is necessary.

#### **G. MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT**

The analysis included in the EA determined that Alternative 3, "May impact individuals and habitat, but would not indicate a local or regional change in habitat quality or population status" (EA Appendix B, pages B-2 and B-3).

#### **H. SAFE DRINKING WATER ACT AND AMENDMENTS OF 1996 (INCLUDING STATE OF IDAHO IMPLEMENTATION)**

Alternative 3 is consistent with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and Amendments of 1996. BMP's were developed from protection measures recommended from this assessment along with site specific BMP's (Appendix C).

#### **I. IDAHO FOREST PRACTICES ACT**

No municipal watersheds are within the effects area of the Northern Prairie project area. Proposed activities are away from water sources used for domestic purposes. BMPs or Soil and Water Conservation Practices (Chapter 2 "Design Criteria" and Appendix C) will be

applied under Alternative 2 and all activities are in compliance with the guidelines in the Soil and Water Conservation Handbook.

#### **J. EXECUTIVE ORDER 12962 – RECREATIONAL FISHING**

Alternative 3 is consistent with this executive order regarding aquatic systems and recreational fisheries (EA, Chapter 4, p. 77-109).

#### **K. STATE OF IDAHO GOVERNOR’S BULL TROUT PLAN**

Alternative 3 is consistent with the direction in the Governor’s Bull Trout Plan (EA, Chapter 4, p. 107).

#### **L. ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE, INTERIM DIRECTIVES NO. 7710-2001-2 AND NO. 2400-2001-3, AND WILDERNESS ACT OF 1964**

Activities under Alternative 3 are consistent with these mandates. There are no roadless or wilderness areas within or adjacent to the Northern Prairie project area (EA, p. A-21).

#### **M. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACT**

Alternative 3 was assessed to determine whether it would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations, in accordance with Executive Order 12898. No impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or any other portion of public involvement during the course of this analysis (EA, p. A-21). Based on this, Alternative 2 complies with Executive Order 12898.

### **V. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT ACTION**

The direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed actions have been reviewed as documented in this Decision Notice, the Environmental Assessment, and the project file. The setting of these proposals is in a localized area, with implications only for landscape, drainages and stands within the analysis area. Consideration of the proposed action is based on their impacts to the ecosystem, local communities, county, and at the effected resource level. They do not have any large or lasting effects on the society as a whole, the nation, or the state. Based on this review, it has been determined that there are no significant impacts on the physical, biological, or social portions of the human environment. The selected alternative is consistent with management objectives, standards and guidelines established for the Northern Prairie project area and the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

#### **A. SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS (BOTH BENEFICIAL AND ADVERSE)**

Effects associated with the selected alternative are discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 of the Northern Prairie EA. These impacts are within the range of those identified within the Forest Plan. The actions will not have significant effects on other resources identified and described within Appendix A and project files. Activities will result in temporary and low impact effects.

Harvesting and log hauling activities will increase traffic on Forest Service and on County roads, which are the primary access roads into the area. Precautionary signings will provide for safety and information in areas of activities.

No significant increase in water yields or sedimentation in the analysis area streams is expected, and State water quality guidelines will be met. Implementation of Inland Fish Strategy (INFISH) standards and guidelines will protect stream courses from sedimentation (Chapter 2, pages 2-19, 2-24, and 2-25; Chapter 3 pages 3-44, 3-46, and 3-47; Chapter 4, pages 4-34, 4-57; 4-86, 4-100, 4-106, and 4-107; Appendix C, page C-7). It is my determination that the selected alternative will have no significant effects on public health and safety or on any resource attributes of the Northern Prairie project area.

**B. UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, SUCH AS PROXIMITY TO HISTORIC OR CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARKLANDS, PRIME FARMS, WETLANDS, WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS, OR ECOLOGICALLY CRITICAL AREAS**

Currently, there are no known districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places that will be affected by the selected alternative. As such, the actions should not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (Appendix A, pages A-18).

There will no change in the IPNFs old growth allocation. Some dry forest recruitment old growth will be treated, but the prescriptions are designed to improve the characteristics of treated stands (Chapter 4, pages 4-21 to 4-25).

No unique parklands, prime farms, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers are located in the project area.

**C. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE EFFECTS ON THE QUALITY OF THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT ARE LIKELY TO BE HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL**

The effects of these activities on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial (Chapter 2, pages 2-19 to 2-23; Appendix A, pages A-18 to A-23). Past monitoring has determined that the actual effects of similar projects are consistent with estimated effects of the proposed activities. There is a wide professional and scientific agreement on the scope and effects of these actions on the various resources.

