



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Hungry Horse and Glacier View
Ranger Districts

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File Code: 1950

Date: October 31, 2008

Dear Neighbor,

I am writing you today to invite your collaboration in the planning of the **Middle Fork Fuels Reduction Project** on the Hungry Horse Ranger District. The area where I am considering fuel reduction treatments includes National Forest System (NFS) lands extending along the Highway 2 corridor from the Nyack Flats area east to the Giefer Creek vicinity (refer to attached maps). You have received this letter because Flathead County records indicate you own property near NFS lands we have initially identified for possible treatment, or you have previously expressed interest in projects on the Flathead National Forest. I am asking for your input regarding location of possible treatment areas, the level of treatment appropriate, and any comments or concerns about this project you may have. It is most useful for your input to be as detailed and site-specific as possible. Please share this information with anyone that may have an interest in fuel reduction on NFS lands in this area.

Resource specialists on the Hungry Horse Ranger District have made a preliminary identification of areas that appear to have the vegetation conditions able to sustain a high-severity crown fire potentially threatening to private homes and land. I want to stress that at this early stage of planning, no specific treatment sites have been selected for treatment or eliminated from consideration. Fuel treatments must be designed to comply with all applicable laws and to protect other resources including wildlife, soils, and water quality. Following collaboration with the public (which includes any responses I receive to this letter) and further analysis by the specialists, I will be identifying specific sites for proposed treatments. You will have additional opportunity at that time to comment on this treatment proposal before I make a final decision. I anticipate making a decision on this project before the fall of 2009.

Background

The Hungry Horse/Glacier View Ranger Districts have implemented several projects in recent years intended to reduce wildland fuels in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). These projects have occurred near Columbia Falls, in the Blankenship area, in the North Fork of the Flathead, and along the Highway 2 corridor between the communities of Hungry Horse and West Glacier.

The main goal of fuel reduction treatments in the Middle Fork Fuels Reduction Project area would be to lower the risk of future high intensity and/or severity wildfire (i.e. reduce the probability of a crown fire) in this area of intermingled private and NFS lands. Fuel reduction treatments would be designed to improve our ability to initial attack and control fires, protect human life and other human and natural resource values, and increase the diversity of tree species to include more long-lived, fire-tolerant species. Although wildland fire is a natural occurrence in this area, the significant impact a severe wildland fire could have on human life and property would be considered unacceptable by many. This is of particular concern within the WUI, where private homes are near NFS lands.



Areas selected for treatment in the Middle Fork Fuels Reduction Project would likely receive a variety of prescribed burning, thinning, or small regeneration treatments designed to reduce forest tree density and dead woody material. Treatments would focus on leaving the best trees and favoring larch and Douglas-fir where available. Larch and Douglas-fir are longer-lived, more wind-firm, and more fire-tolerant than species such as lodgepole pine or spruce. Spacing between trees would generally range between 18 and 30 feet, which is an adequate distance between tree crowns to reduce the risk of fire spread. Most understory conifers would be removed, although some may be left to provide species and forest structural diversity. Small ground fuels would likely be treated by piling and burning, chipping, or removal. In addition to fuel reduction, the prescribed fire treatments would also be designed to create a mosaic of vegetation conditions across the landscape that would benefit wildlife.

Regeneration treatments may be considered in some of the dense lodgepole pine stands. This involves the creation of small openings that would be planted to larch, Douglas-fir, and sometimes ponderosa pine and western white pine. Lodgepole pine is a relatively short-lived species and many stands have reached maturity in this area. These mature lodgepole stands are becoming increasingly susceptible to bark beetles, which have the potential to cause high mortality. Regeneration treatments would begin the long-term process of converting these forests to a more diverse mix of tree species.

How to Participate

There are several opportunities for you to contribute to the development of the project plan and/or provide your comments. There will be an Open House in the Signal Room building at the Isaak Walton Inn in Essex, MT, on **November 19, 2008 between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.** There will further information available and District staff will be on hand to answer questions about the project and discuss ideas you may have. If you are unable to attend the open house, you may return the attached comment form with your ideas to this office at the address above. Hand-delivered comments should be brought to the Hungry Horse Ranger Station office between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Electronic comments may be submitted to the following email address: comments-northern-flathead-hungry-horse-glacier-view@fs.fed.us. To comment by telephone or obtain additional information about this project, please contact Project Leader Michele Draggoo or me at (406) 387-3800. Ideally, I would like to receive comments by **November 28th** so we can proceed with the next step in planning the project. Thank you for your interest in the Middle Fork Fuels Reduction Project.

Sincerely,

JIMMY J. DEHERRERA
District Ranger

Enclosures