



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Hungry Horse and Glacier View  
Ranger Districts

10 Hungry Horse Drive  
P.O. Box 190340  
Hungry Horse, MT 59919  
(406) 387-3800  
Fax (406) 387-3889

---

**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** August 1, 2008

Last spring, many of you received a letter providing details of the proposed Belton Fuels Reduction Project; a project designed to reduce hazardous fuels on National Forest System lands roughly located between Hungry Horse and West Glacier. The project area has been identified as a wildland-urban interface area of high priority for treatment due to the concentration of private dwellings adjacent to Flathead National Forest lands.

Since that letter, a planning team comprised of specialists from many natural resource disciplines reviewed public feedback and analyzed potential effects from the proposed activities. Approximately 18 individuals and groups submitted written, telephone, or personal visit comments after receiving the letter. The majority of the comments were very positive and supportive of this project, although several expressed concerns. Concerns included increased disturbance to wildlife, ineffective fuels treatments, post-treatment unit appearance, road condition, soils impacts, and noxious weed spread. Design features in the proposed action address and help mitigate these concerns; these include obliterating temporary roads, timing restrictions to minimize wildlife impacts, seeding areas to reduce erosion, retaining trees to mitigate visual issues, and restricting mechanical equipment use to periods when soil productivity will not be severely impacted.

We had intended to use a fuels categorical exclusion (CE) to document this analysis, which the Forest Service had developed in response to the Healthy Forests Initiative announced by President Bush in August 2002; the CE would have required the creation of a project file and decision memo. However, the use of this particular CE has been litigated, and in December 2007, the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals concluded that the Forest Service failed to assess properly the significance of the hazardous fuels reduction categorical exclusion. The court reversed the district court's summary judgment in favor of the Forest Service, and remanded this case for further proceedings.

To date, there has been no national resolution concerning the use of this fuels CE, so an environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared to document the resource effects analysis; this EA is now available for public review and comment. The EA addresses the effects of using mechanized equipment and/or hand treatments to reduce tree density and downed wood on approximately 908 acres in 44 units. Additionally, it assesses prescribed burning treatments to reduce fuels and improve wildlife habitat on approximately 916 acres in 6 units.

Those of you who initially commented on this project will receive copies of the EA with this letter; others who are interested in reviewing this document can do so in several ways. Copies will be available at the Hungry Horse Ranger Station and on the Flathead National Forest website at: [www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead/nepa/nepa](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead/nepa/nepa) (the Belton Fuels Reduction Project EA should be apparent at that point). You may also contact us directly at the Ranger Station and a copy will be sent to you.

Comments on this EA are requested from you and other reviewers. The Responsible Official (Forest Supervisor Cathy Barbouletos) will consider all public comments before making a decision



(anticipated by the fall of 2008). When submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons you believe should be considered by the Responsible Official in reaching a decision. Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. In order to retain your administrative appeal rights, you must provide written, oral, or electronic comments during this 30-day comment period. This legal notice will be published in the newspaper of record, *The Daily Inter Lake*, and the comment period will start on the day following publication of the legal notice and ending 30 days following the publication date. We expect publication will occur on August 6, 2008. Your comments must be postmarked by the end of the 30-day comment period. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record, and will be available for public inspection.

Send written comments to:

Jimmy DeHerrera (District Ranger)  
Belton Fuels Reduction Project  
Hungry Horse Ranger District  
P.O. Box 190340, Hungry Horse, Montana 59919

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day following publication of the legal notice. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the correct Responsible Official's office by the close of business on the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day following publication of the legal notice. Office hours are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday - Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments may be submitted to [comments-northern-flathead-hungry-horse-glacier-view@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-flathead-hungry-horse-glacier-view@fs.fed.us). The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, Portable Document Format (PDF), or Rich Text Format (RTF). For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. For more information about this project, please contact Michele Draggoo, Project Leader, at 406-387-3827.

If you have not made any initial comments on this project, and do not respond with comments on this EA or make a request to remain on the mailing list, you will not be notified of the decision for this project. Thank you for your continuing interest and involvement in this project.

Sincerely,

JIMMY DEHERRERA  
Hungry Horse District Ranger

Enclosure