United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

January 2006

Decision Notice

and

Finding of No Significant Impact

for the

Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project

Swan Lake Ranger District
Flathead National Forest
Missoula County, Montana

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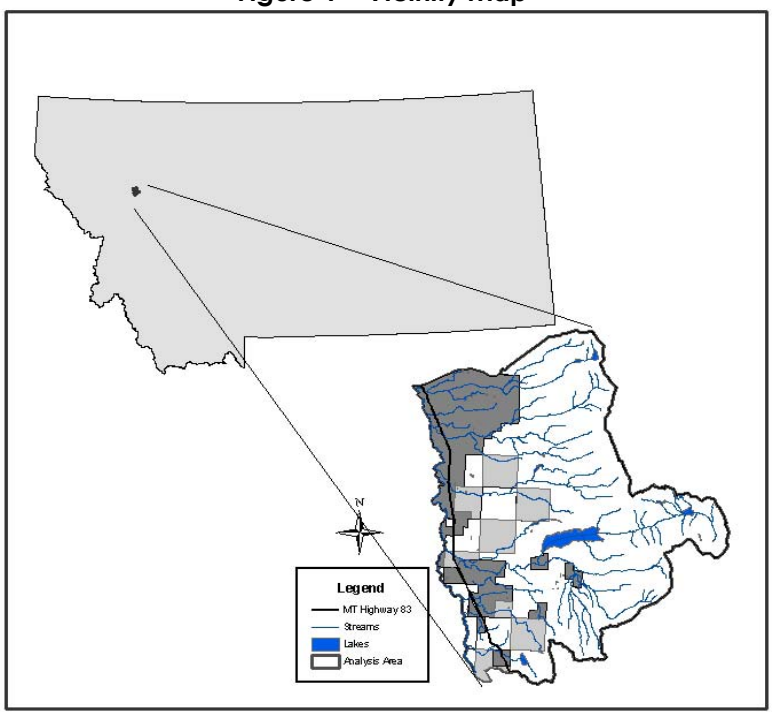
SUMMARY

This Decision Notice (DN) documents my decision and rationale to select Alternative 2 of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project Environmental Assessment (EA) for implementation.

I have decided to allow mechanized and non-mechanized vegetation treatment methods to reduce the hazardous fuel loading and improve forest health conditions on approximately 1,474 acres on National Forest System (NFS) lands. I have also decided to allow construction of approximately 3.8 miles of temporary road which would provide access to units; temporary roads would be reclaimed following the vegetation treatments. Best Management Practices (BMP) will be applied to approximately 22 miles of NFS roads. Activities associated with implementation of the fuel reduction treatments will yield approximately 3.5 million board feet (MMBF) of forest products. More specific detail about this decision is contained in the "Decision and Description of the Selected Alternative" section of this Decision Notice (DN).

Figure 1 – Vicinity Map



This project was conducted under the authorities defined in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, Section 101(2). It was subject to a Predecisional Administrative Review Process (referred to as the "objection process") pursuant to 36 CFR 218, subpart A. It was not subject to notice, comment, and appeal provisions pursuant to 36 CFR 215 (36 CFR 218.3). The objection process ended on September 20, 2005. Two objections were received.

My decision is based on the information contained in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project EA, the supporting information in the Project File, and on comments received from the public and other agencies through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping process, and comments received during the scoping period and 30-day objection period.

PROJECT AREA

The Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project area, located approximately 6 miles southeast of Condon, Montana (Figure 1 – Vicinity Map) in Missoula County, includes approximately 34,500 acres of mixed ownership lands, including 25,160 acres of NFS lands. The activities would occur in Township 20 North, Range 16 West, Sections 16, 20, 32, 34, 35, and 36; and in Township 19 North Range 16 West, Sections 1, 2, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 22, and 23.

The project area extends from the Swan Valley bottom (adjacent to Montana Highway 83) on the west, the Swan Range to the east, the Rumble Creek to the north, and the Clearwater Divide to the south. Treatment area elevations range from slightly under 3,000 feet to over 5,000 feet. Western white pine, Engelmann spruce, western larch, Douglas-fir, and lodgepole pine are the major tree species inhabiting the Project area.

The project area lies within the wildland urban interface, the highest priority area for hazardous fuels treatment in the National Fire Plan and is within the wildland urban interface delineated in the Seeley –Swan Fire Plan.

BACKGROUND

Following the 2000 fire season, Congress directed the Forest Service to identify high-risk wildland/urban interface areas, using the National Fire Plan Guidelines. In response to this guidance, an Interdisciplinary (ID) Team comprised of Forest Service natural resource specialists, in cooperation with members of the public, local fire departments, and other agencies, worked to identify areas in the wildland-urban interface that could benefit from fuel reduction and forest health projects. Condon, Montana, which is adjacent to the project area, was identified as a “community at risk” from wildland fire.

On August 22, 2002, President Bush established the Healthy Forests Initiative, directing the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, and the Council on Environmental Quality, to improve regulatory processes to ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency, and better results in reducing the risk of catastrophic wildland fires.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-148) contains a variety of provisions to expedite hazardous-fuel reduction and forest-

restoration projects on specific types of Federal land that are at risk of wildland fire or insect and disease epidemics. The Act helps rural communities, States, Tribes, and landowners restore healthy forest and rangeland conditions on State, Tribal, and private lands.

Information provided in the *Upper Swan Valley Assessment* (February 2004), which was prepared by Swan Ecosystem Center (Swan Valley Ecosystem Management & Learning Center, Inc.), contributed to the assessment and analysis of the existing condition and the need for fuels reduction management actions within the Project area.

In a cooperative approach, the Seeley Lake Rural Fire District, Swan Valley Volunteer Fire Department, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the United States Forest completed and published *Seeley-Swan Fire Plan* in March 2004. This plan is community based and provides a cooperative and coordinated fire plan for the Seeley Lake and Condon communities-at-risk to wildfires (Project File Exhibit H-20). The Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest is consistent with and would implement fuels reduction treatments recommended in this community fire plan.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The ID Team and I identified the following two purpose and need statements for taking action:

- Provide a safer environment for firefighters and the public by creating defensible space for initial attack fire suppression actions.
- Restore and maintain the health of forest vegetative communities (including native shrubs, forbs, and grasses) within the fuels reduction treatment areas.

The need for these actions is based upon present fuels and stand conditions in the project area, both on private and public land, and the ongoing residential use and development in the Holland Pierce Fuel Reduction and Forest Health Project area.

DECISION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Selected Alternative

As the Responsible Official for the Flathead National Forest, I have selected Alternative 2 of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project

EA for implementation (Refer to Figure 3, page 5). Appendix B of this Decision Notice provides a detailed description of design features associated with my decision to authorize implementation of Alternative 2.

Vegetation Treatments

Mechanized Treatments

As described below, mechanized and non-mechanized vegetation treatment methods will be used to reduce the hazardous fuel loading and improve forest health conditions on 1,367 acres and 107 acres of NFS lands, respectively. The mechanized treatments include the removal of approximately 3.5 MMBF of forest products.

Defensible Fuel Profile Zones (DFPZs)

This treatment will provide about 6.7 miles (253 acres) of DFPZs on NFS lands adjacent to private property boundaries. The DFPZs will consist of a strip approximately 100 to 500 feet wide, where surface ladder and aerial hazardous forest fuels loading (both live and dead) are reduced. The mature tree overstory (trees greater than 30 feet in height) would generally be thinned to a 20 to 40 percent crown closure.

Fuel Reduction Zones (FRZs)

This treatment will reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest health conditions on 1,114 acres of NFS lands within 21 treatment units adjacent to private property and/or immediately adjacent to the DFPZs.

