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Record of Decision

Grizzly Vegetation and Transportation Management Project

Three Rivers Ranger District, Kootenai National Forest
Lincoln County, Montana

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GRIZZLY VEGETATION AND TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT RECORD OF DECISION

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Grizzly Vegetation &
Transportation Management
Record of Decision

I. DECISION SUMMARY

After careful consideration of the potential impacts of the alternatives analyzed and documented in the Grizzly Vegetation and Transportation Management Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) (issued in June 2007), and public comments on this project, I have decided to implement management actions as described below for Alternative 2, with changes (Alternative 2a).

Project activities will occur within the approximately 44,400 acre Grizzly Planning Subunit, 18 miles northeast of Troy, Montana.

ALTERNATIVE 2 with Changes (Alternative 2a)

With this Record of Decision (ROD) I am authorizing the following activities to meet the purpose and need for action described in Section IV:

Vegetation restoration:

- Restoration of western white pine, and western larch:
Regeneration harvest on approximately 340 acres that currently are either dominated by decadent lodgepole pine or shade-tolerant species, followed by planting to western white pine, western larch;
- Restoration of low and moderate intensity fire regime vegetation characteristics, including large tree components:
Commercial thinning of 348 acres that currently have higher than desired numbers of trees in the understory to reduce stand densities, improve species composition, and regeneration harvesting of 200 acres to promote a trend towards seral dominated, resilient forest types with large diameter overstory trees;
- Enhancement of aspen habitat:
Tree removal over 19 acres to reduce conifer competition with existing aspen, and to promote regeneration of aspen;
- Ecosystem and wildlife burning:
Underburning of 468 acres to reduce the number of conifer trees in key winter range and grizzly bear forage areas, and 250 acres to reduce competition on dry site ponderosa pine habitats;
- Precommercial thinning:
Non-commercial thinning of 515 acres to reduce competition and enhance growth and vigor in existing plantations;
- Timber Products:
As a result of the above vegetation restoration activities, an estimated 8.2 million board feet of forest products would be available to local and regional markets.

Road and trail management, including watershed rehabilitation:

- Grizzly bear habitat improvement:
Approximately 18.5 miles of road will be placed in intermittent stored service (storage) status to improve grizzly bear habitat;
- Watershed rehabilitation:
Active decommissioning on 15.4 miles of unneeded road (including converting portions of Road #6132 and #6132D to trail), and storage work on 9.7 miles of road to reduce sediment delivery prior to placing in grizzly bear core;

Best Management Practices (BMPs) including drainage improvements, culvert replacements, and erosion control practices applied on 36 miles of road used for timber haul;
- Passive decommissioning (abandonment) of 27 miles of roads unnecessary for future management;
- Wheeled vehicle motorized access designation:
Designate 65.5 miles of currently open roads as open to motorized use by highway legal vehicles, including 3.5 miles previously closed (portions of 902Y, 902Z) to public access;

Designate 39 miles of existing trails within grizzly bear habitat for non-motorized use;

Fuels management (included within vegetation restoration above):

- Thinning 863 acres of overstocked stands to reduce fuel ladders and decrease competition to desired overstory trees;
- Removing dead and dying lodgepole trees on 907 acres to reduce fuel loadings
- Included in the fuels management is an estimated 402 acres of underburning (44% of the activity fuels) and approximately 308 acres of grapple piling.

Design features and mitigation measures to maintain and protect resource values (ROD Appendix 2)

See ROD Section VIII and the Appendix 1 for a more detailed description of the activities authorized with this decision.

Changes to Alternative 2

In response to agency and public comments, and based on further refinement by the interdisciplinary team, I have decided to modify Alternative 2 in the Draft EIS. This modified alternative is identified as Alternative 2a in the FEIS and ROD. Alternative 2a reflects the following adjustments to Alternative 2:

- **Less harvest.** Alternative 2a harvests approximately 400 less acres than Alternative 2. Appendix 1 contains a detailed table of changes to Alternative 2 and a comparison map of Alternative 2 & Alternative 2a Harvest Units.
- **Less grapple piling.** Alternative 2a utilizes grapple piling on approximately 400 less acres than Alternative 2, further addressing Issue #3, Grapple Piling Impacts on Soil and Weed Infestation (ROD Section VI).
- **More grizzly bear core.** Grizzly bear core is increased by approximately 2,700 acres in Bear Management Unit (BMU) 11. This addition enlarges core in a key grizzly bear approach area and brings the BMU into full compliance of the core standard. This is accomplished with installation of barriers on Road #902B, 903, 6715B, and a portion of Road #902, which are currently closed yearlong to public motorized travel. This change addresses Issue #1, Grizzly Bear Disturbance and Displacement (ROD Section VI).
- **Less decommissioning in core.** In response to public and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concerns about loss of grizzly bear security during decommissioning, approximately 10 miles of decommissioning and intermittent stored service (storage) work is dropped in the Burnt Creek (Vivian Creek Road and spurs) and Little Creek watersheds. This change further addresses Issue #1, Grizzly Bear Disturbance and Displacement.

- **Less harvest along the Burnt Dutch #472 Rd.** The harvest activities along the Burnt Dutch #472 road are reduced by 112 acres to ensure riparian protection and economic feasibility. The remaining harvest is expected to be of short duration. This change results in reduced effects in regard to Issue #1, Grizzly Bear Disturbance and Displacement.
- **Units near Roderick Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) dropped.** Helicopter Units 57 and 57a are dropped because recent field verification found that many of the aspen clones in that vicinity have blown down and objectives to restore aspen through helicopter harvest could not be met. This change also results in reduced effects in regard to Issue #1, Grizzly Bear Disturbance and Displacement (DEIS Chapter 2, pg. 11) and satisfies public concerns regarding Issue # 4, Effects from Units 57 and 57a activities on Potential Future Wilderness Consideration . (ROD Section VI).
- **More winter harvest required.** In addition to the required winter harvest of Units 13, 13a, 18 and 20, Alternative 2a requires winter harvest on frozen ground for Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 17, and 32 to minimize soil impacts (Kuennen 2006). This change also minimizes disturbances to the grizzly bear since operations would only occur during the denning season (12/1-3/31). As compared to Alternatives 2 and 3, Alternative 2a does not necessitate a Forest Plan amendment to allow for an increase in open road densities in Management Area 12, Big Game Summer Range, since Unit 17 is changed to winter harvest and the road to this unit will not be open to public access. This change to required winter harvest further addresses Issue #1, Grizzly Bear Disturbance and Displacement (DEIS Chapter 2, pg. 11).
- **Soil standards met.** In addition to required winter harvest, preharvest, post-harvest, and post-mitigation monitoring and potential skid trail rehabilitation is included for Units 1, 2, 3, 18 and 20, where there is higher existing detrimental soil disturbance and to ensure regional soil standards are met. These units have been redesigned to make the best use of existing skid trails and temporary roads. The temporary road templates would be rehabilitated after use, leaving those areas in an improved condition. (See FEIS Appendix 2 for more information).
- **Wildlife movement corridors provided.** Units 45, 45a, 49, 50, and 50a were redesigned to ensure that wildlife movement corridors are retained. This change results in two openings over 40 acres (52 acres and 74 acres) rather than one 126-acre opening over 40 acres. As compared to Alternative 2, this modification is an improvement in addressing public concerns regarding Issue #2, Regeneration Units greater than 40 Acres. The Regional Forester reviewed the rationale for creating these openings and granted approval for them. (See project file for Regional Office Approval for Openings Greater than 40 Acres).
- **Helicopter harvest dropped.** Since helicopter Units 57 and 57a are dropped, the remaining helicopter units, Unit 34 and 50 were reduced in size by 30 and 34 acres respectively, to accommodate ground based yarding. Temporary roads within Unit 34 (0.1 miles) and Unit 50 (0.4 miles) are analyzed. All temporary roads will be scarified, seeded, and fertilized following use. Temporary roads are minimized in this project by utilizing existing road templates whenever feasible, and obliterated after use, leaving those areas in an improved condition.
- **Design features.** Design features are adjusted to ensure resource protection with these changes. See ROD Appendix 2.
- Other minor adjustments to fuels treatments, logging systems, and watershed rehabilitation activities (detailed in FEIS Appendix 1) are made based on additional field verification to ensure feasibility, efficiency, and resource protection.

Following my review of the Interdisciplinary Team's analysis of Alternative 2a, I have determined that the changes are minor and are within the scope and context of the environmental effects disclosed in the DEIS, FEIS, Biological Assessment, Biological Evaluation, and supporting documentation located in the project file (PF).

See Section IX for more information on the rationale for my decision.

II. PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION.

The project area is approximately 44,400 acres, of which 97% are National Forest System lands. The project area is located approximately 18 miles northeast of Troy, Montana, and is bordered on the west and north by the Yaak River, south by Roderick Mountain and east by the Shepherder-Roderick Butte ridge. Major drainages within the project area include Burnt Creek, Grizzly Creek, Pheasant Creek, and Cool Creek. The legal description is: T34 and 35N, R31-33W, PMM, Lincoln County, Montana.

The project area is predominately a forested geographic area, influenced by Pacific maritime moisture. This moisture yields a rich diversity of trees, shrubs, and grasses with a high rate of growth. The fires of 1889 and 1910 affected 33 and 39 percent of the area, respectively. Since the early 1900s, the Forest Service has had a policy of fire suppression. These events have resulted in a large acreage of deteriorating mature lodgepole pine, an absence of trees greater than 150 years old, an increase in shade tolerant species, and increased stand densities. Active timber management and road construction has occurred throughout the project area outside the inventoried roadless areas (see DEIS Harvest History map, M-8).

Recreational activities include camping, fishing, pleasure driving, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, viewing wildlife, and gathering forest products. Two inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) lie within the project area: the 29,659-acre Roderick Mountain IRA #684, and a portion of the 7,316-acre Grizzly Peak IRA #667.

The area provides habitat for many wildlife species, including grizzly bear, lynx, gray wolf, wolverine, white-tailed and mule deer, elk, moose, and bald eagle. Native fish present are the interior redband trout, westslope cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, longnose dace, largescale sucker, and the slimy sculpin. Since the early 1990s many roads have been gated or bermed to protect grizzly bear security (see DEIS Chapter 3 for more information on area resources).

III. OVERVIEW OF OUR ANALYSIS AND DECISION PROCESS

National Forest planning takes place at several levels: national, regional, forest, and project levels. The Grizzly EIS is a project-level analysis; its scope is confined to addressing the major issues and possible environmental consequences of the project. It does not attempt to address decisions made at higher levels. It does, however, implement direction provided at those higher levels. The decision I am making here does not preclude the need for future decisions to help meet the desired conditions in the project area.

The Kootenai National Forest (KNF) Forest Plan (USDA 1987) provides the primary management direction for my decision. The Forest Plan prescribes goals and management standards for the KNF as a whole and for 23 subdivisions of the Forest referred to as management areas. In general, the goals and standards of the Forest Plan require me to balance a variety of resources and interests in managing these lands (e.g. maintaining or enhancing wildlife and fisheries habitat and providing a sustained yield of timber).

Specific management area (MA) direction from the Forest Plan further guides project development and location of activities in different areas. MAs affected by this project are described in the DEIS on page 33 and displayed on Map M-2 of that document. The treatment summary in ROD Appendix 1 includes the MAs within each harvest treatment unit. The Forest Plan provides MA-specific goals and standards on pages III-43 through III-118. The KNF is in the process of Forest Plan revision. The Proposed Kootenai National Forest Land Management Plan was released for public comment in 2006, and is currently on hold pending review of the 2008 Planning Rule.

The analysis and decision processes for this project are based on the consideration of the best available science. The manner in which best available science is addressed can be found throughout the disclosure of rationale found within the Biological Assessments, Biological Opinions, ROD, DEIS, FEIS Response to Comments, and the project file.

This project is consistent with National Fire Plan and Healthy Forests Restoration Act objectives to reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface. I also considered information presented in the Northern Region Overview. See ROD Section IV below, Purpose and Need.

IV. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The need for action is determined by the extent and intensity of differences between the existing and desired conditions. Where there is little difference between these two conditions, the need for action is low. However, the need for action in this analysis area is compelling, given that conditions are different than what is desired to meet objectives. Based on the comparison between the desired condition, and existing conditions, the management direction provided in the Forest Plan, the Northern Region Overview, the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, the following objectives were identified to develop the proposed action.

Vegetation Restoration

Vegetation communities today are different than historically present, when more frequent fire intervals and other natural disturbances created a diversity of forest structure, composition, and function. The Grizzly landscape assessment identified specific areas where these vegetation conditions occur. Within the Burnt Creek/Clark Mountain, Lang Creek/Cool Creek, and Whitetail areas, past wildfires resulted in extensive areas dominated primarily by lodgepole pine, with minor amounts of more fire resilient species. The lodgepole pine is experiencing widespread mortality, increasing fuel loadings, and shade tolerant/drought intolerant species dominate the understory. Forest species composition and structural diversity that are resultant from mixed severity fire are lacking in much of the area due to large scale past fire events, and previous management practices. The desired conditions are to have vegetation composition and structure that is characterized by mixed severity fire disturbances, including large fire-adapted species, more open stands with less shade intolerant species in the understory, and stand conditions that allow for low to mixed severity fire occurrence.

There is a need to continue management practices that increase the amount of resilient vegetation characteristics, including increasing the dominance of western larch, ponderosa pine and western white pine; reducing overall density of stands to promote large tree growth; enhancing aspen stands by reducing conifer competition; and reintroducing fire in winter range and foraging areas to reduce conifer competition and reinvigorate understory vegetation growth.

Road and Trail Management

The number of roads on the landscape currently do not provide a minimum of 55 percent core grizzly bear habitat, and does not meet standards for total motorized road densities in Bear Management Unit 11 (BMU 11). There are many roads within the planning area that were constructed prior to 1960 that do not meet current management standards, are not necessary for management access, and are contributing to resource damage. A project-specific roads analysis process (FSM 7703) identified opportunities to reduce densities by removing roads from the transportation system that are not needed for management purposes. Also, several roads and trails have been identified to be designated for motorized or non-motorized use pursuant to 36 CFR 212.51.

There is a need to reduce total motorized road densities, as well as open motorized road densities to meet grizzly bear habitat needs, as well as to identify appropriate designated uses in accordance with the final Travel Management Rule of 2005.

Watershed Rehabilitation

Roads are the single largest source of management-related sediment in most streams in the Yaak River basin. Recent sediment source surveys in the project area have identified sites where sediment from roads is entering streams and stream crossings where culverts are not adequate to sustain high flows. In addition, there are areas of unstable fill slopes that are contributing to sediment delivery. Many of these roads have been identified as not being necessary for management purposes.

There is a need to stabilize roads in order to minimize their impact on the watershed condition. Specific sediment production concerns are existing unstable failures, undersized culverts, lack of cross drainage, and unstable fills. Road conditions in upper Burnt Creek present a particularly high risk for water quality. Road failures in this area are contributing sediment to Burnt Creek. Other roads with sediment sources or road/stream crossing at risk have been identified in Lang Creek, Cool Creek, Pheasant Creek, Gus Creek, Little Creek, and unnamed Yaak River tributary watersheds.

Fuels Management

Stand conditions throughout the analysis area have high densities of understory vegetation creating fuel ladder conditions and competing with desired overstory trees. Many stands also have high numbers of dead and dying lodgepole pine, which are contributing to high fuel loads. Stand conditions do not currently represent characteristics representative of mixed-severity fire disturbances of large, fire-adapted species in more open-grown forest structure.

There is a need to reduce existing fuel loadings, as well as to reduce overall stand densities and promote more open-grown forest structure and a greater proportion of large fire-adapted species to allow for future reintroduction of fire.

Timber Products

Availability of timber products for local and regional markets has been reduced in recent years, causing reductions in job opportunities, and closure of local mills. To support a viable industry, wood products from a variety of sources should be available.

There is a need to provide local employment related to forest management and restoration activities and to supply forest products to support this segment of the local and regional economy dependant on forest products.

V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Proposed Action Development: In the spring and summer of 2004, the Three Rivers Ranger District conducted a broad scale assessment of the Grizzly Planning Subunit to identify management needs. This assessment characterized trends in the human, terrestrial, and aquatic features, as well as the vegetative conditions and ecological processes. During this assessment, the District requested input from persons and organizations interested in the area. Numerous responses were received with suggestions for management ranging from less intensive management and fewer motorized opportunities, to higher intensity management and increased motorized access. These suggestions were incorporated to the extent possible in the development of the proposed action.

Proposed Action Scoping: Public involvement on the proposed action was initiated on Friday, June 16, 2006, with the publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the *Federal Register*. A letter was mailed to the District mailing list and local residents near the project area on June 15, 2006, explaining the purpose and need and providing details of the proposed action, and initiating the 60-day public notification for exceeding the 40-acre opening size limitation. Several agencies were on the mailing list including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Lincoln County Air Quality Department, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Six comments were received: two from individuals, one from the Yaak Valley Forest Council, one from the Kootenai Tribes of Idaho, one from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and one from the WildWest Institute. A public field trip occurred on August 1, 2006 at the request of the Yaak Valley Forest Council. The interdisciplinary team and 10 local residents visited and discussed the proposed actions.

