United States Department of Agriculture | **Forest Service** | **Swan Lake Ranger District (406) 837-7500 Fax (406) 837-7503** | **200 Ranger Station Road Bigfork, MT 59911**

File Code: 1950
Date: October 10, 2008

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC INPUT
Mid-Swan Blowdown Salvage Project

Dear Interested Party:

This letter is to request your input regarding a project to salvage wind damaged trees on the Swan Lake Ranger District. These trees were affected by high wind events in June and July of 2008. A map of the areas being considered for salvage accompanies this letter. The wind events caused damage to stands of mature sawtimber-sized trees and resulted in trees blown down by the roots, trees with boles snapped and shattered, heavily leaning trees, and combinations of each. The wind seemed to affect taller trees with large crowns, with less affect on trees lower in the tree canopy. Due to these events, I am proposing salvage of some of the affected trees to use the wood before it decays and looses its value. The areas impacted are in the Swan Valley and include a small area near Goat Creek, which was impacted by the June storm. The bulk of the project is in the Lion Creek Area that was impacted by the July storm. The areas proposed for salvage encompass an estimated **658 acres**.

These wind events have created the potential for forest health issues associated with various bark beetles. Wind thrown trees create ideal conditions for rapid population growth of a number of bark beetle species. Based on the species composition of affected trees and species composition of the remaining unaffected trees, pine engraver, Douglas-fir beetle, and spruce beetle are of concern.

The Swan Lake Ranger District has begun evaluating the resource conditions for these areas affected by wind damage (See Vicinity and Project Area Maps 1-1 and 1-2). We are asking for comments on this project proposal. The following table, enclosed maps and descriptions of proposed actions identify the types and locations of the timber salvage and road management that are being proposed.

Field Trip

This letter is to also make you aware of a **Field Trip to the Project Area on October 30, 2008.** The Field Trip will begin at the Swan Ecosystem Center in Condon, MT at 9:00 a.m. There will be a brief office overview of the project at Condon followed by the Field Trip to some of the proposed salvage units.

Please inform Joleen Dunham, Planning Team Leader by October 27, either by e-mail at jdunham@fs.fed.us, or by phone at (406)837-7510 if you plan to attend the Field Trip. This will help us know how many people to expect and how many maps to make for the Field Trip.

Whether or not you can make the Field Trip, we value your input. Please use the information below to help craft your comments.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is to recover merchantable timber from areas affected by wind damage and, in doing so, to provide wood products for local economies.

The need for the proposal has arisen from the wind storms described above which have resulted in a considerable quantity of timber within the Forest's suitable timber base being affected.

Proposal

The proposal includes the following activities on approximately **658 acres** of National Forest System lands within the Project Area (See enclosed Map 1-2).

- Harvest activities would be implemented using tractor and cable logging systems.
- Slash would be treated through whole tree yarding (WTY), lopping and scattering, excavator piling, and pile burning.
- Four units are within old growth stands (Units 2, 5, 13, and 18) where we propose to remove only some of the affected trees within these stands, while maintaining the old growth character of the stands. Salvage treatments within these stands would be conducted to leave sufficient down trees on site to meet Forest Plan standards for down woody debris.
- Units would be accessed through existing roads and an estimated 0.3 miles of temporary road construction. System roads would be used for log haul. The grizzly bear subunits where the project is proposed are open from 2009 to 2011 and all roads used would be managed consistent with the requirements of the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement.
- Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be implemented on haul routes to meet Timber Sale Requirements.
- Some blowdown trees would be removed from portions of Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) within Lion Creek and the Swan River where site specific design features would assure that there would not likely to be any adverse affect to the streams, fish, or fish habitat.

Table 1 below displays proposed unit acreage, management area, logging system, and slash treatments for those areas affected by wind damage.

TABLE 1.
SALVAGE UNIT INFORMATION.

Unit Number	Acreage	Management Area	Logging System	Slash Treatment
1	15	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
2	9	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
3	17	MA 9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
4	16	MA 9	Tractor/Cable	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
5	8	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
6	29	MA 9	Tractor/Cable	WTY
8	31	MA 9	Tractor/Cable	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
9	6	MA 9	Tractor/Cable	Lop and Scatter
10	63	MA 9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
11	177	MA 9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
13	11	MA 9	Tractor/Cable	Lop and Scatter
14	24	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
15	9	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
16	31	MA 9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
17	6	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
18	31	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
19	10	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
20	23	MA 9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
21	18	MA 9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
22	65	MA 9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
23	40	MA 5/9	Tractor	WTY/Excavator Pile/Burn Piles
24	2	MA 9	Tractor/Cable	WTY
25	1	MA 9	Tractor	WTY
26	16	MA 9	Tractor	Lop and Scatter
Total Acres	**658**			

Descriptions of Proposed Management Activities

A. Vegetation Management:

Salvage: The purpose of this entry is to remove dead, dying, or damaged trees from treatment areas to recover economic value that would otherwise be lost. The primary agent of damage is wind, which has resulted in trees which are uprooted, broken, and/or severely leaning. Merchantable trees, which have been killed by other damage agents and are located within the treatment areas, may also be removed in this entry. Damage severity is variable within and across treatment areas. In severely affected areas, reforestation may be necessary. Regeneration would likely result from a combination of natural seeding and planted seedlings. Mechanical logging systems would be used to extract merchantable material and reduce logging slash/fuel loadings.

