MAIN BOULDER FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT

RECORD OF DECISION

I. DECISION SUMMARY

***In summary*:**

- Proposed fuel reduction treatments will occur on approximately 2500 acres in fifty-one separate units. Stand density reduction, utilizing ground-based harvest equipment, will 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 will 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 will be slashed and prescribed burning activities will 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 will occur in conjunction with the thinning activities.

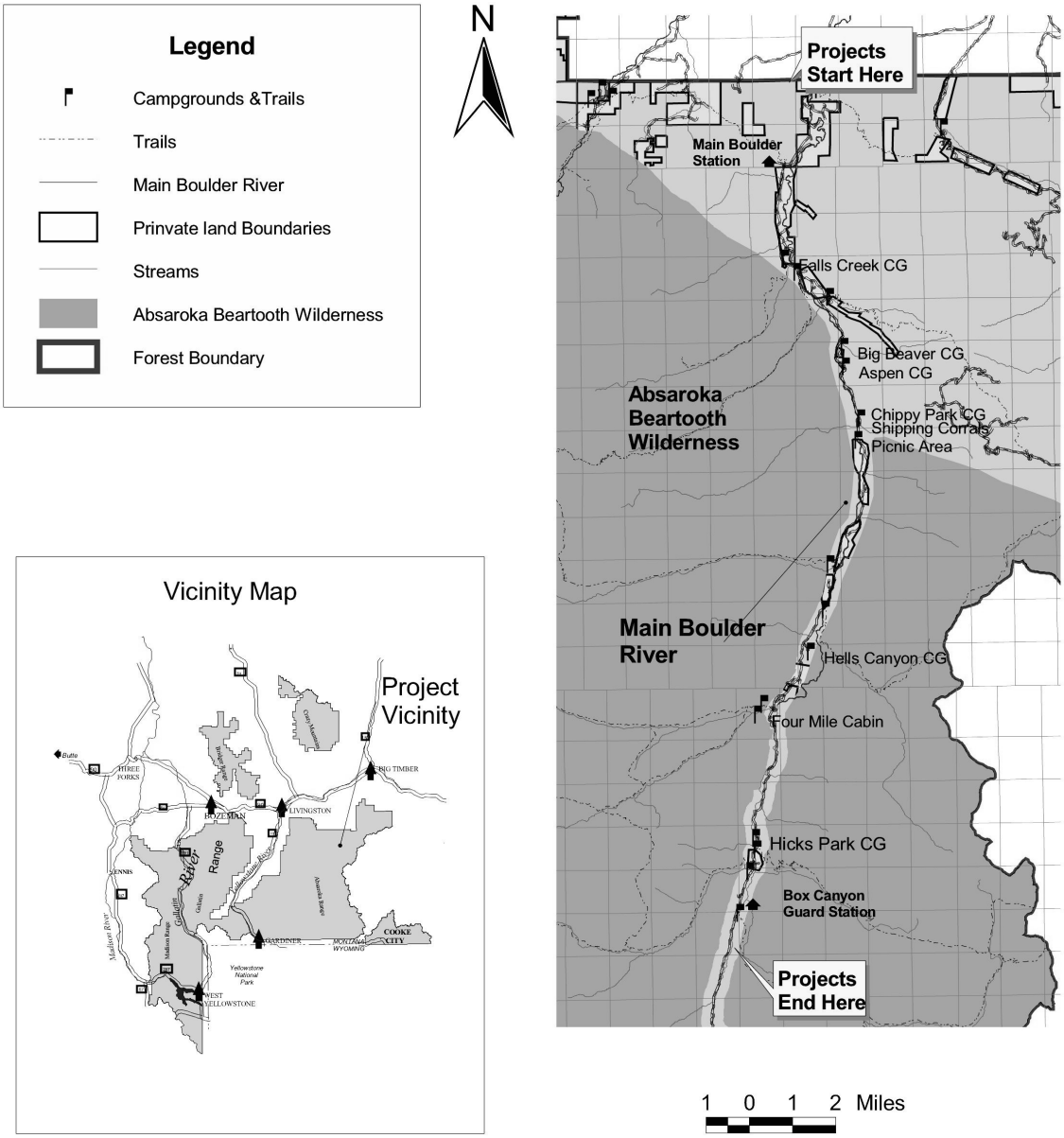
- Aspen clones will have conifers removed within a radius of 100-feet in order to encourage aspen regeneration.

- 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.

The Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project area follows both sides of the Main Boulder River for a distance of approximately 24 miles and is roughly one-half mile wide. The project area lies 30 miles southwest of Big Timber, Montana on the Big Timber Ranger District of the Gallatin National Forest. The legal description is T3S R12E, T4S R12E, T5S R12E, and T6S R12E P.M, Sweet Grass and Park Counties, MT.

Fuel management treatments will occur from the Forest boundary near the Natural Bridge and Falls south to the Box Canyon Guard Station, (refer to Map 1, p. 2). Vegetation management activities will be restricted to the non-wilderness corridor along the Main Boulder Road (#6639).

Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project
Scoping Map



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MAP 1

II. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 1991, the Big Timber Ranger District developed an Integrated Resource Plan for the Main Boulder River Corridor consisting of comprehensive fuels modification, fire prevention, and pre-attack fire plans. The purpose of this initial plan was to identify opportunities on Forest Service lands in the interim until such time as a comprehensive plan could be developed. Through analysis, it was determined that there was significant potential for a large wildfire to occur in the Main Boulder Drainage and that the potential for this type of stand replacing fire could be reduced by implementing fuel reduction activities.

In winter of 94/95 the Main Boulder multi-resource planning team initiated Phase 1 of the Boulder Fuels Reduction Plan. Fuels reduction techniques were prioritized (1.life, 2. property, and 3.resource protection) and analyzed, breaking the drainage into three sections. Several small, localized fuel reduction proposals were initiated. They were to be implemented over the next several years. Included in this plan was the education and advising of private landowners and church camps, in order to create fuel breaks and protect structures in the event of a large fire. It was recognized that insect and disease infestations in the Upper Boulder drainage were creating tremendous fuel loadings, thus the implementation of the Boulder Fuels and Box Beetle Salvage Sales. Heavy infestation levels in the wilderness were not available for control or treatment. Prescribed fire in the wilderness was thought to be too risky to consider at that point in time. While the small, localized fuel reduction projects were successful, it was recognized that they did not begin to treat a large enough area to effectively deal with the fuels buildup and resulting risk in the Main Boulder Corridor.

In the fall of 2002 project initiation of the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project began with the publication of the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register on November 6, 2002. A legal notice concerning the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project was also published in the Big Timber, Pioneer and the Bozeman Chronicle on December 6, 2002. On December 8, 2002 an article was published in the Bozeman Chronicle explaining the purpose and need of the Main Boulder Project as an attempt to reduce fire danger and increase public safety.

Availability of the DEIS was posted in the Federal Register on July 30,2004. A legal notice was published in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle (the paper of record) and the Big Timber Pioneer, stating that the DEIS was available for public review and comment. Copies of the July 28, 2004 DEIS were mailed to persons, groups, local governments, and agencies that expressed interest in the project. A 45-day public review and comment period followed. A total of 12 comment letters pertaining to the project were received at that time.

The FEIS and Record of Decision were released on January 3, 2005. Two appeals of the decision were received and were being processed when on April 4, 2005 the decision was reversed. A need was found to supplement the Northern goshawk analysis and potential effects of the proposed action to the Northern goshawk were reconsidered. A Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement was released for a 45-day review and comment period in April 2005. A total of 6 comment letters pertaining to the project were received. The Final Supplemental EIS and revised Record of Decision are being released concurrently in August of 2005 for a 45-day review and appeal period. For a more complete description of project history, including scoping and public involvement, see page 2-2 of the FEIS.

III. PURPOSE AND NEED

The primary goals of the proposed action, which have formed the purpose and need for the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction 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 secondary goals of the project are to:

1) Improve wildlife habitat/forage by enhancing winter range and meadows.
2) Rejuvenate aspen stands.
3) Improve fire protection in the wildland/urban interface.
4) Increase tree vigor at the stand level, making trees less susceptible to future insect and disease occurrences.
5) Maintain and protect values for river segments that are eligible for consideration and possible inclusion into the "Scenic and Recreational" classifications of the National Wild and Scenic River System.
6) Through collaboration and public involvement in the NEPA process, increase the potential acres treated by providing property owners and local groups with the information needed to appreciate opportunities to implement similar hazardous fuel reduction plans on private land.

Note: The proposed action calls for fuel reduction treatments only on National Forest System (NFS) lands (including National Forest land authorized for special use permits) outside of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Private landowners in the vicinity of the project are responsible for fuels reduction treatments and structure protection measures on privately owned property.

IV. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DECISION

Proposed Action (Selected Alternative)

It is my decision to proceed with fuel reduction and associated activities in the Main Boulder River Corridor as described for Alternative B, the proposed action. The Selected Alternative was designed to meet the purpose and need for the project with both primary and secondary goals having been addressed. The proposed action includes fuel reduction treatments on approximately 2500 acres in fifty-one separate units. (See maps 2-1 through 2-4 on pp. 7-10). Stand density reduction, utilizing ground-based harvest equipment, will occur on approximately 1060 acres on slopes up to 35%, harvesting both large and small diameter trees. Approximately 1040 acres on slopes greater than 35% and/or areas not operable by conventional ground-based equipment will be treated with other methods. These treatments could utilize specialized equipment, as well as horse logging on slopes less than 20%, cable logging, aerial systems, hand thinning, hand piling, and burning. Approximately 200 of these acres on slopes >35% may be inoperable due to the terrain.

Leave tree spacing will be variable, consisting of patches of multi-storied trees as well as open spaced individual trees. This irregular stand structure will break the continuity of vertical and horizontal fuels among individual trees. Prescriptions will vary between adjacent stands to disrupt the continuity of fuel conditions among stands. Conifers will be slashed and controlled burning activities will occur on approximately 400 acres of meadow type areas.
Harvest, skidding, log hauling, and mechanical slash piling will generally occur from November 1 to April 30. These activities could occur outside of this season in some cases, but must include use of slash mats or other, similar techniques to protect soils and limit ground disturbance. Harvest and skidding activities must be completed on a given unit within one year, unless extreme weather conditions prohibit completion. If this were to occur, work in the unit could be finished the following year, but no new units will be released for cutting until harvest and skidding were complete and accepted.

Mechanized equipment will not be allowed within Streamside Management Zones or wet areas in conformance with the State of Montana Best Management Practices (BMP's).

Direct treatment of activity-related and natural down fuels will be constrained to maintain 5-10 tons of coarse, down woody material per acre. Burning will only occur during the spring (April/May) and fall (late September to December) seasons. Conifers will be slashed, followed by prescribed burning on approximately 400 acres of meadow type areas. Prescribed burning, as well as understory burning in some of the thinned units, will occur in spring (May/June) or fall (late September to November).

No new permanent road construction will occur. Commercial harvest operations are expected to require temporary road construction. A maximum of 7.4 miles of temporary road may be needed to

access the areas proposed for mechanical fuels treatment using conventional ground-based logging systems. Of this total, approximately 4.8 miles will be re-examined on the ground prior to project implementation to determine whether opportunities exist to reduce the length of newly constructed temporary road by using existing roads on private or National Forest land. One of the key factors in determining the use of existing roads on private land is whether permission to use the roads can be obtained. Existing roads on either ownership may require reconstruction to support safe and efficient use, consistent with project design criteria and mitigation. (See maps 2-5 through 2-8 on pp. 11-14).

Actual temporary road locations are determined through agreement by the Forest Service during timber sale contract administration. Temporary roads will be constructed to provide access to the interior of harvest units to facilitate ground-based harvest systems. These roads will be built on relatively flat slopes (less than 20%) and will be constructed to the lowest possible standard capable of supporting log haul in order to minimize ground disturbance. Temporary road construction, including right-of-way clearing and removing wood products, will occur July 1- October 30. All newly constructed temporary roads will be closed to the public during harvest activities and permanently closed and rehabilitated within one year of completion of harvest related activities within that portion of the project area. Roads that are seen from key observation areas will be recontoured (the road prism removed) in order to meet visual concerns and other resource needs.