Public Comments on the DEIS: The DEIS was released to the public for comment on June 8, 2007, with a notice in the *Federal Register*, as well as notice in the newspaper of record, *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*, and mailings to those that responded during the initial scoping. There were twelve responses to the request for comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Each comment letter was carefully considered by the interdisciplinary team, District Ranger and District Staff. Agency responses are included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

A public field trip was held on August 29, 2007, to visit and discuss road decommissioning proposals within the project area. Several members of the public attended along with representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Tribal Involvement: The concerns of the Kootenai and Salish tribes were solicited through project scoping. In addition, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have provided a tribal liaison to work in partnership with the Kootenai NF to review project proposals and provide tribal input. No concerns regarding this project were expressed by tribal governments.

Other Agency Involvement: The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks were consulted regarding fish and wildlife habitat, and the Lincoln County Air Quality Department was consulted regarding air quality conditions. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also received project notifications.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) submitted scoping comments and DEIS comments (see FEIS, Ltr. #4). EPA and the KNF completed a total maximum daily load (TMDL) for the Yaak River basin (Yaak TMDL) in 2008. None of the streams in the Grizzly project area were found to be impaired.

Through informal consultation on the biological assessment, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred on April 17, 2009, that the project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the grizzly bear, gray wolf, and Canada lynx (see Concurrence section of the project file). Biological assessments document that the project will have no effect on the water howellia, Spalding's catchfly, slender moonwort, white sturgeon, or bull trout.

VI. SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Public scoping comments revealed six issues representing unresolved conflict with the proposed action (Alternative 2). DEIS Appendix A explains the agency response and disposition of the scoping comments. The following significant issues were used to develop alternatives to the proposed action:

Issue 1) Grizzly Bear Disturbance and Displacement

The public expressed concern that the proposed activities would cause grizzly bear disturbance, reduce security, and displace grizzly bears from the areas of proposed activity. Increased movement of the bears could lead to higher risk of mortality (hunters, vehicles, human interactions).

Issue 2) Regeneration Harvest Units Greater Than 40 Acres

Proposed units 49 and 50 would create an opening of approximately 126 acres. The public expressed concern with these large openings. Also, these units are in MA 11, big game winter range, where regeneration units generally, should not exceed 20 acres.

Issue 3) Grapple Piling Impacts on Soil and Weed Infestation

The public expressed concern that grapple piling causes excessive soil displacement and removal of vegetation, exposing mineral soils and increasing risk of erosion and weed invasion. Grapple piling is explained in the DEIS, Chapter 2, "After harvest operations, residual slash and debris is piled using excavators to reduce fuels accumulations, and to prepare the sites for planting (where necessary). Slash is placed into piles, which are then burned during the fall, when burning conditions are favorable. Sufficient down woody material is retained on site to meet objectives for soil nutrient and habitat needs."

Issue 4) Effects on Potential Future Wilderness Consideration

Concerns were expressed that activities in units 57 and 57a could reduce future potential wilderness consideration, and could impact grizzly bears through disturbance and displacement.

Issue 5) Fragmentation

Public concern was expressed that harvesting units 40 and 60 would increase fragmentation of the surrounding large patches of fire adapted tree species.

Issue 6) Fuels Treatments along Long Meadows Road (593)

Concerns were expressed that fuels reduction treatments in the recent Obermayer Project did not address protection of the escape route to the west from the Yaak area.

VII. DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

1. ALTERNATIVES GIVEN DETAILED STUDY

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative. This alternative is a "status quo" strategy that allows current activities and policies, such as recreation administration, road maintenance, and fire suppression to continue. This alternative provides a baseline for comparison of environmental consequences of the other alternatives to the existing condition (36 CFR 1502.14) and is a management option that could be selected by the deciding official.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is the proposed action. It includes vegetation, road, and trail management, and watershed rehabilitation actions to meet the purpose and need (see Table 1 below and the DEIS pgs. 15-21 for more detailed information on the activities). The proposed action would not reduce existing levels of public motorized access. Roads identified for active or passive decommissioning and intermittent stored service are currently closed to public motorized access or are impassable due to vegetation growth. Refer to Chapter 2 in the DEIS for more details. Alternative 2 includes a project-specific Forest Plan amendment to increase open road densities in MA 12, Big Game Summer Range, during summer harvest.

ROD Table 1. Alternative activities summary

Proposed Vegetation Treatments	Alt 2 Acres	Alt 3 Acres	Alt 2a Acres
Clearcut with Reserves/Planting	384	317	378
Seedtree with Reserves/Planting	159	102	162
Commercial thinning	509	509	348
Salvage	170	171	19
Release	84	25	0
Total Harvest Acres/Volume	1,306 Acres 9.97 MMBF	1,124 Acres 8.38 MMBF	907 Acres 8.2 MMBF
Precommercial thinning	515	515	515
Ecosystem Burning	250	250	250
Wildlife Burning	468	468	468
Total Vegetation Treatments	2,539 Acres	2,357 Acres	2,140 Acres
Proposed Logging Systems	Acres	Acres	Acres
Tractor/Summer Harvest	606	534	251
Tractor/Winter Harvest	158	158	412
Skyline	274	315	192
Skyline/Helicopter	86	0	0
Tractor/Skyline Swing	0	0	52
Helicopter	182	117	0
Proposed Fuels Treatments	Acres	Acres	Acres
Grapple Piling/Burn Piles	692	203	248
Spot Grapple Piling/Burn Piles	20	20	60
Hand Piling/Burn Piles	5	5	0
Grapple and Hand Piling/Burn Piles	0	25	21
Underburning	191	393	402
Yard Tops/Jackpot burning	38	38	38
Lop and scatter	880	998	0
Yard tops	1,306	1,124	907
Proposed Road and Trail Management	Miles	Miles	Miles
Decommissioning (passive)	16.9	16.9	27.4
Intermittent Stored Service (passive & active)	22.6	22.6	18.5
Designate open to wheeled vehicle motorized use	65.5	65.5	65.5
Designate trails for nonmotorized use	38.8	38.8	38.8
Temporary Road construction	2.1 1.6 exist/.5 new	1.9 1.6 exist/.3 new	3.2 1.8 exist/1.4 new
Proposed Watershed Rehabilitation	Miles	Miles	Miles
Decommissioning (active)	27.6*	27.6*	15.4
Intermittent Stored Service (Active only)	11.6	11.6	9.7
Best Management Practices Applied	54.5	49.4	36
Proposed Fuels Management (resulting from vegetation treatments)	Acres	Acres	Acres
Thinning to reduce stocking, fuel ladders	882	753	863
Reduce fuel loading by removing lodgepole pine	928	886	907

*Note: Post DEIS field verified miles of active decommissioning work proposed in Alternatives 2 and 3 = 19.5 miles.

Alternative 3

The alternative strategies (identified in bold below) were developed to address issues raised by the public. The following modifications to the proposed action were identified to be included in this alternative. Alternative 3 also includes a project-specific Forest Plan amendment to increase open road densities in MA 12, Big Game Summer Range, during summer harvest.

Design harvest units to meet Management Area 11 guidelines of 20-acre opening sizes.

Unit 49 would be changed to 20 acres, skyline yarding from road 902Y, lop and scatter,

Unit 50 would be reduced to two units, 20 acres each, with 600 feet distance between units to provide a travel corridor. Units would be skyline and/or helicopter harvested.

Identify units with grapple piling that could be treated with other fuels reduction methods (prescribed burning, whole tree yarding, yarding tops, lopping and scattering) to reduce soil disturbance.

Unit 17 (below road 6084A), 20, 36, 37, 45 would be underburned

Fuels treatment in Unit 50 would be lop and scatter

Fuels treatment in Units 15, 31, 42, 43 would be lop and scatter

Drop units that would increase disturbance and displacement for Grizzly Bears, minimize activities that may reduce future wilderness consideration, and reduce fragmentation.

Drop Units 40 and 60 to minimize disturbance and displacement

Drop 57, 57a to reduce disturbance, displacement and to minimize impacts to future wilderness consideration

Identify additional fuels treatment opportunities along the Long Meadows Road.

Implement defensible space treatment Unit 61 along Long Meadows Road. Understory trees that provide fuel ladders into the overstory would be removed, and slash would be piled and burned. The majority of trees removed would be six inches in diameter or less. Incidental removal of larger diameter trees (up to 12 inches diameter) would occur only where necessary to protect larger diameter trees.

2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

The following alternatives, suggested in public comments, were considered but dismissed from detailed consideration for the reasons summarized below.

Original Proposed Action

The original proposed action was developed to meet the purpose and need, and to provide a starting point for specific field level assessments providing site-specific design features and for analysis purposes. Upon field review by the resource specialists, the original action was refined into the action described as Alternative 2. The changes included modifying logging systems, minor boundary changes to specific units, and dropping units from consideration due to logging feasibility and soils concerns (numerous wet areas, steep slopes). The specific changes are documented in the description of Alternative 2.

