

## PROJECT DESIGN FEATURES – WILDLIFE

Table 1 outlines the recommended management actions to help prevent potential detrimental effects on wildlife species and habitat:

1.	<p>Management activities within ¼ mile (125 A.) of any known goshawk nest would be restricted from March 1 through August 31 to reduce potential human disturbance during the breeding – nesting period. An exception may be made if surveys confirm that goshawks are not nesting or within the area. A wildlife biologist may fit the acreage zone or polygon to the topography to best reduce potential human disturbance around the nest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note – Based on 2008 FIA (Forest Inventory Analysis) data, the Beartooth Ranger District supports approximately 18% old growth forest that meets the Regional Green et al. (1992) definition. The Custer Forest Plan (1986) does not have an old growth standard.</li> <li><u>Purpose:</u> Goshawk is an old growth habitat indicator species in the Forest Plan. To retain goshawk use in the project area. Goshawks are highly sensitive to disturbance from the nesting through fledgling period.</li> </ul>
2.	<p>If an active goshawk nest is discovered within a stand prior to or during treatment activities work should be halted and the wildlife biologist would be notified immediately to determine steps to resolve the situation and maintain habitat and minimize human disturbance. Steps would include maintaining habitat specific for Northern goshawk (e.g., crown cover, snags, interlocking tree crown patches, Reynolds et al., 1992, pg 21-30) over the long term; following the Northern Region Northern Region Overview (Tidwell, July 17, 2007: Brewer et al, May 2007, e.g., acres) and Custer Forest Plan goals and objectives (Forest Plan, p.18).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Purpose:</u> To retain the stand in suitable condition for goshawk use. Goshawks are highly sensitive to disturbance from the nesting through the fledgling period.</li> </ul>
3.	<p>Treat existing aspen clones within the proposed treatment areas to remove all coniferous trees within one conifer tree length from the aspen.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Purpose:</u> To retain aspen on the landscape and to create habitat diversity that improves wildlife species diversity in the area.</li> </ul>
4.	<p>Design units, silvicultural prescriptions, and burn plans to insure snags are retained on the landscape over time to maintain habitat for cavity / snag dependent species.</p> <p>In proposed units 54 and 60, an average of at least 2 snags per acre would be maintained within treated stands. In all other proposed units, An average of at least 5-10 snags, per acre would be maintained within treated stands. Emphasis would be on maintaining snags that are greater than or equal to 12” diameter, leaving the largest snags available and Douglas-fir when available. Trees maintained as snags would be greater than 75 feet from roads and/or private property, and are not a safety hazard during project implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note - There are no identified MIS / goals / standards for snags in the Custer Forest Plan.</li> <li><u>Purpose:</u> Snags are essential for both primary and secondary cavity users.</li> </ul>
5.	<p>Restrict mechanized equipment within 50-feet of wet areas: seeps, springs, wet meadows, and riparian corridors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Purpose:</u> To help maintain habitat security for wildlife and maintain habitat in these areas.</li> </ul>
6.	<p>If temporary road is constructed, decommission all temporary roads and skid trails within 6 months of unit completion. Where readily available, spread logging slash across decommissioned temporary roads and skid trails in areas easily accessed by motorized vehicles to deter vehicle use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Purpose:</u> To help maintain habitat security for wildlife and deter motorized use. The longer the roads are open the less secure these areas are for wildlife. Once the roads are closed they can begin growing vegetation.</li> </ul>
7.	<p>If an active raptor nest is found during unit layout, it would be protected and buffered from planned activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Purpose:</u> To protect and maintain raptor use in the project area.</li> </ul>

8.	<p>If an active raptor nest is discovered within a treatment unit, the Contract Administrator would seek cooperation from the contractor to delay work activities in this area until the young have fledged.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Purpose</u>: To protect and maintain raptor use in the project area.</li> </ul>
9.	<p>If fawns and/or calves are found in active treatment units from the third week of May through the first week of July), individuals implementing the activity (Forest Service/contractor) would coordinate options with the project leader or District wildlife biologist to work in other areas within the vicinity until the young are removed from the area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Purpose</u>: To protect fawns and calves and reduce impacts to deer and elk populations.</li> </ul>
10.	<p>No pre-commercial thinning would be allowed to occur in mapped potential lynx habitat within the project area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Purpose</u>: To protect and maintain lynx habitat and to comply with standards and guidelines in the LCAS (2000) and NRLMD (2007).</li> </ul>

**BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION and ASSESSMENT**  
**for**  
**THREATENED, ENDANGERED, SENSITIVE**  
**and**  
**MANAGEMENT INDICATOR SPECIES/KEY SPECIES**  
**for**  
**BEARTOOTH FRONT STORM DAMAGE CLEAN-UP**  
**AND**  
**FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT 2008**  
**Beartooth Ranger District**  
**Carbon and Stillwater Counties, Montana**

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  1/20/2009    
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  1/21/2009    
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**Project Summary:**

The Beartooth District is proposing fuel treatments that clean-up damaged trees (wind thrown, broken topped or root sprung) from a November 11, 2007 storm event. The fuel treatments are designed to improve the ability of firefighting personnel to suppress wildfires, protect infrastructure, use existing roads as fire control lines, and increase effectiveness of aerial fire retardant use.

**Purpose and Need:**

The purpose of this project is to:

- Improve the ability to control and/or suppress wildfires to protect human and natural resource in the project areas.
- Reduce the risk to wildland firefighters and residents of the wildland-urban interface should a fire occur.
- Improve the ability to safely leave the areas in the event that a wildfire occurs.

This action is needed to respond to potentially hazardous fuels conditions, including increased fuel loads created by the November 2007 storm event. These needs would be addressed by reducing fuel loads, creating fuel breaks, and reducing beetle infestation potential in treatment areas. Fuel breaks and fuel reduction would also serve the purpose of improving overall defensible space around the communities of Red Lodge, Dean, and associated infrastructure on private and public lands.

Proposed activities by geographic area are detailed in Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages. Numbered footnotes within these tables correspond to treatment types described below.

**Table 1. Proposed Benbow Area Units.**

<b>Unit number</b>	<b>Unit acres</b>	<b>Proposed treatments</b>	<b>Treatment Method</b>
1	66	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine and hand.
2	30	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
3	75	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
54	35	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
55	1	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
56	15	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
57	18	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
58	28	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine and hand
59	20	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine and hand
60	89	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
<b>TOTAL BENBOW ACRES = 377</b>			

**Table 2. Proposed Main Fork Area Units.**

Unit number	Unit acres	Proposed treatments	Treatment Method
41	37	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees along US Highway 212 <sup>1</sup> .	Machine
42	10	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
43	33	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
44	17	Thin remaining live trees in Parkside Campground <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
45	40	Thin remaining live trees in Greenough Lake Campground and recreation site and Limberpine Campground <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
46	6	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
47	87	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
48	8	Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees in MK Campground <sup>1</sup> . Thin remaining live trees in MK Campground <sup>2</sup> .	Machine
<b>TOTAL MAIN FORK ACRES = 238</b>			

The following descriptions correspond to numbered end notes in the “Proposed treatments” column in Tables 3 and 4:

**Treatment 1:** Windfall and wind-damaged trees would be removed using ground-based timber harvest equipment where such trees are concentrated or scattered. Equipment used could include skidders, low-angle cable-logging systems, feller bunchers, and/or forwarders. Where available, merchantable trees would be salvaged and sold as commercial timber. Tree removal could begin as early as winter 2008/2009 and continue for up to 5-10 years as timber is sold under contract and/or as funding becomes available to treat areas with lesser amounts of merchantable timber. Remaining slash and non-merchantable down and damaged material would either be removed or piled and burned onsite. Piles would be burned under prescribed conditions under an approved burn plan. Prescribed burning could take several years depending on burning factors like fuel moisture, weather conditions, etc.

**Treatment 2:** Live trees would be thinned to create a shaded fuel break. All thinning would be dependent upon availability of funding. Thinning could begin as early as winter 2008/2009 and continue for up to 5-10 years as funding becomes available. Thinning would include cutting and removal of both small ladder fuels and larger trees to retain average spacing of 10 feet between remaining individual tree crowns. Tree spacing between remaining individual tree boles would be approximately 20’ to 30’ between remaining individual trees. The largest and most vigorous trees would be retained as spacing allows. Where trees are predominantly less than 5” Diameter at Breast Height (DBH), bole spacing would be 15’ to 25’. Thinning would be accomplished by hand crews or using mechanized equipment. While cut biomass would be utilized for forest products where possible, the majority of these areas contain non-merchantable size standing timber. Any cut merchantable trees could be sold as commercial timber to offset treatment costs. Remaining slash and non-merchantable down and damaged material would either be removed or piled and burned onsite. In machine operable ground,

slash would be machine piled to leave  $\leq$  10 tons to the acre. Piles would be burned under prescribed conditions under an approved burn plan. Prescribed burning could take several years depending on burning factors like fuel moisture, weather conditions, etc.

For both treatments 1 and 2, in areas not machine operable, or where it would not be possible to utilize biomass for forest products: 1) Tree boles 6" and greater would be bucked to 6 foot lengths and left in place; 2) All material down to a 3" top would be handpiled; 3) Remaining material would be bucked to lie flat on the ground; and 4) Piles would be burned under prescribed conditions under an approved burn plan. Due to variability in wind damage, topography, equipment operability considerations, streamside management zones, and current road locations, treatments would vary within each unit and continuous openings would not exceed 40 acres.