Figure 2 – Proposed Fuel Reduction Treatments

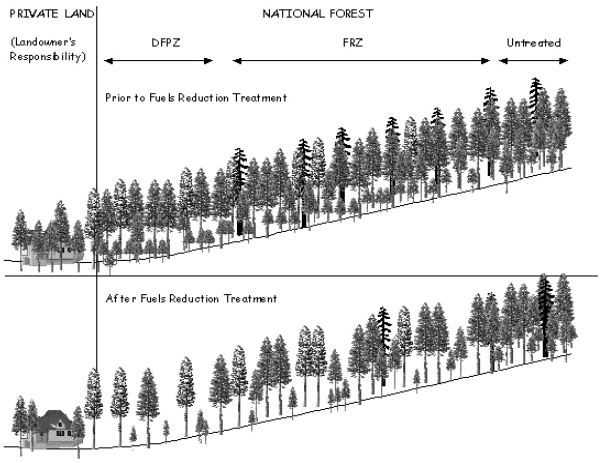
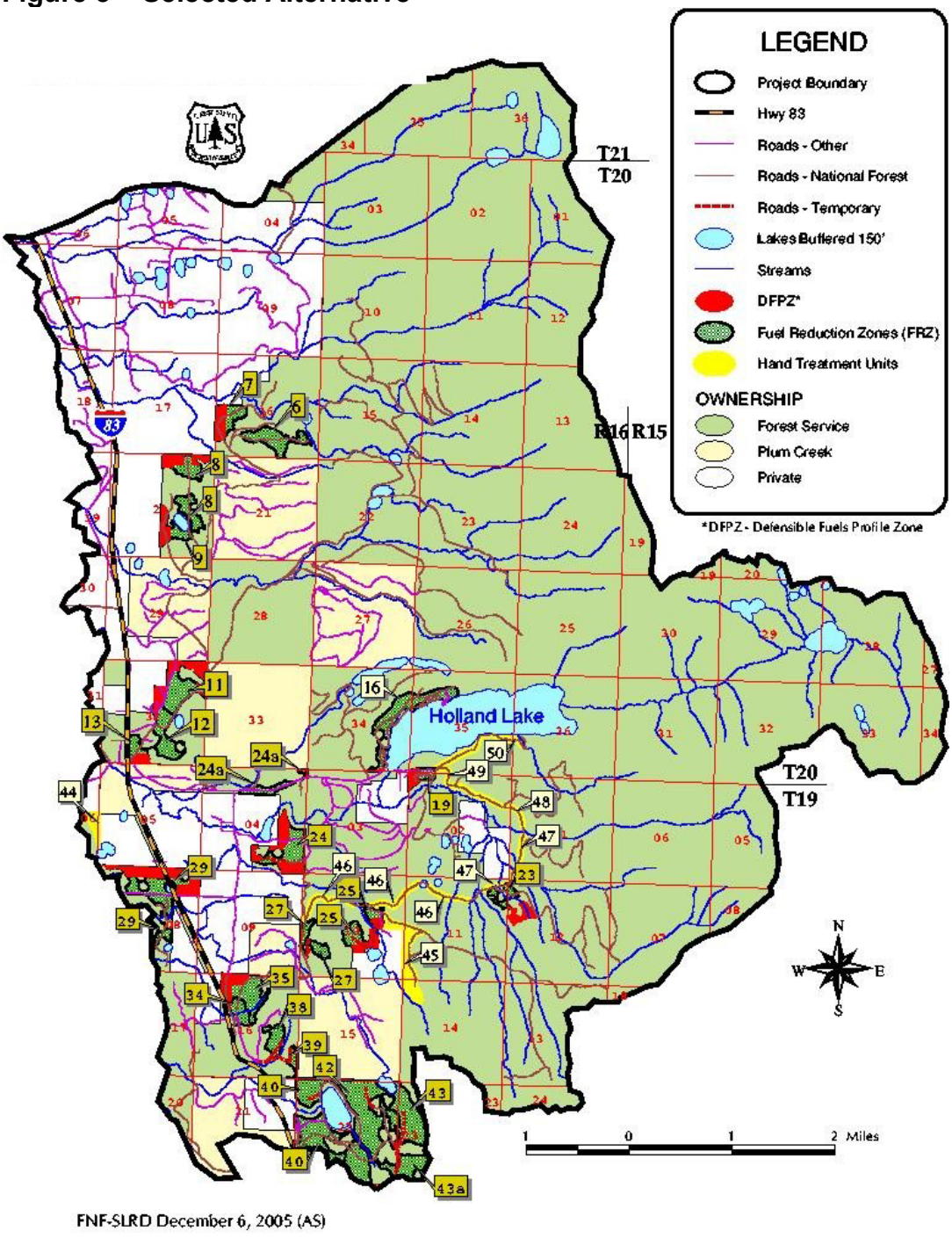


Figure 3 – Selected Alternative



Within the FRZs, the mature tree overstory (trees greater than 30 feet in height) would generally be thinned, on average, to a 40 to 60 percent crown closure. This is similar to the DFPZ treatment, except residual tree stocking is heavier in the FRZ, thus the higher crown closure percents. Post-treatment crown closure conditions in several of the proposed FRZs would be 30 to 50 percent when existing crown closures are below 60 percent because of blowdown or increasing mountain pine beetle populations.

The following table provides a summary of the mechanized vegetation treatments by treatment unit.

TABLE 1. HOLLAND PIERCE FUELS REDUCTION AND FOREST HEALTH PROJECT MECHANIZED TREATMENT MATRIX SUMMARY OF TREATMENT UNITS BY TREATMENT ACRES AND MANAGEMENT AREA (MA)

Unit Number	Treatment Acres			MA[2]	Treatment
	DFPZ	FRZ	Total		
6	--	52	52	13	"Modified low thinning," where the objective is to reduce hazardous fuels and tree crown density, while improvement residual tree health and growth across the treatment areas. This style of thinning removes trees primarily in the lower tree crown classes or position. That is, overtopped, intermediate, and some co-dominant trees would be removed. Most dominant and co-dominant trees would be reserved from cutting.
7	14	28	42	13	
8	25	52	77	9	
9	9	24	33	9	
11	25	62	87	9	
12	15	40	55	9	
13	32	0	32	9	
16	20	69	89	5	
19	21	--	21	15	
23	24	12	36	15	
24	30	58	88	15	
24A	--	25	25	5	
25	10	44	54	15	
27	--	27	27	15	
29	23	100	123	5	
34	5	30	35	5	
35	--	72	72	11C	
38	--	26	26	11C	
39	--	18	18	11C	
40	--	92	92	11C	
42	--	166	166	11C	
43	--	81	81	11C	
43A	--	36	36	11C	
TOTALS	253	1,114	1,367		

1. As discussed in the preceding description of the mechanized fuel treatments, the post-treatment objectives are to achieve, on average, canopy crown closures between 20 to 40 percent within the DFPZs and 40 to 60 percent within the FRZs. It is important to note that the existing (pre-treatment) canopy closure conditions within the proposed treatment are not uniform. For example, within small natural open areas, the existing canopy closure may be 0 percent; and, in contrast, there are areas where the existing canopy closure is at 100 percent. The findings from field observations show that on average, the existing canopy closure within the proposed treatments units ranges from 50 to 70 percent. More detail on the unit specific conditions and prescriptions can be found in the vegetation analysis (Project File Exhibit G-12).

2. Table 1 in the EA provides a summary of Forest Plan MA direction.

3. The proposed action analyzes potential fuel treatments within 569 acres within white-tailed deer winter range habitat (MA 9). To comply with Forest Plan direction for the management of white-tailed deer, the implementation of the Proposed Action would not include more than 284 acres of treatment within the areas analyzed for treatment within MA 9. More rationale for this reduction of treatment within MA 9 is contained in the wildlife analysis (Project File Exhibit G-6). Total acres shown reflect the acres to be treated, within the larger pool of acres analyzed within MA 9.

Non-Mechanized Treatments

The non-mechanized vegetation treatments include hand and/or mechanical treatments within approximately 107 acres of NFS lands. The intent of this treatment includes: 1) the reduction of hazardous fuel loading on NFS lands adjacent to private property within non-commercial size timber stands, and 2) the reduction of hazardous fuel loading immediately adjacent NFS roads which provide egress routes should a wildfire occur. The following table provides a summary of the mechanized vegetation treatments by treatment unit.

TABLE 2. HOLLAND PIERCE FUELS REDUCTION AND FOREST HEALTH PROJECT NON-MECHANIZED VEGETATION TREATMENTS
SUMMARY OF TREATMENT UNITS BY TREATMENT ACRES AND MANAGEMENT AREA (MA)

Unit Number	Treatment Acres	Treatment Description
44	**8**	Hand piling and burning and removal of 5-inch understory – within Section 6
45	**47**	Hand piling and burning and removal of 5-inch understory – within Sections 10, 11, 14
46	**20**	Hand/mechanical piling and burning and/or removal of vegetation within specified "right-of-way" widths along FDR #9558 – to provide egress route (Sections 10, 11)
47	**14**	Hand/mechanical piling and burning and/or removal of vegetation within specified "right-of-way" widths along FDR #9558 – to provide egress route (Sections 11, 12, 1)
48	**4**	Hand/mechanical piling and burning and/or removal of vegetation within specified "right-of-way" widths along FDR #9558 – to provide egress route (Sections 1, 2)
49	**2**	Hand/mechanical piling and burning and/or removal of vegetation within specified "right-of-way" widths along FDR #9558 – to provide egress route (Sections 2, 35)
50	**12**	Hand/mechanical piling and burning and/or removal of vegetation within specified "right-of-way" widths along FDR #44a – to provide egress route (Sections 35, 36)
Total	**107**	

Access Management Actions

Temporary Road Construction

My decision allows the construction of approximately 3.8 miles of temporary road access needed to access treatment units. Of these, 1.1 miles will be new temporary road construction, and 2.7 miles will require opening old, brushed-in road templates. Temporary roads will be reclaimed after the vegetation treatments have been completed.

Specified Road

My decision does not include the construction of specified roads. BMPs will occur on 22 miles of specified road used for haul of commercial products (Project File Exhibit H-17). .

Project Design Features

Appendix B of this Decision Notice provides a complete listing of restoration / protection measures and monitoring activities associated with my decision to authorize the implementation of Alternative 2.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The development of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project has been consistent with the collaborative approach recommended in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (Project File Exhibit H-19).

The public and other agencies, including the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Swan Valley Volunteer Fire Department, have had numerous opportunities to participate in the development of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project.

The following is a summary of the collaborative approach used to develop the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project (Project File Sections B, C, D, E, and F).

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH USED TO DEVELOP THE HOLLAND PIERCE FUELS REDUCTION AND FOREST HEALTH PROJECT

Date	Event	Objective
04/01/05	Project listed in the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions	Invitation to the public and other agencies to comment on and/or participate in the development of the project.
06/05/05	Mailing to interested parties (project mailing list)	Invitation to the public to participate in the scheduled public open house and field trip.
06/14/05	News Release	Invitation to the public to participate in the scheduled public open house and field trips.
06/15/05	Mailing to recreation residence owners within the project area	Inform and invite the public to participate in the development of the project.
06/21/05	Open House	Public meeting – to share information and encourage participation in the project development.
06/22/05	Field Trip	Field trip within the project area – to share information and encourage participation in the project development.
06/30/05	Project listed in the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions	Invitation to the pubic and other agencies to comment on and/or participate in the development of the project.
07/12/05	Public Meeting	Public meeting – to discuss the proposed management actions and the findings of the NEPA analysis.
08/19/05	Mailing of the EA and "notice of pre-decisional review process" to interested parties (mailing list)	Provide interested parties a copy of the EA and notification of the start of the pre-decisional review (objection process)
08/21/05	Legal advertisement in the newspaper of record	Notify the public of the start of the pre-decisional review (objection process)
05/05 to 08/05	Forest Service representative conducting one-on-one meetings and field trips with private land owners and recreation residence owners	Visit with local land owners within the project area to share information on the proposed project and encourage public collaboration in the development of the project.

