

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
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# Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

# Broadaxe

St. Joe Ranger District  
Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
Shoshone County, Idaho

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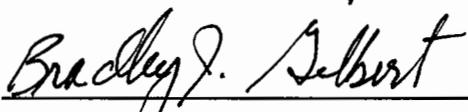
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# FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

## BROADAXE PROJECT

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service  
Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
St. Joe Ranger District  
Shoshone County, Idaho

After considering the environmental effects described in the Broadaxe Environmental Assessment (EA), I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment based on the context and intensity of its impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

*for*  


RANOTTA K. MCNAIR  
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9-23-05

Date

I base my finding on the following:

The project would salvage harvest of live and dead lodgepole pine on approximately 509 acres affected by mountain pine beetles. The proposed action would implement project activities that are of limited scope and duration, affecting only the immediate area around the proposed treatment units. The project would be implemented during the summer and fall months over a period of two to four years. The project was designed to minimize environmental effects through harvest unit location, logging methods, silvicultural prescriptions, and design features of the project (EA, pages 2-3 and 5-10). The Forest Service found no significant issues or unresolved conflict concerning alternative uses of available resources that warrant consideration of additional alternatives (EA, page 2).

**1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse:** I considered beneficial and adverse impacts associated with the Proposed Action Alternative as presented in the Broadaxe EA (pages 4-10). These impacts are within the range of effects identified in the IPNF Forest Plan. I conclude that the specific direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the selected alternative are not significant, and this action does not rely on beneficial effects to balance adverse environmental effects.

### No Effects

Project design and design features effectively eliminated or reduced to negligible most of the potential impacts, therefore, implementation of the proposed action would result in no effect to the following resources: cultural and heritage resources (EA, pages 13-14, 29); inventoried roadless areas (EA, page 14); old growth (EA, page 15); Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive plant species (EA, page 16); the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the streams in the project area (EA, page 20); stream channel conditions (EA, pages 20-21); water temperature in the St., Joe River (EA, page 21); riparian areas (EA, page 20); floodplains (EA, page 20) ; wetlands (EA, pages 20 and 29); Gold Creek or the St. Joe River (EA, page 21); bull trout (EA, page 22); westslope cutthroat trout (EA, page 22); fishery potential (EA, page 22); recreational fishing opportunities (EA, page 22); woodland caribou (EA, page 22); bald eagle (EA, page 22); grizzly bear (EA, page 22); black swift (EA, page 22); Coeur d'Alene salamander (EA, page 22); common loon (EA, page 22); harlequin duck (EA, page 22); northern bog

lemming (EA, page 22); fringed myotis (EA, page 22); peregrine falcon (EA, page 22); Townsend's big-eared bat (EA, page 22); pygmy nuthatch (EA, page 22); northern goshawk (EA, pages 22 and 25); flammulated owl (EA, pages 22, 26-27); moose (EA, page 22); wolverine (EA, pages 24-25); elk habitat potential (EA, page 28); opportunities for wildlife movement and travel (EA, pages 23, 25, 29); parklands (EA, page 29); prime farmlands (EA, page 29); and wild and scenic rivers (EA, pages 21 and 29).

### **Beneficial Effects**

The Broadaxe EA documents the following beneficial effects of implementing the proposed action:

- Fuel accumulations within treatment units would be reduced which would result in areas of effectively low surface and crown fire hazard that may act as barriers to fire spread for fires originating in or outside the treated areas. It would reduce the potential for an ignition to result in undesirable effects within the treated units (EA, page 13).
- The percentage of western larch and western white pine dominated stands would be increased as a result of planting these species (EA, page 18).
- The proposed treatments would remove dead, dying and high risk lodgepole pine while these trees still retain some economic value (EA, page 18).
- High-risk lodgepole pine stands that are experiencing a great deal of mortality would be converted to younger, more vigorous stands of trees (EA, page 20).
- Improvement would occur slowly over time in water temperatures and aquatic habitat complexity as riparian vegetation grows and riparian conditions improve with the proposed action and no action (EA, page 22).
- Foraging habitat for Canada lynx would increase slightly over the next 10 to 30 years (EA, page 23).
- The broadcast burning proposed for slash treatment would likely improve habitat for black-backed woodpeckers by providing fire-killed trees (EA, page 26).
- The project area's ability to support pileated woodpeckers would improve over time (EA, page 28). Old growth would be maintained at existing levels (EA, page 15), and untreated stands would continue to age and increase tree size. The trend for continuing tree mortality through insect and disease agents is expected to persist, so the amount and quality of suitable pileated woodpecker habitat would continue to increase.
- Forage habitat for ungulates would be improved slightly as a result of the proposed prescribed burning (EA, page 28). This in turn would improve the prey base for wolves and wolverine by a slight degree (EA, pages 23-24).

