

Decision Summary – Vegetation CE

Project Name	Ecotonal Habitat Restoration Project		
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 – Decision memo			
Planned Decision Date	3/2021		

Summary Description

Purpose/Need
The purpose of the ecotonal habitat project is to restore the health and vigor of ecotonal communities to improve wildlife habitat and to improve watershed health through stream habitat and riparian habitat maintenance and improvement.
Intended Selected Action
A decision to restore six types of ecotonal habitats on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Ecotonal vegetation communities where treatments would most likely occur: Aspen, Whitebark and Limber Pine, Meadow/Grassland and Forest Interface areas, Riparian Areas, Woody Draws and Montane Ponderosa Pine. Potential ecotonal habitat restoration treatments: Hand Slashing, Limbing, Piling, or Girdling using chainsaw; Mechanical Mastication, Cutting, Piling, Chipping, Skidding; Mechanical Ripping; Prescribed Fire; commercial harvest (no more than 250 acres annually); Instream Habitat Structures; Planting Desirable Species; Biomass Utilization; Directional Felling and/or Fencing. Project implementation will be ongoing and may span 10 to 15 years with a range of 50 to 5000 acres treated annually. Based on historic capacity, we anticipate three to five projects a year averaging an estimated 500-1,000 acres of noncommercial treatments, 250 acres or less of commercial harvest annually and approximately 3,000 acres of prescribed burning. Higher annual estimates are consistent with prescribed burning activity. Prescribed burning and small tree cutting would be authorized in Inventoried Roadless Areas. No road building or commercial harvest is planned in the IRA.
Potentially Significant Effects or Extraordinary Circumstances (if any)
No extraordinary circumstances have been identified. Some of the resources would be present but the effects do not result in extraordinary circumstances.
Public Involvement (include State, local governments and Tribal consultation)
This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Custer Gallatin National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on June 3, 2019 and was updated periodically during the analysis. A scoping notice was posted to the forest project webpage on June 3, 2019. Approximately 342 scoping letters were either emailed or mailed directly to individuals, permittees, stakeholders, groups, organizations, federal and state agencies, and tribes. Contacts included: MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, South Dakota Fish and Game, South Dakota Resource and Conservation and Forestry, Northern Cheyenne, all counties, Montana DEQ, and others. Nine commenters responded during the 30-day scoping period. Commenters included six private citizens, and three state or tribal agencies (Northern Cheyenne Tribe, SD Fish and Game, and SD Resource Conservation and Forestry). Substantive issues were addressed.
Timeline Considerations (statutory, court-related, administrative) and Objections Status
Decision is planned for March, following completed consultation with USFWS. This project is scheduled to be signed ahead of the Forest Plan Revision Decision. The Record of Decision for the Revised Forest Plan is scheduled for late spring or summer 2021.