

File Code: 1950

Date: March 7, 2005

Dear Reader,

I would like to provide you with an update on the Quartz Gold Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and explain what has happened since my last update of September 9, 2004.

During the fall of 2004 I recommended to the Forest Supervisor that the draft EIS not be released because of concerns I had with changed conditions within the analysis area due to an ongoing mountain pine beetle infestation and the status of the old growth resource within the analysis area. These concerns necessitated an extensive field effort to validate current conditions to determine whether to proceed with the proposed action. A brief historical overview of the analysis area helps explain the situation.

Most of the Quartz Gold Analysis Area was not burned during the large fires from 1910 through the 1930s. However, in upper Gold and Broadaxe drainages a large area within the analysis boundary was burned. These large stand-replacing fires encouraged lodgepole pine over thousands of acres. The lodgepole pine reached the right size and age by 1999 to create conditions that allowed the mountain pine beetle to increase beyond endemic population levels. This caused widespread and extensive forest mortality along the Bitterroot Divide.

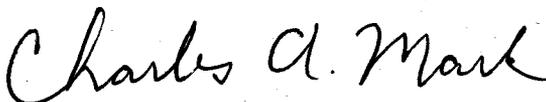
Where fires did not burn over the last 100 years, older forests have developed. All of the old growth management units (OGMU) wholly or partially within the analysis area are above the five percent standard for old growth, and two of these OGMUs are over 20 percent old growth. The field validation effort focused on areas proposed for treatment and allocated old growth stands that required field verification. We have validated about one-third of the allocated old growth for old growth characteristics and examined all of the proposed treatment areas.

I propose to move forward with silvicultural treatments within the Broadaxe Drainage to salvage merchantable forest products within dead, dying, and high risk lodgepole pine stands caused by the mountain pine beetle. I propose to defer further silvicultural treatments within the Quartz Gold Analysis Area until the validation effort is completed for the old growth resource.

Relevant information generated from the extensive public involvement process for Quartz Gold Analysis Area will be incorporated into the Broadaxe Project. I plan to move forward with an environmental assessment (EA). The scoping notice for the Broadaxe Project EA is included for your review and comments are welcome. We hope to implement this project by July of this year.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 208-245-6001.

Sincerely,



CHARLES A. MARK  
District Ranger

# Broadaxe Project Scoping Notice

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

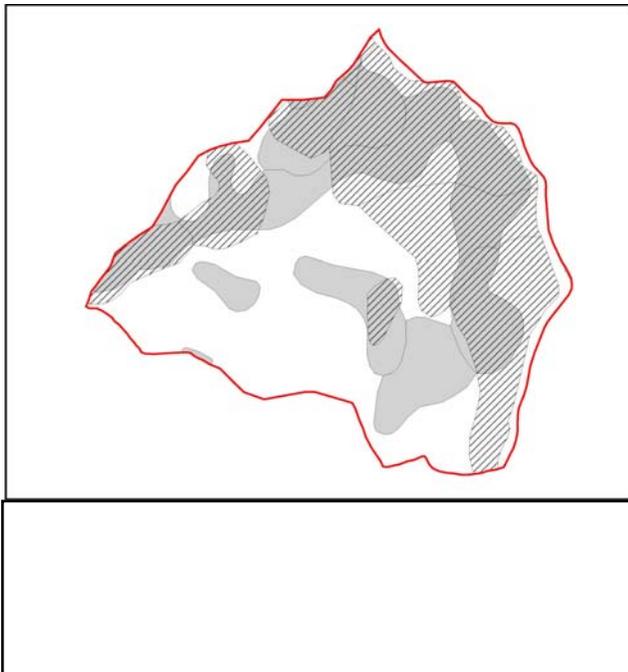
## INTRODUCTION

The St. Joe Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests is considering a proposal to salvage and regenerate approximately 510 acres of dead, dying, and high-risk lodgepole pine in the Broadaxe Project Area. The project is proposed in an area that has experienced significant mortality from mountain pine beetle approximately nine miles southwest of St. Regis, Montana and 23 miles east of Avery, Idaho (see attached map).

Large areas burned in the Broadaxe Drainage from 1910 through the 1930s. These large stand-replacing fires encouraged lodgepole pine over many acres. These stands are 90+ years old now and have become highly susceptible to large-scale infestation with mountain pine beetle. This mountain pine beetle infestation is widespread across areas in western Montana and northern Idaho. Stands proposed for treatment in the Broadaxe Project are comprised of approximately 42-92 percent lodgepole pine. Approximately 49-93 percent of that lodgepole pine has already died, and the remaining lodgepole pine trees are currently being attacked by mountain pine beetles or are at high risk of attack.



**Dead and dying lodgepole pine** - Mountain pine beetle infestation in lodgepole pine in the Broadaxe Drainage, June 2004.