ISSUES

The ID Team and I thoroughly reviewed comments and concerns received on the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project.

Appendix C of the EA provides a listing of the issues identified during the scoping process and describes how those issues were accounted for during the analysis process. In addition, Appendix C to this DN provides a detailed description of the issues identified during the objection process and describes how those issues were accounted for in making my decision. A summary of public comment used in the alternative development process and those that contributed to project design features are listed below.

Public Input that Drove Consideration of Alternatives

During the review of the public comments received on the proposed action, the ID Team considered public input to examine the following three alternative treatments to the Proposed Action.

- Limit treatment to a 40-meter zone along interface areas and/or limit treatment to less than 400 meters from structures.
- Use prescribed fire in lieu of mechanical treatment.
- Use restoration practices that do not require heavy machinery and commercial logging.

As discussed in the EA (pages 10-11) and later in this DN (pages 15-16), these alternatives were considered to respond to public input, but were not considered in detail for the reasons stated in the EA.

Issue or Concerns that Contributed to the Development of Project Design Features

The comments received on the Proposed Action have contributed to the development of several design features (protection / restoration measures and monitoring activities) that are associated with my decision to authorize the implementation of Alternative 2 of Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project. A full listing of design features, with more detail about each, is provided in Appendix B of this Decision Notice.

- Concerns about the protection of grizzly bear spring habitat security contributed to the development of project design features related to timing of harvest. The guidelines contained in the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (Project File Exhibit H-27) were used to help develop these design features, which includes not allowing the vegetative treatments to be conducted during April 1 through June 15 timeframe to avoid potential disturbance of grizzly bear in important spring habitat (DN, Appendix B, page 17).
- Concerns that the proposed fuels reduction and forest health vegetation treatments would not retain wildlife screening cover adjacent to open NFS roads contributed to the clarification of vegetative treatment methods in this regard. The guidelines contained in the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (Project File Exhibit H-27) were used to help develop these design features, which include emphasis on retaining visual screening adjacent to open roads. The project wildlife biologist and silviculturist have jointly developed treatment prescriptions that will retain screening cover within treatments units that are adjacent to open NFS roads. These prescriptions include retaining 40 to 60

percent crown closure within the dominant and co-dominant tree stand structure and selected retention of the existing seedling and sapling size stand structure, which would leave adequate screening cover for wildlife security (Project File Exhibit G-12 - Silviculturist's Report and DN, Appendix B, pages B-5 to B-13).

- Concerns that heavy equipment use associated with the proposal would accelerate soil erosion, increase soil compaction, and degrade soil productivity contributed to the development of several design features to protect the soil resource. These design features include timing and operations restrictions, the reclamation of temporary roads, skid trails and landings, as well as other features to protect the soil resource (DN, Appendix B, pages B-2 to B-3).

- Concerns that building roads, even temporary ones across the wet areas and streams will have significant effects on the watershed contributed to the development of design features to protect the water resource. These design features include: avoiding wet areas during temporary road location, timing and operations restrictions and reclamation of temporary roads (DN, Appendix B, pages B-4 to B-5).

- Concerns that the project would result in the introduction and/or spread of noxious weeds have contributed to the development of design features to minimize this concern, which include the spraying of weeds along up to 30 miles of designated NFS roads within the project area, the application of a seed mix on disturbed sites such as skid trails and landings, and the requirement for equipment to be steam cleaned before transport to the project area (DN, Appendix B, pages B-14 to B-15).

- Concerns that the project would 'open-up the forest,' which could result in increased off road ATV and snowmobile use have contributed to design features related to temporary roads and monitoring. These features include: 1) the reclamation of temporary roads (DN, Appendix B, page B-3), and 2) monitoring within the project area for illegal ORV use during project implementation by the sale administrator and inspectors, and post treatment monitoring of ORV use for a two-year period during the May through November timeframe. In addition, a Forest Service wildlife biologist/technician will monitor for increased ORV and snowmobile use for a two-year period after the completion of the project (DN, Appendix B, page B-16).

- Concerns that the proposed action would reduce white-tailed deer winter range have contributed to the design of the project. As stated in the EA (Appendix B, page B-9), to comply with Forest Plan direction for the management of white-tailed winter habitat (MA 9), the implementation of the selected action would not include more than 50 percent (284 acres) of the 569 acres of MA 9 included in the analysis of the proposed action.

The following table provides a summary of the units and acres proposed for treatment in MA 9 and the units and acres of MA 9 included in my decision for implementation.

TABLE 4. SUMMARY OF THE MA-9 UNITS/ACRES PROPOSED FOR TREATMENT AND UNITS/ACRES SELECTED FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

Unit Number	MA 9 Acres	
	Included in the Proposed Action	Included in the Decision
8	150	77
9	70	33
11	163	87
12	55	55
13	99	32
17	32	0
Totals	569	284

Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement Guidelines

In response to comments received during the objection process, a detailed discussion of the requirements in the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (SVGBCA) is included below.

Through the SVGBCA, four-parties agree about the management of intermingled lands in the Swan Valley. The intent is to agree to land management practices in the Swan Valley that will be protective of grizzly bears in the checkerboard land pattern existing in this area. The agreement was made between Plum Creek Timber Company, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, USDA Forest Service (land managers), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). All parties have signed the Agreement. The guidelines included in the Agreement satisfy Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA)(Project File Exhibit H-27).

The USFWS has concluded that the guidelines contained in the SVGBCA constitute the reasonable and prudent measures referenced in Section 7(b)(4)(IV) of the ESA (Project File Exhibit H-27). Projects complying with the guidelines contained in the Agreement meet the standards of the Flathead Forest Plan and the ESA for the protection of grizzly bears in this regard. The Forest Service has consulted with the USFWS about the specifics of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project;

the USFWS concurred that the project "may effect – not likely to adversely affect" the grizzly bear (Project File Exhibit E-4).

The Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project area lies within the Big Salmon Bear Management Unit (BMU), Buck Holland Subunit. Implementation of this project is planned for a 3-year period, beginning in 2006. The Buck Holland Subunit is in "active" status from 2006 to 2008, as designated in the SVGBCA. Commercial use, defined as major forest management activities (e.g., road construction, timber harvest) may be conducted in "active" subunits with few limitations. Fuel reduction activities will occur in the summer, fall, or winter, and during the spring period (April 1 to June 15) **outside** of spring habitat. The SVGBCA defines spring habitat in the SVGBCA as

"all areas within Linkage Zones that are below 5,200 feet elevation."

There would be no logging activity in spring habitat from April 1 through June 15. The mechanized units lying in spring habitat are units, 23, 25, 27, 29, 30, 33-40, 42, 43a, and 43. The non-mechanized (hand) units in spring habitat are units 44, 45, 46, and 47a. There would be no mechanized or non-mechanized fuel reduction treatments in these units during the important spring grizzly bear period (April 1 through June 15) (Project File Exhibit G-1).

Hiding cover along open roads will be minimally affected by the activities associated with the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project, and the effects to the grizzly bear and other wildlife species will be low. In the FRZ, 40 to 60 percent cover will be retained. This amount of cover will provide adequate screening for wildlife. The highest potential for loss of hiding cover will be in the DFPZ. In these areas, the overstory would be reduced to 20 to 40 percent cover. The project wildlife biologist and silviculturist have jointly developed treatment prescriptions, which will retain screening cover within treatment units adjacent to open NFS roads. These prescriptions include retaining 40 to 60 percent crown closure within the dominant and codominant tree stand structure and selected retention of the existing seedling and sapling size stand structure, which would leave adequate screening cover for wildlife security (Project File Exhibit G-12 and DN, Appendix B, pages B-6 to B-9)

In addition, the contract for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project will include a clause for the temporary suspension or cessation of activities, if needed, to resolve any grizzly bear/human conflict (DN, Appendix B, pages B-16 to B-17).

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives were developed in response to issues identified during scoping, either from within the agency or from the public. According to Section 104(d)(2) of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (Project File Exhibit H-6), this EA is not required to study, develop, or describe any alternative to the proposed action.

This section describes and compares the alternatives considered by the Forest Service for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project. It includes a description of each alternative considered in detail, alternatives considered but not in detail, and a comparison of the relevant environmental effects of these alternatives.

Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

Based upon comments received, the ID Team and I considered three action alternatives to the proposed action, which were not considered in detail. Following is a brief description of those alternatives, along with why they were not considered in detail:

Limit Treatment to a 40-Meter Zone along Interface Areas and/or Limit Treatment to Less Than 400 Meters from Structures

Public comments on the proposed action included a suggestion that any treatment should be limited to 40 meters from structures. This recommendation was based upon research by Jack Cohen. It was also suggested that the ID Team adopt the concepts of Community Protection Zone and Home Ignition Zones (Nowicki, 2003), where fuels reduction treatments would extend less than 400 meters from structures.

