

Summary

Introduction

The Cooney McKay Project Area is located in the Swan Valley near Condon, Montana. The project area stretches from the Swan Mountain Range to the east, Highway 83 to the west, Cooney/Rumble Creek Divide to the south, and Lion/Meadow Creek Divide to the north. National Forest System (NFS) lands occupy 21,800 acres of the project area (57 percent); Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC) owns about 10,068 acres (27 percent); and other private landowners own about 6,163 acres (16 percent). Elevation within the project area ranges from 3400 feet along the Swan River to nearly 8900 feet near Cooney Mountain on the Swan Crest (See Vicinity Map 1-1 displaying the Cooney McKay Project Area).

Three action alternatives were evaluated in detail in this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), along with the No Action Alternative. This section is a general summary of the DEIS. The analysis area, purpose and need, major issues, and alternatives analyzed in detail are briefly described. Additional information is presented in the remaining chapters of this DEIS and in the project file (located at the Swan Lake Ranger District, Bigfork, MT). The maps referred to in this summary are located at the end of Chapters 1 and 2.

Purpose and Need

Based upon the existing condition of the project area, the Swan Lake Ranger District Interdisciplinary Team (ID) Team has identified the following management activities to restore desirable vegetative conditions:

Forest Health

- Improve and/or maintain the general health, resiliency, and sustainability of forest vegetative communities;
- Reduce the growing risk for insects and chronic disease infestation.

Hazardous Fuels Reduction

- Reduce forest fuels buildup adjacent to public and private lands;
- Provide a safer environment for the public and firefighters should a wildfire occur within the proposed treatment areas;
- Increase the probability of stopping wildfires on NFS lands before they burn onto private lands.

Provide Commercial and Personal-Use Wood Products for the Local Communities

Issues

During the issues content analysis and disposition process, the ID Team and District Ranger identified the following two “key” issues, for which action alternatives were developed.

A. Activities in Old Growth

There was a concern that the proposed actions would be harmful to old growth forest habitats. Examples of concerns expressed about the proposed action's impact on old growth forest and associated wildlife follow:

- For viability to be insured, the FS must maintain enough old growth habitat for decades to come on the Flathead National Forest. We have no reason to believe anything other than logging the proposed areas will reduce soil productivity, reduce their natural qualities, reduce their habitat for wildlife, and reduce their resiliency to subsequent disturbance, such as fire (Commentor #5).
- Old growth forests are pretty scarce in this area due to the checkerboard ownership. How much old growth is there in the Project Area? How connected is it? What old growth dependent wildlife are using it? Why are mature forests the focus of treatments? (Commentor #6)
- A range of alternatives needs to be developed. This should include an alternative that does not log in old growth forest habitat (Commentor #6).

Issue Indicator: Acres of treatment within old growth forest habitat.

B. White-tailed Deer Winter Range

There was a concern that the proposed actions could reduce the amount of winter range cover available to big game. An example of concerns expressed about the proposed action's impact on big game winter range (MA 9) follows:

- I would strongly oppose any plan that will reduce protection for wildlife habitat (Comment #2).
- I would like to see adequate connectivity retained as a lot of the ponderosa pine stands are in winter range. Any thinning should leave scattered, thick patches for wildlife cover and connectivity (Commentor #3).
- Thinning could break up hiding cover, travel corridors for sensitive wildlife (Commentor #5).
- How much whitetail deer thermal cover is in the Project Area? The Meadow Smith Project reduced thermal cover to below Forest Plan thresholds. Thermal cover must be retained or increased (Commentor #6).

Issue Indicator: Reduction in the amount of winter range cover available to big game.

Resource Enhancement Projects _____

Resource enhancement projects identified during project design are shown in the table below. These projects were identified to improve other resource values within the project area. Please refer to Map 2-1 at the end of Chapter 2 for a display of the project locations.

Several sources of funding exist for resource enhancement projects. Many items have the potential to be funded with Knutson-Vandenberg (KV) funds, while other items would be funded with congressionally approved funds or Stewardship dollars. Implementation would be based on annual budgets and program direction. These projects are not necessary to mitigate impacts of the Proposed Action, but are specific resource enhancements within the project area that would be beneficial to a variety of resources. If funding were not available, the improvements from these projects would not be accomplished.

