



File Code: 1950-3

Date: August 3, 2006

Dear Reader,

It has been awhile since you have received information about the Bozeman Municipal Watershed Project so I want to take this opportunity to provide you with an update. Since the last scoping period for this project in September and October of 2005, the Forest Service has continued analyzing and addressing issues and begun developing a specific proposal and range of alternatives. In addition, the Forest continues to meet with interested groups and individuals, the City of Bozeman staff, and City Commissioners.

In the previous scoping letter I said the project would consider using the Healthy Forest Restoration Act authority. I have decided not to use that authority, but to use the standard National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to analyze and document the decision.

I have also changed the wording of the purpose and need slightly for clarification purposes. The purpose of the project is to begin reducing the potential severity and extent of future wildland fires in the watershed and begin creating vegetative and fuel conditions that would reduce the risk of excess sediment and ash reaching the municipal water treatment plant in the event of a wildfire. The project's need is to help maintain a high quality, long term domestic water supply for the City of Bozeman, to provide for firefighter and recreating public safety in the drainages, and to reduce the potential fire spread to adjacent private lands in the wildland, urban interface. I believe this purpose and need more clearly states the necessity of this project.

The vegetative management activities identified for the proposal are 1) burning in less dense stands of trees to reduce ground cover and smaller trees in order to keep the stands in an open condition with less chance of rapid fire spread; 2) mechanically or hand cutting and piling smaller, younger trees to reduce the density of these kinds of stands; and 3) partially harvesting mature stands of trees, cutting smaller diameter trees, and leaving larger ones to reduce fuel loadings and break up the composition of vertical and horizontal fuels. The primary objective for all these activities is to address the purpose and need of this project by:

- a. Providing for public and firefighter safety by minimizing the probability and effects of future human-caused fire starts and/or helping to reduce the intensity of a potential wildland fire.
- b. Reducing the potential severity and extent of future wildland fires in Bozeman and Hyalite watersheds.
- c. Begin creating vegetative and fuel conditions that would reduce the risk of excess sediment and ash reaching the municipal water treatment plant in the event of a wildfire.
- d. Reducing the potential fire spread to adjacent private lands in the wildland, urban interface.

Stand treatments have been roughly grouped for descriptive purposes and described in fairly generic terms. The location of treatment areas can be found on the attached map. Alternative



prescriptions will also be developed and presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement to specify the actions needed to achieve this project's purpose and need.

- *Approximately 600 acres of burning in less dense stands is proposed.
- *Mechanical cutting and piling of young trees would occur on 1,300 acres.
- *Partial harvesting is proposed for about 1,500 acres.

Approximately 4 miles of temporary harvest road would need to be constructed. 400 acres of the partial harvesting would occur in the Gallatin Fringe Inventoried Roadless Area. This harvest would be accomplished by helicopter and no roads would be built. I am anticipating that all these activities would be implemented over a 5 year period.

The Forest Service is working with the Bozeman City Commission and staff to coordinate analysis and eventual implementation of this important project. However, decisions made for National Forest System lands are separate than those made by the City. Land management decisions on Federal lands within the watershed are made solely by the Forest Service. Decisions on City lands within the watershed and decisions about City water treatment and storage facilities remain outside the scope of any Forest Service decision. Of course the cumulative effects of potential City actions on City lands will be analyzed in the Forest Service NEPA document.

I would like to invite everyone to an Open House on September 13th to continue discussing this project and answering questions you may have. The Open House will be at the Bozeman Ranger District Office, 3710 Fallon St., Suite C, from 4:00 – 7:30 p.m. Other Forest resource specialists will also be available for your questions.

Any comments you have on this specific proposal will be welcome. I will accept your comments through September 15th. I am hoping to have a Draft EIS for the project ready for your review by early winter. Electronic (e-mail) comments may be sent to comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us. Acceptable file formats are MS Word, RTF, or PDF. Please include Bozeman Watershed Project in the subject line. Please send written or FAX'd comments to:

Bozeman Ranger District, BMW Project
Attn: Teri Seth
3710 Fallon St., Suite C
Bozeman, MT 59718
FAX: (406) 522-2528

For additional information please contact the Ranger District office at (406) 522-2520.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jose V Castro
JOSE V CASTRO
District Ranger