Close Burnt Dutch road (472) between Grizzly and Shepherd trailheads, either seasonally (April 1-June 15), or close yearlong.

This action was proposed by the public to 1) reduce disturbance and displacement of grizzly bears using a known travel corridor between Grizzly Peak and Shepherd Peak, and 2) to improve the wilderness characteristics of this area for future wilderness consideration.

The proposed action identified specific actions to meet core habitat requirements, total motorized road density (TMRD), open motorized road density (OMRD), habitat effectiveness (HE) and linear open road density (ORD) requirements. Closure of this road is not necessary to meet the grizzly bear habitat requirements (see FEIS Appendix 4).

The Burnt Dutch Road #472 is a 16-mile road traversing the pass between Roderick and Grizzly peaks. It connects the Yaak Highway 508 with the South Fork Yaak/Pipe Creek Road NFSR 68. The first and last 5.5 mile stretches climbing either side of the pass are aggregate surfaces maintained for passenger car travel (maintenance level 3). The middle five-mile section cresting the pass is a native rocky surface, maintained for high clearance vehicles (maintenance level 2). In an average year, this middle section of the road is impassible to wheeled traffic due to snow from early December to mid June. The trailheads for Grizzly Mountain Trail #182, Roderick Mountain Trail #189, and Pleasant View/Shepherd Trail #19 are all accessed via this route. The Burnt Dutch Road is particularly appealing as a high elevation scenic loop route through forested terrain as an alternative to the main paved roads passing through the valley bottoms of the Yaak area. BMP work includes culvert replacement and drainage work to reduce sediment delivery, not surface improvements, so motorized travel isn't expected to increase due to this project (See Appendix 1, BMP work). Although traffic is not heavy, it is a popular recreation route providing access for scenic viewing, huckleberry picking, hunting, gathering firewood, and hiking. Interdisciplinary travel analysis for this project identified this road as needed (see Transportation section of the project file).

Changing public access is controversial, and is planned to be addressed at a larger scale at a future date. Public input provided during Forest Plan Revision identifies loop road opportunities as highly valued; therefore, this is better addressed at a larger scale with opportunities for the public to comment on the proposal. Retaining current access management on this road now does not preclude the consideration of closing this road in the future.

Decommission Road 6100

Decommissioning of Road #6100 was proposed in public comments as an alternative to provide greater grizzly bear security rather than the storage work in the Proposed Action. Transportation analysis identified this road as necessary to provide for future management needs based upon existing management direction (see transportation section of the project file). Public and U. S. Fish and Wildlife agency comments following the DEIS expressed concern that decommissioning and storage work could adversely affect the grizzly bear due to the amount of disturbance involved (see Section IX of this decision for more information on this concern for grizzly bear security).

Watershed Rehabilitation without Logging

An alternative that considered only rehabilitation activities was considered but eliminated from detailed analysis since precluding harvest activities would not meet the purpose and need for vegetation restoration, fuels management, and provide timber products. Receipts from timber sales provide a funding mechanism to implement soil and watershed rehabilitation activities on roads that otherwise would have to compete for limited funding.

VIII. SPECIFICS OF THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE - ALTERNATIVE 2a

I have decided to implement Alternative 2a. Changes were made to Alternative 2 as summarized in ROD Section I and detailed in the FEIS Appendix 1, to respond to public concerns and to account for further field reconnaissance. See Section IX, Rationale for My Decision for more information on why I made this decision, including how it best responds to public concerns.

A map of the selected alternative and a summary of treatments is located in Appendix 1 of this Record of Decision.

Alternative 2a, is the environmentally preferred alternative since it meets vegetation restoration objectives, increases grizzly bear core habitat, while responding to watershed needs.

The following is my decision for various management practices contained in Alternative 2a:

- 1. Whether to implement vegetation management activities (harvest treatments, logging methods, road work, slash treatment, reforestation, precommercial thinning), including mitigation measures and design features to protect resources, and if so, the site-specific location of these activities and practices.**

Commercial harvest will be implemented on approximately 907 acres to promote vegetative resiliency by:

- Increasing the dominance of western larch, ponderosa pine and western white pine;
- Reducing stand density to promote large tree growth;
- Enhancing aspen stands by reducing conifer competition; and
- Reintroducing fire in winter range and foraging areas to reduce conifer competition and to reinvigorate understory vegetation growth.

ROD Appendix 1 presents a summary of the treatments and logging systems for each unit and a map display of the site-specific locations.

Approximately 45% percent of the harvest acreage would be harvested during the non-bear year (12/1-3/31) and during frozen ground conditions by tractor yarding. In areas with steep slopes and available access roads (18 percent of the harvest acreage) skyline yarding is specified. The selected alternative would contribute 8.2 MMBF (20,000 CCF) of forest products to the economy.

Harvest units will be accessed from existing roads in most cases. Based on field reconnaissance, eight temporary roads totaling 2.3 miles will be needed for this project. Most of these road segments will be on existing road templates. All temporary roads will be scarified and seeded upon completion of harvest activities to reduce erosion risk, and where existing templates are used, to improve soil conditions.

ROD Table 2, Temporary roads

Temporary Road by Unit	Template	Length
Unit 1	Existing	0.2 miles
Unit 2	Existing	0.6 miles
Unit 3	Existing	0.3 miles
Unit 4	Existing	0.3 miles
Unit 12a	Existing	0.2 miles
Unit 34	New	0.1 miles
Unit 50	New	0.4 miles
Unit 60	New	0.2 miles
Total Miles		2.3 miles

Rehabilitation activities will be limited to dry soil conditions, normally July 15 – September 15, unless otherwise approved by the soils specialist. Units 1 and 2 will be accessed by an existing road template which will be reclassified as a National Forest System road to allow for better utilization and rehabilitation of existing temporary roads, landings, and skid trails. Following project activities it would be put in intermittent stored service to reduce long-term deferred maintenance costs.

Approximately 44% of the activity fuels will be treated with underburning, and the remainder with grapple piling where necessary, jackpot burning and/or yarding tops.

Within approximately 340 acres proposed as regeneration harvest, planting will supplement the natural regeneration anticipated, and restore tree species that are presently not sustainable due to fire exclusion, inadequate seed source, etc. Reforestation of harvested areas will be designed to achieve a mixture of

native tree species appropriate to the specific site. Where deer browsing of seedlings is anticipated, netting will be used to minimize animal damage.

An estimated 515 acres of non-commercial thinning will occur in overstocked sapling-sized trees that have been regenerated within the past 15-25 years.

Design features to protect resource values, including soils, stream, and wildlife habitat, and the potential for noxious weed spread are included in this decision (see ROD Appendix 2).

2. Whether to implement a project specific Forest Plan amendment for MA 12 (Open Road Density).

Alternatives 2 and 3 included a Forest Plan amendment for MA 12, Big Game Summer Range, Facilities Standard #3, "*Roads open to public use will not exceed an average density of ¼ mile per square mile within the contiguous MA.*" Under Alternatives 2 and 3 six harvest units were proposed within MA 12, however five units would be harvested in the winter, and would not affect summer ORD; however, Unit 17 would be harvested in the summer, so would affect summer ORD (DEIS pg. 21).

Under Alternative 2a all six units proposed within MA 12, including Unit 17, would be harvested in the winter, and the roads accessing Unit 17 will not be open to public use. The summer ORD in MA 12 during proposed activities under the selected alternative will remain at 0.62 miles per square mile, below the Forest Plan standard of 0.75. For these reasons, the selected alternative meets this Forest Plan standard and does not include a Forest Plan amendment for MA 12.

3. Whether to implement ecosystem and wildlife burning practices, including mitigation measures and design features to protect resources, and if so, the selection and site-specific location of activities and practices.

This decision will implement 250 acres of ecosystem burning to reduce fuels, competition, and reintroduce fire. Wildlife burning will be implemented on 468 acres also to reduce fuels, although the primary objective is to increase browse and forbs. ROD Appendix 1 presents a summary of the underburning for each unit and a map display of the site-specific locations. The helicopter activity in Burns G and H will last no more than 2 days to reduce grizzly bear disturbance.

4. Whether to implement road and trail management activities to meet project objectives including grizzly bear habitat needs, and whether to implement watershed rehabilitation projects, including decommissioning and storage work, and if so, to what extent

Access management actions for this project to allow for harvest while providing for resource requirements are detailed in ROD Appendix 3.

Road maintenance and Best Management Practices (BMP) work will be applied to the roads used for haul, an estimated 36 miles (see Appendix 1).