**D. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT ARE HIGHLY UNCERTAIN OR INVOLVE UNIQUE OR UNKNOWN RISK:**

The planned actions are similar to actions implemented in other areas on the National Forest system, state, county and private lands. Effects will be similar to those of past actions. The analysis considered the effects of past actions as a frame of reference in conjunction to the estimated effects of the proposal. It is my conclusion that there are no unique or unusual characteristics of the area, which have not been previously encountered, which will constitute an

unknown risk to the human environment (Chapter 2, pages 2-19 to 2-23; Appendix A, pages A-18 to A-23).

**E. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ACTION MAY ESTABLISH A PRECEDENT FOR FUTURE ACTIONS WITH SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OR PRESENTS A DECISION IN PRINCIPLE ABOUT FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS**

The selected alternative is not setting a precedent for future actions of significant effects. Management practices are consistent with the Forest Plan and the Research Station and with the capabilities of the land. This action does not represent a decision in principle about future considerations.

**F. WHETHER THE ACTION IS RELATED TO OTHER ACTIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL INSIGNIFICANT BUT CUMULATIVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS**

The combined effects of past, other, and reasonably foreseeable actions are discussed in the EA. There is no indication of significant adverse cumulative effect to the environment (Chapters 3 and 4 and Appendix E).

**G. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ACTION MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT DISTRICTS, SITES, HIGHWAY STRUCTURES, OR OBJECTS LISTED IN OR ELIGIBLE FOR LISTING IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, OR MAY CAUSE LOSS OR DESTRUCTION OF SIGNIFICANT SCIENTIFIC, CULTURAL, OR HISTORIC RESOURCES**

Currently, there are no known districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places that will be affected by the selected alternative. As such, the actions should not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (Appendix A, pages A-18).

**H. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ACTION MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT AN ENDANGERED OR THREATENED SPECIES OR ITS HABITAT THAT HAS BEEN DETERMINED TO BE CRITICAL UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT OF 1973**

It was determined that the proposed actions will not affect any Threatened, Endangered or candidate wildlife, fish, or plant species which may occur in the area (Chapter 2, pages 2-2, 2-4, 2-28, 2-29, and 2-31; Chapter 4, pages 4-30 through 4-43 and 4-107; Appendix A, pages A-2 and A-4; Appendix B). Complete Biological Assessments are provided within the Project Files for additional information.

**I. WHETHER THE PROPOSED ACTION THREATENS A VIOLATION OF FEDERAL, STATE, OR LOCAL LAW OR REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

The proposal meets federal, state and local laws for air (Appendix D) and water quality (Chapter 2 pages 2-20, 2-31, 2-32, 2-34, and 2-35; Chapter 4, pages 4-58, 4-77, 4-79, 4-84, 4-85, 4-87, 4-96, 4-97, 4-100 through 4-103, 4-106, 4-108, and 4-109; Appendix A. pages A-4, A-6, A-8, and A-22; Appendix C pages C-1, C-3, C-4, C-6, C-8, C-10, C-11, and C-12), streamside

management and riparian areas (Chapter 2, pages 2-19, 2-24, and 2-25; Chapter 3 pages 3-44, 3-46, and 3-47; Chapter 4, pages 4-34, 4-55, 4-57; 4-75, 4-79, 4-86, 4-89, 4-100,4-101, 4-106, and 4-107; Appendix A pages A-7, A-9, and A-22; Appendix C, page C-6 and C-12), cultural resources (Appendix A, pages A-18), and Threatened and Endangered species (Chapter 2, pages 2-2, 2-4, 2-28, 2-29, and 2-31; Chapter 4, pages 4-30 through 4-43 and 4-107; Appendix A, pages A-2 and A-4; Appendix B), and meets National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements.

## **VI. Documents and Project Files**

Project files contain the detailed information, data used and decisions made in selecting Alternative 2 for implementation. The Environmental Assessment, Decision Notice and Finding of no Significant Impact are available for inspection during regular business hours at:

Bonnors Ferry Ranger District  
6286 Main St.  
Bonnors Ferry, Idaho  
83805-9764

## **VII. Appeal Rights**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Within 45 days after the date of the notice of this decision is published in the Coeur d'Alene Press, written Notice of Appeal must be submitted to:

USDA, Forest Service, Northern Region  
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer (RFO)  
P.O. Box 7669  
Missoula, Montana 59807

Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Detailed records of the environmental analysis are available for public review at the Bonnors Ferry District Office, 6286 Main St., Bonnors Ferry, Idaho, 83805-9764.

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition. The notice of appeal must include:

- A statement that your document is an appeal filed according to 36 CFR part 215
- Your name, address and, if possible, telephone number
- The decision being appealed by title and subject, date of decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official

