

Decision Summary – Vegetation CE

Project Name	Ash Creek Restoration and Resiliency		
Forest	Custer Gallatin	Region	Northern
Choose Type of Activity (Wilderness, Roadless, Energy infrastructure, Minerals, Vegetation CE, Land Management Plan) and level of Decision (No DM, DM, DN/FONSI, ROD)			
Vegetation CE: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6) “Timber stand and/or wildlife improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction”. Decision Memo			
Planned Decision Date	March 26, 2021		

Summary Description

Purpose/Need
Due to large high-severity wildfires in the past 20 years, wildlife habitat and vegetation composition have been altered in the project area. This has led to a reduction of hiding and thermal cover for big game and an increase of dead and down fuel loads, which hinder big game movement. This project aims to improve wildlife habitat, provide Ponderosa pine forested areas that are structurally diverse and resilient to future high severity disturbances, provide for biological and structural diversity, restore watershed condition, refresh native grasslands, and reduce fuel loadings in existing and potential forested stands.
Intended Selected Action
The project will improve wildlife habitat and timber stands through prescribed fire, non-commercial thinning, and tree regeneration. Natural forest regeneration and tree planting will assist in increasing thermal and visual cover for big game species, while non-commercial thinning will increase the resiliency of timber stands and wildlife habitat from future high severity disturbances. Prescribed burning is expected to remove dead and down from grassland and transitory areas, improving access to forage and browse. The project area is 110,273 acres and treatments will occur throughout the project area.
Potentially Significant Effects or Extraordinary Circumstances (if any)
None, due to design features and effects analysis of proposed actions.
Public Involvement (include State, local governments and Tribal consultation)
A 45-day scoping period started May 5, 2020, which included a news release, a legal notice in the local newspaper, and letters to local landowners, governments, and Tribal contacts. Seven comments were received from the public including the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Comments focused on vegetation management, wildlife, grazing, road density, fire and fuels, and the Forest Plan. Tribal comments had questions regarding impacts to cultural resources as well as requesting the opportunity to participate in surveys. Substantive comments have been addressed.
Timeline Considerations (statutory, court-related, administrative) and Objections Status
DM planned to be signed March 26, 2021.