B. Road Management:

- Road Maintenance (Best Management Practices – BMPs): The objectives of road maintenance are to reduce the concentration of sub-surface and surface water runoff, minimize road surface erosion, filter ditch water by entering streams, and decrease the risk of culvert failures during peak runoff events. Maintenance work could include culvert installation, replacement of existing culverts with larger culverts, installation of drainage dips and surface water deflectors, placement of rip-rap to armor drainage structures, aggregate surface replacement, aggregate placement to reinforce wet surface areas, ditch construction and cleaning where needed, and surface blading to restore drainage efficiency of the road surface. These actions would bring the roads up to current BMP standards, better accommodate traffic and reduce deferred maintenance. Best Management Practices are required under Timber Sale Contracts prior to hauling of timber over these roads.
- Temporary Road: Temporary roads would be constructed to the minimum standards necessary for log hauling on Forest Development Roads (FDR). Temporary road surface width would be limited to truck bunk width plus 4 feet. Temporary roads would be reclaimed following their use using drain dips, outsloping, scarifying, seeding, and re-contouring.
- Skid Road: Skid roads would be constructed for forwarding logs with a tractor from the felled location to a landing, where they are loaded on trucks and hauled away. In some instances, it may be necessary to have a designated skid road outside of the unit boundary a short distance to a nearby landing location adjacent to the haul route. Skid roads would be reclaimed following their use using drain dips, outsloping, scarifying, seeding, and recontouring.

Management Area Descriptions

The Flathead Forest Plan sets management direction for the project area. Activities proposed with this project are located within the following management areas (MAs):

- **MA 9** – Timberlands capable of providing white-tailed deer winter habitat. Provide cover and forage areas suitable for white-tailed deer winter habitat.

MA 5 – Timberlands in areas of high scenic value, along MT Highway 83. Maintain a pleasing, natural-appearing landscape in which management activities are not evident.

Your input is needed

Please review the proposal and provide us with your comments. Timely input will be needed for us to develop a decision for this project. We need to receive your comments by **November 13, 2008**, for them to be considered as we develop alternatives to this proposal. Comments are most useful when they are site specific and include a clearly identifiable location. Your interest and knowledge can help us develop the best project possible, so please do share your perspectives with us.

We anticipate that the Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project will be completed in May 2009. At that time, we will send a copy of the EA to those who request to be on our mailing list. We will publish the release of the EA in the *Daily Inter Lake*, and you will be given the opportunity to comment on the specific management activities at that time.

If you need more information, please contact me or the Project Leader, Joleen Dunham, at the Swan Lake Ranger District, 200 Ranger Station Road, Bigfork, MT 59911; or call her at (406) 837-7510. E-mail comments may also be sent to **comments-northern-flathead-swan-lake@fs.fed.us**. Electronic comments should be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF format

If you wish to remain on the mailing list for this project, please let us know either by filling in your name and address on this letter and returning it or e-mailing us at jdunham@fs.fed.us, If we do not hear from you, your name will be removed. Please feel free to share this letter with neighbors or other interested parties in the event we have missed someone.

Thank you for your interest in this project.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jane Ingebretson for

STEVE BRADY
District Ranger

Enclosures (Mid Swan Blowdown Salvage Project Vicinity Map and Proposal Map)

Photos of Some Areas Affected by Wind Damage Proposed for Salvage

Photo 1.
Breakage, uprooting, and leaning trees in Unit 11.

Photo 2.
More damage to Ponderosa Pine in Unit 11.

Photo 3.
Damaged portion of Unit 22.

COMMENT SHEET

Mid-Swan Blowdown Salvage Project

Your comments and recommendations will help us identify issues associated with the Mid Swan Project and focus our efforts during the analysis process.

Please fill out and return this form by **November 13, 2008.** Additional comments may be made on a separate sheet of paper and included as well.

NAME: _____

ORGANIZATION / _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

❑ **Please keep me on your mailing list.** ❑ **Please remove me from your mailing list.**

COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Your Comments are Important!

Comments received on the Mid Swan Blowdown Salvage Project (including names and addresses of those commenting) become part of the public record and are available for public inspection. We can accept and consider comments submitted anonymously; however, people submitting anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision (36 CFR 215). Any person may request that we withhold submitted comments from the public record (pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d)) by showing how the Freedom of Information Act permits such confidentiality. However, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. We will inform the requestor of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality. If the request is denied, we will return the submitted comments and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted, with or without name and address, with a specified time.

FOLD HERE AND MAIL BY November 11th, 2008

FROM:

_____

_____

_____

Postage Required

District Ranger
Swan Lake Ranger District
200 Ranger Station Road
Bigfork, MT 59911