The ID Team recommended, and I concurred, that this alternative did not meet the purpose and need for action since:

- An alternative treating only near individual home sites on a limited basis does not fully meet the intent of breaking up fuel continuity generally within the project area to allow firefighters to more safely, tactically, and strategically address a fire in the interface area. Such an alternative would limit the ability of fire fighting efforts to more effectively and safely fight a fire in the area as a whole.
- Such an alternative would leave significant areas of fuel buildup and dense canopies with ladder fuels within the wildland urban interface area. As described above, leaving such stand conditions untreated would limit options that firefighters would have for safely stopping a moving fire within the interface area, and would leave many areas where crown fire potential could have been reduced within the urban interface

untreated. Bypassing the opportunity to treat such areas would not be consistent with the purpose of the project.

- Research has determined that treatments intended to reduce fuels around communities at risk, rather than individual structures, need to go beyond the home ignition zone (Graham, 2004). While individual home-by-home treatments can help reduce the risk of loss of individual homes, relying solely on such treatments would forego strategic opportunities for controlling fires within this wildland urban interface area.

- Such an alternative does not address the need to improve forest health within the interface area being treated.

- Limiting treatments to a smaller area immediately adjacent to homes or structures would only allow for a small subset of the interface area identified in the *Seeley Swan Fire Plan* to be treated in the project area. In addition, it would not meet the broader purpose of the proposal in treating fuels in the wildland urban interface area.

Prescribed fire in lieu of mechanical treatment

Another comment suggested that prescribed fire be used in lieu of mechanical treatment. However, because of the volume of ground and ladder fuels, I decided the risk associated with using prescribed fire to reduce the buildup presented an unacceptable risk to surrounding properties.

Use restoration practices that do not require heavy machinery and commercial logging

The ID Team and I considered a suggestion for an alternative that would accomplish the fuel reduction treatments without the use of logging machinery. Activities under this alternative would include hand slashing and burning activities and avoid disturbances that some people associate with logging, such as soil compaction and the spread of spotted knapweed.

This alternative was not considered in detail because:

- The existing stand conditions require the removal of material and related heavy equipment use on many sites within the project area to meet the project's purpose and need. A significant portion of the material that needs to be removed to achieve the project objectives is large enough that it would not be practical or economically feasible to do this work by hand.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would result in no management activities on NFS lands within the project area at this time.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action (Selected Action)

The proposed action is described in detail in the EA and displayed in Figure 2 (EA, page 5, DN page 5). Appendix B of the DN describes the design features associated with Alternative 2, the Selected Action.

Comparison of the Alternatives

The following table provides a comparison of the relevant environmental consequences associated with the implementation of the alternatives. A more detailed description of the environmental effects can be found in the EA beginning on page 19 and in the Project File, Sections F and G.

TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF RELEVANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS BY ALTERNATIVE

NATURAL RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCE	ALT. 1 (NO ACTION)	ALT. 2 (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)
Forest Fuels Management		
Direct Effects within DFPZs (treatment unit averages):		
Coarse down woody material (> 3 inches)	27 to 100 tons/acre	5 tons/acre
Small down woody material (< 3 inches)	13 to 27 tons/acre	3 tons/acre
Canopy closure	30 to 90%	20 to 40%
Crown bulk density	0.013 lb/cu. ft.	0.006 lb/cu. ft.
Indirect Effects on Proposed Fire Behavior as a Result of Treatments within the DFPZs:		
Rate of spread	Medium	Medium
Fire intensity	High	Low
Torching/crowning	High	Low
Resistance to Control (containment/suppression)	High	Low
Direct Effects within FRZs (treatment unit averages):		
Coarse down woody material (> 3 inches)	29 to 100 tons/acre	10 tons/acre
Small down woody material (< 3 inches)	15 to 27 tons/acre	5 tons/acre
Canopy closure	30 to 90%	40 to 60%
Crown bulk density	0.013 lb/cu. ft.	0.007 lb/cu. ft.
Indirect Effects on Potential Fire Behavior as a Result of Treatment with FRZs:		
Rate of spread	Medium	Low
Fire intensity	High	Medium
Torching/crowning	High	Medium
Resistance to control (containment/suppression)	High	Medium

TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF RELEVANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS BY ALTERNATIVE		
NATURAL RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCE	**ALT. 1 (NO ACTION)**	**ALT. 2 (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)**
Soils (Areas occupied by roads, landings, and ski trails - areas with reduced soil productivity)		
Meets Regional Soil Quality Guidelines	Yes	Yes
Hydrology		
Sediment increases	0	1%
Increased water yield	0	1%
Fisheries T&E and Sensitive Species		
Bull Trout & T&E species biological assessment determination	No Effect	Not Likely to Adversely Affect
Cutthroat - Sensitive species biological evaluation	No Impact	May impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely result in a trend towards federal listing or reduced viability for the population or species
Vegetation – T&E & Sensitive Plants		
Threatened Plants – water howellia – biological assessment determination	No Effect	Not Likely to Adversely Affect
Threatened Plants –Spalding's catchfly – biological assessment determination	No Effect	No Effect
Sensitive Plants – Biological assessment evaluation	No Impact	May affect individuals, but is not likely to result in a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability
Vegetation – Invasive Plants		
Weed abatement along NFS roads	0	Up to 30 miles
Temporary road construction	0	3.8 miles
Potential risk for spread and/or introduction within the project area	Low/Moderate	Moderate
Vegetation – Forest Vegetation		
Vegetation openings larger than 40 acres	Not applicable	
Short-term (up to 20 years) improvement in forest health, resilience and sustainability … effects of thinning/fuels reduction would diminish after 20 years	None	High 1,367 acres (mechanical) Low to Moderate 107 acres (hand)
Risk of severe insect infestations and disease infections within stands proposed for treatment (short-term – less than 20 years)	Moderate to High	Low to Moderate – 1367 acres Moderate – 107 acres
Risk of severe insect infestations and disease infections within stands proposed for treatment (long-term – greater than 20 years)	High to Severe	Moderate – 1367 acres Moderate to High – 107 acres
Probability of a high severity fire occurring with treated stands	High	Moderate (mechanical) Moderate to High (hand)
Fire hazard along private land boundaries treated	High	Low to Moderate

TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF RELEVANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS BY ALTERNATIVE		
NATURAL RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCE	**ALT. 1 (NO ACTION)**	**ALT. 2 (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)**
Miles of DFPZ treated to reduce fuels hazard	0	6.7
Miles total private land boundaries treated	0	11.8
Wildlife – Threatened & Endangered (Biological Evaluation Determination)		
Grizzly bear	No Effect	May effect - not likely to adversely affect
Gray wolf	No Effect	May effect - not likely to adversely affect
Bald eagle	No Effect	May effect - not likely to adversely affect
Canada lynx	No Effect	May effect - not likely to adversely affect
Wildlife – Sensitive (Biological Assessment Determinations)		
Black-backed woodpecker	No Impact	May impact individuals
Common loon	No Impact	May impact individuals
Fisher	No Impact	May impact Individuals
Flammulated Owl	No Impact	May impact individuals
Harlequin duck	No Impact	No Impact
Northern Bog Lemming	No Impact	No Impact
Northern leopard frog	No Impact	No Impact
Northern goshawk	No Impact	May impact Individuals
Peregrine falcon	No Impact	No Impact
Western big-eared bat	No Impact	May impact Individuals
Western toad	No Impact	May impact Individuals
Wolverine	No Impact	May impact individuals
Wildlife - Old Growth Associated Species		
Acres of old growth forest treated	0	0
Wildlife – White-tailed Deer Habitat		
Meets Forest Plan direction for winter habitat	Yes	Yes
Acres of winter range habitat treated	0	Up to 284 acres
Wildlife - Elk and Mule Deer Habitat		
Acres of winter range habitat treated	0	0
Impact on elk security habitat	None	None
Recreation		
Visual Resource – meets Forest Plan VQOs	Yes	Yes
Impacts or restricts existing recreation opportunities	No	No
Heritage Resources		
Number of sites affected	0	0
Social and Economic		
Direct employment	None	28 job years
Total jobs (direct and indirect/induced)	None	65 job years
Products		
Sawlogs	None	3.5 MMBF *(estimate)*

RATIONALE FOR MY DECISION

Decision Criteria

My decision is based on the following criteria:

- How well the alternatives respond to the proposal's purpose and need statements of:
    - Providing a safer environment for firefighters and the public by creating defensible space for initial attack fire suppression actions, and
    - Restoring and maintaining the health of forest vegetative communities (including native shrubs, forbs, and grasses) within the fuels reduction treatment areas.
- How the alternatives meet the goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan, HFRA, and Seeley Swan Fire Plan.

In addition to the decision criteria listed above, I have taken into account the environmental and social consequences of the selecting Alternative 2 [as summarized in this DN (Table 5, pages 17 to 19)].

Considerations

Before reaching my decision to select Alternative 2 for implementation, I considered the following factors:

- The findings presented in the EA and its appendices, as well as the appendices to this Decision Notice and Project File materials;
- The proposal's purpose and need;
- Public comments received during the analysis and objection period, as well as identified issues;
- The environmental and social effects of the two alternatives; and
- Consistency with the Flathead Forest Plan, the National Fire Plan, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, the Seeley-Swan Fire Plan, and other laws, regulations, and policies. I have determined that both alternatives are consistent with Forest Plan direction, and therefore I did not include consistency or responsiveness to the Forest Plan as decision criteria for making my decision.
- I have considered the cumulative effects of past, present, and

reasonably foreseeable actions on NFS and private lands in making my decision, including the Holland Pierce Prescribed Fire Project (Project File Exhibit F-1). The EA (pages 15 – 19) documents the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. Project File Section G, contains cumulative effects worksheets for each resource.

