



File Code: 1950

Date: October 16, 2008

Dear Citizen,

After months of analysis and public involvement, I am pleased to say I have made a final decision on the Sheppard Creek Post-Fire Project. From July to September 2007 the Brush Creek Fire burned a total of approximately 30,000 acres on the Flathead and Kootenai National Forests, Plum Creek Timber Company Lands, and a small amount of other private property. Approximately 24,700 acres of the fire burned on lands administered by the Tally Lake Ranger District, Flathead National Forest.

The Sheppard Creek Post-Fire Project was designed to recover merchantable wood fiber affected by the fires on the Tally Lake Ranger District portion of National Forest System (NFS) lands in a timely manner. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for this project was initiated in December 2007; a Draft EIS and Final EIS were published in May and September, respectively.

In the Record of Decision (which is enclosed with this letter), I am authorizing timber salvage harvest and reforestation activities to occur within portions of the fire area.

Alternative B, as presented in the Final EIS, was modified in the decision to respond to changes identified through more detailed field reconnaissance, mapping refinements, and further consideration of the issues and public comments. My decision includes:

- salvage of fire affected trees on 3973 acres;
- planting trees within salvage units on 1545 acres;
- approximately 11.8 miles of historic road templates would be temporarily opened to access proposed salvage units and reclaimed after use. Approximately 6.0 miles of new temporary roads would be constructed and obliterated upon completion of the project;
- implementing project-specific design criteria detailed in the FEIS on pages 2-3 through 2-12.
- implementing Appendix C, FEIS- Best Management Practices; and
- implementing Appendix E, FEIS- Monitoring Plan for Wildlife, Fish, Soils, Water, and Vegetation.

Based on the need to implement this decision as soon as possible to prevent substantial loss of the salvage volume merchantability and value, the Chief of the Forest Service, Gail Kimbell, has determined that an emergency situation exists. In accordance with 36 CFR 215.10, activities associated with the removal of salvage trees may proceed immediately following the publication of notice of this decision in the legal notices section of *The Daily Inter Lake*.

The decision is still subject to administrative appeal. Details of how to appeal the decision are described at the end of the Record of Decision. The Record of Decision is available at the Tally Lake Ranger Station/Supervisor's Office (650 Wolfpack Way, Kalispell, MT 59901). 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. You may then navigate to the Sheppard Creek Post-Fire Project Record of Decision document.

I would like to thank everyone for their participation in this project, particularly those who provided written comments on the project or attended the public meetings and field trips. This project was challenging for all because of the compressed time frame, the complexity of the issues, and the differing views of people regarding resource management. 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 the issues expressed.

Sincerely,



CATHY BARBOULETOS
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure