RECORD OF DECISION

Rock Creek Integrated Management Project

USDA Forest Service
Yampa Ranger District
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland
Routt and Grand County, Colorado

APRIL 12, 2006

6th Principal Meridian
Township 3 North Range 82 West Section 31
Township 2 North Range 84 West Sections 14-15, 22-27, 34-36
Township 2 North Range 83 West Sections 1-2, 10-14, 19, 22-36
Township 2 North Range 82 West Sections 6-9, 15-22, 27-35
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Township 1 South Range 82 West Section 6

Introduction

This Record of Decision documents the management alternative selected to reduce beetle infestations in lodgepole pine stands on National Forest System Lands administered by the Yampa Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grasslands around Gore Pass. Gore Pass is located along Colorado Highway 134 between Yampa and Kremmling, Colorado. The rational behind the selection decision is based on and supported by the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) completed in January of 2006.

The Yampa Ranger District and Glenwood Springs Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) collaborated on the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project FEIS. The Rock Creek Integrated Management Project encompasses both National Forest System Lands and Public Lands and is an "authorized hazardous fuel reduction project", as defined under Title I of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003; P.L. 108-148, Sec.101(2). The HFRA authorizes hazardous fuel reduction projects on Federal land where there is an imminent risk that an epidemic of disease or insects, or the presence of such an epidemic on immediately adjacent land, will spread and pose a significant threat to an ecosystem component, or forest or rangeland resource, on the Federal land or adjacent non-Federal land (Sec. 102(a) (4)). The selected alternative meets the intention of The Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Prolonged drought, unusually high seasonal temperatures, and extensive areas of susceptible lodgepole pine stands have created an ideal situation for rapid growth of Mountain Pine Beetle populations around Gore Pass. In July of 2003, beetle populations reached epidemic levels.

Responding to these changes, the Yampa Ranger District and Glenwood Springs Field Office completed the **Rock Creek Focused Assessment** in January 2004.

The **Rock Creek Focused Assessment** identified resource values at risk due to extensive beetle epidemics, and the subsequent potential for large, high intensity fires and excessive water flows within the Gore Pass area. These resource values include adjoining private property; water quality; Lagunita Lake dam; irrigation ditches; the Wild and Scenic River corridor; scenery along Gore Pass Highway; developed and dispersed recreation sites, trails; administrative sites; powerlines; transportation systems; wildlife and plant habitats; springs and wetlands; rangeland; heritage sites; and timber. Increases in noxious weeds, sedimentation, and other hydrologic disturbances are also likely without strategic management of the area.

The **purpose and need** for this action is to reduce the size and intensity of existing and imminent Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) epidemics, to reduce the risk of large scale, high intensity wildfires and extreme water flows in the Gore Pass area. This action is needed to:

1. Reduce the susceptibility of the lodgepole stands to MPB activity,
2. Actively suppress ongoing MPB epidemics to limit mature tree mortality,
3. Salvage and reforest areas quickly after MPB epidemics,
4. Relocate and/or decommission segments of the road system that are likely to cause adverse impacts to stream networks,
5. Reduce dangerous fuel accumulations associated with beetle killed trees,
6. Create defensible fire zones around the Lynx and Gore Pass areas, and
7. Reduce anticipated mature tree mortality in Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive wildlife species habitats.

The Forest Service is compelled to consider reasonable responses to a bark beetle epidemic by numerous laws and policies, further described in Chapter 1 of the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project FEIS. The FEIS also documents analysis of alternatives considered to meet this need and clearly identified high value areas at risk on the Routt National Forest where resource, social or economic values would be threatened by bark beetle-induced tree mortality.

Decision

Forest Supervisor, Mary Peterson, has delegated Forest Service signature authority to me for the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project. This Record of Decision is applicable to Routt National Forest System Lands in the Gore Pass area. BLM Area Manager, Jamie Connell, will sign a separate BLM decision applicable to Public Lands in the Gore Pass Area.

Based upon my review of the alternatives, the trade-offs and consequences of each, and the associated research opportunities, I have selected Alternative 2 with two minor modifications. All Design Criteria (FEIS Chapter 2), Watershed Conservation Practices (FEIS Appendix G), and Trigger Points (FEIS Chapter 2) described in the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project Final Environmental Impact Statement are included in this decision, and will be implemented as the specific circumstances dictate. In addition, in keeping with the collaborative nature of the analysis, I have agreed to keep the Colorado Division of Wildlife involved during layout and implementation of the project.