- In weighing the environmental effects of my decision, I considered the existing condition of forest vegetation, in terms of forest health and fuels, the proximity of residences, other structures, and facilities, the potential for catastrophic wildfire, and the effects of management actions or lack of management actions on the area's natural resources.

- In reviewing the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project – *Effects at Forest and Regional Scales: Compatibility with NFMA Requirements for Maintaining Species Viability* (Project File Exhibit H-23), biological assessments and biological evaluations for threatened, endangered, and sensitive wildlife, fish, and plant species (Project File Exhibits G-1, G-4, G-8, G-9, G-13, G-16), I have determined that my decision complies with Agency direction that wildlife, fish, and plant habitat would be managed to maintain viable populations of existing native species distributed across the planning area (DN, Appendix A – Finding of No Significant Impact).

- When comparing the alternatives relative to soil, I find that the disturbance anticipated from management activities associated with implementing Alternative 2 meet Region One Soil Quality Standards. Although Alternative 1 would not impact soils, Alternative 2 does not exceed standards designed to protect forest soils during management activities (EA, page 18, Project File Exhibit G-2). Design criteria have been developed to ensure that all activities meet the Region One Soil Quality Standards (EA, Appendix B).

- My review of the EA and Project File reveals extremely limited impacts to the water resources (measured by changes in water yield, sediment, and nutrients) are anticipated under any of the alternatives (EA, page 21, Project File Exhibit G-3). Baseline conditions, alternative design features that minimize the impacts on the water resource, and evaluation of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions, do not indicate that implementing Alternative 2 would have a measurable cumulative effect on water quality in streams in the analysis area, Swan River, or Swan Lake.

- After review of the effects analysis (EA, pages 26-29), the wildlife biological assessments and evaluations (Project File Exhibits G-1 and G-4), and Effects at Forest and Regional Scales: Compatibility with NFMA Requirements for Maintaining Species Viability (Project File Exhibit H-23), I have determined the implementation of either alternative is not

likely to adversely affect populations of threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with these findings and the concurrence letters are included in the Project File (Exhibits E-3 and E-4)

- After reviewing the effects analysis (EA, page 30) and Project File Exhibit G-5, I have concluded that the implementation of either alternative would not adversely impact wildlife species associated with old growth habitat. Alternative 2 does not included treatments within old growth forest.

- In my review of the effects analysis and biological assessments and biological evaluations for the fish species, I have determined that the potential impact from the implementation of the alternatives on the fisheries resource is not significant (EA pages 22-23; Project File Exhibits G-7, G-8, and G-9). The US Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with these findings and the concurrence letter is included in the Project File (Exhibit E-3).

- Through my review of the effects analysis and biological assessments and biological evaluations for sensitive plant species, I have determined that the potential impact from the implementation of the alternatives on the threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants is not significant (EA, pages 34-36; Project File Exhibits G-13 and G-16).

- Relative to social affects, such as jobs and income, Alternative 2 would provide income associated with harvest and road building activities. Alternative 1 produces none in the short term. In this regard, Alternative 2 is superior to Alternative 1 in producing jobs and income to the community (EA pages 42-43; Project File Exhibit G-23).

- Relative to the social effect of reducing the potential risk of loss of homes, private property or other infrastructure to wildfire; I find that Alternative 2 is superior to Alternative 1 in reducing fuels that contribute to this risk. In addition, Alternative 2 would help create conditions where fire suppression could, in a broader variety of conditions, be more effective (both strategically on the landscape, and tactically near homes and other infrastructure) in reducing loss due to wildfire spread (DN, Table 5; EA, Table 2).

- Table 5 (DN, pages 17 to 19) shows a comparison of many other environmental effects by alternative. In reviewing this information, I conclude that both alternatives would adequately protect important natural resources within the project area.

Comparison of Alternatives

In comparing the alternatives, I considered how each alternative responds to my decision criterion (meeting the purpose and need of the project and meeting the goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan, HFRA, and the Seeley Swan Fire Plan). In making my decision, I considered how well each alternative meets the decision criterion, both immediately after project implementation and over the long-term. My time reference for short-term effects/benefits is from project implementation to 7 years after project implementation; this is the time period considered in the cumulative effects analysis for watershed health in the EA; the time for long-term effects is 7 years and beyond.

Meeting the Purpose and Need of the Proposal

Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative)

Under this alternative, no fuel reduction activities would occur at the current time. The existing fuel buildup would continue to present a threat to firefighter and public safety should a wildland fire occur within the project area. The natural fuel loads in the area would continue to increase. The continued buildup of fuel, especially in the 100- and 1,000-hour fuel size classes would increase the potential for stand replacing fires. There would be an increased likelihood of a crowning wildland fire of a size and intensity that would threaten the interface area.

Stand conditions within the proposed treatment areas would remain densely stocked, multi-storied, and with interlocked crown canopies. Trees and other plants would remain stressed due to competition for limited site resources, such as moisture, nutrients, and sunlight needed to carry out photosynthesis. Forest vegetation would become increasingly more unstable as the forests age, multi-storied/ladder fuel stand conditions increase. Endemic populations of insect and disease would increase.

The purpose and need would not be met with the implementation of this alternative.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

This alternative would implementation fuels reduction and forest health treatments within 1,474 acres of NFS lands within the urban/wildland interface area. Under this alternative, thinning of densely stocked stands, reduction of multi-stored structures, and reduction of hazardous surface fuels accumulative will improve the long-term health, resiliency and sustainability of the treated stands.

Following treatment, the stands will remain fully stocked with mature trees, not overstocked with a multi-storied stand structure, and would be more able to take full advantage of the growth carrying capacity of the sites treated. Treatment of these areas will reduce the hazard of insect infestations or disease infections originating in them, from elevating to epidemic proportions, and spreading to adjacent stands.

The implementation of this alternative would reduce the current hazardous fuel ground loading and open up the tree canopy, resulting in a reduction of aerial fuels and crown bulk density within the treated areas. The treatments will reduce the intensity, torching, crowning, and resistance to fire containment/suppression of a potential wildland fire within the treated areas. This would result in safer conditions for firefighters and the public should a wildland fire occur.

As summarized in the following table, Alternative 2 is responsive the purpose and need statements for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project.

TABLE 6. HOW THE ALTERNATIVES MEET THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL

DECISION CRITERIA		ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE 2 (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)
PURPOSE AND NEED			
Provide a safer environment for firefighters and the public by creating defensible space for initial attack fire suppression actions		Fuels reduction treatments are not implemented	Reduce fuel loading along 6.7 miles of urban/wildland interface. Within the project area, vegetation treatments reduce the existing fuel loading in 1.474 acres of NFS lands within the wildland/urban interface area
Effects on potential fire behavior			
Within DFPZs	Rate of spread	Medium	Medium
	Fire Intensity	High	Low
	Torching/Crowning	High	Low
	Resistance to Control	High	Low
	Acres Treated	0	296
Within FRZs	Rate of spread	Medium	Low
	Fire Intensity	High	Medium
	Torching/Crowning	High	Medium
	Resistance to Control	High	Medium
	Acres Treated	0	1,071

TABLE 6. HOW THE ALTERNATIVES MEET THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL		
DECISION CRITERIA	**ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION)**	**ALTERNATIVE 2 (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)**
Restore and maintain the health of forest vegetative communities within the fuel reduction treatment areas.	Forest health treatments are not implemented. Forest vegetation would become increasingly more unstable as the forests age, multi-stored/ladder fuel stand conditions increase. Endemic populations of insect and disease would increase.	Vegetative treatments to maintain and improve forest health conditions within 1,474 acres of NFS lands would be implemented. Treatments would result in improved forest health, resiliency and sustainability of the treated stands.

Meeting the Goals and Objectives of the National Fire Plan, HFRA, and the Seeley Swan Fire Plan

Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative)

The no action alternative is not responsive to the goals and objectives of national and local initiatives to reduce hazardous fuels within the urban/wildland interface area within the project area. The short-term effect of this alternative would maintain existing fuel buildup within the urban/wildland interface areas and the threat of a wildfire event on NFS land moving onto private property. In the long-term, forest fuels would continue to build up and forest canopies within the proposed treatment areas would continue to become denser and more closed in, and ladder fuels would continue to accumulate. The risk of large mixed severity and stand replacing fire would increase as long as these stand conditions continued. Fire suppression would become more difficult and costly as conditions worsen with time. This would increase the likelihood of a crowning wildfire event of significant magnitude and intensity.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

This alternative is responsive to the National Forest Plan and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. The fuel reduction treatments would modify "potential fire behavior" within the treated areas by reducing the fire's rate of spread through the canopy, intensity, torching, crowning, resulting in a lower probability that a fire could escape from the treated areas and burn onto adjoining private lands. The proposed treatments are designed to allow wildland fire suppression forces a higher probability of successfully containing and suppressing a wildland fire.

The alternative is consistent with and contributes to the implementation of the Seeley-Swan Fire Plan by providing a strategy for hazardous fuel reduction and the protection of life and private property from a potential wildland fire.

After the 2000 fire season, the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior developed an interagency approach to respond to wildland fires, reduce their impacts on rural communities, and assure sufficient firefighting capacity in the futures. Hazardous fuels reduction is one of the key points of this interagency approach outlined in the National Forest Plan and in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. These national initiatives emphasize management in overly dense forest vegetation resulting from decades of fire exclusion, particularly within urban/wildland interface areas. The fuel reduction treatments included in this alternative address these resource concerns very clearly. The fuel reduction treatments would contribute to both national and local (Seeley-Swan Fire Plan) objectives of reducing the number of small fires that become large, reducing the threat to people and property from catastrophic wildland fire, and increase firefighter safety.