Maps 2-1 through 2-4 display the areas of treatment with the selected alternative (proposed action).

The entire project is projected to take 5-7 years to complete. Implementation could occur as early as Winter 2005. The project will be divided into logical subdivisions for implementation purposes.

V. SCOPE OF THE DECISION

The scope of actions addressed in my decision are limited to stand density reduction and the reduction of downed fuel loadings on National Forest Land including:

- Thinning large diameter green conifers
- Harvesting insect or disease damaged/killed conifers.
- Cutting small diameter conifers
- Slashing conifers encroaching into meadows and aspen stands.
- Prescribed burning meadow type areas and underburning in treated stands.
- Piling and removing or burning downed woody materials and fuels resulting from treatment actions.

My decision reflects the results of the analysis of site-specific, on-the-ground activities. It is not a general management plan for the Main Boulder watershed. While environmental effects were disclosed in the FEIS for other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions, the scope of this decision is limited to the actions described above.

MAP 2-1 Proposed Action (Selected Alternative) Map

MAP 2-2 Selected Alternative (Proposed Action) Map

MAP 2-3 Selected Alternative (Proposed Action) Map

MAP 2-4 Selected Alternative (Proposed Action) Map

MAP 2-5 Selected Alternative (Temp Road) Map

MAP 2-6 Selected Alternative (Temp Road) Map

MAP 2-7 Selected Alternative (Temp Road) Map

MAP 2-8 Selected Alternative (Temp Road) Map

Table 1 Proposed Action (Selected Alternative)- Individual Unit Descriptions

Unit ID	Stand Treatment Group	Forest Type	Acres	Mgmt Area	Slope Range %	Fuel Mode	Remarks
MBS	3/6	DF/ Limber Pine	155	6,12,17	2-66	2/8	Cut only up to 8” dbh in roadless area w/hand treatment
1	1	DF/LP	19	3, 11	14-68	8	
2	1	DF/LP	19	11	13-68	8/10	Exclude any knapweed areas
3	2	DF/LP	49	5	13-34	8	Rehabilitate old ATV trails Park Electric powerline
3B	1	DF/LP	10	5	1-22	8	Park Electric powerline
3C	1	DF/LP	25	5	13-54	8	
4	1	DF	26	5	0-43	2/8	Weeds concern use old access road in center of unit Park Electric powerline
5	1	DF/LP	16	5	10-70	8	
5A	1	DF/LP	10	5	7-66	8	
5B	3	Non-Forest	46	5	3-47	8	
5C	3	Non-Forest	19	5	3-13	8	
6	1	DF/LP	17	5	7-21	8/10	
7	1	DF/LP Aspen	126	5	6-66	8/10	Park Electric powerline Use existing trails to minimize weeds
7A	3	Non-Forest	11	5	1-23	8/10	
7B	3	Non-Forest	31	5	6-27	8/10	Old burn bay on South end of unit
8	1	DF/LP	56	5	10-64	8	
8A	3	Non-Forest	35	5	0-28	8	
9	1	DF/LP	40	5	1-53	8/10	
10	1	DF/LP	24	5	13-33	10	
11	1	DF/LP	30	5	7-61	8/10	
12	1	DF/LP	71	5	10-43	8	
13	2	LP	59	5	0-28	8	Park Electric powerline
14	1	LP/DF	11	5	11-18	8	Park Electric powerline
14A	5	LP/DF	41	5	6-26	8	
15	3	Aspen	4	5	2-28	8	
16	1	DF	47	5	17-69	2/8	Park Electric powerline
16A	3	Non-Forest	22	5	17-45	2/8	
17	1	DF	29	5	8-41	10	Park Electric powerline
17A	3	Non-Forest	27	5	8-45	10	Park Electric powerline
18	1	DF/LP	75	5	2-71	10/C	Park Electric powerline
18A	1	DF/LP	105	5	1-59	10/C	

Unit ID	Stand Treatment Group	Forest Type	Acres	Mgmt Area	Slope Range %	Fuel Mode	Remarks
19	1	DF/LP	37	5	11-58	10/C	
19A	3/1	DF/LP Aspen	15	5	1-29	10/C	
19B	3/1	Non-forest	10	5	0-29	10/C	
20	1	DF/LP Aspen	8	5	9-48	8	
20A	3	Non-Forest	3	5	13-27	8	
21	1	DF Aspen	54	5	0-38	8	
22	1	LP/S/DF	39	5	5-42	C	
22A	3/1	Non-Forest	17	5	0-42	C	
23	1	DF/LP Aspen	30	5	1-63	C	
24	1	S/LP/DF	218	5	0-86	10/C	
25	4	S/LP/DF	104	5	5-68	C	
25A	1	S/LP	51	5	0-28	C	
26	1	DF/LP	50	5	5-41	C	
26A	1	DF/LP	30	5	2-38	C	
27	1	DF/LP	146	5	3-83	C	
28	1	S/DF/LP	25	5	0-39	C	
29	1	DF/S/LP	36	5	4-40	C	
30	1	LP/S/DF Aspen	215	15	1-99	C	
31	1	LP/S/DF	79	5	1-47	C	
32	1	LP/S/DF	65	5	0-40	C	
Total			**2487**				

***Brush disposal and/or burning of slash will occur for all units. Underburning will occur in some units as needed to reach resource objectives.**

***Park Electric powerline intersects a number of treatment units. Coordination with Park Electric Power Company prior to treatments will be necessary.**

***Riparian MA7 are too fine to map within the Main Boulder corridor. Treatments in some of the units will continue into the riparian zone and will follow all riparian and MA7 guidelines.**

VI. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Collaboration with the public has been an important part of the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project. The proposal was developed with input from adjacent private homeowners, the local watershed association, as well as state, county, and local officials and groups. The Forest Service has been meeting with the Boulder River Watershed Association, private landowners, recreationists and other interested parties since September of 2001. More than 20 meetings have been held, with the Forest Service providing information and updates regarding the Main Boulder Fuel Reduction Project. The Big Timber Ranger District has engaged a long list of community interests in this project in addition to the watershed association including the Sweet Grass County Commissioners, Sweet Grass Department of Emergency Services, Big Timber Fire Chief and Fire Department, Sweet Grass County Sheriff, the Sweet Grass County Road Department, Sweet Grass Conservation District, Park County Commissioners, Park County Rural Fire Department, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Bureau of Land Management, and local residents.

During the winter/spring of 2002/2003, the Big Timber District Ranger regularly attended the Main Boulder Watershed Association meetings developing a relationship with the group in order to help coordinate mutual goals of fuel reduction in the Main Boulder River Corridor between the Forest Service, county, and private entities.

On January 16, 2003, a field trip led by the district ranger, was held in order to inform interested local groups of the Forest Service's proposed fuel reduction activities in the Main Boulder River Corridor. Participants included a staff representative of Senator Max Baucus, a rep. from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, several representatives from Sweet Grass County including commissioners, road supervisor, rural fire department, and representatives from the Main Boulder Watershed Association.

A meeting was held on May 7, 2003 at the American Legion Hall in Big Timber for the purpose of discussing the coordination of fuels reduction work along the Main Boulder River Corridor. The meeting was well attended with representatives from the Main Boulder Watershed Association, private landowners, and members of several other county, state, and private groups. The meeting accomplished its goal of bringing as many partners as possible to the table to share ideas and goals for fuel reduction in the Main Boulder River Corridor. Following this meeting, a number of interested individuals joined together, forming the Boulder River Fuels Reduction Cooperative.

In June of 2003, the Big Timber Rural Fire Department had performed seventy "fire wise" assessments on private structures in the Main Boulder Corridor.

The Boulder River Fuels Reduction Cooperative has been awarded two grants, one from the USDI Bureau of Land Management, and another from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, to assess and implement fuels reduction efforts on private land. The Boulder Fuels Reduction Cooperative has hired a project coordinator to manage the program and engaged a consultant firm, Fire Logistics, to develop the Boulder River Community Assessment and Mitigation Plan. This plan, developed independently from the Main Boulder FEIS, assessed fire risk and fuel conditions in the Main Boulder Corridor, and identifies actions necessary on private land to protect private land values as well as providing for public and firefighter safety.

Four private lands fuel reduction sites were completed in spring of 2004 and ten private residences were completed in the spring of 2005. An additional ten private sites are currently pending treatment. Two church camps have completed fuels treatment with one additional pending. One private guest ranch is currently under contract for treatment. Park Electric Cooperative is currently in the planning stages for completing fuels treatment within the powerline corridor that runs the length of the drainage across both private and public lands.

Numerous other field trips to the project area were conducted during the summer/fall of 2004. Those attending included both members of the public and various organizations including the US Fish & Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Trout Unlimited, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

VII. MONITORING

My decision incorporates the monitoring activities described in Chapter 2-41 of the FEIS. They encompass a wide range of issues including: project implementation and assurance that design criteria and mitigation measures are implemented for fuels, roadless and wilderness, recreation and safety, noxious weeds, wildlife, water quality/BMP's/fisheries, soils, visual quality, air quality and heritage resources.

General implementation of the project (design, contract preparation, contract administration, and assurance of implementation of mitigation measures) will be completed by Forest Service personnel, and reviewed by the District Ranger and staff throughout the fuels reduction project. Fuels reduction contract administration will be conducted on a regular basis and as needed to obtain acceptable contractor performance throughout project operations. Violations of contract provisions will be addressed immediately upon discovery, and will be dealt with prior to further fuel reduction actions occurring. All contract activities and correspondence will be documented and filed in the fuels reduction contract records.

VIII. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

I have reviewed this project on the ground, have reviewed the public comment and have reviewed the analysis contained in the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project Final Environmental Impact Statement. In making this decision I used the following decision criteria to compare and evaluate the alternatives.

1) Achievement of the project's purpose and need to better provide for firefighter and public safety by increasing the potential time available for evacuation by reducing the probability and intensity of human-caused starts along the Main Boulder River Corridor as well as helping to mitigate the effects of an intense wildfire leaving the wilderness and entering the wildland/urban interface of the Main Boulder River Corridor. (FEIS, Chapter 1-13).

2) Responsiveness to the key environmental issues (significant factors) as described in the FEIS (Chapter 2-4 to 2-10) and consideration of public comments (FEIS Appendix E).

3) Consistency with laws, regulations, and policy (FEIS, Chapter 3-5 to 3-23).

In general, I found this to be a well-designed fuel reduction project with minimal adverse environmental effects. The FEIS addresses the potential effects of thinning, fuel reduction, and burning on a variety of National Forest resources. I have concluded from this information that the predicted effects are acceptable and that Alternative A (no action), living with the current condition for an indefinite period into the future, is not acceptable. Because the analysis demonstrates that the environmental effects are manageable, I believe the Forest Service is mandated by its role as a steward of public resources to pursue an opportunity to improve public and firefighter safety. I strongly believe that Alternative B (proposed action) best serves the overall public interest.

1) Achievement of the Purpose and Need

Alternative B (proposed action) was developed considering fuel hazard, risk of human-caused ignition, social values, property, and human lives at risk. In numerous reviews over the past 10-15 years, fire behavior specialists did not find any safe areas in the Main Boulder corridor, where large groups of people can take refuge from a large fire. All of their reviews have concluded that evacuation is the only method of protecting the 2500-3000 members of the public from a wildfire in the Main Boulder. I am concerned by the prospect of an urgent wildfire situation, made more dangerous by large buses, recreationists, and residents exiting over the single lane Main Boulder Road and encountering incoming fire equipment and personnel. The Sweet Grass County Fire Plan has identified this drainage as the county's highest wildland/urban interface risk. In addition, Sweet Grass and Park Counties' fire chiefs, county commissioners, sheriffs, and numerous other fire behavior and public safety personnel have long recognized the Main Boulder's risk. Because the Main Boulder Road is owned and maintained by the county, I cannot improve access in and out of the river corridor, though the Forest is

working closely with the county to identify possible funding for road improvement projects.

