United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Flathead National Forest
1935 Third Avenue East
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 758-5200
Fax (406) 758-5363

File Code: 1950
Date: October 31, 2006

Dear Citizen,

Today, I signed the Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Valley Face Fuels Reduction Project. The project area is located mostly west and south of Whitefish on the Tally Lake Ranger District, Montana and encompasses approximately 20,000 acres of national forest land. Since you have been involved in this project, I am enclosing a copy of the DN and FONSI in the format you requested.

I have selected Alternative C with modifications for implementation. My decision allows commercial harvest of wood products to reduce fuels and improve forest health on approximately 2095 acres that will yield approximately 11 million board feet. Other fuel reduction activities totaling approximately 1147 acres include precommercial thinning, fuel reduction treatments without commercial timber harvest, and prescribed burning. I have decided to allow approximately 3.1 miles of temporary road construction, 1.3 miles of temporary reconstruction of existing low-grade roads, and 39 miles of road rehabilitation to improve roads to Best Management Practices standards. No new permanent roads will be built and all temporary roads will be reclaimed after use is completed. No existing open system roads will be closed with this decision.

My decision is based on information contained in the Valley Face Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment, the supporting information in the Project Record, and on comments received from members of the public and other agencies during the collaborative analysis of the project and the 30-day pre-decisional objection period that followed publication of the EA.

I chose to modify Alternative C as it was presented in the EA as a result of specific comments I received during the objection period. These modifications are:

- Unit 32 (27 acres) and a portion of Unit 31 (99 acres) were eliminated to protect northern goshawk habitat. Within what was formally Unit 31, a new unit was created along the private boundary, designated Unit 413 (18 acres), which treats only the understory fuels and maintains goshawk habitat.
- A small portion (four acres) of Unit 27 was eliminated to maintain an area of large-tree wildlife habitat.
- Due to the elimination of a portion of Unit 31, temporary road 9 as described in the EA is no longer needed.

With this decision, I am also approving a project-specific amendment to the Forest Plan related to management area direction. This will temporarily amend an MA 9 standard (Wildlife and Fish Standard #4 for MA 9, Forest Plan page III-35) to allow timber harvest and fuels reduction in Units 17, 18, 21, and 421 and reduce the percent of thermal cover in the Mountain Meadow MA 9 white-tailed deer winter range from 50 to 42 percent.

The reason a site-specific amendment is warranted is that the small reduction in thermal cover is not expected to impact the white-tailed deer population. Adequate thermal cover exists in the remaining MA 9 areas, including the Pete Ridge area that annually receives the greatest winter use by white-tailed deer in the analysis area. The Mountain Meadow MA9 area is not considered a moderate- or high-use area by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. This temporary project-specific amendment will reduce the standard for thermal cover in the Mountain Meadow MA 9 white-tailed deer winter range to 42 percent from today until timber harvest and fuel reduction is completed in these four units.

This decision is issued under the authorities defined in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, Section 101(2) and is not subject to notice, comment, and appeal provisions pursuant to 36 CFR 215 (see 36 CFR 218.3). Activities associated with the implementation of this decision may proceed immediately.

For additional information about this project, please contact Tally Lake District Ranger Lisa Krueger or Planning Team Leader Bryan Donner at (406) 863-5400.

Thank you for your interest and involvement in this project.

Sincerely,

Cathy Barbouletos

CATHY BARBOULETOS
Forest Supervisor

Encl.