As summarized in the following table, Alternative 2 (the selected alternative) is responsive to goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan, HFRA, and the Seeley Swan Fire Plan.

TABLE 7. HOW THE ALTERNATIVES RESPOND TO THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL FIRE PLAN, THE SEELEY SWAN FIRE PLAN, AND THE HEALTHY FORETS RESTORATION ACT

DECISION CRITERIA	ALTERNATIVE 1 *(No Action)*	ALTERNATIVE 2 *(Selected Alternative)*
National Fire Plan Objectives: ▪ Increase firefighter safety; ▪ Reduce the number of small fires that become large; and ▪ Reduce the threat to life and property from catastrophic wildfire.	Fuels reduction treatments are not implemented. This alternative is not responsive to the National Fire Plan objectives.	The selected alternative is responsive to the National Fire Plan objectives. This alternative will result in the reduction of existing hazardous fuel loading along 6.7 miles of urban/wildland interface. Within the project area, the vegetative treatments will reduce the existing fuel loading within 1,474 acres of NFS lands within the wildland/urban interface area.
Seeley-Swan Fire Plan Mitigation Goal:	Fuels reduction treatments are not implemented. This alternative is not responsive to the Seeley-Swan Fire Plan fuels reduction treatment.	The selected alternative is responsive to and contributes to the implementation of the Seeley-Swan Fire Plan. The fuel reduction treatments would accomplish approximately 10 percent (1,474 acres) of the 15,427 acres of NFS lands on the Flathead National Forest recommended for fuels reduction treatment in the Seeley-Swan Fire Plan.
Healthy Forests Restoration Act (Title I)	Fuels reduction treatments are not implemented. This alternative is not responsive to the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.	The selected alternative is responsive to the direction provided in Title I of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. The implementation of the selected alternative would result in the reduction of hazardous fuel within 1,474 acres of NFS lands within the wildland/urban interface areas, as identified in the Seeley-Swan Fire Plan.

Summary:

Overall, I conclude that Alternative 2 better meets the purpose and need of the proposed action, is more responsive to national and local wildland/urban interface fuel reduction initiatives, and will be protective of the environment. I have selected Alternative 2, with the design features described in Appendix B of the DN, for implementation. I have determined that the environmental effects of the implementation of this alternative are acceptable. After careful review of the EA and supporting documentation in the Project that the implementation of Alternative 2 is not a major Federal action; and, that the implementation of the alternative will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment (DN, Appendix A – Finding of No Significant Impact).

BENEFITS OF MY DECISION

The benefits of my decision to Selection Alternative 2 include:

- A reduction of hazardous fuels and the opening up of the tree canopy within the urban/wildland interface being treated. This treatment would modify potential wildland fire behavior by reducing the intensity, torching, crowning and resistant to control (EA, page 39).
- The treatments will provide a safer environment for firefighters and the public should a fire occur within or adjacent to the treated interface areas. The fuel reduction treatments along NFS roads, within the interface area, will provide a safer egress routes for home owners should a wildland fire occur (EA, page 39). These treatments will also allow more strategic options to stop or slow the spread of a wildlfire in the wildland urban interface area being treated under most conditions. This helps provide for a greater degree of public safety and higher potential to limit infrastructure losses than currently exists.
- The vegetation treatments will provide conditions that are more resilient to the effects of fire. Leaving fire-adapted trees in an open grown environment and reducing the ladder fuels surrounding them will increase the resilience of forest vegetation to the effects of wildland fire (EA, page 39).
- As mentioned previously, the thinning of densely stocked stands, reduction of multi-stored structures, and reduction of hazardous surface fuels accumulation will improve the long-term health, resiliency, and sustainability of the treated stands. Following treatment, the stands will remain fully stocked with mature trees, not overstocked with a multi-storied stand structure, and would be more able to take full advantage of the growth carrying capacity of the sites treated. Treatment of these areas will reduce the hazard of insect infestations or disease infections originating in them, from elevating to epidemic proportions, and spreading to adjacent stands (EA, page 34).
- Five sites identified in the Swan Lake Watershed TMDL as potential sediment sources will be eliminated with the implementation of Alternative 2. In addition, BMPs will be applied to approximately 22 miles of NFS roads within the project area (Project File Exhibit G-3).
- Design features associated with Alternative 2 include the spraying of noxious weeds along up to 30 miles of NFS roads within the project area (EA, Appendix G, page B-13).
- The social and economic analysis shows that the vegetation treatments would generate about 3.5 MMBF of sawlog volume. The revenue received by the Forest Service would be used to offset the cost of the fuels reduction treatments. It is estimated that the forest products

removed during the implementation of this project would create 28 direct-employment job years, and an additional 37 indirect/induced – employment job years (EA, pages 42-43).

RISKS OF MY DECISION

The risks associated with my decision include:

Threatened and Endangered Species:

The BA for threatened and endangered wildlife species (Project File Exhibit G-1) included a determination of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" for Canada lynx, gray wolf, grizzly bear, bald eagle. The BA for threatened and endangered fish species (Project File Exhibit G-8) included a determination of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" for bull trout. The BA for threatened and endangered plant species (Project File Exhibit G-16) included a determination of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" for water howellia.

Canada lynx

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on Canada lynx and their respective habitat, since implementing this project would not preclude lynx use of habitats in the area, there would be only minor increase in mortality risk, and no significant adverse cumulative effects are expected (EA, pages 26-27; Project File Exhibit G-1).

Gray Wolf

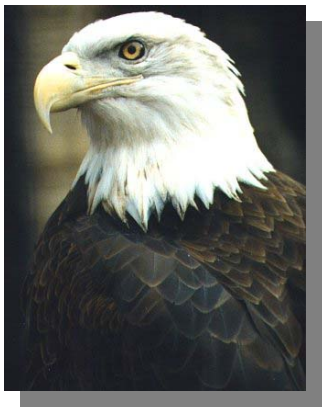
I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on gray wolf and their respective habitat, since the Holland Pierce area contains established human activities (including residential development, recreational residences, a campground, picnic area, boat ramp, and major highway), logging and road building has occurred on all ownerships in the area, the proposal would maintain the existing wolf prey base, would not preclude gray wolf use of habitats in the area, and would not increase morality risk (EA, pages 27-28; Project File Exhibit G-1).

Grizzly Bear

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on grizzly bear and their respective habitat, since this project meets Forest Plan direction, the Holland Buck Subunit currently meets Forest Plan Amendment 19 objectives for open and total road density and security core, design criteria

have been identified to protect threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, and this project complies with the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement and Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines (EA, pages 25-26; Project File Exhibit G-1).

Bald Eagle



I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on the bald eagle and their respective habitat, since the implementation of the alternative would not increase cumulative effects to bald eagles, due in large part, because the project is located in higher human use areas and is away from bald eagle habitat (EA, page 28; Project File Exhibit G-1).

Bull Trout

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on bull trout and their respective habitats, since it will result in long-term reduction of sediment from roads (which is beneficial to downstream trout waters), several existing fish migration barriers will be removed, the project complies with Forest Plan direction and does not have any activity in key bull trout streams, complies with INFISH, and no activity in proposed in riparian areas (EA, pages 22-23; Project File Exhibit G-8).

Water Howellia

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on water howellia. There are nine occupied sites and three unoccupied howellia sites identified within the project area. However, in accordance with Forest Plan Amendment 20, all occupied ponds would be avoided with a 300-foot buffer. Unoccupied ponds of potential habitat would have a 150-foot buffer in which no project activity would occur (EA pages 34-35; Project File Exhibit G-16).

Based upon my review of the effects disclosures in the EA and in the BAs, along with the project design and measures to protect threatened and endangered species and their habitat (EA, Appendix B), I have determined that the risk to threatened and endangered species would be minimal and acceptable.

Sensitive Wildlife, Plant and Fish Species Habitat

The BE for sensitive wildlife species (Project File Exhibit G-4) included a determination of “may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species” for the black-backed woodpecker, common loon, fisher, flammulated owl, Northern goshawk, Western big-eared bat, western

toad, and wolverine. For some species, there is a possibility that land management activities associated with the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project could adversely impact individuals by temporarily displacing them from the area (foraging or habitat). For the Western toad, there is the possibility that individual mortality could result during the actual fuel reduction activity or during temporary road construction.

Black-backed Woodpecker

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on black-backed woodpecker since there may be a reduction of potential feeder and nesting trees. This risk is acceptable since the following mitigation measures will be in place:

- No fuel reduction is proposed in designated old growth, which has a higher potential for providing nesting and feeding habitat.
- Public use of "closed" roads would not be permitted and temporary roads would be reclaimed following use.
- Reclaiming roads following use should help reduce the risk of snag loss over the long-term.
- There would be no long-term impact from fuel reduction operations and associated human activity.

Common Loon

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on the common loon, since:

- The potential for disturbance of nesting loons on Holland Lake would be low because :
    - The proposed treatments are in high human use areas near the lake, where loons are unlikely to nest, and
    - There has been no recent evidence of loons nesting on Holland Lake.
- Design features (buffering the lake and timing restriction) will help mitigate effects of any nesting loon pair on Pierce Lake.

