

**File Code:** 2400; 3400**Date:** May 25, 2017**Route To:****Subject:** Request for Designation of Additional Insect & Disease Treatment Areas in North Idaho (IPNF)**To:** Deputy Chief, National Forest System

Region One is requesting additional designations of landscape-scale areas on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNFs) to address insect or disease threats under Section 602 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6591a), as added by section 8204 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the 2014 Farm Bill.

In March 2014, the Idaho Governor requested and received designation of 50 proposed treatment areas, covering approximately 1,815,864 acres across the Boise, Caribou-Targhee, Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Salmon-Challis and Sawtooth NFs. The IPNFs have 26 designated treatment areas totaling approximately 449,679 acres. These proposed treatment areas were selected because they met the criteria for designation and they covered areas already proposed for restoration activities/projects.

Federal forests cover over 20 million acres in Idaho, representing about 75 percent of the forested landscape and 38 percent of the entire State. Approximately 12.6 million acres of federal forest land is identified as suitable for some level of management. Of the suitable land base, 8.84 million acres (70 percent of the suitable land base) is at high risk of mortality and fire as defined by the criteria in the 2014 Farm Bill. The magnitude of the issue in Idaho requires action. The initial designation of 1.8 million acres represents a modest effort to begin addressing the forest health issues across the entire landscape of the National Forest System in Idaho.

Subsequent to the State's initial designated area request, the IPNFs have conducted a more thorough evaluation of the insect and disease issues across the forest. After consultation with Forest staff, entomologists, pathologists and local collaborative groups, the Forest identified 1,650,925 acres within 216 watersheds at the 6<sup>th</sup> level HUC where there are additional opportunities for designation (Attachments Map A, Map B and HUC6 spreadsheet). These additional areas include 1,566,557 acres in Idaho, 8,853 acres in Montana and 75,533 acres in Washington; however, all are within the IPNFs' jurisdiction.

All additional proposed watersheds meet one or more of the criteria outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill. These watersheds are experiencing declining forest health based on annual surveys; are at risk of substantially increased tree mortality over the next 15 years due to insect or disease infestation, based on the National Insect and Disease Risk Map; and/or contain hazard trees that pose an imminent risk to public infrastructure, health, and safety. These watersheds are experiencing increased bark beetle activity, root disease and tree mortality and are subsequently increasing the potential for uncharacteristic wildfires, as was experienced in fiscal year 2015.



The majority of the watersheds are located in the roaded front country. Areas excluded from consideration include designated wilderness areas, recommended wilderness, wilderness study areas, research natural areas and wild & scenic river. After excluding these areas, the total number of acres requested for designation within these 6<sup>th</sup> level HUCs is 1,650,925.

To date, the IPNFs have completed project planning and implementation on 2 projects within the initial insect and disease designated areas: Jasper Mountain and Bottom Canyon projects. The Forest is also currently planning 11 other projects in the initial designated areas, 7 of which are using or anticipate using the Farm Bill/HFRA NEPA provisions. The IPNFs recently completed a second five-year action planning process working with a host of partners, including local governments and collaborative groups, to update the Forest guide. The guide and associated map is available on the internet and used by the Forest Leadership Team to prioritize restoration treatments across the forest

(<https://www.fs.usda.gov/resources/ipnf/landmanagement/resourcemanagement>). These new areas add to the Forests' priority work focused on treatments to improve resistance and resilience to insects, disease and fire risks.

The IPNFs are committed to active restoration using tools available under the Farm Bill. Their initial success with existing projects and commitment moving forward with partners and the community serves as a strong foundation for success in restoring our forested lands. Designation of these additional areas on a landscape-scale will be an integral part of their efforts to focus restoration work and add additional capacity to the vegetation restoration actions on the Forest. It will also allow the Forest to more efficiently and effectively utilize the North Idaho NEPA Strike Team, the Region One Farm Bill Strike Team and Good Neighbor Authority.

For the reasons above, I am recommending these additional areas be included for designation under the 2014 Farm Bill. For additional/clarifying information or to get the shapefiles associated with this request, please contact Greg Harris, GIS Database Manager at (208) 765-7407 or [gregharris@fs.fed.us](mailto:gregharris@fs.fed.us) or Matt Staudacher, Vegetation Staff Officer at (208) 765-7380 or [mstaudacher@fs.fed.us](mailto:mstaudacher@fs.fed.us).

  
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Enclosures

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