Alternative 2:

Alternative 2 is a combination of preventive, protective, suppression, salvage actions, and road/watershed improvements designed to reduce the impacts of the building MPB epidemic and achieve the desired condition within the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project analysis area.

The analysis area is the Gore Pass Geographic Area which encompasses about 63,857 acres of National Forest Service lands. Four types of actions will be implemented under an adaptive management approach that includes monitoring of beetle activity each year, analyzing the data, and implementing future actions based upon the results of monitoring. The four types of actions are:

- Silvicultural actions (primarily commercial timber removal) and associated road construction on approximately 13,500 acres of National Forest System land. These silvicultural actions are intended to reduce the spread of beetles, remove mistletoe-infested trees, reduce concentrations of dead and dying trees that increase the potential for large-scale high intensity fires, and capture the value of dead and dying trees.
- Suppression techniques involve removing, burning, or peeling beetle-infested trees; and using pheromones to redirect beetles into or out of specific areas. These direct control techniques of MPB infestations, will focus on areas adjacent to private lands and powerline corridors, developed recreation sites, and the 13,500 acres noted above.
- Preventive methods identified involve spraying, forest thinning, and creating changes to existing stand tree species and age distributions. Protective spraying of high-value trees within Gore Campground, Blacktail Campground and Picnic ground, Lynx Pass Campground, and the Lynx Pass Guard Station using a pesticide such as Carbaryl on an annual or biannual basis.
- Road closure, decommissioning, relocation, reconstruction, and/or repair to correct existing or anticipated erosion and likely increased water flows resulting from beetle-induced tree mortality.

The area affected includes predominantly mature lodgepole pine stands that may contain some aspen groves. Silvicultural actions will take place only in stands within ¼ mile of existing roads or within two planned defensible fire zones. No new roads and no intensive silvicultural treatments are proposed within any inventoried roadless areas. Only limited suppression actions are allowed within the roadless areas. No silvicultural treatments are proposed within 100 feet of streams or lakes (see exception 2 below), or on slopes greater than 40 percent.

Alternative 2 (modifications):

My decision to implement Alternative 2 as described in the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project FEIS includes the following two modifications. The described modifications are consistent with the described purpose and need used to frame the analysis. Additionally, in keeping with the adaptive nature of the analysis, specialist reviews will be conducted prior to implementation of the modifications to minimize any potential adverse impacts to resources.

(1) Between Draft and Final, an opportunity was identified by the Rocky Mountain Research Station to conduct a **riparian buffer best management practices effectiveness study** as a result of the rapidly expanding beetle populations. The goals of the study are to quantify the benefits of riparian streamside buffers for soil, water, riparian, and botanical resources, as well as implications for forest canopy reductions for fuel management treatments, wildlife, and other resources. Riparian buffers are relied upon by various resource specialists to protect resources, but long-term information on the effectiveness of these buffers is lacking.

The study would collect qualitative and quantitative data from unharvested units, and from pre and post-harvest units, on a limited and select number of areas within the 100 foot riparian buffers described in the FEIS (Botany Design #10 and 11, pg 21). Potential study locations are identified on the Rock Creek Modification #1 map (attached). In keeping with the adaptive nature of the analysis, specialist reviews will be conducted prior to implementation and selection of study sites to further minimize any potential adverse impacts to resources. This study is identified in the Northern Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative Strategy and Assessment and complements similar studies being conducted in different geographic settings in Region 2. The analysis will further refine the use of riparian buffers to benefit multiple resources and goals. The study will help to determine how effective riparian buffers, included as design criteria for this project, are and to what extent they are necessary for this and future projects.

(2) A 0.8 mile portion of **NFSR 249, Decker Creek Road**, is adjacent to a tributary to Little Rock Creek. The native-surfaced road is difficult to maintain and its drainage features deposit runoff directly into the creek. As identified in the FEIS, the project will reroute the road about 1.1 miles to the west of the current road location, decommissioning the 0.8 mile portion of the road along the creek to a hydrologically self-maintaining state. The reroute requires 0.57 miles of road construction to tie into NFSR 249.1 below the closure to use the current gate location. The change from the FEIS is that the existing gate will not be moved 0.9 miles up the road, because of inadequate locations for gate placement. This alternative reduces the total new road construction by 0.17 miles.