In order to thoroughly assess the present fuel conditions, fire risk, and rate of spread, the analysis uses several different vegetative and fire models. In addition, independent of this analysis, a consultant hired by the Boulder River Fuels Reduction Cooperative used a different fire model to analyze fire risk and rate of spread and came to the same conclusion as our analysis. (Boulder River Community Fire Plan by Fire Logistics, Rath et al, August 2004). Our analysis, backed up and verified by this independent assessment, shows clearly and concretely that the implementation of Alternative B will drastically slow down an intense crown fire in the Main Boulder Corridor as well as minimize the risk of a human caused start in the Main Boulder Corridor becoming a running crown fire. This clearly demonstrates that my decision to implement Alternative B best meets the primary purpose and need for the project. Based on the analysis, as well as demonstrated large fires in very similar canyons (FEIS Chapter 1-6), I strongly believe that this decision is scientifically sound and in the best interest of the public.

Alternative A (no action) would not change public and firefighter safety from the present condition. Under this alternative, any actions that might be taken in response to demonstrated concerns for public safety would be deferred indefinitely into the future. Existing fuel accumulations would not be reduced and dead and dying trees would continue to contribute added fuels. Controlled burning might occur as part of the District's small timber sale, range, and wildlife programs. Burning isolated piles of logging slash and meadows would not treat sufficient acres and likely the acres treated would not be those needed to change foreseeable fire behavior. Vertical and horizontal fuel continuity would remain a concern, with the continued potential for a fast running, intense fire to occur in the Main Boulder Corridor. Alternative A would have no effect on changing the probability of an uncontrollable crown fire from what currently exists in the Main Boulder Corridor (FEIS Chapter 3-26).

2) Responsiveness to Environmental Issues and Public Comments

In making my decision, I considered issues generated internally and publicly, comments submitted during the scoping phase of this analysis, and those submitted during the DEIS review period. The ID team thoroughly studied the issues and developed alternatives, design criteria, and mitigation measures that addressed the most critical issues (FEIS, Chapter 2). The public comments to the DEIS and agency responses (FEIS, Appendix E) clarify and elaborate on the analysis and relevant information upon which I based my decision.

The public assistance and comments I received, both through the extensive collaboration process and the DEIS comment period, where extremely important in project design. While many of the comments expressed strong support for the project, the comments also helped identify areas that needed clarification or additional evaluation. Specifically, public comments helped me clarify project language regarding air quality, riparian management and reestablishment of ground cover. In addition, as a result of public comments, I reevaluated and reduced the number of temporary road miles from 9.27 to 7.4 miles, as well as clarified that not all 7.4 miles of road will be open at any one time during the project; I also updated the economic analysis and added an analysis of weed control costs. In summary, I thoroughly reviewed the key environmental issues, listened to the public comment of our collaborators and commenters and evaluated how they were addressed by the alternatives.

Fuels: I considered the fuels effects that are described in the FEIS, Ch. 3-24 to 3-32 in making my decision. I feel that the potential impact to public and firefighter safety in the event of a wildfire in the Main Boulder corridor is the driving issue for the implementation of this project.

The NEXUS and BEHAVE runs based upon the methods of fuel reduction proposed with Alternative B (Selected Alternative) show a reduction in fire behavior. Fire behavior indicated a change from crown to surface fire after the proposed treatments are completed. On an average day in the drainage, that will result in a rate of spread that will be decreased from the existing condition of 1 - 2.5 mph to .1 - .5 mph after treatments are complete. This will be the average decrease over the entire project. The rate of decrease for individual units will vary by treatment and there will still be areas within the project (leave clumps of trees and areas of heavier crown density) where more extreme fire behavior

may occur (crown fire). By reducing the rate of spread and increasing the likelihood that any fire start will remain small and controllable, public and firefighter safety will be enhanced and additional time will be provided to take measures needed to evacuate the public. In combination with effective fuels treatments on private inholdings, the proposed treatments associated with Alternative B will meet the purpose and need of the project.

Alternative A (no action) would have no effect on the probability of an uncontrollable crown fire occurring from what currently exists within the Boulder River corridor. Without hazardous fuel reduction activities, forested areas would continue to be densely stocked. There would be little if any space between the crowns of individual trees. Small and intermediate size trees would continue to contribute to a continuous fuel layer extending from the ground to the crowns of the larger, dominant trees. This vertical continuity of fuel provides a path into the tree crowns for a fire that might otherwise only consume ground fuels and surface litter. A wind-driven fire would be expected to move quickly from the ground to the forest canopy, killing most of the trees in its path. Fire behavior of this kind – a running crown fire – is the most resistant to suppression control of any fire type. As such, risks to public and firefighter safety would not be changed from the current situation.

Noxious Weeds: The noxious weed issues that I considered in making my decision are described in detail in the FEIS Ch. 3-32 to 3-44. I feel that application of the noxious weed prevention design and mitigation features as described on *Ch. 2-34* of the FEIS should be effective at preventing or at least greatly reducing the spread of noxious weeds. Best Management Practices as defined in the May 2001, FSM 2000, Zero Code 2080-Noxious Weed Management will be followed (Located in Project File, Ref. #272). This supplement replaces previous direction for an Integrated Weed Management approach for management of noxious weeds on National Forest System lands in Region 1.

An integral part of these mitigations will be the implementation of a noxious weed monitoring plan over the project area. This will allow the timely treatment of infestations. Upon implementation of Alternative B, if noxious weeds are introduced or expand into new areas, these weeds will be aggressively treated annually following the direction provided by the May 1987 Gallatin National Forest Noxious Weed Control FEIS (Located in the Project File, Ref #280). The 2005 Gallatin National Forest Noxious Weed FEIS will replace the 1987 direction, once final approval is made. The Noxious Weed FEIS and ROD have been released and is currently in the appeal period (Project File, Ref #289A).

The 1987 FEIS provides clear direction pertaining to the application of chemicals in both upland and riparian areas and complies with direction set forth by the EPA and the State of Montana. Chemical treatments will be applied by licensed applicators consistent with labeling instructions. Treatments adjacent to the Main Boulder Road will be coordinated with Sweetgrass County weed management.

After careful examination of the analysis, I have concluded that the risk of contributing to the spread of noxious weeds during project implementation is acceptable, particularly when compared to the strong likelihood that with Alternative A (no action), weeds would likely spread from existing infestations in the event of a wildfire, due to the current heavy fuel situation, and the type of actions that would be necessary to attempt to suppress the fire, given the lives and property values at risk.

Water Quality: The water quality analysis that I considered in my selection of Alternative B is outlined in Ch. 3-44 to 3-48 of the FEIS. The R1R4 sediment model was utilized by the forest hydrologist for the Selected Alternative in a cumulative mode accounting for all existing roads, timber harvesting, residential and recreational developments in the Main Boulder watershed to the Forest Boundary at the mouth of the canyon. Timeframe for the cumulative effects analysis is 1980 to 2011. Overall sediment and nutrient impacts of Alternative B will be immeasurable and insignificant. Implementation of Alternative B will be in compliance with the Montana Water Quality Act and Administrative Rules of Montana, WQLS/TMDL constraints, and with Gallatin NF Forest Plan direction for water quality protection.

Under Alternative A, no actions would be undertaken over the next several years to

respond to the purpose and need identified in *Chapter 1-13*. The opportunity to reduce fuel accumulations would be deferred and additional fuels would accumulate. No vegetative treatments would be undertaken to treat stands, which are susceptible to lethal fire and to insect and disease outbreaks. The R1R4 analysis for Alternative A shows that existing sediment levels would continue to decline from 2003 to 2004. No additional fire sediment or increase in road sediment would occur.

Because the water quality impacts are projected to be minimal, and current fuels conditions are extreme and continuous, I feel that it is appropriate and necessary to take action to reduce these fuel loadings by implementing Alternative B.

Fisheries: I considered the fisheries analysis outlined in Ch.3-49 to 3-58 of the FEIS in making my decision to choose Alternative B for implementation.

Based on the channel sensitivity analysis, Alternative B poses little threat to the physical integrity of riparian areas or streambank stability. Stream channels in the Main Boulder Corridor have stable stream banks with a low to very low sensitivity to disturbance. Riparian vegetation exerts low to negligible control on channel form and bank stability.

In addition, mitigation measures (FEIS, Ch. 2-32) including streamside management zone (SMZ) rules are designed to reduce or eliminate potential for adverse effects on riparian integrity or bank stability and are consistent with the Trout Unlimited (TU) settlement agreement of 1990. Field trips and follow-up meetings with TU representatives further resolved initial concerns. They fully support the project provided that all mitigation measures, design criteria, and follow-up monitoring procedures are adhered to. They also encouraged that modifications be considered as stand treatments proceed.

With the mitigation included in Alternative B, fuel treatments are designed to maximize the amount of large woody debris (LWD) available for recruitment to stream channels following fuel treatments. The slight predicted increase of sediment is well within annual fluctuations in sediment discharge for the drainage. Thus, the estimated slight sediment increase will have *no effect* on fish habitat quality for any of the streams within the project area.

Analysis shows that the no action alternative would have no fuel reduction activities along riparian corridors of streams within the project and would result in *no effect*, beyond existing conditions, to fish populations or habitat. However, it is worth noting that without fuel reduction, the potential for a higher intensity fire along the Boulder River Corridor increases and post-fire vegetative recovery time could also increase. With large-scale high severity fires, there is a potential threat to watershed integrity and associated fish species persistence. Existing fuels loads are unnaturally high throughout the drainage, including riparian corridors.

I realize that treatments associated with Alternative B will not reduce the likelihood of a large-scale stand replacement fire in the upland Wilderness areas of the Boulder drainage. However, treatments associated with Alternative B will likely reduce the burn severity of a potential wildfire along the Boulder River Corridor. Reducing the severity of a future wildfire could have some beneficial effect to riparian integrity and fish habitat quality.

It is an important point to note that the project meets riparian dependent resource objectives as identified in the TU Settlement Agreement (Agreement Action Item #4). It is also important to note that these benefits would not be realized with the no action alternative.

Scenery: In making my decision to choose Alternative B for implementation, I considered the scenic integrity (existing visual condition) and the need to maintain conditions that allow portions of the Main Boulder River corridor to remain eligible for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic River System as a Scenic and Recreational River. I utilized the analysis provided in Ch 3-58 to 3-64 of the FEIS to compare the visual quality effects associated with implementation of Alternative B (proposed action) against what the corridor will likely look like in the future with no action, which will increase the likelihood of a future catastrophic wildfire.

The design criteria and mitigation on *Ch. 2-37* (Scenery, Wild & Scenic and Recreation) were developed specifically to reduce the potential impacts to the integrity of the scenery that could be caused by the proposed tree thinning and fuel reduction. By following these design and mitigation criteria, impacts will not visually dominate and the scenic integrity of the corridor will be maintained, thus meeting the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objective of Partial Retention and the Scenic and Recreational River standards. Implementation of these mitigation measures will reduce the visual dominance of stumps in the foreground; roads and skid trails constructed for this project; structures that depend upon vegetative screening; slash piles; staging and decking areas, and markings on trees used as directions for logging contractors. The mitigation measures are also designed to maintain the current ambience inside the recreation sites; eliminate unnatural appearing vegetation transitions by feathering or shaping edges of units, and avoid treatments on only one side of the road. After implementation of Alternative B, the Main Boulder River Corridor will appear less timbered than what currently exists, but will more closely resemble the scenic quality of historic times.

The No Action Alternative would have no immediate effects to the scenery or to the potential classification of the Boulder River as a Wild and Scenic River. The scenery that viewers have become accustomed to over the last 80 years would remain fairly unchanged in the short term, except for the increasing number of standing dead trees. Viewers would continue to see an increase in the number of dead, dying, and fallen large and small diameter trees. Over time, viewers would likely notice a decrease in the size of open meadows as conifers slowly fill in, and a continuation in the decline of the aspen component in the project area. There would be an increase in the risk for an uncharacteristically large crown fire, which could cause an extremely dramatic and instant change in the character of the scenery. Houses, cabins, camps, or campgrounds that are currently nestled into the trees, if they survived a fire, could be surrounded by blackened dead conifers within their immediate foreground, perhaps even filling 100% of their viewsheds. In addition, the vegetative screening that currently hides many of these facilities from each other, the road and seen areas along trails would be gone, thus increasing the visual impact these facilities themselves have on the Main Boulder Corridor.

