



File Code: 1950

Date: May 5, 2009

Dear Forest User,

The Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Healthy Forests Restoration Act Project – West Fork Rock Creek are in electronic format on the enclosed compact disc. You are receiving this information since you previously provided comment or expressed interest during the public comment period for this project.

The United States Forest Service, Custer National Forest has proposed the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Healthy Forests Restoration Act Project – West Fork Rock Creek to improve public and firefighter safety, clean-up burned and wind-damaged trees, improve defensible space around structures, and reduce fuel loading on 935 acres of National Forest System lands in the West Fork Rock Creek. The West Fork Rock Creek area is approximately 2.5 miles southwest of Red Lodge, Montana. The purpose and need of this project is to improve public and firefighter safety by 1) removing potentially hazardous burned trees along roads and near recreation sites and 2) reducing fuels to improve fire suppression capability and firefighter and public ingress/egress. In burned areas, fuel reduction would include removing dead and dying trees to create a fuel break along West Fork Road. In unburned areas, fuel reduction would include thinning live trees and removing wind damaged standing and downed trees along West Fork Road, treating willow and aspen stands, conifer removal in elk winter range areas, and improving defensibility around buildings on the National Forest. Because proposed treatments in the Cascade Fire area would not meet 1986 Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Visual Quality Objectives, a temporary, project-specific Forest Plan amendment of the Visual Quality Objectives is proposed to allow for fuels treatments. A complete description of the proposal, a no-action alternative, and the effects of these alternatives is in the enclosed EA.

I am the Responsible Official for this project. Based on review of the EA and findings in the Draft FONSI, I anticipate deciding to select the Proposed Action presented in the EA.

The Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Healthy Forests Restoration Act Project – West Fork Rock Creek is an authorized fuel reduction project as defined by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, section 101(2). This project is subject to the Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process (referred to as the 'objection process') pursuant to the interim final rule for 36 CFR 218, subpart A, published January 9, 2004 (available online at:



<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2004/pdf/04-473.pdf>. This process is not subject to notice, comment, and appeal provisions pursuant to 36 CFR 215 (see 36 CFR 218.3).

Objections must be filed with the Reviewing Officer in writing. The Reviewing Officer is the next higher level supervisor of the Responsible Official, which means the Regional Forester will be the Reviewing Officer for this project. Objections must be submitted by mail at: USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807; by FAX at: (406) 329-3411; or by email at: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. The acceptable formats for submitting an electronic objection are: MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. Please type "Beartooth Front Storm Damage Objection" in the email subject line. Hand-delivered objections will be accepted at the Regional Forester's Office, 200 E. Broadway, Missoula, MT, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. All objections shall be open to public inspection during the objection process (36 CFR 218.7(a)). Objections will be accepted only from those who submitted written comments specific to the proposed project during the opportunities for public comment during preparation of the environmental assessment (EA) (36 CFR 218.6).

The publication date of a legal notice in the Billings Gazette is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection (36 CFR 218.9(a)). Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. An objection, including any attachments, must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) as stated above within 30 days of the date of publication of this legal notice for the objection process (36 CFR 218.9(a)). Incorporation of documents by reference shall not be allowed in the objection (36 CFR 218.7(c)).

At a minimum, an objection must include the following (36 CFR 218.7(d)): 1) The objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available; 2) a signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for email may be filed with the objection); 3) when multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector shall be provided upon request); 4) the name of the proposed authorized hazardous fuel reduction project, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the name(s) of the National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s) on which the proposed authorized hazardous fuel reduction project will be implemented; and 5) provide sufficient narrative description of those aspects of the project that are objected to (36 CFR 218.7(b)) by identifying specific issues and suggested remedies which would resolve the objection.

If an objection is received on this project, the Reviewing Officer and objector may meet and/or converse by telephone to discuss issues raised in the objection and potential resolution. The Reviewing Officer has the discretion to determine whether or not adequate time remains in the review period to make a meeting with the objector practical. These meetings would take place soon after the closing date for filing an objection. All meetings are open to the public. If you are interested in attending any resolution discussions, please contact the Responsible Official or monitor the following website for postings about current objections in the Northern Region of the Forest Service: http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/projects/appeal_index.shtml.

Printed or additional copies of the EA and Draft FONSI may be obtained by writing or calling the Beartooth Ranger District office, (6811 Highway 212 Red Lodge, Montana, or by phone at (406) 446-2103), or may be viewed on the Internet at www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer/. Additional information about the proposed project may also be obtained from the project leader, Dan Seifert, at the Beartooth Ranger District.

Sincerely,

Frederick W Prange (for)

MARY C. ERICKSON
Acting Forest Supervisor

Enclosures