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August, 2006  
Project Update  
Newsletter



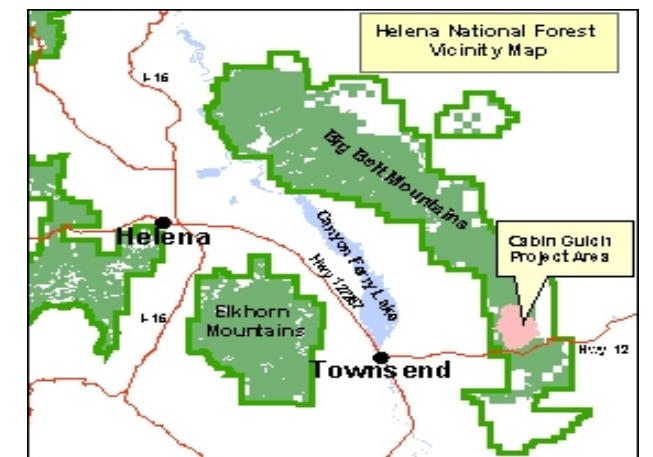
## Cabin Gulch Vegetation Treatment Project

### The project location and purpose...

#### Project Outcomes

- Enhance wildlife habitat.
- Manage the area to be more resistant to high intensity wildfires and insects & disease outbreaks.
- Reduce current & future fuel build-up. Study the effects of fire in a Douglas-fir forest community.
- Maintain old growth.
- Promote species of concern such as aspen, whitebark pine & ponderosa pine.
- Reclaim grassland & shrubland communities.
- Improve water quality by reducing sediment to West Fork Cabin Gulch stream.
- Treat noxious weeds.
- Generate 17.4 million board feet of commercial timber.

The Cabin Gulch Vegetation Treatment Project area is approximately 15,200 acres in size and is located roughly 15 miles east of Townsend, Montana. The Cabin Gulch and North Fork of Deep Creek drainages flow through the analysis area. Private lands border the area on the southwest. The Mount Baldy Roadless Area is north of the project area.



The underlying purpose of the project is to promote a fire-dependent ecosystem that is resistant and resilient to high-intensity wildfire and epidemic levels of insect and disease. There is a need to restore fire-adapted ecosystems, reduce hazardous fuels, and improve the water quality within the Cabin Gulch landscape.

A variety of factors influence the need for treatment in the area. Due to wildfire suppression

and the lack of frequent, low-intensity fires, the warm, dry, forest types have departed from historic conditions. The fuels available for supporting a large wildfire have increased from what was on the landscape 100 years ago.

Aspen stands have declined due to the lack of natural fire which aspen clones need to survive and thrive. Fire suppression has also allowed the growth of conifers in areas where they tradition-

ally do not grow. This has resulted in a decline of grasslands and sagebrush which are important plant communities for wildlife range and browse.

Another significant factor is the prolonged drought and subsequent increase of insect and disease in the area. Now at epidemic levels, the insect activity in the forested communities is resulting in a significant increase of weakened or dead trees.

Furthermore, the West Fork Cabin Gulch road is delivering sediment to the drainage and compromising water quality.

#### The Draft EIS contains three chapters-

- Ch 1 Purpose & Need for action
- Ch 2 Alternatives based on issues
- Ch 3 Affected environment & environmental consequences.

### The planning process...

Planning efforts were initiated early last fall. In November, a public scoping newsletter was mailed to over 500 contacts announcing the proposed action, explaining the analysis process and to solicit formal comments and concerns. An informational open house was held in January to also introduce the projects goals and treatment methods.

This spring an interdisciplinary team of Forest specialists gathered comments, formalized issues and developed alternatives to the proposed action. Based upon the content analysis of the public scoping input, several issues were identified.

Additional data was collected, analyzed and treatment methods refined. Effects were analyzed for each alternative.

#### Key Issues:

1. No Road Closures
2. Hiding Cover
3. Old Growth
4. Timing of Treatment



Hazardous fuels reduction and forest health activities are proposed in the Cabin Gulch area to reduce the risk from wildfire and to restore fire-adapted ecosystems.

### Stay Informed... Stay Involved!

#### It's easy to stay involved!

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is available for public review. The document may be viewed and/or downloaded from the Forest website. Paper copies of the DEIS are available for review at the public libraries in Helena and Townsend.

The Final EIS will be prepared this winter, following receipt and analysis of public comments on the DEIS. Comments will be accepted for 45 days following notification in the Federal Register.

