

Middle East Fork Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Update #2



MARCH 12, 2007

USDA Forest Service, Bitterroot National Forest
Sula Ranger District



Note From the District Ranger:

I hope that many of you read in the Ravalli Republic that I am looking for interested individuals to participate as part of a multiparty monitoring group to monitor the Middle East Fork project. I think it is very important to have some involvement from the local community and I encourage you to send in your interest letter. I've included more information about multiparty monitoring in this update. I look forward to working with the multiparty group to review the project and learn if we did a good job anticipating the outcomes and consequences of this project. Please call me if you have any questions at all about this.

Look for a map of the project showing treatments, units and progress in the next update.

Update

Spring Mink Stewardship Contract

While the commercial logging operations are on hold for now until field conditions improve, the stewardship work associated with the project is scheduled to begin as soon as April 1. This work will be done by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation working with contracted crews from Northwest Forestry. Crews will begin thinning, slashing and piling in those units where helicopter logging has been completed. 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 contracted with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) to complete the non-commercial fuel reduction work.

Kerlebert Stewardship Contract

The contract was recently awarded to Bob Walker Logging of Darby. Plans to begin helicopter logging within the interface have been delayed, but are now scheduled to begin about April 30. The stewardship contract also includes a fish habitat improvement project that is expected to begin by the end of March. That project is located in the East Fork River along the highway about 1 mile west of Bertie Lord Creek.

Area and Road Closures

The Bitterroot NF will close roads and areas during active logging operations to provide for public safety. No closures are in place at this time. We will continue to include information on closures in this update.

Tracy Hollingshead

Letter from Pat Connell, Rocky Mountain Log Homes



6 March 2007

Sula District,
Bitterroot National Forest and the
Community of the East Fork

Folks:

I would like to take this opportunity to express thanks to everyone involved during the recent harvest operations we conducted on the Spring Mink Stewardship part of the Middle East Fork project.

Ryan & Robin Conner's Heli-logging crew did excellent, and safe work on some very steep terrain in often less than ideal working conditions. In particular, I personally appreciate the effort their sawyers and hooking crew did to minimize damage to the "leave stand".

Besides the obvious fire risk benefit by removing the dead standing timber, I am equally excited to relay that indeed, not all mature Doug Fir in the harvest areas were hit by beetles, and that now, these "survivors" have a chance not to be consumed in fire and to be the seed source for the area. This is important to me, as I can only conclude that these green Doug Fir have *some* genetic trait that made them resistant to the beetles.

A large measure of our ability to harvest the units that we did this winter was due to the kindness and cooperation of several East Fork residents who allowed our operations use of their land. Thank you.

From here, we hold our stewardship pre-work meeting with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, their crew from Northwest Forestry with the Forest Officials shortly, and plan to have boots on the ground in April. It was no idle boast by Rocky Mtn Log Homes that we intended to have the slashing, piling and fireline work done within the units we harvested before the thunderstorm season of this upcoming summer.

Pat Connell, *Certified Forester*
Vice President, Resource Operations

Multiparty monitoring of the Middle East Fork Project

The Bitterroot National Forest is looking for individuals interested in working as part of a multiparty monitoring group to monitor the Middle East Fork Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project. The intent of multiparty monitoring is to learn lessons from a project that can be used to improve future projects. Multiparty monitoring is an opportunity to build trust and better understanding among the Forest Service, other agencies, and members of the community of how to improve the health of national forest system lands through management decisions and actions.

We hope to come up with a group of 12-15 individuals who represent a balance of various perspectives on forest management. As a member of the monitoring group, one could expect to be in the field reviewing project activities with the group and meeting periodically to discuss monitoring results. It is likely the group will be active for 2 years, spending an estimated 4-8 hours per month on the project. Ideally the group would include a balanced mix of perspectives, representing the varied interests from all interested stakeholders in this project. The membership could include local community members; industry and forestry interests; local, county, state and federal government representatives; environmental and conservation organizations; recreation interests; academic institutions and researchers.

The Forest is asking anyone who may be interested in volunteering to be part of the monitoring group to send in a letter of interest. Letters should be sent by March 23, 2007 to: Tracy Hollingshead, Sula District Ranger, 7338 Hwy 93 South, Sula, MT 59871 or emailed to: r1_bitterroot_comments@fs.fed.us Include information about: 1) your availability and how much time you would be able to commit to the monitoring effort; 2) your interest in this project; and 3) what perspective or viewpoint you would bring to the monitoring group. Once letters are received the Forest will work with the National Forest Foundation and those who have already expressed interest to select a balanced monitoring group representing the diverse interests in this project. All monitoring group meetings will be open to the public.

On January 26, 2007, Nathan Olson's Advanced Biology Class from Darby High School went on a field trip to the Spring Mink Stewardship contract area of the Middle East Fork Hazardous Fuel Reduction project. Tyler Roundy, Project Manger for R&R Conner Aviation hosted the class that began their morning at the helicopter service landing where they observed the helicopter refueling at the end of a log yarding cycle. Tyler explained the process of falling timber, hooking, yarding and processing logs at the landing. Sheryl Meekin, project Silviculturist with the USFS, was on hand and explained the public involvement, planning and interdisciplinary team process to the class.



She also explained the process of diagnosing forest stands for treatment, writing silvicultural prescriptions, timber marking and volume estimation, and preparing contracts for sale to purchasers such as Rocky Mountain Log Homes.

The group also discussed objectives of the project and non-commercial fuel reduction work that will be completed in the area. The class was able to observe helicopter yarding from Unit 70 to a landing on private land where logs were processed with a stroke delimeter and cut to lengths and sorted for hauling. In this unit, tops were left attached to yarded trees reducing the amount of slash left within the unit. Following the commercial helicopter yarding, hand crews will thin small diameter trees beneath the main canopy and hand pile slash concentrations. Forest Service personnel will burn the piles.

For Additional Information

Call the Sula Ranger District at (406) 821-3201 or visit our website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/>