Approximately 18.5 miles of road will be earth bermed and placed in intermittent stored service status to meet grizzly bear core habitat standards. Prior to this, an estimated 9.7 miles of these roads will receive watershed rehabilitation work including waterbars, removing culverts and stabilizing slopes.

Approximately 15.4 miles of road will be decommissioned after receiving watershed rehabilitation work such as recontouring and waterbars to reduce sediment delivery to streams. Another 27 miles will be passively decommissioned.

An analysis of the transportation network within the analysis area was conducted by District resource specialists to determine the most environmentally sound and safe transportation network. This analysis is located in the transportation section of the project file. I have determined that the access management activities in this decision are consistent with that analysis.

Project area trails predominately lie within grizzly bear core, which precludes motorized travel. These trails were designed for foot and stock travel, and were not designed for motorized use. To remain consistent with trail management objectives and grizzly bear standards, this decision designates 38.8 miles of project area trails closed to motorized travel (see ROD Appendix 1).

Approximately 65.5 miles of National Forest System road currently open to wheeled vehicle motorized travel are designated as such with this project (see ROD Appendix 1). Portions of Roads 902Y and 902Z are opened to public travel with this decision.

5. What, if any, specific project monitoring requirements are needed to assure mitigation measures and design features are implemented and effective, or to evaluate success of project objectives.

The monitoring plan in ROD Appendix 4 will be implemented. This plan includes implementation and effectiveness monitoring activities related to design features for old growth, water quality, fisheries, soils, fuels, wildlife, noxious weeds, and silviculture. The implementation and effectiveness of harvest unit BMPs (DEIS Appendix D) will be monitored during and after timber sale activities as displayed in ROD Appendix 4.

IX. RATIONALE FOR MY DECISION

I have selected Alternative 2a, as it is described above, because it best addresses public concerns while meeting the purpose and need for the project and protecting resources. This section details my rationale for this decision.

Benefits of Implementing the Action Alternatives

All the Action Alternatives satisfy the decision criteria and implementation of any of them would result in many benefits as follows:

- A reduction in tree density and shade tolerant species through timber harvest to encourage growth in fire-adapted species. This reduction in tree density would also result in stands which are less vulnerable to uncharacteristic fires and insect infestations.
- Restoration of species at risk, especially western white pine, western larch, and aspen.
- Fuels reduction in areas of mature lodgepole pine.
- Reduction of fuels to allow for the reintroduction of fire to promote healthy forest conditions, old growth habitat, and to promote protection of wildland/urban interface lands and public safety.
- Improvement in the status of grizzly bear habitat.
- Enhancement of big game cover to forage ratios through reduced stand densities and underburning.
- Non-commercial thinning of overstocked sapling and pole-sized stands.
- Watershed rehabilitation work accomplished through road decommissioning or stabilization, culvert replacement, and road BMPs.
- Habitat enhancement for native westslope cutthroat trout and interior redband trout through reduction in sediment sources.
- Support for the local economy and forest products industry by contributing to the supply of timber, and implementing other projects which provide employment opportunities.
- Wheeled vehicle motorized access designation for roads and trails which meet management objectives and are legally enforceable.

All action alternatives respond in various ways to the purpose and need for action. Since the purpose and need for action responds to Forest Plan goals, objectives, and standards, I used it as an indicator of Forest Plan implementation. The following table displays a comparison of purpose and need objectives by alternative, which helped me evaluate how well the effectiveness of each alternative responds to the Forest Plan.

ROD Table 3. Alternative comparison table - purpose and need

Indicator	No Action	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt 2a
Vegetation Restoration				
Acres of restoration of white pine or western larch	0	543	443	540
Acres of restoration of fire regime vegetation characteristics	0	1086	986	888
Acres of aspen enhancement	0	84	0	19
Acres of ecosystem and wildlife burning	0	718	718	718
Road and Trail Management				
Miles of Intermittent stored service for Grizzly habitat improvement	0	22.6	22.6	18.5
Motorized route designation				
Road miles designated open motorized	0	65.5	65.5	65.5
Trail miles designated non-motorized	0	38.8	38.8	38.8
Miles decommissioned (passive)	0	16.9	16.9	27.4
Watershed Rehabilitation				
Miles decommissioned (active)	0	19.5*	19.5*	15.4
Miles intermittent stored service (active)	0	11.6	11.6	9.7
Miles of Best Management Practices implemented (prioritized based on funding)	0	54.5	49.4	36
Fuels Management				
Acres thinned to reduce stocking	0	898	753	863
Acres treated to reduce fuel loading	0	923	886	907
Fire hazard ratings				
Very High/High	45%	6%	6%	6%
Moderate	55%	25%	25%	25%
Low	0%	69%	69%	69%
Timber Production				
Million board feet of timber produced	0	9.97	8.38	8.2

*Note: Post DEIS field verified miles of active decommissioning work = 19.5 miles. See FEIS Ch. 5, pg. 13.

Why I did not Select the No Action Alternative

There are many reasons why I did not select Alternative 1 (no action). While in the short-term doing nothing may have less effect than the short-term disturbances associated with the action alternative activities, in the long-term, the consequences of doing “nothing” are potentially far greater. I did not select Alternative 1 because:

- Treatments to improve diversity in forest structure and species would not occur.
- The continued build up of fuels and high tree densities would contribute to fires of greater severity that could threaten old growth habitat, overstory trees, private lands, and firefighter and public safety, and increase noxious weed spread. Treatments to allow for the return of fire to maintain ecosystem function would not occur. Big game forage would continue to decline.
- The establishment of more core area in BMU 11 grizzly to bring it up to standards would not occur. The increase in secure area in a known bear approach zone between BMUs would also not occur.
- Sediment reduction activities in area watersheds would not be implemented.
- Motorized use would be legal on area trails, although they were not built for such use.
- Few wood products would be supplied, and there would be limited opportunities for contract employment work on National Forest lands to contribute to the local and regional economy.

In summary, the no-action alternative does not satisfy the purpose and need for the project and does not implement the Forest Plan direction for this area, which includes improving forest conditions and habitats

through management practices. (See DEIS Chapter 3 analysis of Alternative 1 for more detailed information on the effects of no action).

Why I Selected Alternative 2a over the other Action Alternatives

I selected Alternative 2a over the other action alternatives because it best addresses public concerns while achieving project objectives. The following paragraphs explain my rationale by key issue for this project:

Grizzly Bear Recovery

Grizzly Bear Core and other Habitat Requirements

Special consideration was given with this decision to provide adequate displacement habitat for grizzly bears in Bear Management Unit (BMU) 11, where the majority of project activities occur. Approximately 400 acres of harvest is dropped as compared to Alternative 2, so there is less potential for disturbance from harvest activities. Additionally, of the approximately 900 acres of proposed timber harvest, 412 acres will be harvested during the grizzly bear denning season (12/1-3/31).

Since timber harvest will temporarily affect approximately 280 acres of core, these acres will be replaced by an estimated 1,000 acres of core created with this project. In all, 2,700 acres of additional core in BMU 11 will be created prior to and during the project to offer security areas for the grizzly bear, linking two islands of core into one block of over 10,200 acres, and increasing grizzly bear security in a known bear approach area between BMU 11 and BMUs 13 and 14 (see FEIS Appendix 4, Core map).

Helicopter burning of Units G and H will last no more than 2 days.

Project area trails predominately lie within grizzly bear core, which precludes motorized travel. To remain consistent with trail management objectives and grizzly bear standards, this decision designates 38.8 miles of project area trails closed to motorized travel (see ROD Appendix 1).

This project brings both affected BMUs in the project area up to all standards for core, road densities, and habitat effectiveness with this project. With this project BMU 11 core will exceed the core standard of 55%, since the level of core will increase from the current 52% of the BMU to 56% post project (see FEIS Appendix 4 for a more detailed description of these standards.)

Grizzly Bear Core and Watershed Rehabilitation

In response to concerns for grizzly bear security expressed by the Yaak Valley Forest Council, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and others (PF Vol. 003, Docs 46, 49, 50, 52, 56, and 58), I have decided to drop 10 miles of active decommissioning and intermittent stored service work in the Vivian Creek drainage of Burnt Creek and the Little Creek drainage included in Alternatives 2 and 3.

The work on the Vivian Creek Road #6100 and spurs (4.1 miles of decommissioning, 3.6 miles of storage) will be dropped because this drainage on Roderick Mountain is a key habitat area for the grizzly bear. The watershed restoration work in the Vivian Creek area would have resulted in human disturbance during the rehabilitation activities and decreased bear security for several years by opening up the densely vegetated roads. The storage work in the Little Creek drainage (2.4 miles of storage) of Clark Mountain also has the potential to cause disturbance in grizzly bear core. I have weighed the potential impact to the grizzly bear against the risk of water quality and fisheries impacts and determined that at this time the risk to the grizzly bear, a listed species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), is of most immediate concern. ESA listed fish species are not present in the project area (DEIS pg. 102).