I am confident that the design criteria, trigger points, and Watershed Conservation Practices will be effective in reducing adverse environmental effects, thus allowing us to accomplish the desired future condition as intended. My confidence is based on recent success in the Routt National Forest in designing and implementing effective design criteria and monitoring for the Bark Beetle Analysis (2002). A discussion of the effectiveness of the design criteria can be found in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

Permits

The relocation and new construction of NFSR 212 may require a Clean Water Act section 402 stormwater discharge permit. Since this road would be constructed for multiple uses, it may not meet the requirements for a silvicultural exemption. No dredging or filling of wetlands for this road relocation would be necessary, therefore a section 404 permit would not be required. All

other new construction would be for silvicultural purposes only, and would therefore qualify for the silvicultural exemption for required permits.

The modifications to NFSR 206 and NFSR 212 at the intersection with State Highway 134 require a State Highway Access Permit from the Colorado Department of Transportation.

Rationale for the Decision

I considered, weighed and balanced the six factors discussed in the following sections in arriving at this decision. The Selected Alternative provides the best balance in meeting the purpose and need, achieving the objectives, and addressing major issues of this project. Environmental effects are described in greater detail in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. In addition, the Interdisciplinary Team also reviewed comments received between the Draft and Final EIS and determined that no new analysis was needed.

Meeting Purpose and Need

I have chosen Alternative 2 because it provides more protection to areas that have high resource, social, and economic values than the no action alternative, and goes further in meeting the purpose and need to:

1. Reduce the susceptibility of the lodgepole stands to MPB activity,
2. Actively suppress ongoing MPB epidemics to limit mature tree mortality,
3. Salvage and reforest areas quickly after MPB epidemics,
4. Relocate and/or decommission segments of the road system that are likely to cause adverse impacts to stream networks,
5. Reduce dangerous fuel accumulations associated with beetle killed trees,
6. Create defensible fire zones around the Lynx and Gore Pass areas, and
7. Reduce anticipated mature tree mortality in Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive wildlife species habitats.

Stopping large-scale, intense beetle epidemics cannot be fully contained once they begin. However, despite the fact that our ability to limit the spread of beetles from Forest System Lands to private lands is limited, we can reduce the overall risk in some places. Taking no action in the face of increasing beetle populations would be more likely to impact private land and result in undesirable losses of resource values than the management activities we will implement.

Protective Spraying

The objective of protective spraying is to keep individual trees alive by killing beetles as they attempt to enter the tree. Spraying will likely save more than 90 percent of the trees treated. We will spray individual trees or groups of trees that contribute significantly to the scenic or recreational character of areas that have been identified by interested public and agency resource specialists as high-value. Failure to spray trees in these areas would result in the mortality of most mature lodgepole pine trees in these areas. This would significantly reduce the scenic

values and recreation experience of Routt National Forest, particularly in areas of concentrated public use, when there has already been a sizable investment in capital improvements such as buildings, outhouses, picnic tables, etc.

The community is supportive of actions to address the beetle epidemic in high-value areas. The two major areas of concern regarding preventive spraying relate to the effects to non-target organisms and to public health and safety. There are numerous measures included in the FEIS concerning the spraying actions to minimize effects to non-target organisms and to assure public health and welfare.

Watershed Improvements

Tree mortality caused by the expanding beetle epidemic will likely lead to increases in water yield. Watershed improvement projects are necessary, and include relocating and decommissioning segments of roads that are likely to cause adverse impacts to stream networks. These projects will protect watersheds from increased sedimentation, maintain stream channels and infrastructure, and reduce or eliminate existing drainage problems in high-risk basins in anticipation of a water yield increase.

Suppression Actions

Suppression actions can have a local effect by abating a problem before it gets too large to handle. Where beetle epidemics are less extensive and/or intense, suppression activities can temporarily remove a source of contagion, affording a degree of protection to nearby trees in high-value areas. Failure to suppress beetles in these areas would result in the mortality of most mature spruce and lodgepole trees in these areas.

Suppression thresholds will help us use our limited resources on the outbreaks where we can do the most good and will also limit adverse environmental effects.

Preventive Thinning

The objective of preventive thinning is to make tree stands within areas allocated to timber production and in defensible fire zones, more vigorous and more resistant to beetle attacks and wildland fires. Prevention is the only tool available to address the cause of the problem, which is susceptible forest condition, rather than assailing the symptom of the problem which is too many beetles in one place at one time. By modifying the tree stands so that they are no longer favored habitat for the beetles, the chance of a stand replacing infestation is reduced. Preventive thinning is particularly effective with mountain pine beetle infestations in lodgepole pine.