Wildlife: The potential effects to wildlife species and their habitat was an important consideration in making my decision to implement Alternative B. I evaluated the analysis found in Ch. 3-64 to 3-95 of the FEIS, as well as the concurrence letter received from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to the Biological Assessment prepared by the wildlife biologist. Following the mitigation and design criteria for wildlife associated with this alternative should minimize effects to the various wildlife species. Impacts to wildlife populations and their habitat as a result of my decision are acceptable.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurs that implementation of Alternative B is not likely to adversely affect the threatened grizzly bear or the threatened Canada Lynx, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the nonessential experimental gray wolf, and will have no effect for the threatened bald eagle.

As a part of Alternative B, design criteria and mitigation have been included to help maintain adequate hiding cover for elk. (See wildlife mitigation on Ch. 2-35 of the FEIS). Slashing and burning on 400 acres of meadow types will increase and enhance forage production. Rejuvenation of aspen stands will also improve elk habitat. After implementation of the proposed action, the HEI rating, as directed by the Forest Plan, will exceed the required 70% in all timber compartments associated with the project. (See Appendix A-13 of the FEIS).

In accordance with the Forest Plan, a biological evaluation (BE) was completed prior to implementation of activities that have the potential to affect sensitive species. The effects of the proposed action to sensitive and management indicator species are addressed in the FEIS Chapter 3. Numerous mitigation measures and design criteria have been incorporated into the project to help protect sensitive species. (See wildlife mitigation on Ch. 2-35).

Alternative A would have no potential impact to threatened, endangered or sensitive species habitats; or any other wildlife or plant

species of concern that occurs in the project area. However, the risk or potential of a catastrophic wildfire event would persist.

Alternative B will remove or alter some existing potential goshawk nesting and foraging habitat. However, adequate potential nesting and foraging habitat is abundant in adjacent untreated areas primarily in wilderness. Repeated surveys beginning in 1992 thru 2005 have not detected any known occupied nest sites or territories that will be affected by the proposed project (See FSEIS pages A-21 through A-24 and FSEIS C-1 through C-10 for survey data and maps). One incidental observation of an adult goshawk was reported in 1999 from the Box Canyon area (Unit 31 and 32), although no nesting pair or nest location was discovered in the immediate area.

The proposed treatment incorporates retention of untreated forested clumps and improvement of aspen clones that may result in improved goshawk foraging habitat that will still exhibit adequate canopy closure and open understory characteristics favored by goshawks. There is potential goshawk nesting and foraging habitat within the boundaries of the project area. Potential habitat refers to the habitat characteristics preferred by goshawks, but does not infer their presence in any given area. The project may have minor potential disturbance effects, and/or indirect effects on potential goshawk nesting or foraging habitat. This will result from the removal of some potential nest trees and alteration of potential foraging area near the Main Boulder road. However, this is not optimal nesting and foraging habitat because of the disturbance associated with the road and structures along the corridor. All proposed work will occur when any goshawks that traditionally inhabit the analysis area will not be present (November thru March).

The determination is that the project may impact individuals or habitat, but will not lead to a trend toward federal listing of Northern goshawks (MIIH). Suitable habitat occurs in the project area and the species is known to inhabit the drainage. Nest sites may be located in the project area, however, the project will be accomplished prior to or after the nesting season. No known nest locations have been identified. Prior to management activities all units will be surveyed for goshawk using playback tape calls. If goshawks are present and a nest location is found in the project area all mitigation measures as described on p. 2-36 of the FEIS will be followed.

Because the fuel conditions described within the treatment units actually extend well into the Wilderness on both the eastern and western aspects of the drainage, any wildfire in the drainage will also have the potential to damage an area many times larger than the proposed project area. In addition, because of wilderness designation any post fire rehabilitation will be very limited.

I realize that the Selected Alternative may not reduce the likelihood of a large-scale stand replacement fire in the upland Wilderness areas of the Boulder drainage, however, treatments associated with Alternative B may affect the extent and severity of any potential wildfire and will also reduce burn severity along the Boulder River Corridor. Limiting the extent of a large stand replacing fire and reducing the severity of a wildfire along the river corridor could have some beneficial effect for a host of wildlife species and their associated habitats. Those potential benefits would not be realized for the No Action Alternative.

Recreation: Because I realize that the Main Boulder River Corridor has been an important recreational hub offering numerous types of activities for many years, it was important to me in making my decision to carefully consider any possible effects to future recreational opportunities. I have reviewed the analysis found in Ch. 3-95 to 3-102 of the FEIS. I am comfortable that my decision to implement Alternative B will allow all existing recreational activities to continue to be available in the future.

My decision will restrict the majority of the operations to the winter months (November through April). Because the vast majority of recreation use occurs during the summer months, activity during that time period would affect the most Forest users.

During treatment, the surrounding area will be less natural appearing due to on-going fuel treatment activities and machinery use. Ultimately, this will result in more open and

visible areas throughout the drainage. Noise from logging, slashing and piling, etc. will provide less solitude for recreationists. Logging and hauling has the potential of creating hazardous situations for recreationists and road users. Conducting harvest and skidding treatments during the winter (November through April) and providing adequate warning signs will decrease public exposure to the potential hazards and effects will be minimized.

Dispersed use, such as hunting, may be impacted within active treatment areas. Removal of the vegetative cover also has the potential of affecting the way hunters ultimately use the area. Permitted outfitter and guides, in some cases, may be temporarily displaced by fuel treatment activities.

Snow will be removed periodically on the Main Boulder Road during the life of the project. This will allow better access for winter users. On the other hand, plowing further up the Main Boulder Road than the historic parking area at Camp Mimanagish will also temporarily impact the amount of groomed snowmobile trail available in the drainage.

The proposed fuels management activities included in Alternative B coincide with other activities expected to take place on private lands. Although fuel treatments may displace or prevent recreation use at some facilities and could affect dispersed opportunities, this will occur on a very limited, short-term basis. The area's long-term recreation opportunity is not expected to be affected.

Alternative A (no action) would not affect existing recreational opportunities, settings, or activities. The existing landscape character and sense of place would remain the same in the near future. Chances for catastrophic wildfire, however, would continue to be a high threat in the drainage, possibly causing major changes to recreation opportunities and settings in the future. The physical setting and sense of place could change dramatically from a forested environment to one that has been obviously altered by a fire event. Such a setting would likely result in less recreational visitation and reduced clientele to permitted outfitters. Impacts from less severe or smaller wildfires would be less and/or more concentrated.

Air Quality: I have considered the effects to air quality as required by the Clean Air Act in making my decision to implement Alternative B. I evaluated the analysis in Ch. 3-103 to 3-110 and found that by incorporating the mitigation and design criteria found in Appendix B and Ch. 2-33 of the FEIS, the temporary and minor effects to air quality associated with the project are within acceptable limits. Air resources are somewhat unique in that the past impacts to air quality are not usually evident or cumulative.

With the Selected Alternative, units will be harvested and understory and/or pile burning will occur, thus reducing and breaking up the continuity of the fuel loadings in the treated portions of the corridor. Controlled and pile burning associated with Alternative B will likely cause some localized visibility reduction from the smoke plumes. Some obscurement of visibility for driving along the Boulder Canyon road could occur in narrow bands during understory or pile burning. Smoke could also cause temporary visibility reductions from the same units in nearby areas of the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness. Dispersion of the plumes is expected to quickly mix the project smoke to insignificant visibility impact levels. The likelihood of a large wildfire occurring in the Main Boulder Canyon will be reduced by lowering the fuel concentrations and breaking up the vertical and horizontal fuel continuity. There will be a significantly lower chance of a fire start to occur and turn into a large fire in the river corridor after the fuel treatments are completed. Currently, wildfire in the Main Boulder River area has the potential to result in extensive smoke and air quality impacts from $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} emissions.

3). Consistency with the Gallatin Forest Plan, the National Fire Plan, and other Laws, Regulations, and Policy

Relationship to the Gallatin Forest Plan: The FEIS for the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project tiers to the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Gallatin National Forest (Record of Decision signed 9/23/87). The Forest Plan provides direction for all resource management programs, practices, uses, and protection measures for the Gallatin National Forest. The Main Boulder Fuels Reduction project area is mostly in designated in MA 5, MA.7, and MA 15. See MA map in Ch. 1-21 of the FEIS..

The following is a short synopsis of the standards and guidelines established in the Forest Plan that are pertinent to the Selected Alternative. For more detailed information see Ch. 3-5 to 3-13 of the FEIS. Direction can be found primarily in the Forest Plan sections on goals (FP, pp. II-1 to II-2), objectives (FP, pp. II-2 to II-7), standards (FP, pp. II-14 to II-29), and management area direction (FP, pp. III-19 to III-73. Upon thorough review of the FEIS, I have found that both Alternative A (no action) and Alternative B (proposed action) are consistent with all of the pertinent goals, objectives and standards of the Forest Plan.

Visual Quality and Wild and Scenic River Summary: With Alternative B, the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of Partial Retention applies to those areas where fuel treatment is being proposed, except for those areas immediately around recreation sites where the VQO ranges from Partial Retention to Modification. The VQO Partial Retention, as defined on page VI-44 of the Gallatin National Forest Plan, means that the characteristic landscape may appear to be altered slightly and that any noticeable deviations must remain visually subordinate to the landscape character being viewed. The VQO of Modification is defined as land where human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color and texture.

Wild and Scenic River: Amendment No. 12 of the Gallatin National Forest Plan dated June, 1993 mandates that the Boulder River will be managed to protect its outstandingly remarkable values for future consideration and potential classification for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic River System as a Scenic and Recreational River. The river area should be maintained in its near natural environment. Timber outside the boundary but within the visual scene (sic.) area should be managed and harvested in a manner, which provides special emphasis on visual quality. Within a Recreation river corridor, "timber harvesting would be allowed under standard restrictions to protect the immediate river environment, water quality, scenic, fish and wildlife, and other values". Forest Plan Amendment 12 ("River Description and Reasons for Eligibility and Potential Classification in the Forest Plan"), in terms of outstandingly remarkable values relevant to the Boulder River, is not very specific. Because of this, the ID Team and Regional Office Staff agree that the Forest Plan Visual Quality Objective of Partial Retention, that already covers the entire Main Boulder Corridor, is appropriate to use for analyzing potential impacts to scenery.

Following the design criteria and mitigation outlined in Ch 2-37 of the FEIS will ensure that VQO's and Wild and Scenic values will be protected with the implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Recreation Summary: Provide for a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities in a variety of Forest settings (FP, pg. II-1). The Forest Plan recognizes objectives for recreation settings by incorporating the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), which provides a framework for stratifying and defining classes of outdoor recreation environments, activities, and experience opportunities (FP, pg. II-2). Furthermore, the Plan specifically identifies as objectives, activities that will be managed 1) to provide for users' safety, 2) Maintain existing recreational hunting opportunities, 3) Provide safe public access, and 4) Continue the cabin rental program (FP, pg. II-2-3). The Forest has determined the summer ROS classifications are "Rural" for the vast majority of the project area, with the extreme southern-most part of the area above Box Canyon being classified as "Roaded Natural Appearing." Winter ROS is defined as Semi-Primitive Motorized for the majority of the Main Boulder Corridor.

The Selected Alternative incorporates design criteria and mitigation (FEIS Ch. 2-40) to ensure compliance with the ROS classifications for the Main Boulder River Corridor.

Wilderness Summary: The Main Boulder project area represents a narrow roaded corridor into the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. The Forest Service has the responsibility of assuring no unauthorized uses occur within the Wilderness itself. This being the case, the Forest Plan provides direction to manage resources within the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness to maintain their wilderness character and to provide for their use and protection (FP, pg. II-1. The 1964 Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577) and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Act (P.L. 95-249) provide specific direction for the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness.

The Selected Alternative does not include fuel reduction or burning activities in the Wilderness. Additionally, wilderness boundaries that are adjacent to the proposed units will be monumented before fuel reduction activities begin in the unit. See design criteria and mitigation in Ch. 2-39 of the FEIS.

Roadless Summary*:* The Forest Plan identifies Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), including area 1-372, the "North Absaroka" (FP, pg. V-9-10 and Appendix C-5), which is located within or adjacent to portions of the project area. Roadless areas are to be analyzed to determine the effects of any proposed activity that would substantially alter the roadless characteristics of IRAs so as to render them unsuitable for future designation as wilderness.