**National and Regional Direction:** The Northern Region Overview was prepared in October 1998 in response to the Forest Service Natural Resource Agenda. This Overview recognized that ponderosa pine forest systems, aspen, and sagebrush are at risk to being lost due to their high departure from a more natural state. It also recognized the opportunity for using vegetation management and prescribed fire to improve the health of these ecosystems.

The National Fire Plan was developed in August 2000 in response to the large wildland fires in the interior West. The Ten-year Comprehensive Strategy was developed in response to the National Fire Plan. As it relates to this project, these two documents direct the Forest Service to: 1) prioritize hazardous fuels reduction where the negative impacts of wildland fire are greatest; 2) prevent invasive species and restore watershed function and biological communities through short-term rehabilitation; and 3) restore healthy, diverse, and resilient ecological systems to minimize uncharacteristically severe fires on a priority watershed basis through long-term restoration.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) established procedures for Federal agencies conducting environmental analysis for authorized hazardous-fuel-reduction projects on Federal land. The proposed Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project is designed under the requirements of HFRA and for the purpose of responding to the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy. Specifically, project activities were identified in the CWPP/PDM and CWPP, portions of these project areas were identified as WUI, and presence of wind throw poses the significant threat of increased fire danger and potential impacts of a large wildfire to various ecosystem components. .

**Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences:** The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires forests to "provide for diversity of plant and animal communities and tree species consistent with the overall multiple use objectives of the planning area". To accomplish this, NFMA directs that an evaluation of diversity be done "in terms of its prior and present condition" and "consider how diversity will be affected by various mixes of resource outputs and uses". The Act also requires forests to "maintain viable populations of all native and desired non-native wildlife vertebrate species in the planning area". The Act defines a viable population as one having "the estimated numbers and distribution of reproductive individuals to insure its continued existence is well distributed in the planning area".

The Endangered Species Act requires forests to "manage habitat for all existing native and desired non-native plants, fish, and wildlife species in order to maintain at least viable populations of such species", conduct activities and programs "to assist in the identification and recovery of threatened and endangered plant and animal species" and to avoid actions "which may cause a species to become threatened or endangered".

On the Custer National Forest, all of the species considered in this document occur over a geographical area encompassing several states. Because their distribution is so large, the viability of the species is not tied to actions occurring only on a small portion of their natural range such as the Custer National Forest. Therefore, one could argue that viability at the Forest scale is not an issue. Even so, it is recognized that adverse actions occurring within a small portion of the range, if extended out to their entire range, could lead to problems in species viability over time. Therefore, it is important to assess how the actions within a portion of a species range contribute to the viability across the range.

To address this, activities are evaluated in terms of their effect on habitat, at the project level, landscape level, and planning unit, if needed. At the project and forest level, the analysis focuses upon the likelihood of the species or its habitat “persisting” within the analysis area over time. A qualitative rating of persistence is made based upon demographic, habitat, and environmental factors.

- **Demographic:** Life history, population, distribution, birth and death rates, sex ratios, and dispersal potentials within the landscape.
- **Habitat:** Amount, quality, and distribution of habitat
- **Environment:** Disturbance regimes likely within the landscape, successional pathways, and vulnerability to catastrophic events.

Demographics, habitat, and environmental factors rarely function independently. The loss of habitat or increases in disturbance (natural or manmade) could result in changes in population levels, distribution, or demographics. However, at any given point in time, one of the factors may be dominant in determining the likelihood of species persistence within the analysis area. For example, prior to wolves being released in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA), although adequate prey base and habitat existed, wolf numbers were extremely low. Most wolves were thought to be dispersing individuals and no information on the existence of den sites existed. There simply were not enough wolves in the GYA to form breeding pairs. However, since the release, wolf numbers in the GYA have steadily increased. The issue of wolf persistence changed from the number of wolves to wolf mortality. As wolf numbers continue to increase, eventually, wolf mortality issues will subside and prey base and habitat issues will determine wolf distribution and abundance within the GYA. Table 3 shows the persistence analysis process being used for this analysis.

**Table 3. Criteria used to identify whether persistence factors are low, moderate, or highly favorable.**

Factor	Feature	Low Persistence	Moderate Persistence	High Persistence
<b>Demographic</b>	Population Distribution <i>(Province to Domain Scale)</i>	Species is endemic to a section (unit within the National Hierarchical Framework). Single disturbances could affect major portions of species range	Species is endemic to one or more provinces. Disturbances could affect portions of a species range.	Species is well distributed across one or more domains. Disturbances would not likely affect substantial portions of a species range.
	Isolation <i>(Landscape to Province)</i>	Populations are isolated and do not interact with other populations.	Populations are distributed such that interaction between populations is possible (See example 1 above).	Populations are well distributed in such a way that dispersal not disrupted.
	Survival <i>(Landscape to province scale)</i>	Mortality, particularly human caused, is a big factor in affecting species survival.	Mortality, particularly human caused, has an effect on species persistence, but does not threaten survival	Mortality, particularly human caused, is not a factor affecting species persistence.
	Reproduction <i>(Landscape to province scale)</i>	Species has low natural reproductive potential.	Species has a moderate natural reproductive potential.	Species has a high natural reproductive potential.

**Table 3. Criteria used to identify whether persistence factors are low, moderate, or highly favorable.**

Factor	Feature	Low Persistence	Moderate Persistence	High Persistence
<b>Habitat</b>	Quality <i>(Landtype to landscape scale)</i>	Habitat parameters such as tree size and snag size meet minimum requirements. Small changes in structure at the stand level results in habitat rendered unsuitable.	Habitat parameters exceed minimum levels however, small changes renders habitat minimally suitable.	Habitat parameters easily exceed suitability requirements such that small changes do not render habitat unsuitable or minimally suitable.
	Quantity <i>(Landtype or landscape scale)</i>	The amount of habitat barely meets minimum requirements for establishment of territories or to provide for dispersal. Small changes in the amounts of habitat render areas unsuitable.	The amount of habitat exceeds minimum amounts, however, small changes in the amount of habitat renders areas minimally suitable or unsuitable.	The amount of habitat greatly exceeds minimum levels such that small disturbances do not render habitat minimally suitable or unsuitable.
	Distribution <i>(Landtype or landscape scale)</i>	Habitat is distributed across the landscape at maximum juvenile dispersal distances. Pockets of isolated habitat exist. Minor disturbances likely result in increased population isolation.	Habitat is distributed across the landscape within maximum juvenile dispersal distances. Pockets of isolated habitat are rare. However, minor disturbances likely result in increased population isolation.	Habitat is distributed across the landscape at optimum levels for juvenile dispersal and few if any isolated patches exist. Minor and even major disturbances are not likely to result in substantial population isolation across the planning area.
<b>Environmental</b>	Disturbance Extensiveness	Fire hazards (fuel loads, tree densities, tree species composition) and other hazards are extensive and contiguous across the planning area.	Fire hazards and other hazards are not extensive or contiguous across the analysis area. Areas of high hazard are broken by vegetation of lesser hazard or by natural features.	Hazards are not extensive and contiguous. Landscapes are diverse, reflecting natural conditions.
	Historical comparison of disturbances	Disturbances are outside historical levels, in terms of their size, severity or intensity, and are likely wide spread across the analysis area.	Disturbances outside historic levels are not likely, however, management strategies and successional trends lead to a high likelihood of disturbances outside historic levels across a large portion of the landscape within the next 10-20 yrs.	Disturbances outside historic levels are possible but not likely because vegetation within the management area has been managed within historic levels as well.

The persistence rating is a qualitative rating and as such, is not a precise determination. Of greater importance is the change in persistence and the rationale for that change. An increase in persistence from a low to a moderate indicates that habitats are less isolated, or that the amount or quality of habitat is improved, or that the risks to existing habitat are reduced.

**Determination of Effects for Species Potentially Present in the Project area:** The habitat, presence and determination of effects for Federally threatened and endangered species are summarized in Table 4. The habitat, presence, and determination of effects for USFS sensitive species are summarized in Tables 5. The habitat, presence, and description of effects for other Management Indicator Species and “Key species” are shown in Table 6. Table 7 displays the habitat, presence, and description of effects for wildlife species of local public concern. The rationale for the determination of effects for those species with suitable habitat within the project area and within the cumulative effects analysis areas (Lynx Analysis Unit or 6<sup>th</sup> Code HUC) is discussed thereafter.

**Table 4. Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed Wildlife Species Considered for Analysis**

Species <sup>1</sup>	Suitable Habitat w/in Project Area	Species Documented w/in Cumulative Effects Area	No Action Determination of Effect <sup>2</sup>	Proposed Action Determination of Effect <sup>2</sup>	Basic Habitat Description <sup>3</sup>
Canada Lynx <i>(Lynx Canadensis)</i>	Yes	No	NE	NLAA	Spruce/fir, high alpine, and habitats with high horizontal cover
Gray Wolf <i>(Canis lupus)</i>	Yes	Yes	NE	NJ	Remote, well connected forested generalist

<sup>1</sup> Federally listed species based on USFWS website, May 10, 2008, [Listed Species by National Forest](#). The determination of effects for federally listed species (threatened or endangered) is limited to: (1.) No effect; (2) May effect - Not likely to adversely affect; (3) \* May effect - Likely to adversely affect; and (4) Beneficial effect. \* = Considered a trigger for a significant action. Options in determination of effects for proposed federally listed species are: (1.) No effect; (2.) Not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species or result in destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat; (3.) Likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species or result in destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat.