Silvicultural Actions and Associated Road Construction

Silvicultural actions (primarily commercial timber removal) and associated road construction on approximately 13,500 acres are intended to actively suppress ongoing MPB epidemics to limit tree mortality, reduce the spread of beetles, remove mistletoe-infested trees, reduce

concentrations of beetle killed and dying trees that increase the potential for large-scale high intensity fires, and capture the value of dead and dying trees. Areas where timber has been salvaged will be quickly reforested.

Adaptive Management

Alternative 2 is based on adaptive management principles due to the high degree of uncertainty associated with predicting how beetles will spread and to focus on the goal of achieving the desired conditions identified in the 1997 Revised Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (pages. 1-3, 2-7, 2-16, 2-33, 2-36, 2-39, 2-42, 2-44, 2-47).

Adaptive management relies on monitoring changing conditions, and the results of actions, to determine if management changes are needed, and if so, what changes and to what degree. In the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project FEIS, the IDT analyzed a variety of actions within specific areas to allow the flexibility of adaptive management within certain parameters. Consequently, my decision includes the contingencies, thresholds, and monitoring described in the FEIS (pages 20-38), which will serve as the guiding principles for selecting the most appropriate corrective actions to consider during project implementation.

To help guide future implementation, each year the Forest will monitor beetle activity, including:

1. Locations of endemic populations that could lead to outbreaks
2. Locations of breeding habitat
3. Measurements of beetle populations and trends
4. Estimates of the number of infested trees
5. Locations of concentrations

Alternatives Considered and Not Selected

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered one other alternative; the no action alternative described below. Alternative 2 is the environmentally preferred alternative. An unchecked beetle epidemic will generate extensive tree mortality which increases risks for increased water flows and large, high intensity wildfires. This combination of factors has more potential for adverse effects to the resources than interdisciplinary management of the infestation. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in Table 9 of the FEIS on pages 42-54.

Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No silvicultural, road construction, road closure, road decommissioning, road reconstruction, mountain pine beetle suppression, protective spraying, or fuel reduction activities would be implemented to accomplish project goals.

Public Involvement

As described in Chapter 1 of the FEIS, the need for action arose in 2002 when beetle populations increased from endemic to epidemic levels. A proposal to treat the beetle epidemic using preventive, protective, suppression, and salvage actions designed to reduce the impacts of the beetle epidemic, risk of wildfire, and excessive water flows was listed in the **Notice of Intent** (NOI) in the **Federal Register** on June 30, 2004. The NOI asked for public input on the proposal from June 30, 2004 until August 16, 2004.

As part of the public involvement process, the agencies sent out a scoping notice on May 4, 2004; held an open house on the project proposal on May 13, 2004 at the Yampa Ranger District office in Yampa, Colorado; held a second open house on May 19, 2004 at the BLM Kremmling Resource Area office in Kremmling, Colorado; and hosted three tours of the analysis area. Comments on the proposal were also solicited in the Schedule of Proposed Actions and on the Forest website.

The **Notice of Availability** for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was published in the **Federal Register** on June 3, 2005. The DEIS was mailed to interested parties and made available to the public for comment. The comments were addressed in the FEIS.

The **Notice of Availability** for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was published in the **Federal Register** on February 10, 2006. The FEIS was mailed to interested parties and made available to the public for the opportunity to object for National Forest System lands and the opportunity to protest for BLM Public lands. The agencies received no objections or protests.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, landowners, organizations, scientists, and tribes; the IDT identified two significant issues that pertain to this decision. Included below are the significant issues identified followed by a brief description of our response (FEIS pp. 8 & 9).

- **Effects to Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:** There is concern that a number of wildlife species and/or their habitat will be detrimentally affected by the treatments. This concern is highest regarding threatened or endangered species, species that are proposed for listing as either Threatened or Endangered, Forest Service Region 2 Sensitive species, and other species that are dependant on mature lodgepole pine stands.

  The Biological Evaluation and Biological Assessment describe in detail the anticipated effects to Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive species (Appendix C) and the MIS (Appendix B) details the effects anticipated for species relying on lodgepole pine stands. Numerous design criteria have been incorporated into the Proposed Action to reduce detrimental effects to wildlife while still maintaining the effectiveness of the actions (Table 8). In addition, the Forest Service has agreed to involve the Colorado Division of Wildlife throughout the implementation of this project.