**The last day to submit written comments on the DEIS is September 18, 2006**

Following the FEIS the Forest Supervisor will make decisions and document them in a Record of Decision (ROD). Project implementation will tentatively begin the fall/winter of 2006-2007.

#### Mark your calendar for these upcoming events!

**An Open House** to present the alternatives and analysis will be held on Thursday, August 24, 3-7 p.m. at the Townsend Ranger District Office, 415 South Front, Townsend, MT.

**A Field Trip** will be hosted by the Forest Service on August 31. Meet at the Townsend Ranger District Office at 3 p.m. for rides and directions. RSVP by August 29th by calling 266-3425.

**To review the DEIS, visit the Forest webpage at [www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena)**

**DEIS Comments:** Written comments may be mailed to: Attn: Liz VanGenderen, 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT 59602, or emailed to [comments-northern-Helena@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-Helena@fs.fed.us)

We know it takes an effort to participate in these projects. Thanks for being involved and having an interest in **YOUR** public lands.

-Sincerely,

Mike Cole  
Townsend District Ranger



Restoration of sagebrush & grassland meadows would be accomplished using mechanical thinning and prescribed fire.

## Proposed Action—Alternative 2: Treatment & Methods

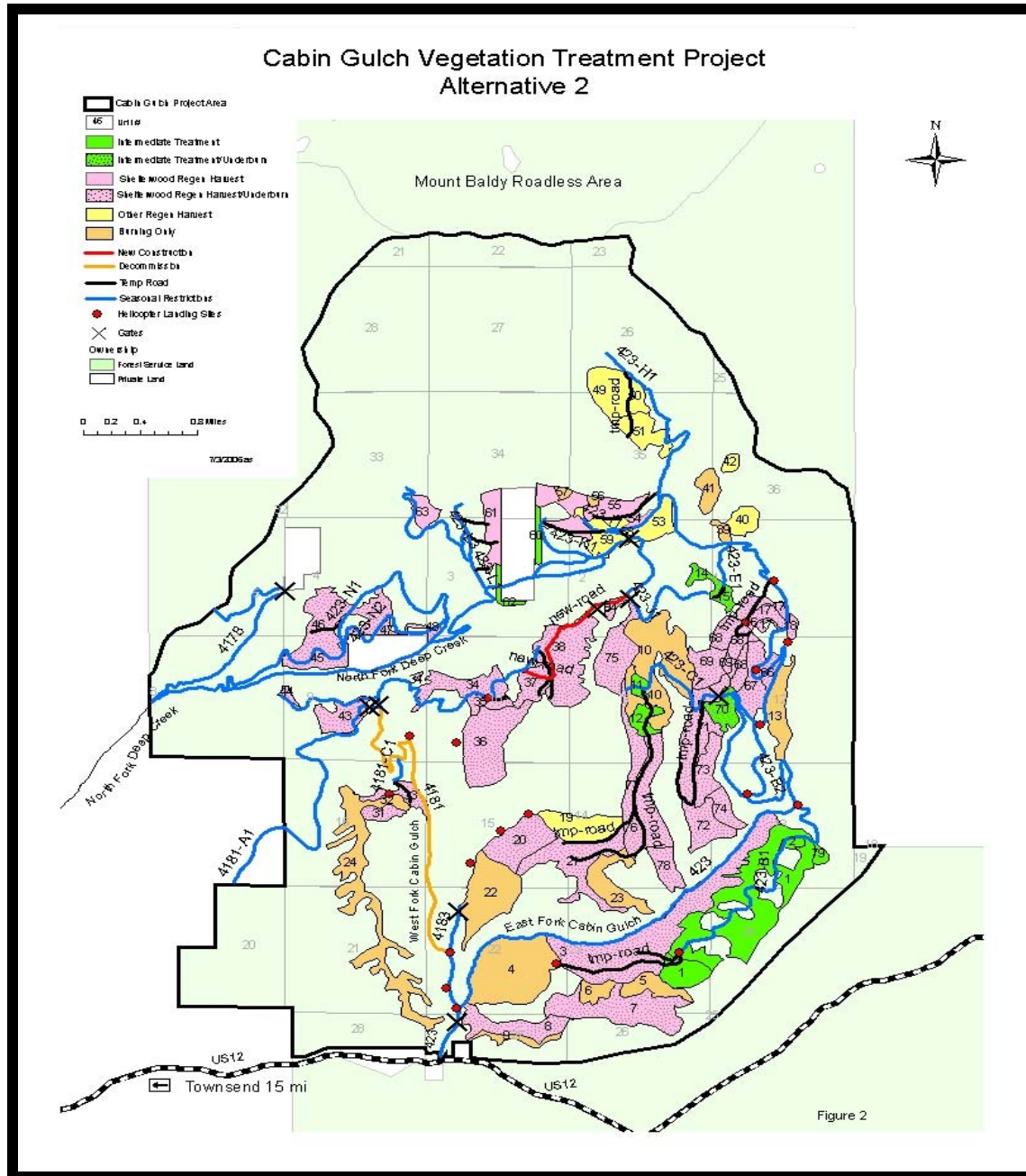
This alternative applies an active landscape approach to meeting all the elements of the purpose and need. It was designed with community stakeholders through the expertise of Forest specialists.

