



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

May 2007



Environmental Assessment

Red Whale Project

**Flathead National Forest
Glacier View Ranger District
Flathead County, Montana**





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Service

Hungry Horse and Glacier View
Ranger Districts
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P.O. Box 190340
Hungry Horse, MT 59919

File Code: 1950

Date: May 3, 2007

We have completed the Red Whale Project Environmental Assessment (EA), and appreciate receiving your comments on this document.

Last summer, we sent a letter to landowners and other interested individuals or organizations providing information about a proposal from the Red Whale Project which identified opportunities to reduce forest fuel levels near private property, enhance habitat diversity and security for several wildlife species, and provide access across National Forest System lands to a State of Montana section of land. The project area is located on the Glacier View Ranger District in the North Fork Flathead River drainage. Proposed management activities occur on National Forest System lands, generally between Moran Creek (just south of Polebridge) north to Whale Creek (about 10 miles south of the Canadian border).

We held a field trip in mid-July to a portion of the project area. This trip had about 13 people attending; most of whom were local landowners. Besides this field trip, we received comments/feedback on the initial proposal from about 21 people either through letters, phone calls, or emails.

Since this last field trip and comment period, a planning team comprised of specialists from many natural resource disciplines reviewed public feedback, developed alternatives to the initial proposal based on public comment and our field knowledge of the area, and analyzed potential effects from the proposed activities.

An environmental assessment (EA) which details potential effects from the proposed management activities has been prepared by these specialists and is now available for public review. Four alternatives were identified and analyzed; Alternative 2 was the initial proposal that was provided to the public last summer; Alternative 1 is the “no action” alternative; Alternative 3 was designed to address issues related to lynx and other wildlife concerns; and Alternative 4 was designed to respond to issues regarding a need to enlarge treatment areas and improve connectivity of treated areas to be more effective in severe burning conditions. A synopsis of the alternatives follows:



Red Whale Project – Comparison of Alternatives

| | Alternative 1 (No Action) | Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 | Alternative 4 |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Mechanical Fuels Reduction | 0 | 2078 acres | 927 acres | 3583 acres |
| Estimated acres of tree thinning or patch seedtree with a commercial product | 0 | 1454 | 833 | 2074 |
| Estimated acres of sapling tree thinning | 0 | 624 | 94 | 1509 |
| Prescribed Burning | 0 | 1363 acres | 1192 acres | 1431 acres |
| New Road Easement to Access State Land | 0 | 0.3 miles | 0.3 miles | 0.3 miles |
| Year-round Trail Closures to Wheeled Motorized Vehicles | 0 | 24 miles ¹ | 25 miles ³ | 18 miles ⁵ |
| Seasonal Trail Closures to Wheeled Motorized Vehicles | 0 | 0 miles | 0 miles | 6 miles ⁶ |
| Current Open Road Closed Seasonally to Wheeled Motorized Vehicles | 0 | 5 miles ² | 0 miles | 5 miles ² |
| Current Open Road Closed Yearlong to Wheeled Motorized Vehicles | 0 | 0 miles | 13 miles ⁴ | 4 miles ⁷ |

¹ Trails #3 (Hay Creek), #14 (Moran Creek), #2 (Moran) and #239 (Coal Cr/Coal Ridge)

² Main road affected: Hay Creek road (closure located ~6 miles up the road) would be closed to wheeled motorized vehicles 12/1 through 6/30.

³ Trails #3 (Hay Creek), #14 (Moran Creek), #2 (Moran) and #239 (Coal Cr/Coal Ridge), #40 (Cyclone Lookout)

⁴ Main roads affected: Hay Creek (closure ~6 miles up road), Moran Creek (closure entire road) and Red Meadow Creek (closure of ~4 miles in the midsection of total road length)

⁵ Trails #14 (Coal Ridge), #2 (Moran), and #239 (Coal Cr/Coal Ridge)

⁶ Trail #3 (Hay Creek) would be closed to wheeled vehicles 12/1 through 6/30.

⁷ Moran Creek road

Those of you who initially commented on this project will receive copies of the EA in a CD format with this letter; others of you who are interested in reviewing this document can do it several ways. Copies will be made available for you at the Hungry Horse Ranger Station and at the Flathead National Forest Supervisor's Office in Kalispell. 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/nepa. The Red Whale EA document should be apparent at that point. Others of you can contact us directly at the Hungry Horse Ranger Station and we will send you an EA directly. You can request either a CD or printed version.

Comments on this EA are requested from you and other reviewers. The Responsible Official (Forest Supervisor Cathy Barbouletos) will consider all public comments before making a decision (anticipated by the end of June 2007). In submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered by the Responsible Official in reaching a decision. Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. In order to retain your administrative appeal rights, you must provide written, oral, or electronic comments during this 30-day comment period. This legal notice will be published in the newspaper of record and the comment period will start on the day following

publication of the legal notice and ends 30 days following the date of publication. We expect this will occur on June 5, 2007. Your comments must be postmarked by the end of the 30-day comment period. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Send written comments to:

Jimmy DeHerrera (District Ranger)
Red Whale Project
Glacier View Ranger District
P.O. Box 190340, Hungry Horse, Montana 59919
(Office hours are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays if submitting hand delivered or oral comments)

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the correct Responsible Official's office by the close of business on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice.

Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-northern-flathead-hungry-horse-glacier-view@fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement form from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

For more information about this project, please contact Michele Draggo, project leader, at 406-387-3827.

If you have not made any initial comments on this project, and do not respond with comments on this EA or make a request to remain on the mailing list, you will not be notified of the decision for this project.

Sincerely,

JIMMY J. DEHERRERA
District Ranger