Fisher

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on fisher, since late successional, coniferous forests (often riparian) with a key component of overhead tree cover are considered optimal or preferred habitat for fisher; and since:

- No fuel reduction or forest health treatments are proposed in wetland or old growth habitats – the habitats with the most potential for high quality fisher habitat and occurrence in the Holland Pierce area;
- Design features provide for large buffers around all wet areas;
- Timber stands proposed for treatment are less likely habitat for fisher;
- Temporary roads would be reclaimed following use and other roads managed as closed roads would be used for accessing fuel treatment areas; and
- Public use of "closed" roads would not be permitted, reducing the risk of losing high quality snags (denning) habitat to firewood cutters.

Flammulated Owl

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on flammulated owl since:

- Open grown, large diameter ponderosa pine forests are considered optimal or preferred habitat for flammulated owl;
- The proposed action does not propose any fuel reduction or forest health treatments in old growth ponderosa pine habitats, the areas with the highest potential for occurrence and habitat;
- Displacement from FRZs during project implementation areas would be short term and the ability of the forested stands to provide habitat would remain unchanged; and
- Temporary roads would be reclaimed following use; and
- Use of other roads managed as "closed roads" would not be permitted, reducing the risk of losing high quality snags (nesting habitat) to firewood cutters.

In addition, recent surveys in the Project Area did not detect the presence of flammulated owls.

Northern Goshawk

The mechanized and non-mechanized fuel treatments could directly affect northern goshawk by decreasing the amount of potential nesting habitat. I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on northern goshawk because:

- Since goshawk are normally associated with mature to old growth forest and thought to prefer closed canopy forest, there would be no fuel reduction or forest health treatments in old growth forest habitat.
- A light thin of the overstory (e.g., 40 to 60 percent canopy cover in FRZ's) might improve conditions.
- Thinning the overstory in some stands may help increase the availability of future large tree habitat.
- There would be no fuel reduction or forest health treatment in wetland or riparian areas;

- Potential habitat is fragmented, with smaller patch sizes available for nesting habitat and a greater distance between blocks of potentially suitable foraging and nesting habitat, due to past logging and road building.

Western Big-eared Bat

The possibility exists that individual roosting bats could be disturbed from day/night roost sites due to activities associated with the proposed action; however, I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on western big-eared bats since:

- It is unlikely that big-eared bats occur in the Holland Pierce area;
- Disturbance of individual roost sites would only minimally affect big-eared bats because the bats commonly change day/roost sites and breeding or winter security would not be affected.
- There have been no reports of the western big-eared bat in the Holland Pierce area or in other parts of the Swan Valley (surveys are ongoing on NFS lands in Montana and Idaho).

Western Toad

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on western toad since:

- There is no fuel reduction or associated activities proposed in riparian areas;
- There are other established human activities and developments in the area;
- There would be direct or indirect effects to important toad breeding habitat associated with streams, pond, or other natural wetland areas;
- The proposed action and the associated temporary road construction are likely to alter existing non-breeding habitat for the western toad;
- There would be no additional cumulative effects to breeding habitat because of the proposed fuel reduction project; and
- Individual western toad mortality would be infrequent, not affecting the species at the population level.

Wolverine

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on wolverine since:

- Denning occurs at high elevations frequently above 8,000 feet.
- There would be no mechanized or non-mechanized fuel reduction treatments and no temporary road construction in potential natal den areas.
- The project would not affect primary habitat; little potential for any significant displacement of individuals.
- There would be no direct or indirect effects to wolverine natal denning security.
- There would be no change expected in ungulate population numbers because of the fuel reduction project; however these vegetative treatments may alter white-tailed deer and elk use patterns as the ungulates adjust their behavior to avoid human presence or disturbance in the short-term, and as they adjust to changes in forage availability over the long-term.
- Forest Plan standards for winter range would be adhered to -- a minimum of at least 50 percent thermal cover could be maintained across both winter range areas.
- Wolverine use of areas where the fuel reduction treatment is proposed would be uncommon.
- Potential displacement of wolverine would be low.

Cutthroat Trout

I accept the risk associated with implementing Alternative 2 on cutthroat trout. There is a small temporary risk of increased sediment (mainly due to road work). But, the project will also help reduce sediment along roads over the long-term, a beneficial step for downstream trout waters. In addition, several fish migration barriers will be removed, another positive step to improve fisheries habitat.

Sensitive Plants

Yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*), Howell's gumweed (*Grindelia howellii*), and Water bulrush (*Scirpus subterminalis*)] I accept the risk associated with the implementation of Alternative 2 on sensitive plants, since their known occurrences are not located near proposed treatment units.

Based upon my review of the effects disclosures in the EA and in the BEs, along with the project design and measures to protect sensitive species and their habitat (EA, Appendix B), I have determined that the risk to sensitive species to be minimal and acceptable.

Big Game Habitat

I am aware of, and accept, the risk that the selected alternative may impact big game habitat; specifically, white-tailed deer winter range. The selected alternative includes 284 acres of vegetative treatments within white-tailed winter habitat. The vegetative treatments have been designed to meet Forest Plan objectives and standards for the managing white-tailed winter habitat (EA, page 31; Appendix B, page B-9). Cumulative affects of harvest on adjacent private and public timber lands have been considered in deciding how much treatment to implement which still meeting overall guidelines for winter range. This decision weighs the risks in this regard and designed the project to meet applicable winter range standards by reducing the level of treatment to a level compatible with maintenance of winter range.

Noxious Weeds

It is possible that allowing the activities associated with the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project could increase the risk of spreading noxious weeds. Vehicle traffic associated with the proposed treatments could increase the potential for seed transport and the weed

introduction and spread, especially along roads normally closed to motor vehicle. On closed roads, the rate of spread is expected to decrease over time, as other vegetation covers the exposed soil and forest canopies increase the shade on the roads.

Ground-disturbing activities, including the proposed thinning, piling, and burning of thinning slash, could expose soil and provide a germination substrate for weeds. However, these activities are located in stands where varying amounts of canopy cover would be retained. The cool, moist habitats and shade would reduce the risk of weeds becoming well established.

The proposed action includes design features to minimize the risk of the spread of weeds (DN, Appendix B). These features include the pre- and post-treatment spraying of noxious weeds on up to 30 miles of NFS roads within the project area. Treatment of invasive plants will be consistent with the strategy outlined in the 2001 Flathead National Forest Noxious and Invasive Weed Control EA (Project File Exhibit H-28).

Wildlife

It is possible that allowing the activities associated with the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health project could open up the landscape to increased illegal ATV and winter recreation use. To monitor if this activity actually occurs, I intend to hire a seasonal Recreation Technician whose duties will include monitoring use in this area (DN, Appendix B, page B-18).

CONSEQUENCES OF TAKING NO ACTION

I have concluded that the risks and consequences of not performing the management activities associated with the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project include:

- Loss of opportunity to improve forest health conditions in the Project Area, including:
    - Increasing vigor of stands by reducing competition between trees, increasing available of light and moisture to remaining trees,
    - Converting multi-storied, mixed species stands to single story or two-storied, more open grown forests, and
    - Increasing tree resistance to future insect or disease influences.
- Loss of opportunity to provide a safer environment for firefighters and the public by creating defensible space for initial attack fire suppression activities, including:

  - Construction of DFPZs on NFS lands adjacent to private property boundaries;
  - Construction of Special Treatment Zones where structures are located within 100 of NFS / private land boundaries;
  - Construction of FRZs where mature tree overstory would be thinned on average to a 40 to 60 percent crown closure; and,
  - Providing for safer public egress routes on NFS roads within the project area.

- Loss of opportunity to reduce fuel loadings on NFS lands adjacent to private lands in the project area (as identified in the *Seeley Swan Fire Plan)*;
- Loss of opportunity to support local communities by harvesting approximately 3.5 MMBF of sawlogs in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project area;
- Loss of opportunity to conduct up to 30 miles of noxious weed treatments;
- Loss of opportunity apply BMPs on 22 miles of Forest Development Roads, including;
  - Replacement of ford on road accessing Unit 26,
  - Spraying of weeds along designed Forest Development Roads.
  - Removing fish barriers.
  - Eliminate 5 sediment sources identified by the Swan Lake Watershed TMDL.

COMPLIANCE WITH CURRENT LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICY

The Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project EA addressed the regulatory framework and regulatory consistency by resource area. I have determined that my decision is consistent with the laws, regulations, and polities related to this project. The analysis leading to my decision was developed within the framework of the following laws, regulations, and policies.

- National Forest Management Act (NFMA)
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- Forest Plan Consistency
- Clean Water Act and Montana State Water Quality Standards

- Clean Air Act
- Endangered Species Act
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- National Historic Preservation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- Environmental Justice Order # 12898

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

Suitability for Timber Management

The NFMA directs that no timber harvesting shall occur on lands classified as not suited for timber production pursuant to 36 CFR 219.14(a) except for salvage sales, sales necessary to protect multiple-use values, or activities that meet other objectives on such lands if the forest plan establishes that such actions are appropriate [36 CFR 219.27(c)(1)].

Stands proposed for harvest treatment in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project area were examined for suitability in accordance with 36 CFR 219.14. Inclusions of non-suitable land were identified within stands proposed for harvest (such as wet areas), and no treatment would occur in these areas. I believe that the remaining portions of these stands are suitable for timber management based upon the following:

- Meet the definition of forestland as described in 36 CFR 210.3.
- Technological feasibility exists to ensure soil productivity and watershed protection. All sites considered for treatment would use established harvesting and site preparation methods. Resource protection standards in the Forest Plan, project design features (DN, Appendix B) and applicable BMPs (Project File Exhibit H-17) would be sufficient to protect soil and water resource values.
- None of the stands considered for harvest have been withdrawn from timber production as specified in 36 CFR 219.14(4).

