

# Middle East Fork Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Update #1



FEBRUARY 23, 2007

USDA Forest Service, Bitterroot National Forest  
Sula Ranger District



## Note From the District Ranger:

While we have a lull in activity on the Middle East Fork Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, I thought that I would send a note to let you know what has been accomplished so far and what you can expect in the next few months. I hope to send these updates out on a fairly regular basis to keep you informed about what is occurring on the project. The next update will include a map of the project showing treatments, units and progress.

The Forest is working hard to honor our commitment to treat hazardous fuels on National Forest lands surrounding the Sula community. I'd like to once again thank those who participated in the planning process for your contributions to this project.

Tracy Hollingshead

## Update

### Spring Mink Stewardship Contract

This stewardship project recently finished operations for the season; work will begin again once the snow is gone and soils dry out. This winter's work included helicopter logging in 7 units near private land. The contract was awarded to Rocky Mountain Log Homes of Hamilton, who worked with R&R Conner, a logging company from Darby, to complete a portion of the helicopter logging. Rocky Mountain Log Homes also contracted with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) to implement the non-commercial fuel reduction work such as slashing and hand piling smaller fuels. RMEF will be working with contractors to complete that as soon as conditions allow.

### Kerlebert Stewardship Contract

The contract was recently awarded to Bob Walker Logging of Darby. Plans for this winter include helicopter logging of some units within the interface. The remainder of their work will occur once the snow is gone. Tree felling and helicopter yarding will likely begin about March 1st and last for nearly 60 days. I'll be able to give you a good description of where they will be working in the next update, once their plans are finalized.

## Project

### Accomplishments:

- 505 acres helicopter logged with additional fuels treatments planned for this summer.
- Required road related work completed prior to log hauling.

### Litigation Status:

Emergency Injunctions were denied by Federal District Court Judge Molloy (6/06&1/07) and the 9th Circuit Court (11/06&2/07). Federal District Court ruled in favor of the Forest Service on the full merits of the case in December 2006. Plaintiffs have appealed that decision to the 9th Circuit Court with a hearing expected sometime this summer.

### Area and Road Closures

The Bitterroot NF will close roads and areas during active logging operations to provide for public safety. Forest Road #5753, also known as the Mink Creek Road and the surrounding area is open now that logging operations have stopped. Watch for short term closures on roads and the surrounding areas in the Dowling Gulch and Colvert Creek vicinities once work begins on the Kerleebert stewardship project.

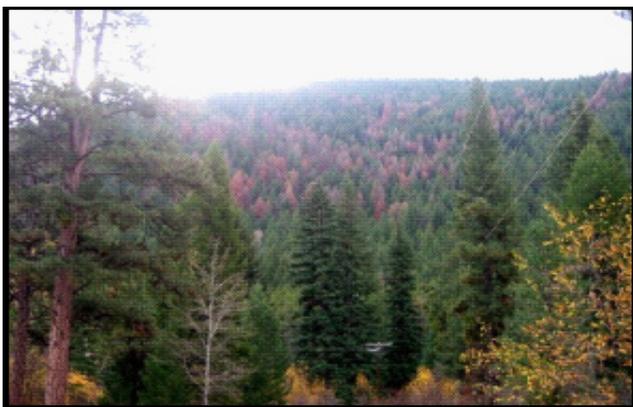


**Unit 37 before treatment (06/05)  
and after treatment (01/07)**



### Background

The Middle East Fork Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project was developed in response to priorities expressed in the Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan, using a collaborative community process. The project was designed to reduce wildfire threats to the Middle East Fork community, restore fire-adapted ecosystems in the Middle East Fork landscape, and restore stands affected by the Douglas-fir bark beetle epidemic.



**Unit 255 before treatment (10/04)  
and after treatment (01/07)**

Treatments include 4,938 acres of a mix of prescribed fire, slashing fuels, hand piling fuels, salvage of bug killed trees, commercial thinning of stands to reduce density, pre-commercial thinning of small trees in past harvest units, planting trees in some areas, and road restoration and road improvement work. The project will be implemented by contracts and Forest Service crews. Two stewardship contracts, Spring Mink and Kerleebert have been awarded and, as was noted earlier, work has begun. The Forest is developing additional contracts this summer. Work continues while litigation on the project is ongoing.

### For Additional Information

Call the Sula Ranger District at (406) 821-3201 or visit our website at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/projects/>