



File Code: 1950-3
Date: January 4, 2005

Dear Interested Party,

Enclosed is a copy of the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for your review. The FEIS and ROD address the effects of implementing a hazardous fuel reduction project on up to 2500 acres in fifty one separate units on National Forest System lands outside of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness in the wildland/urban interface areas along the Main Boulder River Corridor. The project area is adjacent to the Boulder River, encompassing a distance of approximately 24 miles by 1/2 mile and is located approximately 30 miles southwest of Big Timber, Montana on the Big Timber Ranger District of the Gallatin National Forest. The legal description for the project is T3S R12E, T4S R 12 E, T5S R12E, and T6S R12E P.M, Sweet Grass and Park Counties, MT. Fuel management treatments would occur from the forest boundary near the Natural Bridge Recreation Site, south to the Box Canyon Guard Station.

Treatments associated with my selected alternative would consist of:

Stand density reduction, utilizing ground-based harvest equipment, would occur on approximately 1060 acres on slopes up to 35%. Approximately 1040 acres on slopes greater than 35% and/or areas not operable by conventional ground-based equipment would be treated with other methods. A minimum of 15 to 20 percent of the planned acreage for each unit will be left untreated to provide diversity across the landscape and maintain undisturbed habitat.

Conifers would be slashed and prescribed burning activities would occur on approximately 400 acres of meadow type habitats.

In addition to reducing surface fuel loading by commercial thinning and salvaging large diameter trees, small-diameter fuel reduction will occur in each unit. Understory burning and/or pile burning would occur in conjunction with the thinning activities.

Aspen clones would have conifers removed within a radius of 100-feet in order to encourage aspen regeneration.

Commercial harvest operations are expected to require the construction of temporary roads. A maximum of 7.4 miles of temporary road may be constructed to access the areas proposed for mechanical fuels treatment using conventional ground-based logging systems. No new permanent road construction will occur.

Collaboration with the public has been an important part of this project. My selected alternative was developed with input from adjacent private landowners, the local watershed association, as well as state, county, and local officials and groups.

I anticipate the project to take 5-7 years to complete, beginning in the winter of 2005.



The primary goals of my selected alternative (proposed action), which have formed the purpose and need of the project are to:

1. Provide 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 leaving the wilderness and entering the wildland/urban interface of the Main Boulder River Corridor.
2. Extend the potential time available for evacuation in the event of a wildfire by reducing the fire hazard along the Main Boulder Road.
3. Reduce fuel loadings and break up the composition of vertical and horizontal fuels in the river corridor, where possible.

The FEIS analyzes the proposed action (Alternative B) and the no action (Alternative A) alternatives, along with seven other action alternatives considered but dropped from detailed analysis. Based on the analysis presented in the FEIS, my selected alternative is Alternative B (proposed action) because it best meets the purpose and need for the proposal and addresses the issues considered in the analysis.

Copies of the FEIS and ROD are available on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin> on the Projects and Plans page. To request a hard copy of the FEIS or ROD, contact Barbara Ping by phone at (406) 522-2570, or by letter to Attn: Barbara Ping, Forest Ecology Group, Bozeman Ranger District, 3710 Fallon St. Suite C, Bozeman, MT 59718.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215 (June 2003). Individuals and organizations that submitted substantive written or oral comments during the 45-day comment period (36 CFR 215.6) for the Environmental Assessment may file an appeal. Comments received from an authorized representative(s) of an organization are considered those of the organization only; individual members of that organization do not meet appeal eligibility requirements solely on the basis of membership in an organization; the member(s) must submit substantive comments as an individual (36 CFR 215.13).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why my decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

A written appeal, including attachments, must be submitted to the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer (36 CFR 215.8) within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of the FEIS and this decision in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Bozeman, Montana. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the availability of the FEIS and decision in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.15. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Written appeals must be postmarked by the U.S. Postal Service, e-mailed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the last day of the appeal period. Hand delivered appeals must be time and date imprinted at the Responsible Official's office by the close of business on the last day of the comment period.

Paper appeals must be submitted to:

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
P.O. Box 7669
200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59807

Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

In electronic appeals, the subject line must contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF). 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.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.9, if no appeal is received, implementation of this project may begin on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition.

Additional information is available from Bill Avey, Big Timber District Ranger, at (406)932-5155.

Sincerely,



REBECCA HEATH
Forest Supervisor

cc: William Avey