### **Potential Adverse Effects**

The Broadaxe EA documents the following potential adverse effects from implementing the proposed action:

Air Quality (EA, page 12): The proposed action would have limited immediate adverse effect on air quality from proposed prescribed burning, and these effects would be localized and would last for a short duration. Proposed prescribed burning would be monitored and controlled by airshed regulations to avoid violation of air quality standards. Other prescribed burning on federal, state, and private lands within the affected airshed that may occur at the same time are monitored cumulatively on a daily basis and contribute to the local Smoke Management Unit's decision to approve a prescribed burn request on a given day. Noxious weed spraying would have a short-term localized effect in the immediate area of spraying. The impact from spraying would be very minimal to the air quality in the project area. The smell of herbicides would only persist at a spray site for a few days following spraying.

Noxious Weeds (EA, pages 14-15): This area seems to be somewhat resistant to weed invasion because of the short growing season, and design features can reduce the threat of weed expansion. Even with associated weed control methods, however, weed species may colonize disturbed areas. Weed populations are expected to remain stable or increase slightly. Monitoring of noxious weeds will help identify areas needing treatment. Appropriate action would be taken if new populations of noxious weeds were discovered within the project area, and the proposed action would meet the intent stated in the Forest Plan for moderate weed control through the implementation of design features.

Recreational Use of Stateline Road 391 (EA, pages 16-17): The Stateline Road has no special designation, but it is popular for people seeking a high-country, more primitive driving experience. During project activities the Stateline Road may be blocked during week days, but it would be open to the public at night and on weekends throughout timber sale activities. At the end of harvest activity and at the end of use during any given year it would return to a continuously open condition. Approximately 2.25 miles of the road would be temporarily converted from high-clearance vehicle access to passenger vehicle access, but over time the road would revert to high-clearance access.

Soil Productivity (EA, page 17): The proposed action would meet Region 1 soil recommendations and IPNF Forest Plan standards. Direct effects due to construction and recontouring of temporary road are predicted, however, the total disturbance would be less than or equal to 13 percent in each activity area. Monitoring of units in the Beetlemania Timber Sale in the same drainage with similar treatments generally showed less than ten percent detrimental soil disturbance, so the actual disturbance may be less than what is predicted. No cumulative effects are anticipated in the proposed salvage units because there has been no previous management in the units, and no foreseeable future activities are planned.

Visual Quality (EA, page 19): The proposed action is consistent with management direction in the IPNF Forest Plan. Units 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 would meet visual quality objectives (VQOs). It is unlikely Units 1 and 2 would meet the VQO of Retention within the next three to five years. However, as the existing residual trees grow and new regeneration becomes established, the low end of Retention would likely be attained, with full Retention possible within the decade. Forest-wide standards for visual quality (Forest Plan II-25) allow treatments that do not meet VQOs in large areas where the mortality rate for timber is very high.

Watershed Resources (EA, pages 19-21): Water temperatures are the main concern in Gold Creek, and the proposed action would not have an adverse effect on stream temperatures in Broadaxe Creek, Gold Creek, or the St. Joe River. Gold Creek and Broadaxe Creek would be allowed to move toward their target canopy covers and support of beneficial uses. No measurable effects on water quality and beneficial uses from project activities are anticipated. No detectable additional contribution of sediment to streams due to harvest-related ground disturbance is anticipated. Temporary road construction would decrease canopy cover and alter hillslope morphology and hydrologic functioning over the short term, but recovery would be attained within 20 years. The overall effectiveness for all BMPs is expected to be high based on monitoring of BMPs used in the Broadaxe Drainage for the Beetlemania Timber Sale which had similar activities. Small changes in water and sediment yield are predicted based on modeling, but these changes would be so small they would not be detectable in the channel of Broadaxe Creek. Spring and winter floods due to temperature and precipitation fluctuations are more likely to cause channel changes than the proposed action would. No significant increase in water yield or peak flows is predicted for Gold Creek, and no negative effects due to extended peak flows are expected. No impacts to Gold Creek or the St. Joe River are anticipated because cumulative in-stream effects would be negligible. The predicted effects would be well within the historic range of variation and are not likely to affect channel conditions. Harvest openings would not be significantly different than openings anticipated due to beetle kill with no action.

Fisher and Marten (EA, page 24): The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat, but it would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. The amount of young forest in the area would be reduced slightly, but the proposed action would maintain fisher and marten habitat within the guidelines for "High Quality" habitat. The most important factors for fisher and marten are the quality, amount and distribution of late successional forest habitat; and the proposed action would not change any of those factors (EA, page 15).

Black-backed Woodpecker (EA, page 26): The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat, but it would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. Sufficient habitat for black-backed woodpeckers would persist in the project area, and retention of snags would maintain habitat value for black-backed woodpeckers, although at a lower level than existing, within treated stands. The proposed salvage units would make the treated stands lower quality habitat, however, the potential impacts on snags and down wood would be alleviated by the following factors:

- Areas outside of proposed treatment units would continue to provide snags and leave trees at existing levels in the short term, and the number of snags and down woody material in these areas would increase as stands succeed.
- Areas would be reserved from treatment within Inland Native Fish Strategy buffers.

- Snags would also persist in unloggable areas of the treated stands.
- The uncut ridgeline buffer would also maintain snags within the project area.
- The retention of some snags to provide coarse woody debris recruitment in the logging units would also contribute to the overall snag density in the analysis area (Design Features 7 and 8 e and f).
- Green tree retention needs would be met as only lodgepole pine will be salvaged, leaving all other tree species on site.

Even with the conversion of some areas to lower quality habitat, the high levels of mature and old trees coupled with the amounts of insect and disease-related mortality indicate a trend of increasing habitat quality for black-backed woodpeckers. The amount and quality of suitable habitat would continue to increase because old growth would be maintained at existing levels (EA, page 15) and untreated stands would continue to age.

Western Toad (EA, page 27): The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat but would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. The proposed action would result in only minor changes in timbered habitat, and habitat alteration from timber harvest have not been shown as causative agents for population declines. Riparian buffer zones would protect potential breeding habitat and timbered stands near water most likely used by toads. It is unlikely that the stands proposed for treatment would be important habitat for western toads because they are high elevation, drier habitat types. The highest potential for mortality would occur on existing open roads adjacent to potential breeding habitat; but direct mortality from the proposed action is unlikely, and potential adverse effects would not significantly exceed existing levels of risks to the species.

Pileated Woodpecker (EA, pages 27-28): No treatment of any mature timber stands that constitute suitable pileated woodpecker habitat is proposed. Given the amount of insect activity in the area, the proposed action would only have a minor impact on feeding habitat. The project area would retain snags at levels that have been shown to maintain viable populations of cavity-dependent species (EA, page 27). Based on the level of suitable habitat maintained (approximately 51% of the project area), it is not likely that this alternative would adversely impact pileated woodpecker populations.

Elk (EA, page 28): Post-harvest conditions for wildlife related to access would not be changed from the existing condition, but there would be a slight temporary increase in open road density during timber harvest activity. This would be a small increase in the area where the effects of disturbance from the proposed logging activity would be occurring. The proposed action would maintain existing conditions for elk in the project area.

Connectivity for Wildlife (EA, pages 23, 25, 29): Opportunities for wildlife movement and travel would be maintained. Seven proposed harvest units would be partially within identified travel ways, however, all existing canopy cover within the designated travel corridor would be retained except where skyline yarding corridors through the buffer in Units 1 and 2 would be needed. This activity will not exceed guidelines for openings in travel corridors, i.e. limited to one side of the ridgetop, less than 300 feet wide, less than 25 percent of the corridor (IDFG 1995). Temporary roads and roads temporarily opened for the timber sale are not in potential travel corridors.

**2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety:** It is my determination that by incorporating the Design Features for air quality and access management (Design Features 1 and 13; EA, pages 5 and 9), the proposed action will have no significant adverse effects on public health and safety. Placing warning signs in strategic locations and having flaggers or temporary road closures during road construction, logging activity, and prescribed burning activities will limit risks to the public traveling along FH 50. Conducting prescribed burning activities according to the Memorandum of Understanding established between the states of Idaho and Montana and burning only when weather and air conditions are favorable for smoke dispersal will protect air quality (EA, page 12) and public health.

**3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farms, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical area:** The selected alternative will not impact any known cultural sites (EA, pages 13-14, 29). The project area does not contain any parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wetlands, or ecologically critical areas (EA, page 29).