This decision still retains approximately 9 miles of active storage work and 15.4 miles of active decommissioning watershed rehabilitation work. The decommissioning work will include the proposed work on the #6132 road system on the north side of Roderick Mountain. Although this is a key grizzly bear area like the Vivian Creek area, a trail currently provides human access and associated potential disturbance. Furthermore, the ongoing and potential risks to water quality are much greater in this north Roderick Mountain area.

Soil Protection

In units with existing high levels of soil compaction from old roads and trails (Units 1, 2, 3, 18 and 20), I am committing to the following:

- Use of existing road templates, landings, and skid trails where feasible;
- Rehabilitation of all existing road templates used for temporary road locations, and landings used for this project;
- Pre-, post-harvest, and post-rehabilitation monitoring to determine where skid trail rehabilitation will be the most effective and to ensure regional standards are met. This monitoring will contribute to more informed development of future projects;
- Require additional units to be harvested over frozen ground. In total, 45% of the project harvest will be required to be on frozen ground to protect the soil resource.

Grapple piling of activity fuels was carefully field verified to reduce impacts to the extent feasible, with underburning substituted if possible to reintroduce fire to the landscape.

Openings Over 40 Acres

In order to assure that movement corridors exist for wildlife, Alternative 2a reduces the size of openings over 40 acres to two openings of 52 acres and 74 acres, as compared to Alternative 2 with one 126-acre opening. These openings are necessary since the vegetation is dominated by lodgepole pine experiencing increasing mortality and blowdown. As compared to Alternative 3, with three small units and leaving half the area untreated, one entry will limit disturbance to wildlife and decrease the potential for the stands to be further subject blowdown from winds. The harvest will provide increased forage on white-tailed deer habitat, while maintaining movement corridors in accordance with Forest Plan standards. The increased fuel loadings within the stand, adjacent to an open road and near private lands are also a primary consideration in this decision. Regional Forester approval for this action was obtained on March 10, 2009 (PF Vol. 34).

Fragmentation

I carefully considered the issue of fragmentation created through the harvest of Units 40 and 60 as raised by the public, but determined that this treatment is appropriate since harvest in Units 40 and 60 would not fragment the movement corridors associated with these units (FEIS Ch. 5, pg. 16). Forest plan standards for movement corridors are maintained for all harvest units (FEIS Appendix 4, pg. 4-6 and pg. 4-20). Both Units 40 and 60 are comprised of mature lodgepole that is susceptible to blowdown (DEIS pg. 50), neither unit is larger than 40 acres, and both are surrounded by unharvested stands or timber that is large or dense enough to provide hiding cover for wildlife. Harvest would not result in a long-term denial of vegetation, since hiding cover for the bear would return in a couple of decades. Additionally, these patches of open habitat can easily be maneuvered around by grizzly bears in adjacent stands and habitat that offer hiding cover and forage. The harvest activity planned for these units would likely increase huckleberry (*Vaccinium* spp.) production over time (DEIS pg. 123). Road #472 to Unit 60 would not be improved to a condition of providing a larger density of traffic or accommodating increased speeds for vehicles since the road is not being resurfaced (see ROD Appendix 1, BMP work). This road is normally impassable to vehicles from early December to mid-June due to snow. Any disturbances to wildlife in these units during project implementation would be temporary and short term.

Effects on Potential Future Wilderness Consideration

My decision drops the helicopter harvest of Units 57 and 57a, which were proposed to stimulate aspen production. These areas were field verified in the fall of 2008 and the aspen clones necessary for this treatment were found to be greatly diminished and not viable for helicopter harvest. Road access is not available for alternative systems. In dropping these units, the issue of wilderness consideration as raised by the Yaak Valley Forest Council and other area residents during public scoping (ROD Section IV) is resolved.

Table 4 displays a comparison of the alternatives by significant issue.

ROD Table 4-Alternative comparison by significant issue

Indicator		No Action	Alt. 2		Alt. 3		Alt. 2a	
Grizzly Bear Disturbance and Displacement (BMU 11/14)								
Measure	Standard	Existing	During Activity	Post Activity	During Activity	Post Activity	During Activity	Post Activity
Percentage of secure core habitat	55% or greater	52/56	54/55	55/56	54/55	55/56	52*/55	56/56
Open Motorized Route Density (OMRD)	33% or less	28/28	28/29	28/28	28/29	28/28	32-31/29	28/28
Total Motorized Route Density (TMRD)	26% or less	29/26	27/26	26/26	27/26	26/26	29-27/26	25/26
Habitat Effectiveness (HE)	70% or greater	74/76	70/76	74/76	71/76	74/76	70-72/76	74/76
Open Road Density (ORD)	0.75 mi/sq. mi. or less	0.44/0.57	0.48/0.58	0.48/0.57	0.48/0.58	0.48/0.57	0.58-0.57 /0.58	0.48/0.57
Regeneration Harvest Units Greater than 40 Acres								
Number and size of regeneration harvest openings greater than 40 acres		0/0	1/126		0/0		1/52 1/74	
Number and size of regeneration harvest operations in MA 11 greater than 20 acres		0/0	1/126		0/0		1/52 1/74	
Grapple Piling Impacts on Soil and Weed Infestation								
Acres treated with grapple piling		0	712		223		308	
Effects on Potential Future Wilderness Consideration								
Effects to roadless area characteristics								
Natural integrity		No change	Short term impact		Short term impact		Short term impact	
Apparent naturalness		No change	Short term impact		Short term impact		Short term impact	
Remoteness		No change	Short term impact		Short term impact		Short term impact	
Solitude		No change	Short term impact		Short term impact		Short term impact	
Special Features		No change	No change		No change		No change	
Manageability		No change	No change		No change		No change	
Fragmentation								
Number of units/acres treated in Units 40, 60		0/0	2/57		0/0		2/57 (see FEIS Ch. 5, pg. 16)	
Non-Commercial Fuels Treatments along Long Meadows Roads 593, West of the Town of Yaak								
Acres treated along Long Meadows Road		0	163		189		152 (field verified)	

*If decommissioning and all other activities active at once. This will not be the case due to timing restrictions (see ROD Appendix 2).

Cumulative Effects

In addition to the purpose and need and public issues, I've considered the potential for cumulative effects from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in conjunction with project activities and have determined that there will be no significant cumulative effects. In making this determination I examined past, present, ongoing, proposed, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and the cumulative effects analysis is consistent with Forest Service NEPA Regulations (36 CFR 220.4(f), July 24, 2008) in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality Memorandum, *Guidance on the Consideration of Past Actions in Cumulative Effects Analysis*.

My conclusion is based on: 1) the project's consistency with CEQ direction, 2) on-the-ground review and discussions with District resource specialists, and 3) review of the extensive project environmental documentation, including biological assessments, and findings that through project design resources are protected.

X. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAW, REGULATION, AND AGENCY POLICY

Numerous laws, regulations, and agency directives require that my decision be consistent with their provisions. I have determined that my decision is consistent with all laws, regulations, and agency policy. The following summarizes findings required by major environmental laws:

1. NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT (16 USC 1600 ET SEQ.)

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and accompanying regulations require that several specific findings be documented at the project level. These are:

A. Consistency with Forest Plan (16 USC 1604(i))

The Kootenai Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) establishes management direction for the Kootenai Forest. This management direction is achieved through the establishment of Forest goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and Management Area goals and accompanying standards and guidelines. Project implementation consistent with this direction is the process by which we move toward the desired condition described by the Forest Plan. Forest Plan direction provides the sideboards for project planning. In addition, the National Forest Management Act requires that all resource plans are to be consistent with the Forest Plan (16 USC 1604 (i)). The DEIS displays the Forest Plan and Management Area goals and objectives applicable to the Grizzly project area (DEIS pg. 33). The alternative development process and the management goals of the alternatives are described in the DEIS Chapter 2, while the environmental consequences of the alternatives in relation to the Forest Plan standards and guidelines are displayed in the DEIS Chapter 3 and the FEIS.

Old Growth

Alternative 2a does not propose activities in old growth. All harvest units were designed to be at least 300 feet from any old growth stand in order to eliminate the potential for edge effects created by removing tree canopy. Roads opened for timber harvest activities restrict public access with the exception of the 902Y and Z spurs, which don't border old growth. The project maintains 10.5% of designated old growth in the project area, well distributed across dominate habitat types of suitable National Forest acres below 5,500 feet elevation, and has been designed to conserve old growth attributes wherever they exist outside of old growth management areas. All alternatives would maintain a sufficient amount and distribution of old growth forest habitat as directed by the Kootenai Forest Plan. The Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report for FY 2007 (Monitoring Report) (USDA Forest Service, 2008) documents the forest-wide status of old growth. Forest-wide analysis of old growth, which is disclosed in the FY 2007 Monitoring Report, concludes that at least 10% of the KNF below 5,500 feet is managed as old growth as required in the Forest Plan.

