

## APPENDIX A – FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT \_\_\_\_\_

FOR THE

### **Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project Environmental Assessment**

Swan Lake Ranger District

Flathead National Forest

Missoula County

**January 11, 2005**

In accordance with CFR 1508.13 and direction provided in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 40, Section 43.1), I have determined that the management actions included in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health proposal is not a major Federal action; and, that the implementation of the proposal will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared for this project. I have followed the implementing regulation for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) and other criteria for determining the significance of effects.

*/s/ Cathy Barbouletos*

*1/11/06*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Responsible Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Before making my determination, I have carefully reviewed and considered the following information:

- The direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of these actions as documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project;
- The analysis documentation in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project File;
- Comments received during the scoping for this proposal; and,
- Past experiences with fuels reduction projects on the Flathead National Forest.

The Interdisciplinary (ID) Team and I have “screened” the management actions included in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health proposal for “significant impact”. The results of this screen are summarized on the following pages.

**Significant**, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both **context** and **intensity**.

## I. Context

Criteria	Remarks
<p>This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27).</p>	<p>The effects of the proposed actions are limited in context. The project area is limited in size (1,367 acres of mechanical treatments and 107 acres of hand treatment) and the activities limited in duration (management actions associated with the proposal would be completed within a 3-year time frame). Effects are local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.</p> <p>The project is located adjacent to private property and homes on the lower slopes of the Project Area (EA, Figure 2). As such, the forest land surrounding these private lands would be affected by this proposal. The people most affected by the project will be the local residents on the adjacent lands. This action is also a continuation of fuels and thinning projects that have occurred for many years on the Flathead National Forest and elsewhere across the Northern Region and the nation as a whole, without significant effects. Short-term adverse effects would be mitigated through implementation of the Standards and Guidelines in the Land and Resource Management (Forest) Plan for the Flathead National Forest, Best Management Practices, and the design features (EA, Appendix B) developed specifically for this project.</p> <p>The project design features (Appendix B) minimize and avoid adverse impacts to the extent that such impacts are almost undetectable and immeasurable, even at the local level. These design features include, but are not limited to, protection of riparian habitat, seasonal and operations restrictions to avoid impacts to grizzly bear habitat; protection of sensitive or threatened plant species, protection of the soil resource, reclamation of temporary roads, noxious weed abatement.</p> <p>Within the context of the landscape as a whole, or at the stand level, the ecological consequences are not found to be significant in either the short- or long-term.</p>

## II. Intensity

This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible Officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluation intensity (40 CFR 1508.27):

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Criteria	Remarks
<p>1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the balance of effects will be beneficial.</p>	<p>Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making a determination of significance. While there will be beneficial effects, this action does not rely on those effects to balance adverse environmental impacts. Detailed specialist reports (Wildlife, Fisheries, and Plant Biological Assessments and Biological Evaluations; Forest and Regional Scales – Compatibility with NFMA Requirements for Maintaining Species Viability; Water and Soil Resources Reports, Noxious Weed Report, Cultural Resources Report, Fuels and Air Quality Report) included in the Project File contain comprehensive effects analyses, and the findings from these resource-specific reports are incorporated by reference and summarized in the EA.</p> <p>It is my determination, based on review of these analyses and consultation with specialists, that through careful incorporation of specific design features, as described in Appendix B of this DN, the proposed action, including mechanical and hand fuel reduction treatments, burning of thinning slash and natural forest fuels, and temporary road construction, would not have a significant impact on the environment. All effects would be small or short-lived. None are deemed irreversible or irretrievable and do not set in motion further effects. All potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects are evaluated in the EA, specialist reports, and Biological Assessments and Evaluations.</p>
<p>2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.</p>	<p>The fuel reduction treatments are designed to increase the efficiency of fire suppression efforts and reduce risks to firefighters, local residents, the public, structures, and natural resources. The implementation of these treatments would result in improved community safety because the fuel reduction would allow direct suppression tactics by firefighters, which would increase the chance of suppressing the fire before it reaches the private property.</p> <p>All burning of thinning slash and natural fuels would comply with State Air Quality Standards and be coordinated through the Montana Airshed Group.</p> <p>Dust from timber hauling activities would be controlled using the dust abatement requirements within the stewardship/timber sale contract provisions.</p> <p>Herbicide treatments of weeds would comply with label directions and in accordance with, and under decision authority of the Flathead National Forest Noxious and Invasive Weed Control EA and Decision Notice (USDA May 2001), to which the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health EA tiers. These treatments would not affect public health or safety (EA pgs. 37-38, Project File Exhibit 19).</p> <p>Project design features have been developed to address public</p>

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	<p>safety concerns associated with the proposed salvage harvest and associated actions. I believe that the proposed action would not likely have any significant impact to public health or safety.</p>
<p>3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.</p>	<p>The project area does not contain, and is not near to, any of the unique characteristics that would be significantly impacted. No areas have been identified as ecologically critical.</p> <p>Heritage surveys have been completed and no previously undiscovered sites within the project area boundaries were found (EA, pgs. 43-44, Project File Exhibit 15).</p> <p>The project area includes wetlands and water howellia habitat. The project design includes features to protect wetlands, howellia ponds, and riparian habitat conservations by avoiding such areas in project design (EA, Appendix B). Impacts to wetlands would be avoided during project layout and under contract provisions for timber harvest.</p> <p>In recognition that the project includes important wildlife habitat for grizzly bears, the project has been designed to comply with the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (SVGCA) to insure that the linkage zones and disturbance impacts are within acceptable standards as described in the SVGCA (EA, pgs. 24-29, Project File Exhibit G-1). The project design includes seasonal and operations restrictions to avoid impacts to grizzly bear habitat (EA, Appendix B).</p> <p>Based on this information, I conclude that the proposed actions would have no effects on unique resources.</p>
<p>4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.</p>	<p>Based on the limited context of the project, my review of comments received during the scoping of this project, and the analysis documented in the EA and Project File, I do not find any highly controversial effects to the human environment.</p> <p>Some comments received on the proposal included listings of references, some of which were presented as opposing science. The ID Team reviewed these comments and citations and evaluated them in terms of applicability to the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health proposal (Project File Exhibit C-5).</p> <p>I conclude that the proposed action is not considered highly controversial by professionals, specialists, and scientists from associated fields of forestry, wildlife biology, soils, fisheries, and hydrology. While the proposal may be controversial, I do not believe that there is significant controversy over the effects of this action.</p>

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5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.	<p>Based on my review of comments received during the scoping of this project and the analysis documented in the EA and Project File, I find the possible effects on the human environment that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks are minimal or non-existent.</p> <p>Given the nature of the trees and lesser vegetation to be removed and the large proportion to be left, the effects to the quality of the human environment are not significant. The agency has considerable experience in such projects and the consequences of such actions are well established and predictable.</p> <p>A technical analysis (EA and Project File) that discloses potential environmental impacts (which is supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional opinion) has been completed, and I believe that the impacts of implementing this proposal are within the limits that are considered thresholds of concern.</p>
6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.	<p>The Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health proposal represents a site-specific project that does not set precedence for future actions or present a decision in principle about future considerations. Any proposed future project must be evaluated on its own merits and effects. The proposed actions are compatible with the Forest Plan, and the capabilities of the land. I believe that this action does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.</p>
7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.	<p>Connected, cumulative, and similar actions have been considered and included in the scope of the analysis.</p> <p>The analysis accounts for past, present, and reasonably foreseeable Forest Service, Plum Creek Timber Company, and by private landowners actions within the project area (Project File Exhibits F-1, G-2, G-3, G-4, G-5, G-6, G-7, G-10, G-11, G-13, G-16).</p> <p>Based on my review of the analysis and disclosure of effects in the EA, specialist reports, Biological Assessments and Evaluations, and other analyses in the project file, I conclude that the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health proposal does not represent potential cumulative adverse impacts (EA, Table 2, pp. 12-15).</p>
8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.	<p>I am not aware of any features in the affected area that are listed or are being considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.</p> <p>Heritage surveys have been completed Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health project area and no previously undiscovered sites within the project area boundaries were found (EA, pp.43-44), Project File Exhibit G-15). The potential for impacting undiscovered sites is mitigated by compliance with</p>

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	Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and through the design features included as part of the proposed action alternative (EA, Appendix B). In the event such resources are discovered during project implementation, they will be evaluated and protected. I believe that this action will not have a significant effect on scientific, cultural, or historical resources.																								
9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.	<p>No threatened or endangered species or its habitat would be adversely affected by the implementation of the proposed action. Biological Assessments for threatened and endangered species have been completed for the proposal, these BAs determined:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Species</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Determination</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Project File Exhibit</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Bald eagle</td> <td>May affect, not likely to adversely affect</td> <td>Exhibit G-1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grizzly bear</td> <td>May affect, not likely to adversely affect</td> <td>Exhibit G-1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gray wolf</td> <td>May affect, not likely to adversely affect</td> <td>Exhibit G-1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Canada lynx</td> <td>May affect, not likely to adversely affect</td> <td>Exhibit G-1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bull trout</td> <td>May affect, not likely to adversely affect</td> <td>Exhibit G-8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Water howellia</td> <td>May affect, not likely to adversely affect</td> <td>Exhibit G-16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spalding's catchfly</td> <td>No effect</td> <td>Exhibit G-16</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Species	Determination	Project File Exhibit	Bald eagle	May affect, not likely to adversely affect	Exhibit G-1	Grizzly bear	May affect, not likely to adversely affect	Exhibit G-1	Gray wolf	May affect, not likely to adversely affect	Exhibit G-1	Canada lynx	May affect, not likely to adversely affect	Exhibit G-1	Bull trout	May affect, not likely to adversely affect	Exhibit G-8	Water howellia	May affect, not likely to adversely affect	Exhibit G-16	Spalding's catchfly	No effect	Exhibit G-16
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10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.	<p>As described in the EA (regulatory Framework and Consistency sections for each resource area), the proposed action is consistent with all applicable Federal, state, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The National Forest Management Act (NFMA)</li> <li>▪ The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)</li> <li>▪ The Endangered Species Act</li> <li>▪ The Clean Water Act and Montana State Water Quality Standards</li> <li>▪ The Clean Air Act</li> <li>▪ The Migratory Bird Treaty Act</li> <li>▪ The National Historic Preservation Act</li> <li>▪ The American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act</li> <li>▪ The Environmental Justice Act</li> <li>▪ The Healthy Forests Restoration Act</li> </ul> <p>The proposed action is consistent with Forest Plan direction.</p> <p>I have concluded that the proposed action does not violate any Federal, state, local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.</p>																								