- **Effectiveness of the Treatments:** This issue is essentially twofold. First, will the treatments achieve the objectives for which they were intended? That is will they

materially affect the amount and/or intensity of the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic within the analysis area? Secondly, will the cumulative effect of the treatments and the expected tree mortality from Mountain Pine Beetles be a more desirable outcome than allowing the epidemic to run its course?

Several measures will be used to address these two questions. These are the expected reduction in tree cover percent for the tree stands within the analysis area (see Tables 17-19), tree size and species composition mixes, changes to wildland fuel profiles, to name a few. In addition, monitoring is built into this project that will ensure that if treatments are not achieving objectives for which they are intended, they will be identified and other treatments identified in the FEIS will be used.

- **Only One Action Alternative:** This project is an "authorized" project a under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. As such, the agencies have the latitude to analyze only the Proposed Action and the No Action scenario (since no additional alternatives were submitted and no Community Wildfire Plans are in place that conflict with the proposed action). Nevertheless, the commentor's concern about the need to retain flexibility is valid.

  The Proposed Action is what could reasonably be expected as the maximum amount of actions that could be implemented in the five to eight year timeframe. There is a considerable range of actions between the No Action alternative and the Proposed Action. The Responsible Official could decide to implement portions of the Proposed Action and still be within the range of effects analyzed. A decision to implement within the range created by the No Action and the Proposed Action could be based on an expectation of the funds available to implement the project, an expectation of the resources available to implement or based on issues raised during the comment period. For this analysis no issues were raised during the comment period that would have necessitated the creation of a new alternative. Several commentors were asking for some level of activity that was less than the Proposed Action. As described above, any alternative generated to respond to these comments would have simply been a reduced version of the proposed action and are already within the "decision space" that is available to the Responsible Official based on the analysis of effects contained within the Rock Creek EIS. In addition, the agencies integrated many elements of the commentor's issues into the FEIS.

  Nearly all of the concepts presented by Colorado Wild during scoping were used in developing the proposed action from the onset. The following summarize the eight concepts presented in the scoping letter used in developing an alternative and to what extent they were used in developing the proposed action.

  1) *Minimize new road construction*
     In the DEIS pages 11 and 12 the factors used to select the stands proposed for intensive silvicultural treatment are described. These include being within ¼ mile of an existing road or within one of the two fuels emphasis areas and not within inventoried roadless areas. Both of these factors reduce the miles of roads needed to

access the stands proposed for treatment. Additionally, a large portion of the new road construction is being proposed to allow decommissioning of road segments that are identified as currently or likely to cause watershed problems (primarily due to the proximity of these existing roads to streams).

2) *Focus treatments on removal of infested and dead near high use areas*
All of the developed recreation sites and the Lynx Pass administrative sites have intensive silvicultural treatments, suppression actions and protective spraying proposed in and/or adjacent to these high use sites.

3) *Focus treatments adjacent to private lands*
Many of the moderate and high hazard stands within ¼ mile of private lands have been identified for intensive silvicultural treatments, all of the lands within ¼ mile of these lands have been identified for suppression actions and these lands have been identified as a priority for suppression actions (DEIS page 23).

4) *Protect and restore watersheds*
This concept is one of the basic premises behind the proposed action. The Purpose and Need identified in the DEIS on page 2 which incorporated watershed needs as a reason for the proposed action. Additionally the use of partial cutting where possible was designed in part to reduce the impacts to watershed from the expected loss of live mature tree cover. Also, the emphasis on relocating road segments away from streams and emphasizing reconstruction and maintenance of roads to reduce watershed impacts all are designed to reduce the detrimental impacts to watersheds.

5) *Encourage species other than lodgepole pine*
The partial cutting treatments identified (DEIS pages 13-17) describe that lodgepole pines are the target species for removal and other species generally are identified for retention. Also the Green Tree Retention provides direction on retaining species other than lodgepole.

6) *Use prescribed fire*
Prescribed fire is anticipated for use primarily in disposing of piled slash. The likelihood that prescribed fire (broadcast burning) could be successful in achieving the objectives of the project is low.

7) *Allow limited spraying*
This is what is being proposed in the proposed action.

8) *Consider alternative insect treatments*
The alternative insect treatments listed in the comment are included in the proposed action.

