



File Code: 1950

Date: November 27, 2002

It has been nearly 16 months since the August 14, 2001 lightning strike ignited the Moose Fire near the Whitefish Divide. It took about two months of firefighter effort and a change in weather to control the fire. Many management activities have taken place in the fire-affected and nearby areas since the fire was controlled. Emergency rehabilitation actions took place last fall in 2001 to reduce erosion effects from the fire. I also assembled a team of natural resource specialists in November 2001 to assess post-fire conditions in the Moose Fire area. This team recommended a number of restoration and recovery actions and management opportunities, in and adjacent to the fire area. Some of these activities have already occurred or are planned in the near future; these include commercial mushroom harvest, reforestation, maintenance of trails, improving roads so that they meet best management practices, and monitoring a variety of conditions in the area including noxious weeds, bark beetles, soils, roads, forest conditions, and streams.

In January 2002, I initiated the Moose Post-Fire Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to address resource concerns that were identified in the post-fire assessment. These concerns helped to guide the purpose and need of the project which was to:

- Decrease potential mortality caused by bark beetles to remaining live Douglas-fir and spruce trees within and outside the Moose Fire area
- Recover merchantable wood fiber affected by the Moose Fire in a timely manner to help support local communities and contribute to the long-term yield of forest products
- Reduce the hazard and severity of future fires by reducing future fuel accumulations caused by the Moose Fire on specific sites adjacent to private property or administrative sites

After months of analysis and public involvement, I am pleased to say I have made a final decision on the Moose Post-Fire Project. While I realize that I will not fully satisfy all public concerns, as many of them are mutually exclusive, I believe that my decision provides the best balance of management activities to respond to the purpose and need of the project and issues.

In the Record of Decision (which is enclosed with this letter), I am authorizing the use of bark beetle management tools, fuels reduction, salvage harvest and related activities, as well as road decommissioning and restrictions to be conducted in a portion of the area burned by the Moose Fire in 2001 and adjacent areas on the Flathead National Forest.

Alternative 3, as presented in the Final EIS, was modified in the decision to respond to changes identified through more detailed field reconnaissance and monitoring; and to address grizzly bear management changes identified during formal consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. My decision will:



- Salvage 2015 acres to address bark beetle concerns and to provide wood products (estimated volume of 14-15 MMBF)
- Implement 272 acres of spruce beetle pheromone funnel traps
- Apply MCH, an anti-attractant pheromone, to individual live Douglas-fir trees in the Glacier Institute, Big Creek Campground, and within portions of the Wild and Scenic River Corridor
- Create up to 100 trap or pheromone baited trees across limited portions of the salvage area.
- Decommission 56 miles of roads
- Implement wheeled motorized restrictions on 11 miles of existing open road
- Plant trees on 1065 acres
- Implement two project-specific amendments to the Forest Plan
- Conduct management requirements, design features, and monitoring displayed in the FEIS

My decision does not include any salvage activity in inventoried roadless areas or any building of permanent or temporary roads.

In October 2002, the Regional Forester submitted a request to the Chief of the Forest Service asking him to determine that an emergency situation exists in the Moose Fire area. I notified all of you about this request in the letter that was released with the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

In November 2002, the Chief granted an exemption from stay of activity for the salvage units and associated road maintenance activities. As a result, I expect sale advertisement and award to occur soon after notice of this decision is published in the legal advertisements in *The Daily Inter Lake*. As a result of this exemption from stay of activities, I believe that removing dead, dying, and at-risk trees before the spring beetle flight in 2003 should effectively suppress beetle populations in these areas while they are still manageable, thereby reducing the potential for future bark beetle population build-up and subsequent tree mortality within and outside of the Moose Fire area.

I have provided a 30-day period between the release of the FEIS and the Record of Decision according to regulations specified under FSH 1909.15 Chapter 27.21(10)(b). During this 30-day period, the Chief or myself did not receive any comments about the exemption request.

The Record of Decision is available at the Hungry Horse Ranger Station (P.O. Box 190340, Hungry Horse, MT 59919), the Flathead National Forest Supervisor's Office in Kalispell, and Flathead County Library branches in Kalispell, Whitefish, and Columbia Falls. For those of you who have access to a computer, we will have the entire document on the Flathead National Forest website at: www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead/nepa. Then navigate to the Moose Record of Decision document.

Sincerely,

CATHY BARBOULETOS
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure