



File Code: 1950

Date: February 28, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

The Laramie District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests is seeking comments on a proposal to implement pre-commercial thinning titled *Laramie Precommercial Thinning Analysis 2008*, on approximately 4,619 acres of lodgepole pine stands in the southern portion of the District, from Rob Roy Reservoir south to the Colorado border. The precommercial thinning would occur on 319 different sites distributed across the southern District. The proposed sites were clearcut approximately 15 to 30 years ago and have now regenerated into overstocked stands of lodgepole pine that are seedling and sapling sizes (up to 4 inches D.B.H. and 7 to 15 feet in height). These stands require precommercial thinning or brush control to improve growth, without the use of herbicides. Approximately 500 to 1000 acres per year would be treated, depending on available fiscal funding.

Each year the District determines which clearcut sites are available for precommercial thinning and then accomplishes the work by either awarding a Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) contract or thinning the stands using Forest Service crews. In either case, the stands are generally thinned to a 9' x 9' spacing which leaves 538 trees/acre. Spacing would range from 8' X 8' to 11' X 11', depending on the natural stocking numbers within each unit. Some stands would have a 50% variability allowance for the spacing, to allow a native looking stand to remain. Along roads and trails, however, a tighter 8' x 8' spacing (681 trees/acre) would be used in a 100 foot buffer strip to maintain denser hiding cover for wildlife. Slash visible from major system roads would be removed from the immediate foreground (100 feet) to maintain aesthetics. No new roads will be constructed, and no product removal is associated with this proposal. Slash heights would not exceed 24 inches. Thinning activities usually occur between June 1 and November 15.

An interdisciplinary team of Forest Service specialists will complete an environmental analysis of the effects of the thinning proposal. The analysis will compare the existing condition of the different sites to their desired conditions, as defined in the Medicine Bow National Forest Plan (Forest Plan). Upon completion, the analysis will be documented in an appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document.

In addition to the NEPA process, we will also be analyzing this project for its potential effects to heritage resources, as required by the National Historic Preservation Act (1966, as amended). If you have any concerns pertaining to the effects of the project on archaeological or historic sites, please contact Kolleen Bean at (307) 745-2443.



RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS AND DOCUMENTS

The Forest Plan is an overall strategy to guide the management of the Forest for multiple uses. The Plan establishes management Standards and Guidelines for the Forest and it defines Management Areas (MAs) where certain resource activities may be emphasized. The MAs involved in this project include 5.15 (Forest Products, Ecological Maintenance and Restoration Considering the Historic Range of Variability) and 5.13 (Forest Products).

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Due to the site-specific nature of the proposal, the decisions to be made are limited to the following:

- 1) Should the project be implemented or not?
- 2) Should the project be implemented as proposed or should it be modified?
- 3) If the project is approved, are there specific mitigation and/or monitoring measures that should be implemented?

CONSULTATION

Scoping is an important part of the Forest Service environmental analysis process for determining issues to be addressed and for identifying significant issues related to a proposed action (40 CFR 1501.7). For these reasons, I encourage you to take the time to consider the proposal and to submit your comments on it as noted in this scoping letter. No other formal public comment period regarding this action or the environmental analysis is planned.

This comment period is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. This comment period is being provided pursuant to the July 7, 2005, order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. Those who provide timely and substantive comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the *Laramie Boomerang* (newspaper of record, published February 28th, 2008). The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for the proposed precommercial thinning. The ending date for comments is March 31, 2008. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. Written comments should be submitted to:

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests
ATTN: Adriene Holcomb, Forester
2468 Jackson Street
Laramie, WY 82070
Facsimile: (307) 745-2398

OR

E-mail: comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-laramie@fs.fed.us. (Acceptable formats for electronic comments are: rtf, pdf or word.)

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Forest Service regulations outlining the requirements for providing comments on a Proposed Action can be found at 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3). These include (1) name and address, (2) title of the proposed action, (3) specific substantive comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that should be considered before reaching a decision. In order to obtain eligibility to appeal, each individual or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR, Subpart B, Section 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request of confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status (not all basis apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the USDA Office of Communications at 202-720-2791. To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, US Department of Agriculture, Washington DC 20250, or call 1-800-245-6340 (voice) or 202-720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.

If you would like additional information related to this proposal please contact Adriene Holcomb, Forester, at (307) 745-2341 or Kim Hanson, Forestry Technician, at (307) 745-2416.

Thank you for caring about your National Forests.

Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas A. Florich
THOMAS A. FLORICH
Acting District Ranger