I find that these issues have been adequately addressed in the FEIS and this decision with the application of established design criteria.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ, 1502.22) requires that we identify relevant information that may be incomplete or unavailable for an evaluation of reasonably foreseeable significant adverse effects in an Environmental Impact Statement. I have determined no incomplete or unavailable information was deemed essential for me to make a reasoned choice among the alternatives portrayed in the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project FEIS.

This decision to implement Alternative 2 as modified is consistent with the intent of the 1997 Revised Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan's long-term goals and objectives listed on pages 1-1 and 1-2. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for the following Desired Conditions.

Management Area 1.5 = National River System – Wild Rivers, Designated and Eligible

- Natural processes such as fire, insects, and disease will be allowed to influence vegetative composition and structure as long as they enhance or are compatible with wild river values.

Management Area 4.3 = Dispersed Recreation

- Insect and disease outbreaks will generally be allowed to influence forest vegetation unless resource management objectives are threatened (Routt Forest Plan page 2-36).

Management Area 5.11 = General Forest and Rangelands – Forest Vegetation Emphasis

Management Area 5.13 = Forest Products

- Forest insects and diseases will be present but locally restricted (Routt Forest Plan, page 2-40, 2-44).

Management Area 8.3 = Utility Corridors

- There will be little evidence of insect or disease damage (Routt Forest Plan page 2-56).

The Rock Creek Integrated Management Project is an authorized hazardous fuel reduction project, as defined under Title I of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003; P.L. 108-148, Sec.101 (2) on Federal land described in Sec. 102 (a)(4). This alternative meets requirements of all relevant laws, regulations, and policies, including but not limited to:

- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
- National Forest Management Act of 1976
- Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974
- Organic Administrative Act of 1897
- Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960
- Clean Water Act of 1948
- Clean Air Act of 1955, as amended
- Protection of Wetlands Executive Order 11990
- Endangered Species Act of 1973

- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended
- Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1976

My decision comprises all practical steps within Forest Service jurisdiction to minimize damage to the biological and physical environment and effectively protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources, while effectively meeting the purpose and need for action. I have ensured that my Decision is consistent with the Chief's letter of June 7, 2001 regarding delegation of authority and interim protection of roadless areas. To inform this decision, a site-specific roads analysis was conducted for the Rock Creek Geographic Area. It tiered to the Routt Roads Analysis for the Routt National Forest. Other documents (i.e. Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy) were incorporated into the FEIS by reference. Public comments received during the public involvement process for this project were also used extensively in developing this project.

I have reviewed the FEIS and supporting analyses. This Decision is within the range of actions and effects analyzed and disclosed in the FEIS. The decision includes the prescribed conditions of implementation, project design criteria, and monitoring identified in the FEIS to protect resource values.

Implementation

Under the provisions of the HFRA, and the 36 CFR 218 Objection regulations, the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project may be implemented immediately after this Record of Decision is signed. I intend to implement this decision as soon as possible to allow critical actions to be completed this season, thereby reducing detrimental effects of beetle induced mortality. I am also considering using Stewardship Contracting Authority to implement all or portions of this project. Project implementation is expected to continue over the next several years.

Administrative Review

Projects authorized under the HFRA are exempt from the established notice, comment, and appeal procedures set out at 36 CFR 215. Instead, 36 CFR Part 218, subpart A, Sec. 218.1 establishes a separate pre-decisional administrative review ("objection") process (Federal Register; Vol. 69, No. 6; Friday, January 9, 2004). The 30-day objection period is the sole means by which administrative review of an authorized project on National Forest System land may be sought.

The Responsible Official may not issue a decision concerning an authorized project until the Reviewing Officer has responded to all pending objections. When no objection is filed within the 30-day time period, the Reviewing Officer shall notify the Responsible Official, and approval of the authorized project may occur on, but not before, the fifth business day following the end of the objection-filing period (Sec. 218.11).

The objection period for this project closed on March 14, 2006. The Forest received no objections and the BLM received no protests for the Rock Creek Integrated Management Project.

Contact Person

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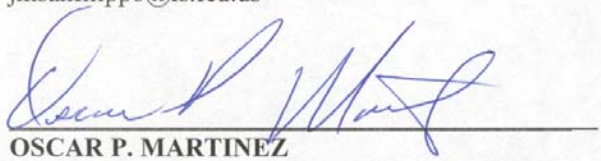

4/12/06

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Yampa Ranger District
Medicine Bow – Routt National Forests &
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Date