**TABLE S-1.
RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS**

Ground Location	Enhancement Project
FDR 899 at Pony Creek	Replace culvert prevent a potential wash-out.
FDR 124 at Condon Creek	Replace culvert to provide fish passage and avoid beaver problems
FDR 901 at Condon Creek	Replace culvert with bridge to provide fish passage
FDR 9762 at Smith Creek	Replace culvert with bridge to provide fish passage
FDR 560 at North Fork Rumble Creek	Replace culvert with larger culvert to provide fish passage
Noxious Weed Spraying	Weed Spraying on Roads not included on Haul Routes
Unit 25-7 (Stand 213-1-007) - T21N, R17W, Sec. 25 and Unit 30-11 (Stand 213-1-011) - T21N, R16W, Sec. 30	Signing of snags in old growth treatment units that are located along open roads, in order to retain a greater number of large snags that might otherwise be cut for firewood.

Alternatives Considered In Detail

Alternative 1 – No Action

This alternative represents the existing condition in the Cooney McKay Project Area. Under this alternative, none of the activities proposed for the Cooney McKay Project would occur. No vegetative treatments, fuel reduction activities, temporary road and access management, planting and site restoration activities to aid in vegetation recovery, or other activities associated with the proposed action would occur at this time. Ongoing activities such as recreation, public firewood gathering, fire suppression, and normal road maintenance would continue. Activities identified in Chapter 3 as current and foreseeable actions would occur.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action (Maps 2-2A and 2-2B)

Intent: Alternative 2 was developed to respond to the purpose and need for the Cooney McKay Project.

Alternative 2 (the Proposed Action) focuses on improving forest health and reducing hazardous fuel buildup in the Cooney McKay Project Area by using various vegetative treatments, both commercial and non-commercial. Features associated with this alternative include the following:

- A total of about 921 acres would receive treatments that would remove commercial products, including sawlogs, post and poles, pulp, and chips.
- This alternative also emphasizes intermediate harvest treatments in stands possessing old growth attributes removing primarily lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir to sustain the health and vigor of western larch and ponderosa pine totaling 119 acres in Units 18-97, Unit 18-95, 25-07, 25-72, and 30-11. These treatments are proposed to reduce the likelihood of the loss of these stands due to a wildfire. The intent is to reduce the uncharacteristically high amount of ground and ladder fuels currently within these stands, while still preserving their old growth character.
- This alternative treats 672 acres in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

- There would be approximately 20.9 miles of BMPs implemented on haul roads as required for Timber Sale Contract.
- An estimated 1.25 miles of temporary road would be constructed to access harvest units as shown below in Table S-2.

Alternative 3 (Maps 2-3A and 2-3B)

Intent: Alternative 3 was developed to address Issue #1, Old Growth.

Under Alternative 3, no treatments would be proposed in old growth forest habitat. This alternative was developed based upon concerns from the public that treatments within old growth stands could destroy old growth attributes and adversely impact wildlife species associated with old growth communities. Features associated with this alternative include the following:

- This alternative does not treat stands possessing old growth attributes. Units 18-97, 18-95, 25-7, 25-72, and 30-11, totaling 119 acres would be dropped.
- A total of about 802 acres would receive treatments which would remove commercial products including sawlogs, post and poles, pulp, and chips.
- This alternative treats 589 acres in the WUI.
- There would be approximately 20.1 miles of BMPs implemented on haul roads as required for Timber Sale Contract.
- An estimated 1.25 miles of temporary road would be constructed to access harvest units as shown below in Table S-2.

Alternative 4 (Maps 2-4A and 2-4B)

Intent: Alternative 4 was developed to address the Issue #2, White-tailed Winter Range.

Alternative 4 was developed in detail to address concerns that vegetative treatments in MA 9 could result in loss of existing white-tailed deer winter habitat. Features associated with this alternative include the following:

- Under this alternative, Seed Tree Units within NFS lands designated as MA 9 in the Forest Plan (Units 26-20, 26-20a, 26-85, 26-91, 30-56, and 8-8) would be dropped.
- A total of about 845 acres would receive treatments that would remove commercial products including sawlogs, post and poles, pulp, and chips.
- This alternative also emphasizes intermediate harvest treatments in stands possessing old growth attributes removing lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir to sustain the health and vigor of western larch and ponderosa pine totaling 119 acres in Units 18-95, 18-97, 25 07, 25-72, and 30-11.
- This alternative treats 609 acres in the Wildland Urban Interface.

