

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Libby Pre-commercial Thinning
Proposed Implementation Date:	January, 2012 through January, 2014
Proponent:	Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, Libby Unit
Location:	All DNRC State Trust Lands in Southern Lincoln County managed by Libby Unit
County:	Lincoln

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Pre-commercial hand thinning of young tree stands that have been regenerated from past timber sales. The thinning would follow through with the prescribed silvicultural prescriptions and environmental assessments of these past timber sales and incorporate all requirements of the State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP) and Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management. Additionally, the Montana DNRC Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) would be employed on all covered lands. The purpose of the thinning is to promote tree health and vigor. This environmental assessment checklist will cover pre-commercial thinning for the next two years.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

No public scoping was done for this project. In the past Libby Unit has never had any comment on this type of project.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None foreseen.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No action – Current land management activities would continue, while certain overstocked stands would continue to develop at slow rates with low vigor.

Action - Pre-commercially thin stands as prescribed in previous silvicultural prescriptions and environmental assessments. Treated stands would develop with less competition, resulting in increased growth rates and improved vigor. The Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management and all Resource Management Standards (RMS) set by the State Forest Land Management Plan would be met. Additionally, the Montana DNRC Habitat Conservation Plan would be employed on all covered lands.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP) would be incorporated. Highway vehicles would be used on existing roads to access the stands, and chainsaws used for hand thinning.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Forestry BMPs would be incorporated into the contracts. The Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management; Watershed Management and watershed RMS would be implemented. Additionally, the Montana DNRC Habitat Conservation Plan would be employed on all covered lands.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

No impacts would occur.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

To assure protection of sensitive plant species, the Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management; Biodiversity and Silviculture as well as RMS for Sensitive Species would be implemented. Additionally, the Montana DNRC Habitat Conservation Plan would be employed on all covered lands.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Terrestrial, Avian and Aquatic Habitats will be maintained through The Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management; Big Game, Fisheries and applying Biodiversity RMS; Big Game Species RMS; and Sensitive Species RMS will be implemented. Additionally, the Montana DNRC Habitat Conservation Plan would be employed on all covered lands.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Threatened or endangered species may migrate through the area. The Montana Administrative Rules for Forest Management; Watershed Management, Threatened and Endangered Species and Sensitive Species and SFLMP guidance for Grizzly Bear, Wolf, Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle management will be implemented where appropriate. Fisheries RMS will be implemented. Additionally, the Montana DNRC Habitat Conservation Plan would be employed on all covered lands.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

These sections have been reviewed for archaeological evidence and have been cleared for operations. If evidence of artifacts is discovered before or during thinning, operations may be suspended to investigate and secure the site.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Significant topographic features, terrain or aesthetic values would not be changed by this thinning. There would be a temporary noise increase associated with a standard thinning operation.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No limited resources would be used from the project. There are no other activities nearby that would affect the project.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other known or foreseen studies or plans for this area that are pertinent to this project.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.• Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.• Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Normal health risks associated with a standard thinning operation.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No impacts would occur.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

This project would add some additional work and income to the local work force.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Income tax revenue from the thinning contracts would increase slightly. Due to the relatively small size of the thinning program, there would be no measurable cumulative impact from this proposed action on tax revenue. Property taxes would not change.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

There would be no measurable cumulative impacts related to demand for government services due to the relatively small size of the thinning program.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The DNRC would manage lands involved in this project in accordance with the State Forest Land Management Plan (DNRC 1996), the Administrative Rules for Forest Management (ARM 36.11.401 through 456), the recently adopted Montana DNRC Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP; DNRC 2011), and all other laws applicable to thinning activities on State lands.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This project would not influence the recreation potential. There are no wilderness areas within the project area area.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

There would be no measurable cumulative impacts related to population and housing due to relatively small size of the thinning program, and the fact that people are already employed in this occupation in the region.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Native communities or lifestyles would not be disturbed.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Cultural uniqueness would not be disturbed.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

There are no other unique social or economical qualities in this area.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Dave Marsh	Date: January 26, 2012
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V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The Action Alternative is selected.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No significant impacts are expected. All projects are being conducted on sites previously reviewed through the timber sale planning process and all current resource management standards will be applied.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Mark Peck
	Title: Libby Unit Manager
Signature: /s/ Mark Peck	
Date: 1-27-12	