Clearcutting and Even-aged Management

When timber is to be harvested using an even-aged management system, a determination that the system is appropriate to meet the objectives and requirements of the Forest Plan must be made. Where clearcutting is to be used, it must be determined to be the optimum harvest method [16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(F)(i)].

Silvicultural site-specific prescriptions for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project have been prepared by a certified silviculturist and reviewed by the ID Team members. Target stand conditions were developed based on management objectives and site characteristics. The prescriptions considered existing stand conditions, the target stands, and resource constraints in determining the biological and technological feasibility of all silvicultural systems, including uneven-aged systems, and their appropriateness for the site.

I have reviewed the silvicultural information in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project, along with the site-specific management objectives developed from Forest Plan direction, and I have determined that the management practices described in the silviculturalist's report (Project File Exhibit G-12) are appropriate methods to achieve the multiple resource objectives on the sites selected for harvest.

Vegetative Manipulation

The activities included in my decision comply with the requirements under 36 CFR 219.27(b) in regard to altering vegetative tree cover. I have determined that the management practices in the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project shall:

- Be best suited to the multiple-use goals stated in the Forest Plan for the area.

Based on my review of pertinent information from the Project File and the comments I received, I have determined that my decision, compared to the no action alternative is best suited to meet these goals.

- Not be chosen primarily because they will give the greatest dollar return.

My decision to implement the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project is based on a variety of reasons as discussed elsewhere in this Decision Notice. Economics was only one of the many factors I considered in making my decision; the decision is not based primarily on the greatest dollar return, but rather reducing hazardous fuels in the WUI and providing a safer environment for firefighters and the public by creating defensible space for initial attack fire suppression actions and restoring and maintaining the health of forest vegetative communities.

- Be chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.

In making my decision, I considered the effects on residual trees and adjacent stands. The selected alternative includes management actions designed to meet or exceed Forest Plan snag management guidelines (Project File Exhibit G-12).

- Be selected to avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and to ensure conservation of water resources.

My decision avoids permanent impairment of site productivity. This determination is supported by the effects disclosures in the EA (pages 19-21) and Project File (Exhibits G-2 and G-3), through alternative design features (EA, Appendix B), and through the application of BMPs (Project File Exhibit H-17).

- Be selected to provide the desired effects of water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.

The information provided in the Project File documents that the vegetative management treatments included in my decision would achieve the desired forest vegetation conditions described in the silviculturist's report (Project File Exhibit G-12). After reviewing the social and environmental effects of the alternatives (EA, pages 42-43 and Project File Exhibit G-23), I have determined that my decision is consistent with Forest Plan direction for the management of natural resources, including water quality/quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.

- Be practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total costs of preparation, logging, and administration.

The information presented in the Project File regarding transportation and harvesting requirements indicates that implementation of my decision is feasible and practical. The following information supports this determination: Implementation of the project would not require significant investments in roads, since a road system is already in place; logging of similarly situated areas has demonstrated the feasibility and practicality of this type of vegetative treatment.

Roads

The NFMA requires that the necessity for roads be documented and that road construction be designed to "standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources" [36 CFR 219.27(10)]. The NFMA also requires that "all roads are planned and designed to re-establish vegetation cover on the disturbed areas within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed 10 years .... unless the road is determined a necessary permanent addition to the National Forest Transportation System" [36 CFR 219.27(11)].

Management actions associated with Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project do not include construction of specified roads. There

will be no changes to the existing condition for motorized recreation within the project area. Approximately 3.8 miles of temporary roads will be constructed and reclaimed after their use (EA, page 4). I believe that we have met the intent of 36 CFR 219.27(10) and (11).

Wildlife Viability

The NFMA directs the Forest Service to manage wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native species in the planning area. Based on my review of the wildlife Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project (Project File Exhibits G-1 and G-4, respectively) and the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project "Effects at Forest and Regional Scales – Compatibility with NFAM Requirements for Maintaining Species Viability" (Project File Exhibit H-23), I conclude that my decision poses little risk to the viability and distribution of native wildlife species.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provisions have been followed as required by 40 CFR 1500. The Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Decision Notice complies with the intent and requirements of NEPA.

Scoping for the project included public field trips and meetings, a mailing that provided information about the project and solicitation for comments, and public notices (legal advertisements) and a public review/objection period on the EA. Issues identified during the initial scoping for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project assisted the ID Team and me in project design and with the analysis process. Project File Section C contains the comments received on this project.

Appendix C in the EA provides a summary of Forest Service responses to issues identified during the scoping of the project, and Project File Exhibit K-4 provides my responses to issues identified during the objection period.

This DN describes the decisions I have made and my rationale for making the decisions.

Forest Plan Consistency

The National Forest Management Act and accompanying regulations require that "All resource plans...must be consistent with the Forest Plan" [16 U.S.C. 1604 (i)].

The Forest Plan establishes management direction for the Flathead National Forest. This direction is described in Forest-wide and management area specific standards. Designing and implementing a project consistent with this direction is a way to move the Flathead National Forest towards the desired future conditions described in the Forest Plan. Project File Exhibit H-7 displays the Forest Plan management area direction applicable to the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project Area. The Forest Plan designated NFS lands within the Project Area as MA-5, MA-9, MA-11C, MA-13, MA-15, and MA-15C.

TABLE 8. MANAGEMENT AREA DESCRIPTIONS

MA	Description
5	Roaded timberlands in areas of high scenic value. Much of this MA lies along the Swan Valley Highway (MT Highway 83).
9	Timberlands capable of providing white-tailed deer winter habitat.
11C	Timberlands capable of providing grizzly bear habitat located on the Southern portion of the Swan lake Ranger District.
13	Roaded and unroaded lands capable of providing mule deer and elk winter habitat.
15	Timberlands where timber management with roads is economical and feasible
15C	Timberlands where timber management with roads is economical and feasible; and, designated as key white-tail deer summer range.

After reviewing the EA and Project File, I find that the actions associated with my decision are consistent with Forest Plan direction and meet the applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Clean Water Act and Montana State Water Quality Standards

Upon review of the EA and Project File, I find that activities associated with my decision would comply with State water quality standards. My decision includes project design features and measures to protect the water resource (EA, Appendix B) and applicable BMPs (Project File Exhibit H-17) to achieve water quality standards. Inland Native Fish Strategy Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA) would be established along all wetlands and stream courses that are in or adjacent to treatment areas.

Clean Air Act

After reviewing the EA and Project File, I find that the activities to be implemented would be coordinated to meet the requirements of State Implementation Plans, the Smoke Management Plan, and Federal air standards.

Endangered Species Act

Under provisions of this Act, Federal agencies are directed to seek to conserve endangered and threatened species and to ensure that actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any of these species. Upon review of the Biological Assessments for wildlife, plants, and fish for the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project (Project File Exhibits G-1, G-4, G-8, and G-16), I find that the project meets the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the following determinations:

TABLE 9. DETERMINATIONS FOR THREATENED & ENDANGERED SPECIES FOR THE HOLLAND PIERCE FUELS REDUCTION AND FOREST HEALTH PROJECT

Species	Determination
Bald Eagle	"May effect, not likely to adversely affect"
Gray Wolf	"May effect, not likely to adversely affect"
Grizzly Bear	"May effect, not likely to adversely affect"
Canada Lynx	"May effect, not likely to adversely affect"
Bull Trout	"May effect, not likely to adversely affect"
Water Howellia	"May effect, not likely to adversely affect"
Spalding's Catchfly	"No effect"

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 provided in the Project File (Exhibit G-22) and Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Wildlife Species (Project File Exhibit G-4), I find that my decision complies with this Executive Order.

National Historic Preservation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

Since there are no known heritage resource sites within the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project area, no impact on cultural resources is expected by implementation of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project (EA, page 43).

Recognizing that the potential exists for unidentified sites to be encountered and disturbed during project activity, special provisions for their protection would be included in all contracts used to implement this project (EA, Appendix B). This provision allows the Forest Service to unilaterally modify or cancel a contract to protect cultural resources regardless of when they are identified. I have determined that my decision to implement the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project complies with the Region One programmatic agreement (1995), with the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The Forest Service has consulted with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes during the analysis process (scoping and comment periods). The intent of this consultation has been to remain informed about Tribal concerns regarding the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and other tribal issues. In addition, the tribes have rights under the Hellgate Treaty of 1855, including hunting, gathering, and grazing rights. I believe that our actions fulfill the requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act and other related laws, regulations, and policies.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," requires that Federal agencies make achieving environmental justice part of their mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. I conclude that the risk of such disproportionate effects on minority or low-income populations from this action is very low. My decision does not pose any significant socio-economic risks that disproportionately affect low income or minority populations in communities where timber producing employment opportunities and workers are located. The implementation of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project would not cause a significant change in local employment or revenue sharing with local communities. Thus, this decision should not disproportionately affect low-income or minority populations and communities.

APPEAL PROVISIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION ____

Copies of the Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project EA are available for review at the Swan Lake Ranger District Office in Bigfork, Montana, and at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Kalispell, Montana. The supporting Project File, which includes the internal scoping, public involvement, and specialist reports, is available for review at the Swan Lake Ranger District.

This Decision Notice is issued under the authorities as defined by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, section 101(2). It is not subject to notice, comment, and appeal provisions pursuant to 36 CFR 215 (see 36 CFR 218.3). Implementation of this project may proceed following publication of this Decision Notice.

CATHY BARBOULETOS Date

Forest Supervisor
Flathead National Forest