Visual Quality Objectives

For each management area, the Forest Plan established visual quality objectives (VQOs) based on methods described in The Visual Management System-Landscape Management Handbook Number 462 (USDA Forest Service 1974). These objectives identify standards of visual quality that proposed activities in those areas should meet. The Proposed Action would be consistent with the Forest Plan VQOs for the management areas that it passes through (see pgs. 203 of the DEIS and pg. 5 of Chapter 5 of the FEIS).

Soil and Water Resources

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that timber will be harvested from NFS lands only where soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged - 16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(i).. All activities proposed are consistent with this direction.

The Forest Plan states that project plans for activities requiring the use of ground-based equipment will establish standards for the area allocated to skid trails, landings, temporary roads, or similar areas of concentrated equipment use (USDA Forest Service 1987a). None of the activities would exceed the Regional Soil Quality Standards for detrimentally disturbed soils (FSM R1 Supplement 2500-99-1).

The proposed project is consistent with the goals, objectives, and standards for soil and water resources set forth in the Kootenai Forest Plan because project mitigation and BMPs have been included to protect soil and water resources. The BMPs include Soil and Water Conservation Practices at a minimum to

control non-point source pollution and protect soil and water resources from permanent damage. The 2002 KNF Monitoring Report (USDA Forest Service 2003) states that monitoring between 1990 and 2002 shows that 94 percent of the BMPs implemented during that time were effective. Each of the alternatives would follow INFS standards and guidelines for any activities in riparian areas.

Plants and Animals

Guidelines for Forest Plans shall “provide for the diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives, and within the multiple-use objectives of a land management plan adopted pursuant to this section, provide, where appropriate, to the degree practicable, for steps to be taken to preserve the diversity of tree species similar to that existing in the region controlled by the plan.” (16 USC 1604(g) (3)(B)).

Sensitive species are managed under the authority of the NFMA and are administratively designated by the Regional Forester (FSM 2670.5). In making my decision, I have reviewed the analysis and projected effects on all sensitive species listed as possibly occurring on the Kootenai National Forest. I concur with the findings documented for these species.

- The statement of findings for this project, as found in Appendix F of the FEIS, are as follows: **No impact** on the common loon, Harlequin duck, Northern bog lemming, Northern leopard frog, Peregrine falcon, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and Woodland caribou due to the lack of occurrence or known existence within the project area; *Botrychium ascendens* (Upward-lobed Moonwort), *Botrychium crenulatum* (Wavy Moonwort), *Botrychium hesperium* (Western Moonwort), *Botrychium paradoxum* (Peculiar Moonwort), *Botrychium pedunculatum* (Stalked Moonwort), *Corydalis sempervirens* (Pink Corydalis), *Heterocodon rariflorum* (western pearl-flower), *Lomatium geyeri* (Geyer’s biscuit-root), and *Phegopteris connectilis* (northern beech-fern) due to lack of occurrence or project design will avoid and protect known populations.

May impact individuals but would not contribute to a trend to federal listing or loss of viability for the Coeur d’Alene salamander, fisher, flammulated owl, Townsend’s big-eared bat, wolverine, western toad, black-backed woodpecker, redband trout, or westslope cutthroat trout. These findings also apply to the bald eagle, which was removed from the Threatened and Endangered species list in the summer of 2007.

B. Suitability for Timber Production

No timber harvest, other than salvage sales or sales to protect other multiple-use values, shall occur on lands not suited for timber production {16 USC 1604(k)}.

Determination that lands are suitable: All acres proposed for harvest in the selected alternative were reviewed by a certified silviculturist and determined to be suitable for timber production and capable of being regenerated within five years of timber harvest (see DEIS pages 56-57).

Analysis of current and historical regeneration data for the project area supports the conclusion that adequate stocking of the proposed harvest units is assured with site-preparation efforts occurring in a timely manner following harvest (DEIS pages 56-57).

C. Timber Harvest on National Forest System Lands

A Responsible Official may authorize site-specific projects and activities to harvest timber on National Forest System lands only where:

1. Soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged - 16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(i). The selected alternative will avoid impairment of soils. This determination is supported by the disclosures in DEIS pgs. 75-86 and FEIS Appendix 2, and the application of Best Management Practices (DEIS, Appendix D) and contained in the Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook 2509.22 (USDA Forest Service, 1988) to prevent the loss of soil. Documentation of the effects of the selected alternative to site productivity and soil and water resources are contained in the soils analysis and the Project File. The estimated cumulative disturbance by harvest unit ranges from 0-14%, meeting regional guidelines limiting detrimental disturbance to 15%.

Watershed rehabilitation activities are designed to improve the overall conditions of the watershed.

2. There is assurance that the lands can be adequately restocked within five years after final regeneration harvest (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(ii). The knowledge and technology currently exists to adequately restock the harvested areas and is documented in the vegetation analysis (DEIS pg. 56-57) and project file.
3. Streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water are protected from detrimental changes in water temperatures, blockages of water courses, and deposits of sediment where harvests are likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat - 16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(iii). The selected alternative meets all Forest Plan standards as amended by INFS (DEIS, pgs. 100-115 and FEIS Appendix 3). All streams and wetlands will be buffered with riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCA's) as directed by INFS.
4. The harvesting system to be used is not selected primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber - 16 USC 1604(g)(3)(E)(iv). The decision to implement the selected alternative is based on a variety of reasons as discussed earlier in this decision, not solely on economics. Economics was but one of the many factor which I considered.

D. Clearcutting and Even-aged Management

A Responsible Official may authorize projects and activities on National Forest system lands using cutting methods, such as clearcutting, seed tree cutting, shelterwood cutting, and other cuts designed to regenerate an even-aged stand of timber, only where:

1. For clearcutting, it is the optimum method; or where seed tree, shelterwood, and other cuts are determined to be appropriate to meeting the objectives and requirements of the relevant plan (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(F)(i)). I have determined that clearcutting is the optimal method of treatment for Units 1, 2, 3, 10, 13, 13a, 18, 32, 33, 45, 45a, 46, 49, 50, 50a, and 55k in the selected alternative. I have also determined that prescribing other even-aged systems under the selected alternative is appropriate for Units 4, 11, 12a, 36a, 40, 44 and 60. My determination is based upon field reviews; discussion of alternative silvicultural systems, prescriptions and the use of even-aged management found in the diagnosis; the evaluation of effects found in Chapter 3 of the DEIS; and the Silviculture section of the project file.
2. The interdisciplinary review has been completed and the potential environmental, biological, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts have been assessed on each advertised sale area and the cutting methods are consistent with the multiple use of the general area (16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(ii)). As discussed in the DEIS, the environmental analyses were completed by an interdisciplinary team (see list of preparers in Chapter 4 of the DEIS).
3. Cut blocks, patches, or strips are shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain (16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(iii)). The selected alternative meets visual quality objectives (VQOs). See Scenic resource analysis, Chapter 3 of the DEIS, pages 198-203, FEIS Ch. 5, pg. 5, and the project file.
4. Cuts are carried out according to the maximum size limit requirements for areas to be cut during one harvest operation (16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(iv)). The selected alternative proposes two areas of adjacent regeneration units that combined create two openings that exceed 40 acres in size. These opening were identified in the proposed action, and has been reviewed and approved by the Regional Forester (March 10, 2009).
5. Timber cuts are carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, esthetic resources, cultural and historic resources, and the regeneration of timber resources (16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F)(v)). The timber harvest conducted under the selected alternative provides the necessary protection for the above resources. This determination is supported by disclosures in Chapter 3 of the DEIS and Chapter 5 of the FEIS and FEIS Appendices 2, 3, and 4. The Standards and Guidelines contained in the Forest Plan are designed to provide the desired effects of management practices on the other resource values. The selected alternative meets or exceeds applicable Standards and Guidelines, as noted under "Consistency with Forest Plan" in this section. My consideration of these factors is documented throughout Chapters 2 and 3 of the DEIS, the FEIS, and the project file.

