

Required Disclosures

Potential Conflicts with Plans and Policies of Other Jurisdictions

Cultural Resources

The laws and policies that govern cultural resource protection on Federal lands are coordinated with the SHPO of Montana, who serves in an advisory capacity. The policies for Forest Service and SHPO are consistent. The Forest Service would inform and consult with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes on proposed activities, site information, and potential impacts.

Wildlife

The Forest Service and the MDFWP work together to manage wildlife, but the missions of the two agencies are different. The Forest Service manages the land and affects wildlife habitat by modifying the structure and composition of the vegetation and by creating and restricting access. The State of Montana manages the animals, and they affect wildlife by adjusting hunting seasons, harvest and day limits, and enforcing other rules that affect fish and wildlife populations.

The Forest Service works with the USFWS for the recovery of Threatened and Endangered Species. The Forest Service consults with the USFWS when Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Species may be affected.

Water Quality

Section 313 of the Clean Water Act requires Federal agencies to comply with all Federal, State, interstate and local requirements, administrative authority, and process and sanctions with respect to the control and abatement of water pollution. Executive Order 12088 also requires the Forest Service to meet the requirements of the Act. All action alternatives would comply with the Clean Water Act and Montana State Water Quality Standards. These alternatives would incorporate reasonable Soil and Water Conservation Practices, avoid channel degradation, and comply with the Forest Plan.

Air Quality

The prescribed underburning of harvest units under all action alternatives has the potential to affect local air quality. This activity is conducted in accordance with the State of Montana air quality guidelines administered by the Montana/Idaho State Airshed Group, made up of industry, State and Federal agencies, and local Health Department representatives.

Potential conflicts occasionally exist between National Forest concerns for meeting land management goals and the commitments of the Stage Agencies for clean air.

Other sources of potential conflict exist between private landowners within Montana, State land management agencies, and other adjoining National Forests competing for the limited number of suitable burning days. When such conflicts are identified, the Forest Service does not burn.

Probable Environmental Effects that Cannot be Avoided

Implementation of any alternative would inevitably result in some adverse environmental effects. The severity of the effects can be minimized by adhering to the features of the alternatives such as the Best Management Practices. If management activities occur, some effects cannot be avoided. Even Alternative A – the No Action Alternative has effects.

Cultural Resources

There is no assurance that every cultural resource site would be located in advance of all planned management activities. Some ground-disturbing activity may affect an undiscovered historic or prehistoric site. Sites discovered in this manner would be protected immediately from further disturbance.

Wildlife

The availability of stand structure, composition, patch size, and specific wildlife habitat elements is dynamic and changes over time. Consequently, wildlife populations associated with specific habitat conditions also change with time. All action alternatives would move habitat conditions within/towards historic ranges. Changes in habitat availability can cause changes in local population numbers of specific species. Proposed action alternatives can directly harm species through timber harvest and associated activities. Species primarily affected would be birds, amphibians, and small mammals. Although the proposed actions may affect individuals, it is not expected to cause a loss of population viability.

Air Quality

Temporary seasonal effects on air quality are unavoidable under any of the action alternatives. Prescribed fire is an integral part of ecosystem management, fuel treatment, and site preparation for reforestation. These activities would be scheduled when air dispersion is good.

Relationship between Short-Term and Long-Term Productivity

Short-term uses are those that generally occur annually. Long-term productivity refers to the ability of the land to produce a continuous supply of a resource.

Water Quality

The duration of the effects of timber management on the water resource is highly variable and dependent on land and vegetation types. Stream channel conditions may be altered because of short-term direct and indirect effects of management activities.

Wildlife

As explained above, the availability of stand structure, composition, patch size, and specific wildlife habitat elements is dynamic and changes over time. The appropriate scheduling of timber harvest and treatment of specific timber stands and habitat conditions can provide for and help sustain a mosaic of habitat conditions representative of historic ranges.

Vegetation

Managed stands produce a higher volume of wood fiber through time than unmanaged stands. Regeneration of desired fast-growing species, planting of genetically improved trees, stocking control to reduce competition and improve growth of individual trees, and intermediate treatments to maintain the health and vigor of stands are silvicultural means of maintaining the long-term yield of forest stands.

In the short-term, harvesting stands that are at a high risk of mortality captures economic value that would otherwise be lost. Timely reforestation puts the land back into a productive growing condition.

Depending on the level of timber harvesting and the site preparation method that follows, reductions in organic matter could reduce long-term site productivity. Silvicultural prescriptions include measures designed to maintain varying levels of organic matter. Reforestation of harvest areas could change plant succession, stand development, and species composition.

Air Quality

The temporary impacts of smoke from prescribed debris burning and road dust from vehicles associated with proposed activities would have minor short-term effects on visual quality and recreation use. The short-term impacts are traded for by minimizing the risks from wildfire and long-term increased site productivity. The short-term impact of prescribed burning is required to decrease the risk from wildfire on these sites. Wildfires generally provide significantly more air pollution. Silvicultural treatments and prescribed burning would increase long-term site productivity.

Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources

An irreversible commitment of resources refers to the loss of production or use of a non-renewable resource due to a land use decision that, once executed, cannot be changed. An irretrievable commitment of resources applies to loss of production or use of renewable resources for a time.

Soil Productivity

Best Management Practices would be used to avoid soil productivity losses from timber harvesting and associated temporary road/skid trail construction. Temporary roads would constitute an irretrievable commitment of resources even though they would be reclaimed. The soil mixing and disturbance that would be associated with temporary construction would lower soil productivity. While plant and tree growth on these sites would occur over the short term, growth rates may be slower within the temporary road template. Full productivity recovery would take decades.

Air Quality

The impact of prescribed burning would have temporary seasonal impacts on the air quality in all alternatives except Alternative A – No Action.

Scenic Resources

Irretrievable changes in the existing appearance of the landscape would occur under the action alternatives. These changes would become progressively less noticeable as vegetation recovered in harvested areas and along roads.

Wildlife

The loss or modification of habitat for certain wildlife species is an irretrievable commitment of resources. As treated vegetation recovers, associated habitat would also recover. However, the timeframe for this to occur may be many decades for mature and old growth-related species.

Cultural Resources

Any activity that would disturb a cultural resource is an irreversible commitment.

Specifically Required Disclosures

Effects of Alternatives on Social Groups

Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, ordered Federal agencies to identify and address the issue of environmental justice (i.e., adverse human health and environmental effects of agency programs that disproportionately impact minority and low income populations). At this time, no minority or low-income communities have been identified in the Hemlock Elk Project Analysis Area.

Based on experience with similar projects on the Swan Lake Ranger District, none of the alternatives would substantially affect minority or low-income individuals, women, or civil rights. The implementation of this project is expected to provide job opportunities in communities such as Swan Lake, Condon, Seeley Lake, Bigfork, Columbia Falls, and Kalispell, Montana. Some of these communities include minority populations that may benefit from the economic effects. Small or minority-owned businesses would have the opportunity to compete for some of the work.

Effects on Floodplains and Wetlands

Floodplain areas constitute all of the wetlands in the analysis area and are protected as RHCAs. Wetlands may occur in the form of seeps, springs, and small bogs; however, the exact locations of all these have not been identified prior to unit layout. These seeps, springs, and small bogs are not evident through aerial photography and are probably less than 0.25 acre in size. These areas would be protected by adhering to the Montana Stream Management Zone regulations, INFISH, BMP practices, and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 CFR 323). See the Water Resources Section of this chapter for more specifics.

Effects of Alternatives on Threatened and Endangered Species

Threatened and endangered wildlife, fish, and plant species may be affected by the proposed activities in the analysis area. A BA was prepared for bull trout. The proposed action determination is “may affect – not likely to adversely affect”. Some of the proposed resource enhancements proposed fall within scope of a recently completed programmatic biological opinion which covers culvert replacements, bridge placements and other work which may have short term negative effects due to short term sediment. These projects will proceed under the terms of the programmatic assessment done for such work. The determination for projects done under the programmatic biological opinion is **“may affect – likely to adversely affect” individuals, but the biological opinion discusses that the short term affects will not jepordize populations.** A BA was prepared for the Canada lynx and grizzly bear with a determination of **“may affect—not likely to adversely affect.”** A BA was prepared for the water howellia and Spalding’s catchfly with a determination of **“may affect – not likely to adversely affect”** for water howellia and **“no effect”** for Spalding’s catchfly.

Energy Requirements and Conservation Potential of Alternatives

The energy required to implement the alternatives in terms of petroleum products would be insignificant when viewed in light of the production costs and effects of the national and worldwide petroleum reserves.

Effects of Alternatives on Prime Rangeland, Forest Land, and Farm Land

The alternatives presented comply with Federal Regulations for prime lands. The definition of prime forestland does not apply to lands within the National Forests. Lands administered by the Forest Service in the analysis area do not include prime farmlands or range lands. In all alternatives, Federal lands would be managed with the appropriate consideration to the effects on adjacent lands.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

On January 10, 2001, President Clinton signed an Executive Order outlining responsibilities of Federal agencies to protect migratory birds. Upon review of the information regarding neo-tropical migratory birds in the Migratory Bird Project File, there would be no significant loss of migratory bird habitat from the implementation of any of the action alternatives.

All action alternatives move stand structure, composition, patch size, and specific wildlife habitat elements within/towards historic ranges. Changes in habitat availability can cause changes in local population numbers of specific species. Proposed actions are expected to maintain sufficient amounts and types of habitat to allow migratory birds to continue to inhabit and reproduce within the Hemlock Elk Project Analysis Area.

The action alternatives contain practices that avoid or minimize, to the maximum extent practicable, adverse impacts on species of migratory birds. However, proposed actions would create short-term disturbances and may cause harm to some species. Therefore, proposed actions may harm individuals, but are not likely to cause a loss of population viability of associated migratory birds.

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