No treatment or road construction is proposed within the North Absaroka IRA that would alter the potential eligibility of the area for inclusion into the Wilderness system. With implementation of the Selected Alternative, the only activity that will occur in roadless designation is a portion of the Main Boulder Station Unit, where trees and ladder fuels less than 8" dbh will be slashed and prescribed burning will follow the slashing treatment. These are both acceptable activities in areas designated as roadless.

Wildlife Summary:

Threatened and Endangered Species The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 mandates that the effects of land uses and management activities be evaluated as part of the biological assessment process for listed species. The Gallatin Forest Plan provides specific direction for management of wildlife habitat by various management areas (MA). A biological assessment was prepared by the District Wildlife Biologist and sent to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for review. Concurrence with the determinations was received on May 13, 2004. The Service concurs that the Proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the threatened grizzly bear or the threatened Canada Lynx, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the nonessential experimental gray wolf, and will have no effect for the threatened bald eagle.

Big Game The Forest Plan provides direction for increasing populations of big game animals (FP, pg. II-1), emphasizing forage and cover needs on big game winter range (FP, pg. II-3) and emphasizing management of special and unique wildlife habitats such as wallows, licks, talus, cliffs, caves and riparian areas (FP, pg. II-18). As a part of the proposed project, design criteria and mitigation have been included to help maintain adequate hiding cover for elk. (See wildlife mitigation on Ch. 2-35). Slashing and burning 400 acres of meadow types will increase and enhance forage production. Rejuvenation of aspen stands will also improve elk habitat. After implementation of the Selected Alternative, the HEI rating as directed by the Forest Plan, will still exceed the required 70% in all timber compartments associated with the project. See Ch. A-13 of the FEIS.

Sensitive and Management Indicator Species Sensitive species are those animal species identified by a Regional Forester for which population viability is a concern as evidenced by a significant current or predicted downward trend in population numbers, density, or in habitat capability that will reduce a species' existing distribution (FSM 2670.5.19). There are ten species listed as sensitive for Region 1. In accordance with the Forest Plan, a biological evaluation (BE) was completed prior to implementation of activities that have the potential to affect sensitive species

The effects of the Selected Alternative to sensitive and management indicator species are addressed in detail in the FEIS, Chapter 3. The Selected Alternative will not lead toward a downward trend toward listing for any of the species discussed. Numerous mitigation measures and design criteria have been incorporated into the project to help protect sensitive species. (Ch. 2-35 of the FEIS).

Fisheries Summary: The Gallatin National Forest Plan provides broad direction for the management of forest fishery resources and more specific direction for management of sensitive species.

Goals (FP, p. II-1)

1. Maintain and enhance fish habitat to provide for increased fish population.

Objectives (FP, p. II-1)

1. Management of timber within riparian zones will be designed to improve fish habitat.
2. Projects to improve lake and stream habitat will be implemented.

Forest Plan Standards (FP, p. II-17)

1. Habitat that is essential for species identified on the *Sensitive Species* list developed for the Northern Region will be maintained to manage these species.
2. The Forest will be managed to maintain and where feasible, improve fish habitat capacity in order to achieve cooperative goals with the Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks.

The Selected Alternative incorporates numerous design features and mitigation measures in order to protect the soil, water, vegetation, fish and wildlife that are dependent on the riparian habitat in the river corridor. See fishery mitigation section on Ch. 2-32 of the FEIS.

Water Quality Summary: Gallatin National Forest Plan Management Area 7 direction requires that manipulation within riparian areas occur only for the purpose of meeting riparian dependent resource objectives. Riparian areas are defined as the land and vegetation for approximately 100 feet from the edge of a perennial stream. Management Area direction for facility standards in riparian areas directs to: 1) Minimize the amount of material from road construction wasted into riparian areas and follow BMP's (Best Management Practices) that apply to road construction. 2) Design road drainage to minimize the entry of sediment into streams. Road design will also provide for low risk of drainage failure and mass failure. 3) Minimize the number of stream crossings. The state of Montana requires that BMP's be implemented for all activities in order to comply with B1 Classification water quality standards.

Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be used to mitigate the impact of ground disturbing activities associated with Alternative B and minimize erosion and sedimentation, to streams and water courses (FP, pp. II-1, II-5 and II-23). The State of Montana requires that BMP's be used on all activities to comply with State water quality standards. A complete list of BMP's is located provided in Appendix C.

Fine sediment levels, resulting from Alternatives A and B, are within GNF Implementation Guidelines for spawning habitat composition in the Main Boulder River.

Beneficial aspects of wildfire to stream ecosystems will be retained by both alternatives, including large woody debris recruitment and nutrient cycling.

Standard BMP's for protecting wetlands, bogs, springs, seeps, and other potential amphibian habitat will be observed.

***Sensitive Plant Species*:** The Forest Service is mandated to maintain viable populations of all desirable native and non-native species under the National Forest Management Act (FSM 2670.232). There are provisions in the sale contract to modify the sale activities should any individual plants or populations of plants be located once harvest has begun.

The effects of the selected alternative to sensitive plant species are addressed in this FEIS (Ch. 3-86). Sensitive plant surveys were conducted within the project area in 2002. There were no sensitive plants found in the project area. This project will not affect the viability of any sensitive plant populations. This project is in compliance with Forest Service policy on sensitive plant species and with direction in the Forest Plan.

Forest Plan Management Areas: The Main Boulder Fuels Project lies within eight management areas as described in the Forest Plan. The majority of the units lie in MA 5, 15, or 7. All of the units associated with the Selected Alternative are compatible with their respective management area direction. See the MA Map in Ch. 1-21 of the FEIS.

Management Area 3 (MA 3): These areas consist of nonforest, noncommercial forest and forested areas, which are unsuitable for timber production. They generally do not have roads passing through them. Topographic constraints and poor accessibility characterize these areas (FP, pp. III-6 through III-7). Management goals for MA 3: Managed essentially in their present condition to protect existing improvements and resources, with minimal investment for resource activities. Timber Standards 1) Classified as unsuitable for timber production. 2) Timber Salvage, firewood and other products removal may occur where access exists 3) Permit salvage of dead, dying or high hazard trees to prevent disease and insect population build-up that will adversely affect regulated timber stands (FP, pp. III-6 through III-7).

Management Area 5 (MA 5) – These areas consist of travel corridors that receive heavy recreation use. Areas included are portions of Boulder River (FP, pp. III-14 through III-16). Management goals for MA 5 include: (1) Maintain and improve the wildlife habitat values and the natural attractiveness of these areas to provide opportunities for public enjoyment and safety, (2) Allow a level of timber harvest consistent with goal 1 (FP, pp. III-14 through III-16). Timber Standards 1) Area is classified as suitable for timber production, 2) Manage to provide a diverse vegetative pattern, 3) Include even-aged and uneven-aged harvest method systems. The standards for harvest are in Forest Plan Appendix A-1, 4) shape and scale even-aged openings to replicate natural openings, 5) permit commercial and precommercial thinning if it enhances the recreational values of the area, 6) natural mix of species is desirable. Use species variety to improve visual quality, 7) Actively control tree damaging agents.

Management Area 6 (MA 6) – These areas are generally large blocks of undeveloped land with a trail system and a few roads passing through. They provide a wide variety of opportunity for dispersed recreation uses in a variety of terrain and vegetation types (FP, pp. III-17 through III-18). Management goals for MA 6 include: (1) Provide for a wide variety of dispersed recreational opportunities, (2) Provide additional public access to these areas. Timber Standards 1) Area is classified as unsuitable for timber production, 2) Harvesting of firewood, post and poles, or other products can take place adjacent to existing roads.

Management Area 7 (MA 7) – These consist of riparian management areas that will be managed to protect the soil, water, vegetation, fish and wildlife dependent on it (FP, pp. III-19 through III-23). These areas are classified as suitable for timber production if adjacent areas contain suitable timber (FP, pp. III-19 through III-23). Timber management activities will occur in these areas.).

Management Area 11 (MA 11) - These areas consist of forested big game habitat. They include productive forestlands that are available for timber harvest, provided that big game habitat objectives are met (FP, pp. III-33 through III-36). Management goals for MA 11 include: (1) maintain elk habitat effectiveness following timber harvest; (2) base vegetative management on vegetative characteristics needed for featured wildlife species; (3) allow a level of timber harvest consistent with goals 1 and 2; and (4) meet state water quality standards and maintain stream stability (FP, pp. III-33 through III-36). Timber Standards 1) Area is classified as suitable for timber production, 2) Design timber harvest on big game winter ranges to enhance winter range capacity. 3) Include even-aged and uneven-aged harvest method systems, 4) Design even-aged openings so no point is more than 600 feet from cover, 5) No commercial thinning is planned, 6) Natural mix of species is desirable. 7) Actively control tree damaging agents.

Management Area 12 (MA 12) - These areas provide important habitat for summer or winter wildlife use in a variety of terrain and vegetative types. These areas also offer dispersed recreation opportunities (FP, pp. III-37 through III-39). Management goals for MA 12 include: (1) Maintain and improve the vegetative condition to provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife species; (2) Provide for a variety of dispersed recreational opportunities; (3) Provide forage for livestock consistent with goal 1. Timber Standards 1) Classified as unsuitable for timber production. 2) Harvest of post and poles and other wood products can take place adjacent to existing roads (FP, pp. III-37 through III-39).

Management Area 15 (MA 15) - These areas consist of open grasslands or steep rocky slopes interspersed with timber and are located in occupied grizzly bear habitat (Management Situation 1 and 2) and provide for dispersed recreation and livestock use (FP, pp. III-47 through III-49). Management goals for MA 15 include: (1) Meet grizzly bear mortality reduction goals as established by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, (2) Manage vegetation to provide habitat necessary to recover the grizzly bear, (3) Provide forage for livestock consistent with goal 1. 4) Provide dispersed recreation opportunities consistent with goal 1. Timber Standards 1) Classified as unsuitable for timber production. 2) Allow harvest of post and poles and other wood products in areas adjacent to existing roads (FP, pp. III-47 through III-49).

Management Area 17 (MA 17) - These areas consist of grasslands or nonproductive forestlands on slopes of less than 40 percent that are suitable for livestock grazing and contain important big game habitat. They contain some of the most productive and heavily used portions of range allotments (FP, pp. III-52 through III-53). Management goals for MA 17 include: Maintain or improve vegetative conditions and forage production for livestock and wildlife use. Timber Standards 1) Classified as unsuitable for timber production. (2) Allow harvest of post and poles and other wood products in areas adjacent to existing roads (FP, pp. III-52 through III-53).

Consistency With the National Fire Plan Direction: The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program contain nine guiding principles that are supported by the Gallatin National Forest Fire Management Plan and the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project.

1.) *Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.* The purpose and need of the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction project is to provide for firefighter and public safety, modifying fire behavior by changing the fuels environment throughout the project area. The modification of fuels will provide safer conditions in the event of a large wildfire event.

2.) *The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural agent have been incorporated into the planning process.* Treating the wildland/urban Interface will reduce the current level of risk, allowing the possibility of future wildland fires to play an ecological role in the adjoining wilderness landscape under certain conditions.

3.) *Fire management plans, programs, and activities support land and resource management plans and their importance.* The project is consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the Gallatin National Forest Fire Management Plan.

4.) *Sound risk management is the foundation for all fire management activities.* The Main Boulder Fuel Reduction project analyzes the risk to the public and firefighter communities associated with each alternative, by comparing the resulting fuel conditions associated with management activities versus “no action”, as related to fire behavior.

5.) *Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management objectives.* With the Main Boulder Fuel Reduction project, the overriding value at risk is the safety of the public and firefighters. A cash-flow analysis included in the Appendix to this document supports the conclusion that the anticipated return from the sale of wood products will exceed the total cost of the activities likely needed to realize the desired post-treatment condition.

6.) *Fire management plans must be based on the best available science.* The Main Boulder project has incorporated the latest science and modeling techniques for fire behavior prediction and the effectiveness of fuels treatments (NEXXUS).

7.) *Fire management plans and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations.* The

Main Boulder Fuels Project addresses the need for increasing public and firefighter safety in the event of a large fire event. Smoke management, recreational values, and the impacts of fuels treatments on wildlife, fish, noxious weeds, soils, and visual quality are also addressed in the document.

8.) *Federal, Tribal, State and local interagency coordination and cooperation are essential.* Coordination and cooperation for the project included local consultation with the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Cooperative, Boulder Watershed Group, Park and Sweet Grass County officials including fire and law enforcement, and local environmental groups. Federal cooperation and consultation includes State, Federal and Private Forestry groups and interested tribal governments.

9.) *Standardization of policies and procedures among Federal agencies is an ongoing objective.* This is not applicable to this particular project.

Other Laws and Regulations: The Selected Alternative (Alternative B) is consistent with the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), the Endangered Species Act, The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Executive Order 12962, National Historic Preservation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, the 1964 Wilderness Act, the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Act, and the State of Montana Water Quality Act. Further details are located later in this document in the section titled *Findings Required By Other Laws And Regulations.*

Other regulations and guidance pertinent to this project include FSM 2525 Riparian Area Management, Land Use Strategy for WCT and YCT, Trout Unlimited Agreement, Northwest Rivers Council Settlement Agreement, and FSM 5150 Fuel Management. Further details are located later in this document in the section titled *Other Guidance..*

IX. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

I have examined two alternatives in detail – the Proposed action (Alternative B) and the no action (Alternative A). I determined that these two alternatives provide a full range of reasonable alternatives that define and respond to the key issues and fulfill the purpose and need of the project. In addition, seven other alternatives (Alternative C through Alternative I) were considered but not studied in detail (FEIS, Chapter 2-43 to 2-46). The following discussion summarizes the two alternatives considered in detail. Alternative B (the Selected Alternative) is described in further detail on page 4 of this document. Chapter 2 of the FEIS contains a complete description of all of the alternatives (including design criteria and mitigation) and the process used to develop them.

Alternative A - No Action

The NEPA requires the consideration of a "no action" alternative (40 CFR 1502.14d) where none of the proposed actions identified in Chapter 1 of the FEIS would occur. This alternative provides a baseline of comparison to aid in determining the significance of issues and effects of the Proposed action. The no action Alternative responds to concerns that oppose any additional vegetation manipulation or temporary road construction in the project area. It does not respond to the purpose and need of this project as it would not contribute toward improving the current situation regarding public and firefighter safety.

Under this alternative, no actions would be undertaken in the next few years to respond to the purpose and need of the project identified in the FEIS, Ch.1-13. The opportunity to reduce fuel accumulations would be deferred. No treatments such as hand piling or grapple piling would be done on the existing ground fuels. No burning would be completed. No vegetative treatments would be undertaken to treat stands, which are susceptible to lethal fire and to insect and disease outbreaks. Trees would not be harvested to meet the objectives for fuels management. Meadows would continue to shrink due to incroachment by conifers. Aspen stands would continue to decline with little new regeneration. There would not be any road construction or

reconstruction in the project area. The actions identified in the FEIS, Chapter 2, Mitigation and Design Criteria would also not be accomplished, including any resource improvement projects.

Those activities described as Reasonably Foreseeable Actions in the FEIS, Ch.3-2 would likely proceed. These activities could include such activities as noxious weed spraying, occasional small timber sales (primarily to salvage dead and dying trees), hazard tree reduction projects, and campground maintenance. Developments on private land would continue, including construction of additional residences. Fuel reduction projects would also likely occur on several of the private inholdings, however would likely be less than what would occur if the proposed action were implemented. Much of the future grant money available to private residents is dependent upon the Forest Service simultaneously treating National Forest lands. Fuels treatments on private land would be much less effective when adjacent National Forest lands are not treated. Additionally, the private land fuels reduction efforts are aimed at structure protection, and do not have public and firefighter safety as their primary objective. As such, fuels reduction efforts on private land alone will not result in less risk for a fast running crown fire running through the corridor.

Of the alternatives, Alternative A responds best to the key issues of scenic integrity and peoples differing sensitivities to change. No short-term effects would occur to visuals although there would continue to be vegetative changes (insect and disease mortality, encroachment, undergrowth) through time. No additional impacts would occur to residents and visitors resulting from activities included in the proposed action including any impacts to recreation activities.

I did not select Alternative A (no action) because I am concerned for the safety of the public and firefighters by the prospect of an urgent wildfire situation in the Boulder River corridor given the current continuous fuel conditions. I believe the Forest Service is mandated by its role as a steward of public resources to pursue opportunities to improve public safety when they are found, as long as they do not create unacceptable adverse environmental effects to National Forest resources.

Alternative B - Proposed Action

Alternative B (proposed action) is described in Ch. 1-14 and further detailed in Ch. 2-12 of the FEIS. It is the agency's initial proposal developed to meet the project's purpose and need. This alternative was developed considering the areas of high fuel hazard, high risk of human-caused ignition, and high social values. Considering hazard, risk, and value, stands of trees that have high potential for lethal fire to affect lives and property in this wildland/urban interface were included for treatment in this alternative.

The proposed action includes as a priority for treatment stands where the reintroduction of fire will maintain and/or improve wildlife habitat, and those having existing insect and disease outbreaks. Implementation will contribute to meeting society's need for wood products. The proposed action is consistent with the management direction of the GNF Forest Plan. The project area is situated along the Main Boulder Road and within the Main Boulder River Corridor. All of the treatments have been designed to maintain and protect values for river segments that are eligible for consideration and possible inclusion into the "Scenic and Recreational" classifications of the National Wild and Scenic River System

Mechanized equipment may be allowed on a case by case basis on dry, stable ground, or on frozen ground or snow within some specified Streamside Management Zones or wet areas as approved by the Department of Natural Resources letter for Alternative Practices dated June 21, 2005. See Project File, Ref. #518 for Alternative Practice approval letter. All design criteria and mitigation outlined in the FEIS on pages 2-31 through 2 -32 will be adhered to.

Conifers will be removed around aspen clones for a 100-foot radius surrounding them in order to encourage aspen regeneration.

Maps 2-1 through 2-4 on pp. 7 to 10 of the ROD display the areas of treatment associated with the proposed action. Detailed

descriptions of the proposed treatment groups to be implemented with the proposed action can be found in Ch. 2-14 through 2-18 of the FEIS. Table 1, pp. 15 & 16 of the ROD displays individual unit information (stand treatment group, forest type, acres, management area, slope %, fuel model, and remarks). Operating periods for the various associated activities are described on pp. 4& 5 of the ROD. Design criteria and mitigation measures that are applicable to all units can be found in Ch. 2-31 through 2-41 of the FEIS. Table B-1, displaying unit-specific mitigation, can be found in Appendix B, pp. B-1 through B-4 of the FEIS.

The entire project is expected to take 5-7 years to complete and will be separated into logical subdivisions for implementation purposes. Components of the Proposed action include:

Commercial Harvest

Proposed fuel reduction treatments will occur on up to approximately 2500 acres in fifty-one separate units. Stand density reduction, utilizing ground-based harvest equipment, will occur on approximately 1060 acres on slopes up to 35%. Large and small diameter trees will be harvested. Approximately 1040 acres on slopes greater than 35% and/or areas not operable by conventional ground-based equipment will be treated with other methods. These treatments could utilize specialized equipment, as well as horse logging on slopes less than 20%, cable logging, aerial systems, hand thinning, hand piling, and burning. Approximately 200 acres on slopes >35% may be inoperable by any means due to the terrain. (See Maps 2-1 through 2-4 on pp. 7-10)

Leave trees will be unevenly spaced with patches of multi-storied trees as well as open spaced individual trees. The continuity of vertical and horizontal fuels among individual trees within a stand will be broken. Prescriptions will vary between adjacent stands to help break up fuel continuity among stands. Understory burning and/or pile burning will occur in conjunction with the thinning activities. Burning will occur during the spring and late fall seasons.

Retention Areas (Leave Clumps)

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. Harvest will not occur within 15 feet of water bodies (Riparian Reserves). Riparian reserves will be joined with other retention areas where possible. No-cut buffers around water bodies are intended to prevent disturbance to soil, organic matter, and surface vegetation in order to maintain and enhance their function as sediment catches and refuge for wildlife.

Small-diameter Fuels Treatments

In addition to reducing surface fuel loading by commercial thinning and salvaging large diameter trees, small-diameter fuel reduction will occur in each unit. These treatments will include the thinning small diameter materials (6" diameter or less) and piling and burning the slash or chipping it. Some of the <6” material may be sold and utilized as forest products, if a market is available. Approximately 5-10 tons per acre of down woody material should be retained following thinning.

Meadows

Conifers will be slashed and prescribed burning activities will occur on approximately 400 acres of meadow type habitats. Prescriptions will attempt to bring meadow habitat conditions closer to those that occurred historically. Aspen clones will have conifers removed within a radius of 100-feet in order to encourage aspen regeneration. Prescribed burning will help to rejuvenate grasses. Many of these areas have been identified as elk winter range.

Four-mile Cabin (Units 21 and 22)

Aggressively opening up Units 21, 22 and 22A (page A-11 of FEIS) around the immediate (approximately 3 acres) historic cabin area should help protect the cabin and assist in returning the area to a setting more reflective of the site type selected for the cabin originally. Regenerating an Aspen/grassland setting with stringers of conifers along Four-mile creek will provide a historic setting and a

good vegetative community meeting the purpose and need of the project.

The Four-mile Cabin Unit can serve as a demonstration area for the application of the "Fire-Wise" guideline. The current Four-mile cabin was built in 1937 on a standard C-4 Forest Service Cabin Plan and is currently used as a recreational rental cabin. See Project File, Ref #519 for a more detailed treatment and description of historical cabin.

Temporary Road Development

No new permanent road construction is being proposed. Commercial harvest operations are expected to require the construction of temporary roads. A maximum of 7.4 miles of temporary road may be necessary to access the areas proposed for mechanical fuels treatment using conventional ground-based logging systems. Of this total, approximately 4.8 miles will be re-examined on the ground prior to project implementation to determine whether opportunities exist to reduce the length of newly constructed temporary road by using existing roads on private or National Forest land. One of the key factors in determining the use of existing roads on private land is whether permission to use the roads can be obtained. Existing roads on either ownership may require reconstruction to support safe and efficient use, consistent with project design criteria and mitigations. Maps 2-5 through 2-8 on pp. 11-14 disclose the approximate locations of proposed temporary roads, including those roads to be re-examined.

Actual temporary road locations are determined through agreement by the Forest Service during timber sale contract administration. Temporary roads will be constructed to provide access to the interior of harvest units to facilitate ground-based harvest systems. These roads will be built on relatively flat ground slopes (less than 20%) and will be constructed to the lowest possible standard capable of supporting log haul in order to minimize ground disturbance. Temporary road construction, including clearing and removing of wood products from within the road right-of-way, will occur July 1-October 30. All newly constructed temporary roads will be closed to the public during harvest activities and permanently closed and rehabilitated within one year upon completion of harvest related activities within that portion of the project area. Rehabilitation will include making the temporary roads on National Forest System lands impassable for any motorized travel, as well as necessary other resource protection practices. Temporary roads that are seen from key observation areas will be recontoured (the road prism removed) in order meet visual concerns and other resource needs.

I selected Alternative B (proposed action) because it meets the purpose and need. It achieves both the primary and secondary goals for action described earlier in this Record of Decision. The proposed action is the only alternative that fully addresses the issues, meets the purpose and need of the project, and complies with Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Alternative B complies with the legal and administrative constraints that combine to define how well any alternative can provide for greater public and firefighter safety. I strongly believe that Alternative B (my selected alternative) best serves the overall public interest.

X. COMPARISON OF THE ALTERNATIVES

The following table briefly compares the two alternatives considered in detail as they relate to project components, the eight key issues, and compliance with Forest Plan Standards.

Table 2 Comparison of Components by Alternative.