2. THE CLEAN WATER ACT AND STATE WATER QUALITY STANDARDS

Beneficial uses of the Grizzly project area include human uses such as drinking water, irrigation, and recreation, as well as protection of fisheries and aquatic life. I believe that the selected alternative complies with applicable Clean Water Act and Montana State Water Quality standards and maintains beneficial uses through the application of BMPs and other design features as listed in DEIS Appendix D and ROD Appendix 2. These beneficial uses in the Grizzly project area will be maintained as a result of the application of general and site-specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) contained in the Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook 2509.22 (USDA Forest Service, 1988) as well as other protective design features. These include, but are not limited to: 1) harvest will not occur in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA); and 2) no new specified road construction; temporary road construction (approx. 2 miles) will utilize BMPs to reduce erosion and will be decommissioned following harvest; 3) haul road maintenance will address currently poor road drainage and will be timed during drier months to avoid sediment mobility during rain events; 4) ground-based logging is restricted to sustained slopes of 40% or less and measurable effects to peakflows are unlikely due to application of RHCA buffers and BMPs; and 5) proposed actions are in compliance and will meet Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS) standards and guidelines. Specific practices are described in detail in Appendix 25 of the Forest Plan. Kootenai Forest Plan monitoring results for BMP implementation in 2001 indicated a high compliance rate. 96% of activities evaluated had appropriate BMPs implemented, and 94% of those BMPs were effective (KNF September 2002). Forest plan monitoring results also indicate the protection of RHCA has been effectively implemented (KNF September 2001).

As required by the Clean Water Act, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) has published a list of streams and portions of streams where the state has identified water quality concerns. The Forest Service and MDEQ have a policy that MDEQ will be notified when activities are proposed in watersheds that are on the 303(d) list. The Yaak TMDL assessed streams on the 303(d) list and was completed in 2008. No streams in the Grizzly project area have ever been on the 303(d) list or found to be impaired. In 2003 stream monitoring sites were established throughout the Yaak River basin for the TMDL project, and four monitoring sites were established in the Grizzly project area (Burnt Creek, Grizzly Creek, Pheasant Creek, and Cool Creek). Grizzly Creek is a tributary to Burnt Creek, and considered a reference watershed. Conditions were excellent and included a particularly robust macroinvertebrate community. Burnt, Pheasant and Cool Creeks monitoring sites were all found to be in relatively good condition with respect to channel morphology, channel stability and percent fines (see project file). No macroinvertebrate data was collected in these three streams.

3. THE CLEAN AIR ACT

Upon review of the DEIS (Chapter 3 pgs. 65-74), I find that the selected alternative will be coordinated to meet the requirements of the State Implementation Plans, Smoke Management Plan, and Federal air quality requirements.

4. THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (16 USC 1531 ET. SEQ.)

Section 7 of the ESA requires federal agencies to ensure that the actions they authorize, fund, and carry out do not jeopardize endangered or threatened species or their critical habitats. A federal agency also is required to consult with USFWS and/or NOAA Fisheries if it is proposing an action that may affect listed species or their designated critical habitat.

A current list of the threatened and endangered fish and wildlife species occurring within the vicinity of the proposed project was obtained from the USFWS on December 16, 2008. The USFWS identified eight species (Kootenai River population of white sturgeon, gray wolf, grizzly bear, Canada lynx, bull trout, Spalding's champion, water howellia, and slender moonwort) as potentially occurring within the project vicinity (see Consultation Section of the project file). The bald eagle was officially removed from the threatened species list on August 8, 2007. This species was immediately placed on the sensitive species list (Forest Service Northern Region) for a period of five years, after which a status review will be made to determine the need to remain on or be removed from that list.

The final rule for designating critical habitat for the Canada lynx was recently published in February 2009, and the lynx was analyzed according to this direction (FEIS Appendix 4).

Consultation with USFWS has focused primarily on potential impacts to grizzly bear recovery zone and possible mitigation measures to minimize impacts. As required by the Endangered Species Act, a biological assessment was prepared for the proposed project and submitted to the USFWS. The biological assessment determined that the proposed action would have **no effect** on the bull trout, white sturgeon, water howellia, Spaulding's catchfly, and linearleaf moonwort; and **may affect, but not likely to adversely affect** gray wolf, grizzly bear and Canada lynx. USFWS Concurrence was given on April 17, 2009.

5. NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT, AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT AND NATIVE AMERICAN GRAVE PROTECTION ACT

Heritage resource overviews have been completed on all areas to be impacted by ground-disturbing activities. No heritage resources are expected to be affected by this action. Recognizing that the potential exists for unidentified sites to be encountered and disturbed during project activity, contract provision B6.24# will be included in all timber sale contracts. This provision allows the Forest Service to unilaterally modify or cancel a contract to protect cultural resources regardless of when they are identified. This provision would be used if a site were discovered after a harvest operation had begun.

6. GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Forest Service consulted with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes and Kootenai Tribe of Idaho during the analysis process. The intent of consultation has been to remain informed about Tribal concerns regarding American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) and other tribal issues. In addition, the Salish (Flathead), Kootenai and Upper Pend d'Oreilles have rights under the Hellgate Treaty of 1855 (July 16, 1855). These rights include the "right of taking fish at all usual and accustomed places, in common with citizens of the Territory, and of erecting temporary buildings for curing; together with the privilege of hunting, gathering roots and berries, and pasturing their horses and cattle upon open and unclaimed land." The federal government has trust responsibilities to Tribes under a government-to-government relationship to insure that the Tribes reserved rights are protected. Consultation with the tribes throughout the project planning helped insure that these trust responsibilities were met.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

I have considered the effects of this project on low income and minority populations and concluded that this project is consistent with the intent of the Environmental Justice Act of 1994 (EO 12898). Representatives from low income and minority populations were notified of this project through the public participation process and no concerns were received. This project was designed to contribute to the economic well being of local communities (see DEIS, purpose and need, and DEIS Chapter 3 Economics analysis and Required Disclosures). Resource analysis disclosed no disproportionate effects to low income or minority populations.

8. MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

On January 10, 2001, President Clinton signed an Executive Order outlining responsibilities of federal agencies to protect migratory birds. Upon review of the effects analysis regarding neotropical migratory birds in the DEIS, pg. 3-94 and FEIS Appendix 4, I find that the selected alternative complies with this Executive Order.

9. ADMINISTRATION OF THE FOREST DEVELOPMENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM – ROADS POLICY – 36 CFR PART 212 ET AL. (PUBLISHED IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER ON JANUARY 12, 2001).

A roads analysis has been prepared for the Grizzly analysis area (see Transportation Section of the project file). I have determined that the selected alternative, which includes no new permanent road construction, and the construction of approximately 2.3 miles of temporary road, as well as the decommissioning of approximately 43 miles of unneeded road, complies with the Roads Policy.

10. NATIONAL FIRE PLAN

The proposed action for the Grizzly project responds to the intent of the National Fire Plan (DEIS, pgs.57-65). I have determined that the selected alternative meets the goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan to: 1) reduce the number of small fires that become large, 2) reduce the threat to life and property

from catastrophic wildfire, 3) increase firefighter safety, and 4) restore natural ecological systems to minimize uncharacteristically intense fires.

XI. APPEAL PROVISIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

1. APPEAL PROVISIONS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the *Daily Inter Lake*, Kalispell, Montana. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record 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.

Paper appeals must be submitted to (Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.):

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region	or	USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer		ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
P.O. Box 7669		200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59807		Missoula, MT 59802

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Faxed appeals must be submitted to: FAX: (406) 329-3411. 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).

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

- The appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
- A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
- When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
- The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
- The regulation under which the appeal is being filed (36 CFR 215);
- Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
- Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
- Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
- How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

If an appeal is received on this project there may be informal resolution meetings and/or conference calls between the Responsible Official and the appellant. These discussions would take place within 15 days after the closing date for filing an appeal. All such meetings are open to the public. If you are interested in attending any informal resolution discussions, please contact the Responsible Official or monitor the following website for postings about current appeals in the Northern Region of the Forest Service: http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/projects/appeal_index.shtml."

Detailed records of the analysis are available for public review at the Three Rivers Ranger District, 12858 U. S. Highway 2, Troy, Montana 59935. For further information on this decision, contact Kathy Mohar, Team Leader, at the district office (406) 295-4693.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur 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 appeal disposition.

The selected alternative would result in timber sales which would be planned for bid in the fall of 2009. Harvest is expected to be completed by 2012, with extension possible for market-related conditions. Slash disposal and reforestation activities are predicted to be completed by 2013. Burning treatments are anticipated to be accomplished by 2015 if funding is obtained and timing restrictions allow. Typically, work on haul roads using best management practices (BMPs) would be accomplished prior to haul of timber products. Precommercial thinning activities are expected to be accomplished by 2015. The watershed rehabilitation work is dependent on timing restrictions and obtaining funds, so timing is uncertain. Based on past experience, however, funding is considered likely. These dates are tentative, based upon anticipated budgets, work force, weather and other considerations. Actual dates and timing of implementation and accomplishment could vary.

s/Paul Bradford

4/24/09

PAUL BRADFORD
Forest Supervisor

Date