<sup>2</sup> The determination is based on the presence of suitable habitat.

<sup>3</sup> Montana Natural Heritage Database. 2008. <http://www.mtnhp.org/animalguide/>

**Table 5. Region 1 Sensitive Species considered for Analysis.**

Species <sup>1</sup>	Suitable Habitat w/in Project Area	Species Documented w/in Cumulative Effects Area	No Action Determination of Effect <sup>2</sup>	Proposed Action Determination of Effect <sup>2</sup>	Basic Habitat Description <sup>3</sup>
American peregrine falcon ( <i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Cliff habitat over 200' high with suitable ledges for nest construction
Baird's sparrow ( <i>Ammodramus bairdii</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Prefers native prairie but structure is more important so may nest in tame grasses
Bald Eagle ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Nesting structure near a large water-body (lake or river) to provide sufficient forage
Black-backed woodpecker ( <i>Picoides arcticus</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Primary habitat is recently burned forested areas, secondary habitat is spruce/fir forests
Blue-gray gnatcatcher ( <i>Polioptila caerulea</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Open stands of juniper and limber pine with intermixed sagebrush
Burrowing owl ( <i>Athene cunicularia</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Open grasslands, nesting and roosting in burrows dug by mammals or owls
Grizzly Bear ( <i>Ursus horribilis</i> )	Yes	Yes	NI	MIIH	Remote, well connected forested generalist
Greater sage grouse ( <i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Sagebrush with intermixed grasslands
Harlequin duck ( <i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i> )	No	Yes	NI	NI	Inhabit fast moving, low gradient clear mountain streams
Loggerhead shrike ( <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Grassy pastures that are well grazed, nest in shrubs or small trees, preferably thorny such as hawthorn
Long-billed curlew ( <i>Numenius americanus</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Open grasslands or prairie usually near water
Long-eared myotis ( <i>Myotis evotis</i> )	No	No	N/A	N/A	Use a variety of habitats but are strongly associated with coniferous forests
Long-legged myotis	No	No	N/A	N/A	Primarily a coniferous-juniper forest bat found at moderate elevations ( $\geq 6000$ ft) but

Species <sup>1</sup>	Suitable Habitat w/in Project Area	Species Documented w/in Cumulative Effects Area	No Action Determination of Effect <sup>2</sup>	Proposed Action Determination of Effect <sup>2</sup>	Basic Habitat Description <sup>3</sup>
<i>(Myotis volans)</i>					may also inhabit riparian cottonwood bottoms and desert areas
Pallid bat <i>(Antrozous pallidus)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Arid deserts and grasslands with rock outcrops
Spotted bat <i>(Euderma maculatum)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Desert to montane coniferous forests
Townsend's big-eared bat <i>(Corynorhinus townsendii)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Cave and cave-like structures along with forested foraging habitat
Black-tailed prairie dog <i>(Cynomys ludovicianus)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Relatively flat grasslands with diggable soils, throughout the central plains
White-tailed prairie dog <i>(Cynomys leucurus)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Xeric sites with mixed stands of shrubs and grasses from the Bighorn Basin in Montana to Utah
Wolverine <i>(Gulo gulo)</i>	Yes	Yes	NI	NI	Remote subalpine and spruce/fir forested areas

<sup>1</sup> Species listed as sensitive on the 2008 Forest Service Northern Region Sensitive Species List (Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Concern Resource Guidance website). Options in determination of effects: (1) No impact; (2) May impact individuals or Habitat, but is not likely to cause a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability; (3) Likely to result in a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability; and (4) Beneficial impact. There would be "no impact" to sensitive species determined to be absent from the project area and not included in this table.

<sup>2</sup> The determination is based on the presence of suitable habitat.

<sup>3</sup> Montana Natural Heritage Database. 2008. <http://www.mtnhp.org/animalguide/>

**Table 6. Custer National Forest Habitat Indicator Species (MIS) and Key Wildlife Species Considered for Analysis.**

Species	Suitable Habitat w/in Project Area	Species Documented w/in Cumulative Effects Area	No Action Description of Effect <sup>3</sup> + = Positive 0 = Neutral - = Negative	Proposed Action Description of Effect <sup>3</sup> + = Positive 0 = Neutral - = Negative	Basic Habitat Description <sup>4</sup>
<b>MIS<sup>1</sup></b>					
Northern goshawk <i>(Accipiter gentilis)</i>	Yes	No	0	0	Mature forest generalist
White-tailed deer <i>(Odocoileus virginianus)</i>	Yes	Yes	0	0	Grassland to montane conifer forest
Ruffed grouse <i>(Bonasa umbellus)</i>	Yes	Yes	0	0	Primary habitat includes dense early seral staged forests dominated by aspen, secondary habitat includes other dense deciduous or conifer woodland areas
Western kingbird <i>(Tyrannus verticalis)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Open or partially open country with scattered trees, including agricultural lands
Bullock's (Northern) oriole	No	Yes	0	0	Open deciduous woodland and riparian areas

Species	Suitable Habitat w/in Project Area	Species Documented w/in Cumulative Effects Area	No Action Description of Effect <sup>3</sup> + = Positive 0 = Neutral - = Negative	Proposed Action Description of Effect <sup>3</sup> + = Positive 0 = Neutral - = Negative	Basic Habitat Description <sup>4</sup>
<i>(Icterus bullockii)</i>					
Yellow warbler <i>(Dendroica petechia)</i>	Yes	Yes	0	0	Brushy riparian especially with willows
Ovenbird <i>(Seiurus aurocapillus)</i>	Yes	Yes	0	0	Mid-late successional, closed-canopied deciduous or deciduous/conifer forests with limited understory
Spotted (Rufous-sided) towhee <i>(Pipilo erythrophthalmus)</i>	No	No	0	0	Shrubby riparian areas, woody draws, and woodland undergrowth
Brewer's sparrow <i>(Spizella Breweri)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Strongly associated with sagebrush, but also uses other areas with scattered shrubs and short grasses
Sharp-tailed grouse <i>(Tympanuchus phasianellus)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Mosaic of dense grass and shrubs with forbs for nesting, woody riparian areas in winter
Yellowstone Cutthroat trout	Yes	Yes	See Aquatics Section	See Aquatics Section	Upper Yellowstone and Upper Snake River drainages
Largemouth bass <i>(Micropterus Salmoides)</i>	No	No	0	0	Warm freshwater areas with beds of aquatic vegetation that have been stocked (exotic species in Montana)
<b>KEY SPECIES <sup>2</sup></b>					
Elk <i>(Cervus Canadensis)</i>	Yes	Yes	0	0	Grassland to forested alpine areas
Golden eagle <i>(Aquila chrysaetos)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Open hilly to mountainous areas
Merlin <i>(Falco columbarius)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Patchy shrub/grassland habitats with large trees to support nesting (secondary nester)
Mule deer <i>(Odocoileus hemionus)</i>	Yes	Yes	0	0	Rugged grassland to forested alpine areas
White-tailed deer	Yes	Yes	0	0	Grassland to montane conifer forest
Bighorn sheep <i>(Ovis canadensis canadensis)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Remote, steep, rugged terrain, such as mountains, canyons, and escarpments where precipitation is low and evaporation is high
Pronghorn antelope <i>(Antilocapra americana)</i>	No	No	N/A	N/A	Rolling grasslands to mixed sagebrush shrublands
Sharp-tailed grouse	No	No	N/A	N/A	Mosaic of dense grass and shrubs with forbs for nesting, woody riparian areas in winter
Yellowstone cutthroat trout	Yes	Yes	See Aquatics Section	See Aquatics Section	Upper Yellowstone and Upper Snake River drainages

<sup>1</sup> Management Indicator Species include the categories of Habitat Indicator and Key (Major Interest) Species. Habitat Indicator species are based on the Custer Forest Plan (USFS 1986, p. 18).

<sup>2</sup> The Key (Major Interest) Species are based on the Custer Forest Plan (USFS, Oct. 1986, see list on p. 17 and 180 of the Forest Plan; USFS, Oct. 1986b. FEIS, p. 121. See Direction; USFS, Oct. 1986, p. 18.) Management Indicator Species include the categories of Habitat Indicator and Key (Major Interest) Species.

<sup>3</sup> The determination is based on the presence of suitable habitat.

<sup>4</sup> Montana Natural Heritage Database. 2008. <http://www.mtnhp.org/animalguide/>

**Table 7. Wildlife Species of Local Public Concern Considered for Analysis.**

Species <sup>1</sup>	Suitable Habitat w/in Project Area	Species Documented w/in Cumulative Effects Area	No Action Description of Effect <sup>2</sup> + = Positive 0 = Neutral - = Negative	Proposed Action Description of Effect <sup>2</sup> + = Positive 0 = Neutral - = Negative	Basic Habitat Description <sup>3</sup>
Moose <sup>4</sup> ( <i>Alces alces</i> )	Yes	Yes	0	0 See white-tailed deer, mule deer and elk section for effects	Variable: summer, mountain meadows, river bottoms, wet areas; winter, willow flats, mature coniferous forests. Willows are an important habitat component.
Pine martin ( <i>Martes Americana</i> )	Yes	Yes	0	0 See goshawk section for effects	Boreal preferring mature conifer or mixed wood forests. Uses deadfall and snags as den sites.

