



File Code: 1950

Date: December 1, 2008

Dear Friends and Neighbors of the St. Joe Ranger District:

The St. Joe Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests is proposing a timber stand improvement program for 2009-2015 which includes pruning western white pine and/or pre-commercial thinning and release. I am interested in any site-specific comments you may have on this project.

Purpose and Need:

Proposed thinning/release units currently have 450 to 6,000 trees per acre of mixed species of conifers. Thinning/release would reduce competition in the stands, improve the growth of the remaining trees, reduce diseased and damaged trees, maintain stand and tree vigor, maintain stocking levels in even-aged stands and provide a commercially valuable wood product earlier in the rotation. In general, the primary leave trees will be the more long-lived seral species such as western larch and western white pine. The thinning/release will decrease the less desirable mid- to late-succession species such as grand fir and western hemlock.

Western white pine comprised up to 70 percent of the units proposed for pruning. Western white pine trees are vulnerable to white pine blister rust, and pruning will significantly reduce their susceptibility to being infected with blister rust.

Proposed Action:

The St. Joe Ranger District is proposing to pre-commercially thin/release and prune approximately 3,800 acres in previously harvested stands within the St. Joe, St. Maries, and Little North Fork Clearwater drainages (see enclosed maps).

The units to be thinned/released are a mix of common northern Idaho conifers such as western white pine, western larch, Douglas-fir and others. The entire project will be accomplished using hand tools such as chainsaws and handsaws.

The age class of trees to be thinned/released varies from 3 - 30 years with a maximum diameter at breast height of 5-7 inches. All species may be present in varying proportions. The trees remaining after treatment will be the best available, least damaged and diseased, have good form and color, and show the most vigorous growth over the past few years.

White pine to be pruned will generally be 8 to 20 years of age and 6-25 feet tall. Trees will be prioritized by health, height and largest crown. Pruned trees will retain a minimum of 50% of the live crown and will not be pruned higher than 8 feet from the ground. All pruning would be completed with pruning shears and handsaws.

The work would be accomplished from 2009 to 2015.



Treatment areas behind gates will be access using District administrative access procedures. Roads that have been closed with barriers may be opened , but only during the operating season. Barriers would be reconstructed or reinstalled when work is completed each season. If access were desired via a road that is brushed in, an interdisciplinary review would be conducted to evaluate options and recommendations for brushing out the road(s).

#### Documentation and Appeal:

The preliminary analysis of this proposal indicated it falls into a category of action that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Category 31.2[6] Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction). If there are no extraordinary circumstances and potential effects are minor or non-existent the decision will be documented in a decision memo. Pursuant to 36 CFR 215, the final decision may be subject to appeal.

This project does not include use of herbicides, road construction, or commercial timber harvest.

#### Your Comments:

I am the responsible official for this project, and I will consider all public comments before making a decision. In submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe I should consider in reaching a decision.

Any decision to proceed with the proposed action may be subject to administrative appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215 by any party which has submitted written comments on the proposed action during the 30-day comment period. Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. The comment period will start on the day following publication of the legal notice in the *Coeur d'Alene Press* (expected December 4, 2008) and ends 30 days following the date of publication.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record 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. 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 should be aware that, under the FOIA, 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. When 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.

Please send written comments to: Charles A. Mark, District Ranger  
Timber Stand Improvement  
St. Joe Ranger District  
222 S 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1  
St. Maries, ID 83861

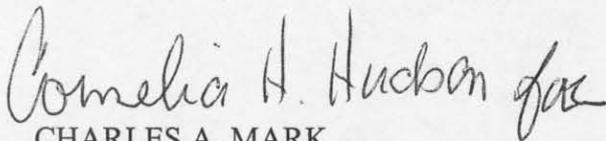
Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day following publication of the legal notice in the newspaper of record (*Coeur d'Alene Press*). The anticipated date of publication is December 4, 2008. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the St. Joe Ranger District office located in St. Maries, Idaho by the close of business on the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day following publication of the legal notice. The St. Maries office business hours are Monday through Friday 7:30 am to 4:00 p.m., excluding federal holidays.

Oral comments must be provided at my office during normal business hours via telephone or in person, or if during non-business hours, must be at an official agency function (such as a public meeting) which is designed to elicit public comment.

Electronic comments may be submitted to [comments-northern-idpanhandle-stjoe@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-idpanhandle-stjoe@fs.fed.us). The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments, in this case: Timber Stand Improvement. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

If you would like more information, please contact John Montgomery, project leader, or Cornie Hudson, Environmental Coordinator, at the St. Joe Ranger District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles A. Mark". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

CHARLES A. MARK  
District Ranger