**4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Effects analysis was conducted using scientific literature (see Literature Cited), and the interdisciplinary team reviewed literature cited in public comments on the project (project file, S-37 and CP-19). The literature that applies to this project did not indicate that this project would be highly controversial. I received several public comments through the scoping process, including the 30-day comment period for the EA (Response to Comments). Some opposition does exist, but the majority of the comments are in support of the proposed action. No highly-controversial or significant issues related to the human environment were identified during the scoping and 30 day-comment periods (EA, pages 2-3). No significant issues were raised during the analysis process (EA, pages 2-3).

**5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk:** The proposed action is similar to Beetlemania Timber Sale which was implemented in the Broadaxe Drainage in 1998. Monitoring shows the Beetlemania Salvage Timber Sale was completed with no effects to Broadaxe Creek (EA, page 21) and soil effects that are less than those predicted for the proposed action (EA, page 17). Analysis of the proposed action considered the effects of past actions, such as the Beetlemania Timber Sale, as a frame of reference in conjunction with scientifically accepted analytical techniques, available information, and best professional experience and judgment to estimate effects to the human environment. It is my conclusion that there are no uncertain or unique characteristics in the project area which have not been previously encountered or that would constitute an unknown risk to the human environment.

**6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or presents a decision in principle about future consideration:** The selected alternative will not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The proposed activities are similar in nature and effects to many other projects in the immediate area and are consistent with the IPNF Forest Plan. This action does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individual insignificant but cumulative significant impacts:** The effects of the selected alternative combined with the effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions will not have any significant cumulative effects. The proposed action would have no effect on some resources (see #1 above) and no cumulative effects on soil productivity (EA, page 17), wolverine (EA, page 25), northern goshawk (EA, page 25), elk (EA, page 28). For the following resources the proposed action may contribute to effects from past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, but the cumulative effects would not be significant.

Air Quality (EA, page 12): Air quality would remain good until the occurrence of a major wildfire event near or down-wind of the area, after which a return to pre-existing conditions could be expected within a matter of days. Other reasonably foreseeable future activities (Table 4) would have no effect on air quality.

Noxious Weeds (EA, page 15): Weed populations are expected to remain stable or increase slightly. The proposed action would meet the intent stated in the Forest Plan for moderate weed control through the implementation of design features (Design Features 11; EA, page 9).

Forest Species Composition and Structure (EA, pages 18-19): Outside the treatment units mortality in lodgepole pine would continue. Natural regeneration back to lodgepole pine is expected and only incremental change in this forest cover type would occur over time. The cumulative changes in stand structure would only be incremental. Reasonably foreseeable activities (EA, Table 4) would not change stand structure or species composition.

Watershed Resources (EA, page 21): Water temperature in the St. Joe River downstream of the project area would not be affected by project activities. In compliance with TMDL requirements (IDEQ, 2003, p. 94-96), thermal modifications in the Upper St. Joe River sub-basin would not be exacerbated. No significant increase in water yield or peak flows is predicted for Gold Creek, and no negative effects due to extended peak flows are expected. No water yield effects are expected in the St. Joe River downstream of the project area. No impacts to Gold Creek or the St. Joe River due to proposed activities are anticipated because cumulative in-stream effects would be negligible. At the cumulative effects scale, a short-term, one percent increase in total sediment and a delay in water yield recovery in Gold Creek are highly unlikely to affect the stream channel. The Beetlemania project activities had no effect on Broadaxe Creek or headwater tributaries. Reasonably foreseeable future activities (EA, Table 4) would not affect

watershed conditions in Broadaxe Creek or Gold Creek.

Canada Lynx (EA, page 23): The proposed action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect Canada lynx. The Gold Creek LAU was used for cumulative effects analysis, and it would continue to meet the standards of the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (Ruediger, et al., 2000). Reasonably foreseeable activities (Table 4) would have no effect on lynx or their habitat in the Gold Creek LAU.

Gray Wolf (EA, page 24): The proposed action would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat because the prey base would be maintained (as shown by no decline in elk habitat potential), design features would avoid adverse direct and cumulative impacts (maintaining corridors and linkages, avoiding known den and rendezvous sites), and there would be no consequential change in the likelihood of human-wolf interactions.

Fisher and Marten (EA, page 24): The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat, but would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. The most important factors for fisher and marten are the quality, amount and distribution of late successional forest habitat, and the proposed action does not change any of those factors. No cumulative effects on old growth (late successional forest habitat) are expected (EA, page 15) as a result of reasonably foreseeable activities (EA, Table 4).