## PURPOSE AND NEED

The Forest Service is proposing this project to:

- Meet forest plan standards for forest protection related to insects and diseases in Management Areas 1 and 6 (IPNF Forest Plan III-4 and III-30, respectively) by restoring fully stocked, diverse, vigorous stands that include species less susceptible to mountain pine beetle (western white pine and western larch); so the lodgepole pine / mountain pine beetle situation is not perpetuated within the treatment areas.
- Reduce long-term hazardous fuel accumulations within treatment areas.
- Contribute to the local employment, income, and lifestyles (IPNF Forest Plan II-11) while the dead, dying, and high-risk lodgepole pine still has some economic value.



## **PROPOSED ACTION**

The Forest Service is proposing salvage harvest of dead, dying, and high risk lodgepole pine, and tree planting on approximately 510 acres affected by mountain pine beetles. Approximately 375 acres would be harvested using skyline-logging systems, and approximately 135 acres would be harvested using ground-based systems. Harvest would be followed with broadcast burning, jackpot burning, lopping, and/or machine piling. Planting with a mix of western larch and rust resistant western white pine would be combined with natural regeneration to achieve desired stocking levels and species mix. Approximately one mile of temporary road would be needed for product removal and would be completely recontoured after use.

## **PRELIMINARY ISSUES**

Public input is part of the process to identify issues relating to the Broadaxe Project proposed action. The following issues identified during the analysis for the Quartz Gold Project may be relevant for the Broadaxe Project. The project is designed to address these issues with measures such as harvest unit location, riparian buffers, logging methods, silvicultural prescriptions, and timber sale contract provisions for protection of resources.

- Gold Creek is listed under 303(d) of the Clean Water Act for temperature, sediment, nutrients, and habitat alteration. A temperature total maximum daily load (TMDL) has been developed; and sediment, nutrients, and habitat have been recommended for delisting.
- Activities associated with timber harvest could produce sediment and increase water yield which may induce detrimental channel change and could affect water quality and fisheries habitat.
- Soil productivity could be reduced by removal of organics and associated nutrients or by detrimental impacts such as compaction, displacement, puddling, or severe burning.
- Timber harvest may result in fragmentation of wildlife habitat which could affect wildlife travel corridors and interior forest habitat.
- Ground disturbing activities can lead to spread or introduction of noxious weeds. Noxious weeds displace native vegetation.
- Use of the Stateline Road for timber harvest could negatively impact the type of recreational experience people have when they use the road.
- Proposed timber harvest may not meet visual quality objectives.

## **DOCUMENTATION AND APPEAL**

The initial agency analysis of preliminary issues for this proposed action, as described above, indicates that the action is not likely to result in any significant environmental effects to the human environment. Therefore, we are planning to prepare an environmental assessment (EA) rather than an environmental impact statement. This determination will be reassessed following a review of issues identified by the public and other agencies resulting from this scoping.

Persons responding in writing to this scoping notice will be notified of the availability of any environmental documents related to this proposal. The EA will be available for comment for a period of 30 days.

Any decision to proceed with actions described in the EA will be subject to administrative appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215 by any party which has submitted substantive written comments on the EA during the 30 day comment period.

## YOUR COMMENTS

The St. Joe Ranger District needs to receive your comments on this project by April 6, 2005 to incorporate them in the development and analysis of this project. A comment form is enclosed. Comments may be submitted in writing; by phone, fax, e-mail; or in person to:

St. Joe Ranger District  
222 South 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1  
Phone: (208) 245-2531 Fax: (208) 245-6052  
E-mail: (project leader, Cornie Hudson) chudson@fs.fed.us

Your name will be removed from the mailing list for this project if you do not submit comments or request to remain on the mailing list.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215.

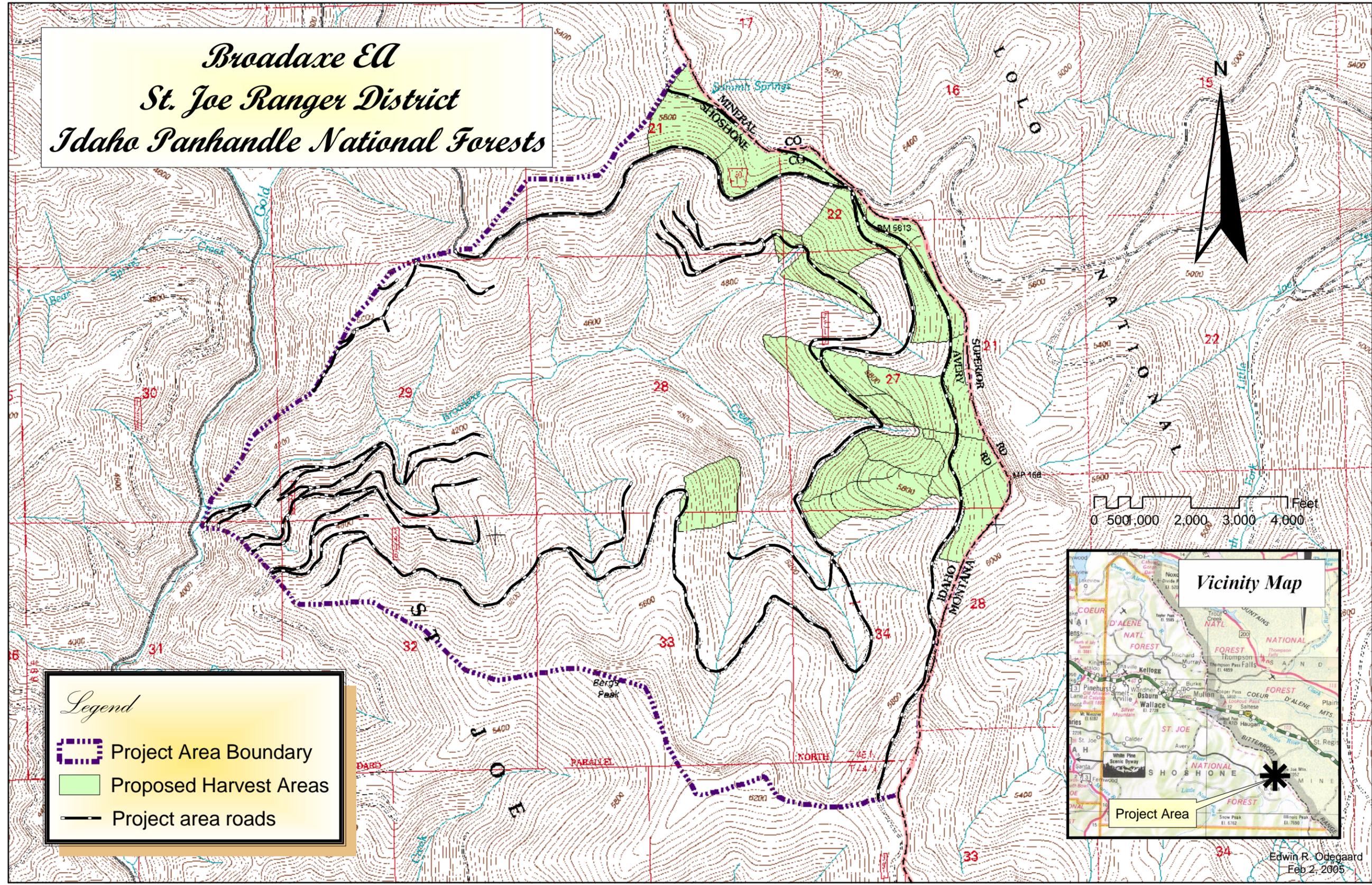
*Charles A. Mark*

CHARLES A. MARK  
District Ranger

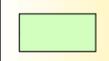
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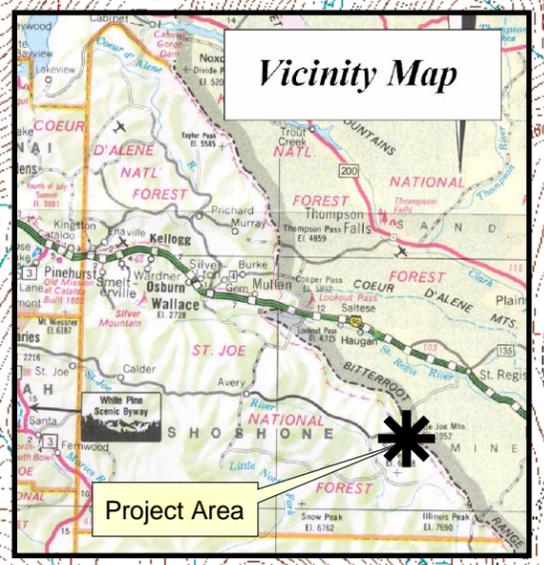
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*Broadaxe EA  
St. Joe Ranger District  
Idaho Panhandle National Forests*



*Legend*

-  Project Area Boundary
-  Proposed Harvest Areas
-  Project area roads



**BROADAXE PROJECT  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
COMMENT FORM**

Please fill out this form and send it to us if you want to continue to be on the mailing list for this project.

We estimate that the Broadaxe Project Environmental Assessment will be available in May 2005. We would like to receive your comments by April 7, 2005. For the convenience of our public and in an effort to reduce costs, documents related to this proposal will be available on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' internet web page (<http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/>). If you wish to remain on the mailing list you will receive the documents in the mail unless you specify otherwise below.

Please fill in your address on the back side of this sheet, write in your comments, check your format preference and return this form to:

**St. Joe Ranger District  
Broadaxe Project EA  
222 S 7<sup>th</sup> Street Suite 1  
St. Maries, ID 83861**

\_\_\_\_\_ Please do not send any more information to me on these projects. I will access information on the web page.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in staying on the mailing list for Broadaxe Project EA.

See other side



## BROADAXE PROJECT EA COMMENTS

If we do NOT hear from you, your name will be removed from the mailing list for this project.

Name

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Address

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR COMMENTS WILL BE CONSIDERED PART OF THE PUBLIC RECORD:**

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.