Item	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B (Proposed Action)
Acres of Thinning with Conventional Ground-based on ≤ 35% Slopes	0	1060
Acres of Thinning with Specialized Equipment or Hand-thinning on ≥ 35% Slopes	0	1040
Acres of Conifer Encroachment Reduction (Meadows)	0	400
Miles of Temporary Road Construction	0	Up to 7.4
Acres Controlled Burning (Meadow Areas)	0	400

Table 3 Comparison of Effects to Key Issues and Compatibility with Forest Plan

Effects to Key Issues	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B (Proposed Action)
Fuels- Extent of Fuel Continuity	High	Moderate
Noxious Weeds- Risk of Spread	Moderate	Moderate to High
Water Quality	High	High
Fisheries Habitat	Productive	Productive
Scenic Quality	Retention, Partial Retention	Retention, Partial Retention, Modification
Wildlife – Endangered Species Grizzly Bear Canada Lynx Gray Wolf Bald Eagle	 No Effect No Effect No Effect No Effect	 Not Likely to Adversely Effect Not Likely to Adversely Effect Not Likely to Jeapordize No Effect
Wildlife – Sensitive Species	No Effect	May Impact Individuals, Would Not Lead to a Trend Toward Federal Listing
Recreation Opportunities	Roaded Natural, Roaded Modified	Roaded Natural, Roaded Modified
Air Quality	Complies with Clean Air Act	Complies with Clean Air Act
Meets Forest Plan Standards	Complies with all Applicable Standards	Complies with all Applicable Standards

XI. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

Throughout the analysis process, a wide variety of alternatives were presented and explored to address certain issues. However, for one reason or another, many of these alternatives did not merit detailed analysis or further consideration in the process. These seven alternatives are listed below and described in detail in the FEIS, Ch. 2-43 to 2-46).

Alternative C: This alternative would allow prescribed fire to spread into the Wilderness following natural control boundaries and features, rather than taking control measures to contain the fire before it entered the Wilderness. With this alternative, additional fuels could be treated on less than 50 acres in the wilderness and would mostly consist of fairly open areas with natural barriers, as these are the only places that assure that the prescribed fire could be stopped without vegetative manipulation.

This alternative was eliminated from further analysis because the small amount of additional fuels able to be treated safely would not significantly enhance the wildland fire use program in the wilderness or significantly reduce the fire risk to the WUI (wildland urban interface). Therefore, it did not address the purpose and need. Because it does not significantly enhance the wildland fire use program in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, it does not meet the criteria necessary for a management ignited prescribed fire found in the Absaroka-Wilderness Fire Management Guidebook.

Alternative D: This alternative is similar to Alternative B (the Proposed action) with the exception that no stand density reduction, fuel removal activities, or controlled burning would take place in any riparian areas. Heavy fuel loadings are present in many of the riparian areas. The contributing fuels (ladder fuels, large and small diameter trees) would not be removed to break up the continuity of fuels.

This alternative was eliminated from further analysis because restricting activity in riparian areas does not address the possible consequences (loss of shade, rise in water temperature, loss of future woody recruitment, and/or sediment introduction into the streams and river from the lack of vegetative cover), if a wildfire were to occur. In addition, it does not adequately address the purpose and need for fuel reduction in the Main Boulder River corridor because much of the heavy fuels currently in the riparian areas consists of live large and small diameter trees and other live ladder fuels (shrubs, etc.).

Alternative E: Alternative E would be similar to the Proposed action with the exception that there would be no underburning within the units or prescribed burning in the meadow areas. The additional mechanical treatment necessary to avoid burning would more heavily impact soils and increase the potential for noxious weed invasion.

This alternative was eliminated from further analysis because it was determined that it was not feasible to minimize fuel loadings in all of the units to acceptable levels (5-10 tons/acre) without the assistance of prescribed burning, therefore it did not meet the purpose and need.

Alternative F: Alternative F would be identical to Alternative B, the Proposed action, except that prescriptions would call for flush cutting (to the mineral soil level) all stumps for a distance of 50 ft. from all key observation points and corridors (the Main Boulder Road, recreation sites, the Main Boulder River). In addition, a 6-inch stump height would be required in the area from 50’ to 150’ from seen areas in order to ensure that the natural look of the river corridor will be maintained.

This alternative was dropped from further analysis because it was determined that flush-cutting all stumps within 50’ of key observation points and corridors on the rocky terrain in the Main Boulder was neither practical nor safe. Also, the generally rocky and uneven terrain in the project area increase the capability of the ground surface to visually absorb some of the stumps, making them less visually dominant and making the need for this general requirement unnecessary.

Alternative G: Alternative G would include the same units as Alternative B, the proposed action. Treatments would remove greater amounts of trees and ladder fuels. Stands would be thinned, and fuels removed to the

optimum levels identified through the Farsite Modeling runs, in order to keep a potential wildfire on the ground.

This alternative was dropped from further analysis because fuel modification on this scale would be inconsistent with retaining the "sense of place" in the Main Boulder River corridor, which is a key concern voiced from the public through scoping comments. Alternative G would not be consistent with the visual quality objectives (VQO's) for the Main Boulder River corridor of "partial retention". The significantly greater removal of both trees and shrubs would likely have negative effects on wildlife species. This alternative did not meet the secondary goals of the purpose and need.

Alternative H: Alternative H would attempt to create defensible space by treating only areas that are adjacent to structures and developments.

This alternative was dropped from further analysis because these treatments would not be enough to effectively break up fuel continuity. Alternative H would not reduce fuels enough to either buy time or effectively increase safety for individuals living or recreating in the corridor. Alternative H was dropped from further analysis because it would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

Alternative I: Alternative I would be similar to Alternative B (the proposed action) with the exception that only dead and dying trees would be removed from riparian areas.

This alternative was dropped from further analysis because it does not adequately address the purpose and need for fuel reduction in the Main Boulder River Corridor. Much of the heavy fuels currently in the riparian areas consists of live large and small diameter trees and other live ladder fuels (shrubs,etc.).

XII. CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

Based on the issues identified in Chapter 2 of the FEIS, I feel that the principle Federal Laws applicable to this proposal include the National Forest Management Act of 1976, Endangered Species Act of 1973, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703-711), Presidential Executive Order 12962 (June 1995*),* National Historic Preservation Act (as amended 1992), American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and Native American Graves and Repatriation Act, the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, 1964 Wilderness Act, and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Act Compliance with these laws is discussed below, and references within the FEIS are noted. The State of Montana Water Quality Act (1969, 1975, 1993, 1996) is also discussed below under *State Laws*.

Federal Laws

National Forest Management Act of 1976 / Gallatin Forest Plan

Timber production on Federal land is a use allowed by several acts of congress. It is a part of the mission of the Forest Service to manage the timber resource on a multiple-use/sustained yield basis. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) restricts timber production to lands classified as suitable for timber management (36 CFR 219.14). NFMA also set certain management requirements for forest plans to meet, pertaining to conservation of such resources as soil and water and plant and animal diversity (36 CFR 219.27) (Novak 2000a). The Gallatin Forest Plan standards are established to meet these requirements.

In accordance with NFMA, my decision to implement Alternative B will only allow for timber harvesting on suitable timberland. All other NFMA requirements will also be met. The selected alternative is consistent with NFMA and management direction provided by the goals, objectives, and standards of the Gallatin Forest Plan.

Endangered Species Act of 1973

Under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, each Federal agency must ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species. If a threatened or endangered species, or species proposed for listing occurs in an area where a project is proposed, a Biological Assessment (BA) must be conducted. If the action will result in a "may affect" or "beneficial effect" determination for the species, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must occur. If the action results in a "not likely to adversely affect" conclusion, informal consultation and a letter of concurrence must be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. If a "no effect" results, no consultation is necessary. To reduce effects of an action to an acceptable level, mitigation (coordination measures) may be necessary.

I have found this analysis to comply with the Endangered Species Act, Section 7. A Biological Assessment for the Selected Alternative (located in the Project File, Ref #293) was submitted to the US Fish & Wildlife Service for review. In a letter dated May 13, 2004, the US Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed the Biological Evaluation for the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project Proposed action and concurred with the findings of the Big Timber Ranger District Wildlife Biologist. These findings concluded that Alternative B (Proposed action) is not likely to adversely affect the threatened grizzly bear or the threatened Canada lynx, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the nonessential experimental gray wolf, and will have no effect for the threatened bald eagle.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703-711)

Migratory bird species are protected from harm under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). A January 2001 Executive Order requires federal agencies to ensure that environmental analyses of federal actions evaluate the effects of actions and agency plans on migratory birds, with an emphasis on species of concern.

I understand that the Main Boulder Project area may provide suitable nesting habitat for at least 25 known species, but could provide nesting habitat for as many as 150 species of neotropical and resident bird species. Mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project design that will limit activities in treatment units between from April 1st thru the end of October annually; unless surveys by the District Biologist or other qualified personnel reveal that activities will not affect migratory birds or other threatened or sensitive wildlife species. I am convinced that the abundance of large acreages of adjacent undisturbed forest, shrub, and ground nesting habitat will offset any short and long term impacts to migratory bird nesting habitat. There are abundant insects and seed sources for migratory birds throughout the analysis area. The proposed treatments will affect a relatively small proportion of habitat in the analysis area that provides forage for migratory birds and may result in habitats that provide differing, but valuable foraging habitats for these and other species in the future.

Executive Order 12962 (June 1995)

Section 1. Federal Agencies shall, to the extent permitted by law and where practicable, and in cooperation with States and Tribes, improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities by the following provisions relevant to the proposal:

> b. Identifying recreational fishing opportunities that are limited by water quality and habitat degradation and promoting restoration to support viable, healthy, and where feasible, self-sustaining recreational fisheries….
>
> h. Evaluating the effects of Federally funded, permitted, or authorized actions on aquatic systems and recreational fisheries and documents those effects relative to the purpose of this order…

Based on the channel sensitivity analysis conducted by the forest hydrologist, the Selected Alternative poses little threat to the physical integrity of riparian areas or streambank stability. Channels have stable stream banks with a low to very low sensitivity to disturbance. Riparian vegetation exerts low to negligible control on channel form and bank stability. In addition, mitigation measures, including SMZ rules are designed to reduce or eliminate the potential for adverse effects on riparian integrity or bank stability. With the mitigation and design criteria included in the proposed action, I concur that fuel treatments have been designed to maximize the amount of LWD available for recruitment to stream channels and that reducing the density of the

understory trees will bring riparian stand density to more normal stocking levels in the absence of wildfire. Reducing high fuel loads along riparian corridors will also reduce the potential for high intensity wildfires along the corridor, which could have some beneficial affect to riparian integrity and fish habitat quality.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations, directs Federal agencies to integrate environmental justice considerations into federal programs and activities. Environmental justice means that, to the greatest extent practical and permitted by the law, all populations are provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered or are allowed to share in the benefits of, are not excluded from, and are not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment (RO 13898 and Departmental Regulation.

My decision regarding the Selected Alternative sought out and incorporated public involvement through scoping, the DEIS 45-day public comment period, and numerous public meetings and field trips to the project area. My decision will not have a discernible effect on minorities, American Indians, or women, or the civil rights of any United States citizen. Nor will it have a disproportionate adverse impact on minorities or low-income individuals.

National Historic Preservation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

The Forest Service is mandated to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (as amended 1993) [Public Law 89-665]. Section 106 of the NHPA requires that federal agencies with direct or indirect jurisdiction over undertakings afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) reasonable opportunity for comment on such undertakings that affect properties included in or eligible for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) prior to the agency's approval of any such undertaking (36CFR800.1). Historic properties are identified by a heritage resource inventory and are determined as either eligible or not eligible properties for the National Register. Eligibility is reviewed, and concurrence given by the Montana Historic Preservation Office (MTSHPO). Sites that are determined eligible are then either protected in-place or adverse impacts must be mitigated. This process has been completed.

The Forest Service has obligations under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) of 1978 to "protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian" [Public Law 95-442]. Executive Order 13007 of 1996 further directs federal agencies to accommodate access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners and to avoid adversely affecting such sites. Consultation activities took place primarily with the Crow; February 20, 2003, May 29, 2003, and July 18, 2003.

I am convinced that the design/mitigation measures for site protections outlined in Appendix A-9 of the FEIS can be readily implemented so that no adverse direct or indirect affects will result from the treatments prescribed for the units associated with the Selected Alternative. These treatments should significantly reduce fuel loadings adjacent to these sites, helping to make site protection more viable in the event of a wildfire in the corridor. Currently there are excessive fuel loadings adjacent to many of the sites.