Summary

- There would be approximately 17.9 miles of BMPs implemented on haul roads as required for Timber Sale Contract.
- An estimated 1.0 miles of temporary road would be constructed to access harvest units as shown below in Table S-2.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a comparison of the alternatives in terms of:

- How the alternatives compare to one another;
- How the alternatives meet the Purpose and Need for the proposal;
- How the alternatives respond to the key issues;
- The potential environmental consequences associated with the implementation of the alternatives.

**TABLE S-2.
COMPARISON OF ACTIVITIES BY ALTERNATIVE**

Activity	Alternative 2		Alternative 3		Alternative 4	
	Acres	MMBF	Acres	MMBF	Acres	MMBF
Commercial Harvest						
Commercial Thinning	561	2,608	561	2,608	550	2,575
Old Growth Maintenance	119	715	0	0	119	715
Seed Tree	79	339	79	339	14	42
Salvage	69	345	69	345	69	345
Thin from Below	93	93	93	93	93	93
Total Acres/Volume	921	4,100	802	3,385	845	3,770
Non - Commercial Treatment						
Thin From Below	50		50		50	
Pre-commercial Thinning	105		105		105	
Hand Planting	79		79		14	
Restoration Planting	48		48		48	
Ecosystem Burning	1,833		1,833		1,833	

**TABLE S-2.
COMPARISON OF ACTIVITIES BY ALTERNATIVE**

Activity	Alternative 2		Alternative 3		Alternative 4	
	Acres	MMBF	Acres	MMBF	Acres	MMBF
Logging System						
Cable	4		4		4	
Tractor	756		637		691	
Forwarder	110		110		110	
Cable/Tractor	51		51		51	
Hand	50		50		50	
Fuels Treatment						
Grapple Pile/Burn/Chipping	887		768		845	
Handpile/Lop & Scatter	155		155		155	
Underburn	34		34		0	
Road Management						
Temporary Road Construction	1.25 miles		1.25 miles		1 mile	
Best Management Practices	20.86 miles		20.09 miles		17.9 miles	

**TABLE S-3.
COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES – HOW THEY RESPOND TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED
(some activities are listed more than once because they meet more than one purpose and need).**

Purpose and Need Statement	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
Forest Health				
Improve and/or maintain the general health, resiliency, and sustainability of forest vegetative communities and reduce the risk of insect epidemics and disease infestations within the Project Area. (Indicator: Acres treated – Commercial Thinning, Old Growth Maintenance, Seed Tree, Salvage, Thinning From Below (commercial and noncommercial), Pre-Commercial Thinning & Ecosystem Burning, exclusive of planting).	0	2,909	2,790	2,833
Improve and/or maintain the general health, resiliency, and sustainability of forest vegetative communities and reduce the risk of insect epidemics and disease infestations within the Project Area. (Indicator: Hand and Restoration Planting)	0	127	127	62

Cooney McKay Forest Health and Fuels Reduction DEIS

Summary

TABLE S-3.
COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES – HOW THEY RESPOND TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED
 (some activities are listed more than once because they meet more than one purpose and need).

Purpose and Need Statement	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
Hazardous Fuels Reduction				
Reduce forest fuels buildup adjacent to public and private lands (Indicator - Acres within WUI).	0	672	589	609
Reduce forest fuels buildup adjacent to public and private lands (Indicator: Acres outside of WUI, exclusive of planting)	0	2,237	2,201	2,224
Provide a safer environment for the public and firefighters should a wildfire occur within the proposed treatment areas.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Increase the probability of stopping wildfires on NFS lands before they burn onto private lands.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provide Commercial and Personal Use Wood Products for the Local Communities				
Timber Harvest Acres	0	921	802	845
Timber Harvest Volume (MBF)	0	4,100	3,385	3,770

TABLE S-4.
COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES AND HOW THEY RESPOND TO THE KEY ISSUES

Indicator	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
Acres of treatments in old growth forest habitats (Indicator: Acres)	0	119	0	119
Reduction in the amount of winter range cover available to big game. (Indicator: Percent Reduction)	0%	1%	1%	0%

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