<sup>1</sup> The Wildlife Species of Local Public Concern are based on public comments received during the public scoping period (January 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The determination is based on the presence of suitable habitat.

<sup>3</sup> Montana Natural Heritage Database. 2008. <http://www.mtnhp.org/animalguide/>

<sup>4</sup> Moose, along with elk, bighorn sheep and black bear are special emphasis species for Management Area D (Custer Forest Plan 1986) on the Beartooth Ranger District.

### **Current Wildlife Habitat Conditions**

The Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction project area, here after referred to as project area, (Figure 1) is located in the Rock/Wyoming Creek, Fishtail Creek, and Little Rocky Creek drainages. These drainages support land of varied topography with elevations ranging between 5500 to 8000 feet. They each have a variety of forested and non-forested plant communities. The forest stands in Rock/Wyoming Creek are primarily mature to pole sized lodgepole pine stands. Spruce/lodgepole and spruce/sub-alpine fir stands are located along the riparian corridor with occasional aspen stands throughout the drainage. The Little Rocky Creek and Fishtail Creek drainages are dominated by dry site lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir stands with intermixed grassy meadows and aspen stands.

The diversity of forest stand structure in the project area is decreasing due to the current successional pathway and disturbance patterns. This has led to a gradual elimination of the more open, fire maintained stands of larger diameter coniferous trees and healthy aspen stands. Lack of low-intensity fire disturbance has resulted increased tree density in the overstory; abundant tree regeneration and shrub development in the understory on wet sites; little tree regeneration or shrub development in the understory on dry sites; and a buildup of ground fuels (both larger diameter and litter layers). This has resulted in pole to mid aged/sized contiguous tree stands that are more prone to stand replacing fire because of increased fuel loading. The 6<sup>th</sup> code HUC or Lynx Analysis Unit will be used for cumulative effects analysis area for each of the areas.

## Federally Threatened and Endangered Species

### *Canada lynx*

#### Population and Habitat Status

**Table 7.** Canada Lynx; Population and Habitat Status.

Canada Lynx Activity	Project Within Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU)	Foraging Habitat	Denning Habitat
Occasional reported sightings	Yes	Yes	Yes

The project is located within the Rock Creek and Rosebud Lynx Analysis Units (LAU) both of which are thought to support potential lynx habitat (Table 7). The Rock Creek LAU supports 68426 acres of potential lynx habitat and the Rosebud LAU supports 58016 acres of potential lynx habitat. Most of the available lynx habitat is comprised of Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, spruce and subalpine fir habitat types. The analysis area supports numerous pole to mature lodgepole or Douglas-fir forest stands with limited understory development. Table 8 summarizes the number of acres of potential lynx habitat proposed to be treated by LAU.

**Table 8.** Effects of treatments on Canada lynx habitat by LAU.

LAU Name	Acres of Lynx Habitat	Treatment Acres	Percent Change
Rock Creek	68426	194	0.3
Rosebud	58016	25	0.04

The presence and abundance of snowshoe hare and other prey species in the analysis areas are not known. However snow track surveys conducted during the winter of 2003 thru 2007 in Main Rock Creek and West Fork Rock Creek indicate that snowshoe hare densities are low in these drainages. Table 9 summarizes horizontal cover measurements taken within the project area in proposed treatment areas with what was thought to provide the highest levels of horizontal cover. Survey locations were random and followed Region One guidance for determining horizontal cover (Bertram and Claar 2008). A common characteristic of all of the stands found in the project area, except for the Spruce dominated sites, is that they supported poorly developed understories that lacked horizontal cover and had little to no forage base for snowshoe hares. This may explain why snowshoe hare numbers are low throughout the project area.

**Table 9.** Horizontal cover by treatment unit within LAUs.

LAU Name	6 <sup>th</sup> Code HUC	Unit Number/Random Point Number	Dominant Overstory Tree Species/Understory Species	% Horizontal Cover <sup>1</sup>
Rock Creek	Main Rock Creek	41/03	LPP Pole/Needle Litter	22
		41/04	LPP Pole/Needle Litter	35
		41/11	LPP Pole/Needle Litter	32
		42/01	Spruce/Riparian	85 <sup>2</sup>
		43/02	LPP Pole/Needle Litter	56 <sup>2</sup>
		44/01	Spruce/Riparian	64 <sup>2</sup>
		47/03	LPP Pole/Needle Litter	40
		48/01	Spruce-Subalpine fir/grass	28
		47/05	LPP Pole/Needle Litter	18
		46/02	Spruce/grass	50 <sup>2</sup>
Rosebud	Little Rocky Creek	45/03	LPP Pole/Needle Litter	16
		59/01	LPP Pole/Needle Litter – Dry Site	26
		59/02	Douglas-fir/Needle Litter – Dry Site	50 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Followed Region One guidance for determining horizontal cover (Bertram and Claar 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Site provides adequate summer snowshoe hare habitat where cover values should be greater than or equal to 48% (Bertram and Claar 2008).

Forested stands scattered throughout the project area provide adequate horizontal cover for snowshoe hares which are the primary prey species for Canada lynx. Forested stands with horizontal cover values greater than or equal to 48% are thought to provide the best summertime habitat for snowshoes hares and lynx. Blowdown timber from the November 7, 2007 storm event created additional snowshoe habitat within the Rock Creek and Rosebud Lynx Analysis Units. Approximately 5,162 acres of blowdown occurred in the Rock Creek LAU with 238 acres (5%) proposed for salvaging. About 9,652 acres of blowdown occurred in the Rosebud LAU with 377 acres (4%) proposed for salvaging. However a small percentage of the proposed salvage would occur in potential lynx habitat (Table 8).

Unconfirmed sightings of lynx have been reported on rare occasions on the District, but none in the project area. Winter track surveys for lynx have been conducted in the project area during the winters of 2003 thru 2007. No lynx sign was detected with these surveys. The project area is located in “Core Habitat” that was outlined in the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction FEIS 2007. The existing persistence rating for Canada lynx in the project area is low, due to habitat features and the lack of snowshoe hares.

**Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

Tables 10 and 11 outline applicable standards and conservation measures from the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy 2000. Table 12 outlines the applicable standards and guideline from the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD) FEIS 2007. All standards and conservation measures are met. Individual lynx that could potentially occur in the project area may be displaced due to timber salvage activity. However, the likelihood of displacement is minimal since lynx have not been confirmed to use the area, the area’s snowshoe hare population is low, and large acreage’s of continuous suitable snowshoe hare habitat is lacking in the area. No mortalities or indirect effects are anticipated. Project activities will not occur during winter months and thus no increase in areas of compacted snow would take place. Negative changes to lynx habitat would be limited. However removal of downed trees and some canopy would stimulate understory development (increase horizontal cover) and stimulate the forage base for snowshoe hares. About 0.3 percent of the available lynx habitat within the Rock Creek LAU and 0.04 percent in the Rosebud LAU would be affected by the proposed project. No adverse effects to the prey base are expected. Within the cumulative effects analysis area two small scale hazardous fuels projects have or are scheduled to occur in the near future. These projects, Grizzly Peak I and II, impact about 0.01% of the available potential lynx habitat in the Rock Creek LAU. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. Approximately 5,700 acres of potential lynx habitat (8%) were damaged by the wildfire in the Rock Creek LAU. Known cumulative effects are well under the 15% and 30% thresholds as described in the LCAS (2000) and NRLMD (2007) (see Tables 10-12).

**Table 10.** Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy Standards; Conservation Measures Applicable to All Programs and Activities (LCAS, 7-2 to 5).

Standards	Pre-Treatment	Post-Treatment	Compliance
<b>Programmatic Planning</b>			
Conservation measures will generally apply only to lynx habitat on federal lands within Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs)	Completed	N/A	Yes
Lynx habitat will be mapped using criteria specific to each geographic area to identify appropriate vegetation and environmental conditions; refer to glossary and description for each geographic area in LCAS	Completed	N/A	Yes
To facilitate project planning, delineate LAUs; LAUs should be at least the size of area used by a resident lynx and contain	Completed	N/A	Yes

sufficient year-round habitat			
LAU boundaries will not be adjusted for individual projects, but must remain constant	Maintained	Maintained	Yes
Prepare a broad-scale assessment of landscape patterns comparing historical and current ecological processes and vegetation patterns, such as age-class distributions and patch size characteristics; in the absence of guidance developed from such an assessment, limit disturbance within each LAU: if more than 30% of lynx habitat within a LAU is currently in unsuitable condition, no further reduction of suitable conditions shall occur as a result of vegetation management by federal agencies	Current situation maintained	Current situation will be maintained	Yes
<b>Project Planning</b>			
Within each LAU, map lynx habitat; identify potential denning and foraging habitat (hares, squirrels, etc.), and topographic features important for lynx movement (major ridge systems, prominent saddles, and riparian corridors); identify non-forest vegetation (meadows, shrublands, grasslands, etc.) adjacent to and intermixed with forested lynx habitat, providing habitat for alternate lynx prey species	Completed	Analyzed	Yes

**Table 11.** Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy Standards; Conservation Measures to Address Risk Factors Affecting Lynx Productivity (LCAS, 7-4 to12).

Standards	Pre-Treatment	Post-Treatment	Compliance
<b>Timber, Wildland Fire, and Recreation Management</b>			
Within each LAU, maintain denning habitat in patches generally larger than five acres, comprising at least 10% of suitable lynx habitat	Maintained	Maintained	Yes
Management actions shall not change more than 15 percent of lynx habitat within a LAU to an unsuitable condition within a 10 year period	Maintained	Maintained	Yes
Maintain habitat connectivity within and between LAUs	Maintained	Maintained	Yes
On projects where over-snow access is required, restrict use to designated routes	N/A, no over-snow access	N/A, no over-snow access	Yes
Design burn prescriptions to regenerate or create snowshoe hare habitat (e.g., regeneration of aspen and lodgepole pine)	Incorporated	Incorporated	Yes
Design burn prescriptions to promote response by shrub and tree species that are favored by snowshoe hare.	Incorporated	Incorporated	Yes

**Table 12.** Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction FEIS Standards and Guidelines to Assess Risk Factors Affecting Canada Lynx (ROD, Attachment 1 pages 2-4).

Standards	Pre-Treatment	Post-Treatment	Compliance
<b>Vegetation Management</b>			
Standard VEG S1 – No more than 30% of lynx habitat within an LAU can be in a stand initiation stage that does not provide winter snowshoe hare habitat.	Maintained	Maintained	Yes
Standard VEG S2 – Timber management projects shall not regenerate more than 15 percent of lynx habitat on NFS lands within a LAU in a 10 year period	Maintained	Maintained	Yes
Standard VEG S5 – Precommercial Thinning	N/A, no precommercial	N/A, no precommercial	Yes

	thinning	thinning	
Standard VEG S6 – Vegetation management projects that reduce snowshoe hare habitat in multi-story stands or late succession forest may occur only: within 200 feet of developed sites, for research studies, or for incidental removal during salvage harvest. Timber harvest is allowed in areas that have potential to improve winter snowshoe hare habitat but presently have poorly developed understories that lack dense horizontal cover.	Maintained	Maintained	Yes

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action **MAY AFFECT, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT THE CANADA LYNX OR THEIR HABITAT.** My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) impacts to lynx habitat would be low; 2) the project is in compliance with the LCAS and NRLMD standards and guidelines; 3) a positive change in prey habitat would likely occur; 4) lynx have not been reported in the area; 4) only 9% of the total blowdown is proposed for salvaging leaving over 14,000 acres of new denning and foraging habitat; and 5) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area (LAUs) would received vegetation treatments.

**Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

None necessary; project activities are in compliance with LCAS and NRLMD standards and guidelines.

***Gray Wolf***

**Population and Habitat Status**

Table 13. Gray Wolf; Population and Habitat Status.

Wolf Activity	Den Site	Rendezvous Site
Two packs known to use the Beartooth Mountains	None	None

As shown in Table 13, wolves have been reported sporadically on and adjacent to the District. At least two packs, the Rosebud and Moccasin Lake packs, utilize the Beartooth Mountains portion of the District (Trapp 2007). Occasional wolves that are probably not associated with these packs have also been reported on the Beartooth Unit. On the Big Timber District, Gallatin National Forest, packs occur in the East Boulder and West Boulder areas, and wolves have been reported in the Crazy Mountains. Wolf activity has been reported in the project and cumulative effects area (Table 13). Den and rendezvous sites have not been identified. Suitable prey within and adjacent to the project area and within the cumulative effects analysis area consists mainly of elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer. The existing persistence rating for wolves in the project area is low, due to habitat features.

**Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

Direct effects may involve temporary displacement of wolves when project activities occur. No adverse indirect effects are anticipated due to the small scale of operations. No measurable cumulative effects are

expected with this project due to the scale where less than 2% of the analysis area would be treated. Other federal actions are not anticipated. This proposed action will have no adverse effects on the low persistence rating.

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action **WOULD NOT JEOPARDIZE THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE GRAY WOLF OR THEIR HABITAT**. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) wolves in the project area are designated as nonessential experimental population; 2) den and rendezvous sites are not known to occur in the area; 3) the project is temporary and small in scale(<2% of cumulative effects analysis area); and 4) impacts to wolf habitat and prey are low.

**Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

None necessary, adverse effects are not anticipated.

**Forest Service Sensitive Wildlife Species**

***Grizzly Bear***

**Population and Habitat Status**

**Table 14.** Grizzly Bears; Population and Habitat Status.

Bear Management Unit	Sub-unit	Visual Sightings	Den Sites	Mortality
N/A	N/A	None	None	None

The project area is within the Grizzly Bear Management Area outside the Primary Conservation Area and is over 10 miles east of the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone (Table 14). The project area is predominantly comprised of Douglas fir and lodgepole pine ranging from young to mature in age. Mature whitebark pine stands are also present at the higher elevations.

Most of the project area is heavily used by recreationists because the area has numerous campgrounds, trailheads and cabin sites (see Recreation Section). Grizzly bears may move through the area in the future as the GYA population grows and expands, but limited grizzly bear activity has been documented in the project area (Schwartz et al. 2005). The existing persistence rating for grizzly bears in the project area is low, due to habitat features.

**Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

Direct effects are not anticipated but wandering grizzly bears may be temporary displaced while project activities take place. Mortalities are not anticipated. Food storage orders are in place on the District. Indirect effects are not anticipated. The project will result in very little ground disturbance. Changes in open road and total road density will not occur. Changes in core and security areas will not occur. The project is not located within the Primary Conservation Area (MS1 and 2). Table 15 outlines applicable conservation and management plans with their goals, standards, guidelines, and incidental take statements for grizzly bears. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage.

Approximately 2,200 acres of potential grizzly bear habitat, whitebark pine forest, were damaged by the wildfire in the Rock Creek LAU. The stand initiation stage within the burned area will provide additional foraging habitat in the future. Overall effects would be similar to those listed above under the gray wolf section. This proposed action will have no adverse effects on the low persistence rating.

**Table 15.** Grizzly Bear – Applicable Plan Goals, Standards, Guidelines, and Incidental Take Statements.

Standards	Pre-Treatment	During-Treatment	Post-Treatment	Compliance
<b>Forest Plan Standards</b>				
<b>Custer N.F. Standards address Management Situation I, II, and III areas.</b>	Project area is not within Management Situation I, II or III areas	N/A.	N/A.	Yes
<b>Incidental Take Statements</b>				
None				
<b>Other Plan Standards</b>				
<b>Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan (1993)</b>				
1. Maintain and improve habitat	N/A	Habitat conditions would be maintained.	Habitat conditions would be maintained.	Yes
2. Minimize grizzly-human conflict potential	Special Food Order 98-08-02-04 is in effect on the Beartooth District.	Food storage orders are followed by District personnel implementing the project.	N/A	Yes
3. Resolve grizzly-human conflict	N/A	Current situation would be maintained	N/A	Yes
<b>Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwestern Montana 2002-2012</b>				
Goal: To manage for a recovered grizzly bear population in southwestern Montana and to provide for a continuing expansion of that population...	N/A	Current situation would be maintained	N/A	Yes
<b>Forest Plan Amendment for Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation for the Greater Yellowstone Area National Forests FEIS (2006)</b>				
Goal: Manage grizzly bear habitat within the Primary conservation Area...	Project is outside the PCA	Habitat conditions would be maintained.	Habitat conditions would be maintained.	Yes
Guideline 3: Outside the PCA in areas identified as suitable for grizzly bears emphasize proper sanitation techniques	Special Food Order 98-08-02-04 is in effect on the Beartooth District.	Food storage orders are followed by District personnel implementing the project. Orders are	N/A	Yes

including food storage orders and information/education...		posted at recreation areas. "Bear Aware" education program.		
Guideline 4: inside and outside the PCA in areas identified as suitable for grizzly bears maintain the productivity of four key grizzly bear food sources...emphasize maintaining and restoring whitebark pine stands.	N/A	Habitat conditions would be maintained.	Habitat conditions would be maintained.	Yes

### Determination of Effects

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action **IS MAY IMPACT INDIVIDUALS OR HABITAT, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO CAUSE A TREND TO FEDERAL LISTING OR LOSS OF VIABILITY**. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) The project area is located outside the Primary Conservation Area; 2) Den sites are not known to occur in the area; 3) impact to grizzly bear habitat is considered low; 4) the food storage orders are in place; 5) the project is in compliance with Forest Plan Standards and conservation plan standards, goals, and guidelines; 6) No road construction, reconstruction, or maintenance would occur; and 7) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area would received vegetation treatments.

### Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects

None necessary with food storage orders compliance.

## Harlequin Duck

### Population and Habitat Status

**Table 16.** Harlequin Duck; Population and Habitat Status.

Harlequin Duck Activity	Known sightings	Nesting Habitat	Foraging Habitat
Yes, outside project area			

Harlequin ducks are known to occur in the upper portion of the West Fork Rock Creek drainage within the Beartooth Wilderness Area near Quinnebaugh Meadows (Table 16). No breeding pairs are known to occur with in the project area. Harlequin ducks inhabit fast moving, low gradient, clear mountain streams (MTNHP 2008). Harlequin ducks are most often found where "banks are covered with a mosaic of trees and shrubs with a significant positive correlation with overhanging vegetation" (Diamond and Finnegan 1996). Harlequin ducks return to the previous years breeding sites the majority of the time (MTNHP 2008). The existing persistence rating for harlequin ducks in the project area is low, due to habitat features.

### Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis

No adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects are anticipated with the proposed project. If Streamside Management Zone guidelines and Best Management Practices are followed the project will have no impacts on

potential harlequin duck habitat. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. This wildfire impacted about 19 acres of potential harlequin duck habitat. Measurable cumulative effects are not anticipated. The proposed action would not likely reduce the existing persistence rating within the cumulative effects area for harlequin ducks.

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action **WILL HAVE NO IMPACT**. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) implementation of Best Management Practices; 2) implementation of Streamside Management Zone guidelines; 3) the project will not effect overhanging bank vegetation; and 4) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area would received vegetation treatments.

**Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

Implement SMZ guidelines and BMPs to maintain riparian habitat and corridors. Implement wildlife project design features.

***Wolverine***

**Population and Habitat Status**

**Table 17.** Wolverine; Population and Habitat Status.

Wolverine Activity	Known sightings	Denning Habitat	Foraging Habitat
Yes, outside project area	Yes, outside project area	Yes, outside project area	Yes

Wolverines are thought to occur in the upper reaches of most of the drainages within the Beartooth Mountains including the Rock Creek and Rosebud Creek Drainages (Table 17). Wolverine are limited to alpine tundra, and boreal and mountain forests (primarily coniferous), especially large wilderness areas (MTNHP 2008). When inactive, wolverines occupy dens in caves, rock crevices, and under fallen trees (MTNHP 2008). Their primary “habitat requirement appears to be large, isolates tracts of wilderness or roadless areas supporting a diverse prey base (Banci 1987). Wolverine are generally solitary and wide-ranging and occur at relatively low densities (Hornocker and Hash 1981). Wolverine are opportunistic feeders but small to medium sized rodents and carrion make up a large portion of their diet (MTNHP 2008). The existing persistence rating for wolverines in the project area is low, due to habitat features.

**Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

Direct effects may involve temporary displacement of wolverine when project activities occur. Indirect effects are not anticipated due to the small scale of operations. No measurable cumulative effects are expected with this project due to the scale where less than 2% of the analysis area would be treated. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. The stand initiation stage within the burned area will provide additional foraging habitat in the future. This proposed action will have no adverse effects on the low persistence rating.

## Determination of Effects

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action **NEUTRAL BUT MAY HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON FORAGING HABITAT AND PREYBASE**. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) Den sites are not known to occur in the project area; 2) only 9% of the total blowdown is proposed for salvaging leaving over 14,000 acres of new denning and foraging habitat; 3) the project is temporary and small in scale (<2% of cumulative effects analysis area); and 4) impacts to wolverine habitat and prey are low.

## Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects

Implement SMZ guidelines and BMPs to maintain riparian habitat and corridors. . Implement wildlife project design features.

## Management Indicator Species and Key Wildlife Species

### *Northern goshawk*

#### Population and Habitat Status

**Table 18.** Northern Goshawk; Population and Habitat Status.

Northern Goshawk Nests	Known sightings	Nesting Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Foraging Habitat <sup>1</sup>
No	No	Yes	Yes

<sup>1</sup>In general, managing habitat for northern goshawks will provide for a host of wildlife species, thus the “management indicator species” concept as outlined by the 1976 National Forest Management Act (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(B)). No further analysis beyond that completed for northern goshawks will be conducted for these species which includes the pine martin.

The project area is thought to support potential goshawk habitat (Table 18). Northern goshawks prefer nesting in mature, unlogged or lightly managed, forest habitats with relatively closed canopies (greater than 60%), typically on the lower 1/3 of north, east, and west aspects with less than 30% slope, greater than 30 acres in size, and within 600 feet of water (Bull and Hohmann 1994). Two known nest sites on the Beartooth Ranger District are located in Douglas fir and lodgepole pine stands with greater than 50 percent canopy closure. Most literature sources state that goshawks require open water within a ¼ mile of nest trees (Bull and Hohmann 1994, Reynolds 1992) but nests on the Forest have been found over two miles from water sources. Goshawks use a variety of habitats for foraging but prefer mid to late succession forest and rarely use grassland openings (Reynolds 1992), except for foraging along their edges. Home range sizes vary from around 3,000 to 9,000 acres depending upon quality of habitat and available prey, with an average of 6,000 acres.

Squires and Reynolds (1997) confirmed that areas with high canopy closure, big trees, open forest floor, and moderate slopes are the most “typical” nest stands. However, he also indicated that goshawks are not restricted to nesting in these stands and could use stands with lower canopy cover as well. Reich (2004) cautioned against using habitat data where known goshawks are nesting to extrapolate a definition of good nesting habitat. Goshawks exhibit high site fidelity and may use lower quality habitat but not produce young. Goshawks will nest in stands of various sizes. Larger tends to be better, but not at the expense of having suitable nesting habitat distributed across the landscape. It is important to provide nesting habitat across the landscape, outside of known territories.

Based on the existing condition, the analysis area currently provides low to moderately suitable habitat for goshawks. The habitat is low to moderate quality for several reasons, but is primarily linked to the mid-aged forested stands that provide few large trees capable of supporting a goshawk nest and where most of the area occurs at elevations non typical of supporting goshawks. No goshawks are known to occupy the project area. However, if an active goshawk nest is discovered within a stand prior to or during treatment activities work should be halted and the wildlife biologist would be notified immediately to determine steps to resolve the situation and maintain habitat and minimize human disturbance. Steps would include maintaining habitat specific for Northern goshawk (e.g., crown cover, snags, interlocking tree crown patches, Reynolds et al., 1992, pg 21-30) over the long term; following the Northern Region Northern Region Overview (Tidwell, July 17, 2007; Brewer et al, May 2007, e.g., acres) and Custer Forest Plan goals and objectives (Forest Plan, p.18) (See Project Design Features).

Based on 2008 FIA data, the Beartooth Ranger District supports approximately 18% old growth forest that meets the Regional Green et al. (1992) definition. Since it is not possible to map the exact location of the existing old growth, the TSMRS database was used estimate the location and acreage of old growth in the project area. The Rock/Wyoming Creek, Fishtail Creek, and Little Rocky Creek drainages support approximately 4679, 4427, and 4926 acres of old growth respectively. Approximately 88 (1.9%) acres of potential goshawk nest habitat (mature forest) in the Rock/Wyoming Creek drainage, 43 (1.0%) acres in Fishtail Creek drainage, and 193 (3.9%) acres in Little Rocky Creek drainage blew down or was wind damaged. The proposed activities would not affect the existing potential nesting habitat in the area because the majority of the treated acres are wind thrown or wind damaged. The proposed salvage treatment would help move the existing habitat towards the desired balances (Reynolds et al. 1992) for post-fledging areas by creating more open areas for foraging habitat. The acres of live trees proposed to be thinned-from-below would maintain a 10 foot crown spacing of the dominant trees. These acres should provide future goshawk nesting habitat. Due to the small scale of the project, the existing persistence rating for northern goshawk is low to moderate due to habitat features.

### **Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

The analysis area is currently unoccupied by goshawks but suitable habitat is present in the area. Based on current habitat conditions, the area supports two elements typically found within a goshawk home range. These elements include potential nest stands and foraging habitat. No adverse direct or indirect effects are anticipated with the salvage treatments because most of the treated acres are wind thrown or wind damaged and therefore do not currently support suitable nesting habitat. The limited acres that are thinned-from-below would provide for future nesting habitat. The capacity to support additional prey numbers and/or species could increase as a result of the proposed project. However due to small scale of the proposed project, these changes to habitat capacity changes would be fairly insignificant. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. Approximately 3,000 acres of potential goshawk habitat (8%) were damaged by the wildfire in the cumulative effects analysis area. The stand initiation stage within the burned area will provide additional foraging habitat in the future. This proposed action will have no adverse effects on the low to moderate persistence rating.

### **Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action **MAY IMPACT INDIVIDUALS, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO CAUSE A TREND TO FEDERAL LISTING OR LOSS OF VIABILITY.** My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) impacts to potential goshawk habitat would be low; 2) no negative change in prey base would occur; 3) the proposed action would make the project area less vulnerable to stand replacement wildfire; 4) implementation of the project design features; 5) goshawk have not been reported in the area; and 6) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area would receive vegetation treatments.

## Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects

If an active goshawk nest is discovered within or near a treatment area prior to or during treatment activities work should be halted and the District wildlife biologist would be notified immediately to determine steps to resolve the situation. Implement other wildlife project design features.

### *White-tailed deer, Mule Deer, Moose, and Elk*

#### Population and Habitat Status

**Table 19.** Big Game; Population and Habitat Status.

Big game Activity	Seasonal Range	Calving or Fawning Habitat
Yes	Yes	Yes

White-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, and elk, hereafter referred as big game, are semi-migratory in the Beartooth Area and their home ranges provide yearlong habitat. The critical season for big game is winter. Preferred winter range habitat consists of dense, pine growth interspersed with riparian, meadows and hardwood draws. Shrubs constitute the major portion of the winter diet of big game. Primary winter forage species include chokecherry, snowberry, sagebrush, willow, and aspen. Dry grasses and forbs will also be consumed based on their availability. Big game are opportunistic and utilize existing agricultural land where available. Thickets and topography add hiding and thermal cover for big game. Riparian areas and sagebrush stands provide high quality fawning, calving, and forage habitats. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks have not mapped any specific seasonal ranges for these big game species in the watersheds being analyzed for this project with exception of elk winter range in the Main/Wyoming Creek drainages. Elk winter range in this area is located several miles for the project area.