Clean Air Act

Congress passed the Clean Air Act in 1963, and amended it in 1972, 1977, and 1990. The purpose of the act is to protect and enhance air quality while ensuring the protection of public health and welfare. The act established National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), which must be met by state and federal agencies, and private industry. States are given primary responsibility for air quality management. Section 110 of the Clean Air Act requires States to develop State Implementation Plans (SIP) what identify how the State will attain and maintain NAAQS, which are identical to the Montana standards for PM_{10} (particulate matter with less than 10 microns. The SIP is promulgated through the Montana Clean Air Act and implementing regulations. The regulations provide specific guidance on maintenance of air quality, including restrictions on open burning (ARM 16.8.1300). The Act created the Montana Air Quality Bureau (now under DEQ) and the regulatory

authority to implement and enforce the codified regulations.

The NAAQS have been established for carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, ozone, and PM_{10}. There are numerous types of pollution that could be controlled, but particulate matter is the primary pollutant of concern. The $PM_{2.5}$ standard requires concentrations of $PM_{2.5}$ not to exceed a 24-hr average of 65 ug/m^3 (micrograms per cubic meter). Average annual arithmetic $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations are not to exceed 15 ug/m^3.

The August 1977 Clean Air Act amendments designated areas into PSD (Prevention of Signification Deterioration) classes. Class 1 airsheds are given the most protection from human caused air pollution in order to protect their pristine character. Class II airsheds allow for a greater amount of human caused pollution. The EPA has not yet identified any Class III airsheds.

By incorporating the specific guidelines for air quality, which are outlined in the mitigation section of the FEIS on Ch. 2-33 and in Table B-1, implementation of the Selected Alternative will comply with all of the laws, policies, and guidelines that are discussed above. Impacts to air quality are not usually evident or cumulative.

Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act provides the overall direction for the protection of the nations waters from both point and non-point source of water pollution. The Montana Water Quality Act establishes general guidelines for water quality protection. It requires the protection of the state's water as well as the full protection of existing and future beneficial uses. All of the streams within the analysis area for the proposed Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project are classified as B1 streams under the Montana Water Classification system. Streams within the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness Area are designated as A1. The Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM 17.30.623) require that waters classified as B1 are suitable among other things for the "growth and propagation of salmonid fishes and associated aquatic life.

The Selected Alternative is consistent with all of the above-mentioned laws. These laws will be strictly adhered to upon implementation of the Proposed action. Additional protective mitigation has also been established for the project as outlined in Ch. 2-31 of the FEIS.

The 1964 Wilderness Act and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Act

The 1964 Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577) and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Act (P.L. 95-249) provide specific direction for the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. The Wilderness Act, defines wilderness as an "area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man…"; wilderness retains "its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements", which is to be "managed so as to preserve its natural conditions…"; wilderness "generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable…". It also has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness was established on March 27, 1978. This Act set aside almost 1,000,000 acres on the Gallatin, Custer, and Shoshone National Forests as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. In designating the Absaroka-Beartooth, Congress assured this enduring wilderness resource will be secured for the American people of present and future generations.

The Selected Alternative does not include fuel reduction or burning activities in the Wilderness. Additionally, wilderness boundaries that are adjacent to the proposed units will be monumented before fuel reduction activities begin in the unit.

State Laws

The State of Montana Water Quality Act (1969, 1975, 1993, 1996)

State Laws: The State of Montana Water Quality Act requires the state to protect, maintain, and improve the quality of water for a variety of beneficial uses. Section 75-5-101, MCA established water quality standards based on beneficial uses. The Department of Environmental Quality designates the Main Boulder River as B1 Classification. Streams within the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness Area are designated as A1. Waters classified as B1 must be suitable for drinking, culinary, and food processing purposes after conventional treatment; bathing, swimming

and recreation; growth and propagation of salmonid fishes and associated aquatic life, waterfowl and furbearers; and agricultural and industrial water supply. A 5 NTU turbidity increase above naturally occurring turbidity is allowed in B1 waters. Surface waters within the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness are classified as A1, which have similar suitability criteria for beneficial uses except that no turbidity increase above naturally occurring turbidity is allowed.

The R1R4 sediment modeling was run for the Selected Alternative in a cumulative mode accounting for all existing roads, timber harvesting, and residential, and recreational developments in the Main Boulder watershed to the Forest Boundary at the mouth of the canyon. The timeframe for the cumulative effects analysis is 1980 to 2011. Overall sediment and nutrient impacts of Alternative B will be immeasurable and insignificant. Implementation of Alternative B will be in compliance with the Montana Water Quality Act and Administrative Rules of Montana, WQLS/TMDL constraints, and with Gallatin NF Forest Plan direction for water quality protection.

XIII. OTHER GUIDANCE

I find that the Selected Alternative is consistent with the direction given in the Forest Service Manual (FSM), Land use Strategy for westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) and Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT), the YCT Conservation Management Direction and Guidelines, and the streamside management zone (SMZ) rules. Additional restrictive mitigation as outlined in Ch. 2-32 of the FEIS will also be applied with implementation of this project.

- Forest Service Manual -FSM 2526 Riparian Area Management and FSM 2670.22 Sensitive Species Management
- Trout Unlimited Settlement Agreement - The goals, policies and objectives for aquatic resources outlined in the Forest Plan have been further defined within an agreement with the Madison-Gallatin Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) in 1990.
- Land Use Strategy for WCT and YCT - The Upper Missouri Short Term Strategy for Conserving Westslope Cutthroat Trout (UMWCT short term strategy) was finalized into a “Land Use Strategy” in April 2001. The final Strategy provides implementation direction for the MOU that was adopted in 1999. Region One has been an integral player in the development of this strategy. The initial short-term land-use strategy for WCT was adopted in 1996 by the GLT to apply towards management of YCT on the Gallatin. During the March 21st, 2002, GLT meeting, a decision was made to apply the finalized Land Use Strategy for implementing the 1999 MOU and Conservation Agreement for WCT in Montana to YCT populations on the Gallatin National Forest.

- Cooperative Conservation Agreement for Yellowstone Cutthroat trout within Montana**.** In 1998, the Gallatin and Custer National Forests joined numerous other agencies and the Crow Tribe in forming the Cooperative Conservation Agreement for Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout within the state of Montana.

- Montana Streamside Management Zone Law and Rules (SMZ) will be followed with exceptions granted for site specific Alternative Practices to the SMZ Law by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation dated June 21, 2005 (See Project File, Ref. #518 for Letter of Alternative Practices approval). Site specific Alternative Practices were granted to facilitate the removal of submerchantable trees within the SMZ to reduce fire risk and temporary bridges for stream crossing. All design criteria and mitigation outlined in the FEIS on pages 2-31 through 2 -32 will be adhered to.

Forest Plan Amendment No. 12; Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers:

The Amendment No. 12 of the Gallatin National Forest Plan dated June, 1993 mandates that the Boulder River will be managed to protect its outstandingly remarkable values for future consideration and potential classification for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic River System. This Amendment defines the current eligibility classification of the Main Boulder River prior to formal Wild and Scenic River Study specifically as follows:

Recreation River:

- *from the Gallatin National Forest boundary to Blakely Creek,*
- *from Miller Creek to Bramble Creek*

Scenic River:

- *from Blakely Creek to Miller Creek,*
- *from Bramble Creek to the Wilderness boundary*

Following design criteria and mitigation outlined in Ch 2-37 of the FEIS will ensure that Wild and Scenic values will be protected with the implementation of the Selected Alternative.

FSM 5150 Fuel Management Policy:

5150.2 - Objective. To identify, develop, and maintain fuel profiles that contribute to the most cost-efficient fire protection and use program in support of land and resource management direction in the forest plan.

5150.3 - Policy. Integrate fuel management and fire management programs in support of resource management objectives.

1. Use an interdisciplinary approach to integrate fuel management planning into all appropriate activities.

   a. Identify, through an economic analysis, the most cost-efficient fuel profile to meet resource management direction in support of the fire protection program. Consider a full range of fuel management alternatives, including no treatment. Fuel management activities must be responsive to long-term site productivity, utilization opportunities, and air quality considerations.

   b. Where a management activity, such as timber sales, thinning, or road construction, contributes to an unacceptable fuel profile, modify that activity to reduce its incremental contribution to the fuel profile.

   c. On lands where repetitive management activities will occur, evaluate the projected fuel profile to determine the most cost-efficient time(s) of entry and the level of treatment(s).

2. Manage fuel in accordance with fire management direction in the forest land and resource management plan.

   a. Expend funds for fuel management only for the purpose of resource protection. Do not allow such expenditures to exceed the expected cost plus net value change that might occur without treatment.

   b. Where the planned treatment meets other resource management objectives, such as site preparation for reforestation, identify the benefits and costs in the economic analysis to determine appropriate funding needs (FSM 5152).

3. Follow the safety requirements in FSH 6709.11, Health and Safety Code Handbook, and FSH 5109.32a, Fireline Handbook (FSM 5103).

The selected alternative has been designed to comply with the FSM 5150 Fuel Management Policy.

Administrative Direction:

The objectives of the Selected Alternative include creating a more defensible area in the wildland urban interface (WUI) by reducing the wildfire severity risk and crown fire hazard in the Main Boulder River Corridor.

- Directed by National Fire Plan (2000), the Cohesive Strategy (October 2000), 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy (August 2001), 2001 Review and the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, Gallatin National Forest Plan, (1987).

- Measured in terms of a reduction of *crown bulk density*, an increase in *crown base height* and site conversion to *Fuel model* 8. Under these conditions, the sites meet guidelines established in Fire Smart – Protecting your Community from Wildfire, (1999) for interface hazard mitigation.

Maintain low risk areas by reducing conifer encroachment.

- Directed by National Fire Plan (2000), the Cohesive Strategy (October 2000), 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy (August 2001), 2001 Review and the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, Gallatin National Forest Plan (NFP), (1987).

- Measured in terms of percent effectiveness of mortality estimates for mature and small trees from the First Order Fire Effects Model (FOFEM, 4.0 Reinhardt, Keane and Brown, 1997).

XIV. OTHER DISCLOSURES

Code of Federal Regulations - 40 CFR 1505.2 (c)

In making my decision, I gave full consideration to the adequacy and effectiveness of the mitigation measures identified in Chapter 2, page 31 of the FEIS. These measures are incorporated into the proposed action and, as such, implementation will go forward only on the condition that the listed mitigation will occur. I am confident that the mitigation identified in the FEIS constitutes all practical means available to me to avoid or minimize the foreseen environmental harm attributable to implementing the selected alternative. Environmental effects will continue to be monitored for the life of the project (Chapter 2, page 41 of the FEIS) and management strategies will adapt to incorporate more effective measures as these become known.

XV. APPEAL RIGHTS

36 CFR 215.13 – Who may appeal.
(a) Individuals and organizations who submit substantive written or oral comments during the 45-day comment period for a draft environmental impact statement, 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 solely on the basis of membership in an organization; the member(s) must submit substantive comments as an individual in order to meet appeal eligibility.

XVI. REVIEW AND APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.14. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice in the Bozeman Chronicle, the paper of record. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The legal notice in the Bozeman Chronicle is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source. I am the responsible official.

Paper appeals must be submitted to:

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

Electronic appeals must be submitted to:

appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us

In electronic appeals, the subject line should 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).

Appeal contents must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215.14

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.

XVII. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of the Main Boulder Fuel Reduction Project, Alternative B (Proposed action) will begin as early as winter of 2005 and is projected to continue for up to seven years. The project will be split into logical subdivisions for implementation purposes.

XVIII. FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT PERSON

Copies of the Main Boulder Fuel Reduction Project are available at the Big Timber District Office in Big Timber, Montana and the Bozeman Ranger District in Bozeman Montana. Copies are also available on the Internet at http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin in the Project and Plans area. For additional information or questions concerning this decision or appeal process, please contact Barbara Ping, ID Team Leader at 406/522-2570 or Brent Foster, Co-ID Team Leader, or Bill Avey, District Ranger at (406)-932-5155.

REBECCA HEATH
Forest Supervisor

August 8, 2005
Date