Alternative 2 would emphasize cost-effective timber harvest, reduce the susceptibility of timbered stands to insect and disease, capture the economic value of trees killed, promote aspen stand vigor, promote reproduction of whitebark pine and reclaim grassland and shrubland communities.

Treatment methods are designed to reduce ladder fuels and fine woody debris, create more heterogeneous stands, increase structural diversity, and restore the fire adapted ecosystem in the area by moving the landscape towards desired conditions.

This proposal includes approximately nine miles of temporary road construction. These would be fully recon-toured following project completion. About three miles of the West Fork of Cabin Gulch road would be permanently closed. Less than one mile of permanent road would be constructed for access to the upper portion of the West Fork of Cabin Gulch from the North Fork of Deep Creek.

The proposed research effort will increase knowledge of results of thinning and underburning relative to Douglas-fir and pine beetle infestations.



### Comparison of Alternatives...

**ALT. #1 NO ACTION**

provides the baseline for a comparison of the environmental effects of the other alternatives. The current situation as described by each resource in Chapter 3 would continue. Ongoing work, or work previously planned and approved would continue.

**ALT. #3**

was designed to address issues concerning hiding cover, big game security, old growth and winter recreation.

**ALT. #4** was designed to address issues with road closures and new road construction. It is similar to alternative 2 with regard to vegetation treatments.

**Streamside Management Zones (SMZs)**

will provide snag and down woody debris habitat in ALL alternatives.

For more information on each of the alternatives reference the DEIS on the forest webpage.

## Alternatives Summary Table

Treatment Type	Alt. 2 acres	Alt. 3 acres	Alt. 4 acres
SDI Research Thinning	288	246	288
Precommercial Thin	51	51	51
Shelterwood	10	515	10
Group Shelterwood	153	346	153
Seedtree	77	103	77
Precommercial Thin/SageGrass	33	618	33
Mixed Severity Burn	346	202	346
Mixed Severity/Sage grass Burn	290	169	290
Sage/grass Burn	116	28	116
Research Underburning	225	0	225
Shelterwood Underburn	976	9	976
Group Shelterwood Underburn	1033	83	1033
Commercial Thin Underburn	28	0	28
Clearcut with Reserves Underburn	64	130	64
Liberation Harvest	178	22	178
Weed & Clean, Pile & Burn	22	33	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,890</b>	<b>2,555</b>	<b>3,890</b>

Treatment Systems Used	Acres (%)	Acres (%)	Acres (%)
(hand-thin or burn only) No equipment	1,083 (28)	928 (36)	1,083 (28)
Tractor	1,389 (36)	980 (38)	1,389 (36)
Cable	825 (21)	282 (11)	825 (21)
Helicopter	593 (15)	367 (15)	593 (15)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,890 (100)</b>	<b>2,557 (100)</b>	<b>3,890 (100)</b>



Aspen is a species that is declining in this area due to competition from conifers and lack of wildfire in its life cycle.

### Decisions to be made...

The Forest Supervisor will make the following decisions and document them in a Record of Decision (RPD) once the final EIS is completed.

- Whether or not to implement the proposed action or an alternative to the proposed action.
- What monitoring requirements are appropriate to evaluate implementation of this project.
- Whether or not a forest plan amendment is necessary.



Whitebark pine is rapidly disappearing due to a combination of white pine blister rust and mountain pine beetle. Proposed treatment will remove competing lodgepole pine and subalpine fir to allow the whitebark pine to reproduce.