Black-backed Woodpecker (EA, page 26): The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat, but would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. The proposed action would not change access (Design Feature 13. d, page 9), therefore; the incidental removal of snags for firewood (EA, Table 4) would not be significantly affected, and black-backed habitat would be maintained.

Western Toad (EA, page 27): The proposed action may impact individuals or habitat but would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. The impacts from proposed federal actions under this alternative combined with current and future activities (EA, Table 4) would not contribute appreciably to existing impacts and would not affect population viability.

Pileated Woodpecker (EA, page 28): Current and reasonably foreseeable activities (EA, Table 4) would not affect pileated habitat. The proposed action would not change access (Design Feature 13. d; EA, page 9), therefore; the incidental removal of snags for firewood (EA, Table 4) would not be significantly affected, and pileated woodpecker habitat would be maintained.

Connectivity for Wildlife (EA, page 29): There would not be any further appreciable changes to existing permanent impediments to movement. The effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions would continue to affect and alter wildlife movement in and through the analysis area, but the area would still maintain corridors suitable for wildlife movement. The proposed action would not have unacceptable, irreversible and irrevocable adverse impacts on connectivity because of the relatively limited amount of salvage harvest and road building proposed with this project, and the conscious efforts to minimize impacts through alternative design associated with the proposed action.

**8. 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:** A comprehensive evaluation of heritage resources was conducted and there are no known sites that would be impacted (EA, page 13-14, 29). District Ranger, Chuck Mark, consulted with the Coeur d' Alene Tribal Cultural Committee about this project, and they expressed no concerns with the proposed action (project file, Vol. V, S-40). The Nez Perce Tribal Representative expressed no concerns about the proposed action (project file, Vol., V, S-41).

**9. 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:** This project will not significantly adversely affect Threatened or Endangered species or their habitat. The selected alternative will have no effect on grizzly bear (EA, page 22), woodland caribou (EA, page 22), bald eagle (EA, page 22), water howellia (EA, page 16), or Spalding's catchfly (EA, page 16). It would not jeopardize the continued existence of bull trout (EA, page 22). It may affect but is not likely to adversely affect Canada lynx (EA, page 23). Implementation of the selected alternative is not likely to

jeopardize the continued existence of gray wolf or result in destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat (EA, page 24).

**10. Whether the proposed action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:** The selected alternative meets federal, state, and local laws for air quality (EA, page 12), heritage resources or cultural sites (EA, pages 14 and 29), noxious weeds (EA, pages 14-15), water quality (EA, page 20), fisheries (EA, page 22) and Threatened and Endangered species (EA, pages 16, 22-24). It also meets National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements (Broadaxe EA and this Finding of No Significant Impact).

The proposed action is consistent with the NFMA and the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Forest Plan. This proposal does not require any Forest Plan amendments. According to 36 CFR 219.12 (Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 3, January 5, 2005, page 1059) a final determination of suitability for timber production is made through project decisions. In this case, that determination is not required because lodgepole pine will be salvaged from insect-infested areas; and that may take place on areas that are either suitable or not suitable for timber production.

16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E) National Forest System Land and Resource Management Plans

- (i) Timber harvest is not expected to result in irreversible damage to soil, slope, or watershed conditions (EA, pages 17, 21).
- (ii) Openings will be restocked within five years after harvest (Vegetation Report, page 17).
- (iii) The proposed harvests will not seriously or adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat (EA, pages 19-22).
- (iv) The proposed harvesting system is not selected primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber (Purpose and Need for proposed action). Only lodgepole pine in areas infested with mountain pine beetle will be harvested. Other species that may have more value for timber will be left on site (EA, page 18).

16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F) National Forest System Land and Resource Management Plans

- (i) In some areas the selected harvest methods will result in areas of even-aged stands of timber, but only lodgepole pine will be harvested. All other species will be left. The proposed lodgepole pine salvage is appropriate to meet the objectives and requirements of the IPNF Forest Plan (Purpose and Need for the proposed action).
- (ii) An interdisciplinary team reviewed and assessed the project. Their findings are reported in detail in each resource report and are summarized in the Broadaxe EA.
- (iii) Harvest units will be shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain (EA, Design Feature 10).
- (iv) Opening size limitations do not apply in this case because natural insect and disease attacks have occurred, and the proposed timber harvest will only take place in those areas (FSM Northern Region 2471.1; EA, page 4).
- (v) The proposed harvests will be carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and esthetic resources, and the regeneration of the timber resource (EA, pages 11-29).