Open roads have been shown to cause disturbance to large game, especially during hunting seasons. The Custer National Forest uses juxtaposition of open roads to assess security cover and vulnerability to direct impacts. Effective elk security cover is described as: elk hiding cover modified by open roads. The greater the density of open roads within an area, the less effective is the hiding cover in providing security.

In this analysis elk will serve as a surrogate for mule deer, white-tailed deer, and moose. This is because there is a large amount of overlap in habitat use and distribution between these species, and impacts of open roads in the project and cumulative effects areas are expected to be very similar for these species. Also most of the research that pertains to the affects of roads on big game species has been done on elk in this region of the United States.

Many studies have shown that motorized access influences elk habitat use (Lyon 1983, Frederick 1991, Lyon and Christensen 2002). Elk have repeatedly been shown to avoid habitat adjacent to open roads (Lyon et al. 1985). Declines in habitat use have been reported within 0.25-1.8 miles of open roads (Lyon and Christensen 2002), but substantial reductions in habitat use are normally confined to <0.5 miles of an open road. Many variables influence elk habitat use relative to open roads.

Observed declines in habitat use adjacent to roads have led to the development of elk habitat effectiveness models. Habitat effectiveness refers to the percentage of available habitat that is usable by elk outside the hunting season (Lyon and Christensen 1992). The literature contains several recommendations for managing open roads within summer elk habitat. Using Lyon's model for habitat effectiveness based entirely on road density (Lyon 1983), Christensen et al. (1993) recommended that habitat effectiveness should be 70% or greater

(open road density <0.7 mi/sq mi) for areas intended to benefit elk summer habitat and retain high use. Areas where elk are one of the primary resource considerations should have habitat effectiveness of 50% or greater (open road density <1.9 mi/sq mi). Areas with <50% habitat effectiveness (>1.9 mi/sq mi) were expected to make only minimal contributions to elk management goals (Christensen et al. 1993). Additionally, Canfield et al. (1999) recommended that open road densities should be less than 1.0 mi/sq mi in big game summer habitat, with scattered key areas with no roads. However, the 2005 Montana Elk Management Plan does not contain objectives or recommendations for management of open road density within summer elk habitat.

Motorized access is one of the few factors affecting elk vulnerability that the Forest Service has management authority for. Hillis et al. (1991) provided guidelines for managing elk habitat to limit elk vulnerability. The key concept was to provide security areas for elk during the hunting season where they are less vulnerable to harvest. They defined secure areas as >250 acres in size and >0.5 mile from an open road, and recommended that they comprise >30% of the analysis unit. Although open roads have the largest effect on elk vulnerability, restricted roads also have an impact because they provide easier access for hunters using non-motorized transportation (Skovlin et al. 2002). Lyon and Burcham (1998) found that elk hunters are likely to use closed roads to access areas farthest from open roads. The Hillis guidelines for secure areas included a recommendation to minimize closed roads within elk security areas, but did not provide standards for accomplishing this (Hillis et al. 1991). The 30% secure habitat level should be viewed as the minimum necessary to avoid excessive bull elk mortality during the hunting season, realizing that more may be necessary in some districts due to variables such as topography, vegetation cover, and hunting pressure. Elk security habitat and open motorized route density by watershed is displayed in Table 20.

**Table 20: Elk security habitat and open motorized route density by watershed.**

Watershed	% Elk Security	Open Motorized Route Density (miles/square mile)
Rock and Wyoming Creek	71	0.85
Little Rocky Creek	12	1.78
Fishtail Creek	88	0.17

Most of the project area offers suitable year-round habitat for deer and moose but elk typically move to higher elevations during the summer months (Table 19). The existing roads within the project area receive heavy use during the summer months and moderate to low use the rest of the year. No new road construction is proposed with this project. The persistence rating for big game is moderate in the project area due to habitat conditions.

### **Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

The proposed activities would meet the access and habitat management recommendations for elk (big game) in two of the affected watersheds. Open motorized route densities and percent elk security habitat in the Rock/Wyoming Creek and Fishtail Creek drainages are 0.85 and 0.17 miles/miles<sup>2</sup> and 71% and 88% respectively. These values are within Christensen et al’s (1993) and Canfield et al’s (1999) recommendations for access and habitat management. The Little Rocky Creek drainage does not meet access and habitat management recommendations. This shortfall is primarily caused by the past mining activities (22.1 miles of open road) and this drainage is relatively small (12136 acres) where 8021 acres (66%) occur on National Forest System lands. Since all of the proposed project’s temporary roads and skid trails (see map \*\*, page \*\*) will be closed, they will not be an additive impact to access and habitat management for big game in any of the analyzed watersheds.

Treatment activities would have short-term impacts that include temporary displacement of big game. Big game would generally use the treatment areas when humans have left for the day. The activities associated with proposed action have the potential to directly impact a few fawns or adults due to increased human presence and noise and possibly fawn or calf abandonment. Calve/fawn abandonment should not be an issue due to mitigations requiring that active treatment areas will be inspected for the presence of fawns and calves (see Project Design Features). If any are found, individuals implementing the activity will coordinate options with the project leader to work in other areas within the vicinity until the cow or doe has had time to remove the young from the area. No indirect effects are anticipated. Long-term habitat improvement is expected from increased grass, forb and browse production in treated areas and the lowered risk of stand replacement wildfire. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. The stand initiation stage within the burned area will provide additional big game foraging habitat in the future. The proposed action would not likely reduce the existing persistence rating within the project area in the long-term for elk, moose, or deer.

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action would have a *neutral* effect on white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, and elk. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) the proposed action would temporarily increase the amount of human related activities and associated noise throughout the project area but over the long-term forage would be improved; 2) the proposed action would make the project area less vulnerable to stand replacement wildfire; 3) implementation of the project design features; 4) the project would not negatively impact access and habitat management for big game; and 5) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area would received fuel treatments.

**Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

Active treatment areas will be inspected for the presence of fawns and calves. If any are found, individuals implementing the activity will coordinate options with the District wildlife biologist. Implement other wildlife project design features.

***Ruffed Grouse***

**Population and Habitat Status**

**Table 21.** Ruffed Grouse; Population and Habitat Status.

Ruffed Grouse Activity	Nesting Habitat	Drumming Logs
Yes	Yes	Yes

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend data suggests that ruffed grouse are declining at a non-significant rate from 1966 through 2000 and from 1980 through 2000 across North America as well as within Montana (Sauer et al. 2005). Presently ruffed grouse occupying the Beartooth RD seem to be stable. Ruffed grouse are found in dense, brushy, mixed-conifer and deciduous tree cover, often along stream bottoms. In the winter they eat deciduous tree buds and shrubs and in the summer they have a mixed diet of insects, green plants and berries. Adult birds spend most of their lives within two square miles and males are generally found within ½ mile of their drumming logs (MTNHP 2008). Aspen and deciduous shrubs are important habitat components in the analysis area (Table 21). The persistence rating for ruffed grouse within the project area is high, primarily due to habitat features.

## Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis

Treatment activities would have short-term impacts that include temporary displacement of ruffed grouse. Grouse would generally use the treatment areas when humans have left for the day. The activities associated with proposed action have the potential to directly impact nests and adults due to increased human presence and noise and possibly could lead to nest or drumming log abandonment. This should not be an issue due to the project mitigation which requires that active treatment areas to be inspected for the presence of active nests and drumming logs. If any are found, individuals implementing the activity will stop work within 300 feet of the area until July 1. No indirect effects are anticipated. Long-term habitat improvement is expected from increased grass, forb, shrub and aspen production in treated areas and lower risk of stand replacement wildfire. When all project design measures are implemented, there should be no cumulative impacts to ruffed grouse or their habitats. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. This wildfire impacted about 19 acres of potential ruffed grouse habitat. Measurable cumulative effects are not anticipated. The proposed action would not likely reduce the existing persistence rating within the cumulative effects area for grouse.

## Determination of Effects

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action would have a *neutral* effect on ruffed grouse. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) the proposed action would temporarily increase the amount of human related activities and associated noise throughout the project area but over the long-term, forage and nesting cover would be improved; 2) the proposed action would make the project area less vulnerable to stand replacement wildfire; 3) if all proposed project design measures are followed, there would be little risk to altering nesting behaviors or success within the project area; and 4) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area would received fuel treatments.

## Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects

Active treatment areas will be inspected for the presence of active ruffed grouse nests and drumming logs. If any are found, individuals implementing the activity will stop work within 300 feet of the area until July 1. Implement other wildlife project design features.

## *Bullock's Oriole, Yellow Warbler and Ovenbird*

### Population and Habitat Status

**Table 22.** Bullock's Oriole, Yellow Warbler and Ovenbird; Population and Habitat Status.

Bird Activity	Nesting Habitat	Foraging Habitat
Yes	Yes	Yes

The analysis for these three species is combined because they have similar habitat requirements. They are linked to riparian habitats and deciduous woodlands (Table 22). Bullock's oriole is an open deciduous woodland generalist that forages by gleaning insects, especially caterpillars, from trees and shrubs (MTNHP 2008). The Custer NF has assigned this species as the riparian tree indicator (USFS 1986). The yellow warbler is tied more directly to riparian woodlands, especially those with willows (MTNHP 2008), and is therefore the Forest indicator for shrub components of riparian systems. Ovenbirds use mid to late succession, closed canopied deciduous forests with poorly developed understories. Yellow warblers forage on insects, especially caterpillars, and spiders. They take most food items from the leaves and bark. They are also known to

occasionally fly-catch and eat small fruits or probes in flowers. Threats to these species include reduction of riparian habitat in combination with nest parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds.

The 1966 through 2000 Montana survey-wide BBS data for these species suggest that both of these species have an increasing population trend (Sauer et al. 2005). The yellow warbler is believed to have a significantly increasing trend. The LandBird 2002 through 2004 surveys conducted on the District detected Bullock's orioles, yellow warblers and ovenbirds. As stated in the ruffed grouse section, suitable habitat is located in the project area, riparian habitat and numerous aspen and cottonwood stands are located in the project and cumulative effects analysis area. The persistence rating for Bullock's orioles, yellow warblers and ovenbirds in the project area is high, due to habitat factors.

### **Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

The activities associated with proposed action have the potential to directly impact nests and adults due to increased human presence and noise and possibly could lead to nest abandonment. Most (90+ %) of the existing habitat for these species in the analysis area will not be impacted by the project. However, the aspen and deciduous shrub habitat that is treated would benefit from the proposed vegetation treatments. In July 2008, the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. This wildfire impacted about 19 acres of riparian habitat. Measurable cumulative effects are not anticipated. No change in the existing persistence rating is expected with the proposed action.

### **Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action would have a *neutral* effect on Bullock's orioles, yellow warblers and ovenbirds. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) the proposed action would temporarily increase the amount of human related activities and associated noise throughout the project area but over the long-term forage and nesting cover would be improved; 2) the proposed action would make the project area less vulnerable to stand replacement wildfire; 3) this activity could have short-term adverse impacts on nesting activities, but is not believed to be substantial due to the small area affected and duration of expected impact. There would be little risk to altering nesting behaviors or success within the project area; 4) Opening the tree canopy would help to stimulate deciduous shrub growth and improve habitat for all three species; and 5) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area would received fuel treatments.

### **Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

Implement SMZ guidelines and BMPs to maintain riparian habitat and corridors. Implement other wildlife project design features.

## ***Snags Habitat***

### **Current Condition**

The Custer Forest Plan did not identify a snag management standard. On the Beartooth RD, fire killed snags have remained on thousands of acres of the landscape. On the District there have been several wildfires that have killed over story trees since 2000, but because of resource concerns and timber harvest economics, no salvage sales have occurred. The most recent wildfire occurred in July 2008; the Cascade Wildfire burned approximately 10,200 acres in the West Fork Rock Creek drainage. In this project area the regional snag management recommendations (USFS, Jan. 2000, P. 6, VRU Cluster 1) are address as part of project design

criteria and silvicultural prescriptions. Site specific snag densities and sizes are not available for the project area.

Snag densities based on FIA samples in 1997 (Sandbak, 2008.02.25) are available for the Custer NF (Table 23) and Beartooth RD (Table 24). Snag densities  $\geq 10.0$  inches dbh are 7.4 / A. for the Custer NF and 12.7 for the Beartooth RD. Snag densities  $\geq 20$  inches dbh are 0.4/ A. for the Custer NF and 0.8 / A. for the Beartooth RD. Data indicates large diameter snags  $\geq 20$  inches dbh are relatively rare on the landscape on the Beartooth RD. Snag density estimates for the three 5<sup>th</sup> Code HUCs where the proposed treatment areas occur are displayed in Table 25 (Lundberg, 2008.09.30). Again large snags are limited in the affected 5<sup>th</sup> Code HUCs.

**Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

The proposed action is likely to remove some existing snags that were created (wind damaged trees) by the November 11, 2007 storm event. However many of the wind damaged trees do not have commercial value due to fracturing so they would remain on the landscape to provide snag habitat. Non-commercial treatments including mechanical and prescribed burning would tend to retain large live trees during the mechanical phase and consume and create several snags during the prescribed burning phase.

Considering the past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions of cumulative effects the proposed action would remove some existing snags because of timber harvest activities and prescribed burning. These losses in snags are expected to be offset by the creation of snags from prescribed burning. The proposed action and existing condition are expected to meet regional snag management recommendations (USFS, Jan. 2000, P. 6, VRU Cluster 1).

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action would have a *neutral* effect on snag habitat. My determination is based on the following rationale: 1) the proposed action would meet the regional snag management recommendations; 2) the proposed action has a project design feature that would maintain existing snag habitat in the projects area; 3) some of the proposed treatments would create additional snag habitat and 4) the project is small in scale where less than 2% of the cumulative effects analysis area would received fuel treatments.

**Recommendations for Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

Implement the snag project design feature and follow the regional snag management recommendations.

Table 23. Snags per acre on the Custer NF for all Ranger Districts based on FIA samples, 1997 (Sandbak, 2008.02.25).

<b>Snags per Acre by Diameter Class</b>					
<b>Custer Forest</b>	<b>Snags per Acre</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Lower Bound</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Upper Bound</b>	<b>Total Number PSUs</b>	<b>Number Forested PSUs</b>
<b>5.0-9.9"</b>	20.6	10.6	32.9	195	105
<b>10.0-14.9"</b>	5.2	2.7	8.2	195	105
<b>15.0-19.9"</b>	1.8	0.9	2.9	195	105
<b>20.0-24.9"</b>	0.4	0.2	0.7	195	105
<b>25.0"+</b>	0.0	0.0	0.1	195	105

<b>Total Snags Greater or Equal to Specified Diameter</b>					
<b>Custer Forest</b>	<b>Snags per Acre</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Lower Bound</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Upper Bound</b>	<b>Total Number PSUs</b>	<b>Number Forested PSUs</b>
5"+	28.1	16.2	42.4	195	105
10"+	7.4	4.3	11.1	195	105
15"+	2.2	1.2	3.5	195	105
20"+	0.4	0.2	0.7	195	105
25"+	0.0	0.0	0.1	195	105

Table 24. Snags per acre on the Beartooth Ranger District based on FIA samples, 1997(Sandbak, 2008.02.25).

<b>Snags per Acre by Diameter Class</b>					
<b>Custer Forest District 2</b>	<b>Snags per Acre</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Lower Bound</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Upper Bound</b>	<b>Total Number PSUs</b>	<b>Number Forested PSUs</b>
5.0-9.9"	37.5	19.4	58.9	95	49
10.0-14.9"	8.9	4.5	14.3	95	49
15.0-19.9"	3.0	1.3	5.0	95	49
20.0-24.9"	0.7	0.2	1.2	95	49
25.0"+	0.1	0.0	0.3	95	49

<b>Total Snags Greater or Equal to Specified Diameter</b>					
<b>Custer Forest District 2</b>	<b>Snags per Acre</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Lower Bound</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Upper Bound</b>	<b>Total Number PSUs</b>	<b>Number Forested PSUs</b>
5"+	50.1	29.1	74.8	95	49
10"+	12.7	7.2	19.0	95	49
15"+	3.8	1.8	6.0	95	49
20"+	0.8	0.3	1.3	95	49
25"+	0.1	0.0	0.3	95	49

Table 25. Snags per acre in the Rock Creek, West Fork Rosebud and Little Rocky Creek drainages based on FIA samples, 1997(Lundberg, 2008.09.30).

<b>Snags per Acre by Diameter Class – Rock Creek</b>					
<b>Custer Forest District 2</b>	<b>Snags per Acre</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Lower Bound</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Upper Bound</b>	<b>Total Number PSUs</b>	<b>Number Forested PSUs</b>
5.0-9.9"	16.6	0.0	44.5	21	11
10.0-14.9"	4.5	0.0	10.4	21	11
15.0-19.9"	1.4	0.0	3.5	21	11
20.0-24.9"	0.7	0.0	2.0	21	11
25.0"+	0.0	0.0	0.0	21	11

<b>Snags per Acre by Diameter Class – West Fork Rosebud Creek</b>					
<b>Custer Forest District 2</b>	<b>Snags per Acre</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Lower Bound</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Upper Bound</b>	<b>Total Number PSUs</b>	<b>Number Forested PSUs</b>
5.0-9.9"	77.1	0.0	189.5	15	6
10.0-14.9"	5.5	0.0	15.0	15	6

<b>15.0-19.9"</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	15	6
<b>20.0-24.9"</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	15	6
<b>25.0"+</b>	0.3	0.0	1.2	15	6

<b>Snags per Acre by Diameter Class – Little Rocky Creek</b>					
<b>Custer Forest District 2</b>	<b>Snags per Acre</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Lower Bound</b>	<b>90% Confidence Interval - Upper Bound</b>	<b>Total Number PSUs</b>	<b>Number Forested PSUs</b>
<b>5.0-9.9"</b>	116.4	0.0	270.4	12	4
<b>10.0-14.9"</b>	25.6	0.0	74.0	12	4
<b>15.0-19.9"</b>	2.4	0.0	6.3	12	4
<b>20.0-24.9"</b>	0.7	0.0	2.9	12	4
<b>25.0"+</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	12	4

### Consultation

Verbal concurrence with effects determinations for Gray wolf and Canada lynx was received from Lou Hanebury of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on July 24, 2008. A Biological Assessment for the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project 2008 was submitted to Mark Wilson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State Office, Helena MT. on July 24, 2008. A concurrence letter is pending.

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