

CASE STUDY: Upper Sheep Creek Farm Bill Project

Forest: Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forest

District: White Sulphur Springs Ranger District

County: Meagher

NEPA Tool Used: Farm Bill/Insect & Disease Categorical Exclusion

Timeline from Initiation to Decision: 8 months

Acres Treated: 1,456

FIF Funding: \$75,000

“With Forests In Focus grant money, the White Sulphur Springs Ranger District was able to hire an additional four biological science technician temporary employees. This tripled our capacity to accomplish surveys for Canada lynx habitat and old growth which are necessary to meet our Forest Plan standards. In essence, these additional surveys resulted in a decision that included three times the amount of acres than we would have been able to analyze without Forests In Focus funding.”

-Allison Kolbe, USFS Wildlife Biologist

Highlights: Located in the Little Belt Mountains along the U.S. Hwy 89 corridor between White Sulphur Springs and Niehart, the Upper Sheep Creek project proposes a range of management activities to maintain or restore the structure, function, composition and connectivity of a forest system that has been adversely affected by insect and disease. The proposed activities promote whitebark pine regeneration, protect older, large trees and thin several previously harvested units to improve growth and resiliency of younger forest stands. Additionally, the project addresses concerns related to dead, dying or overcrowded forest conditions that pose a higher risk for severe wildfire along the U.S. Highway 89 corridor and around a subdivision in the wildland urban interface.

Because additional funding was made available through the Forests in Focus initiative, the Forest Service was able to hire additional seasonal interns from the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC). Working in conjunction with Forest Service wildlife technicians, the interns were trained to do old growth and lynx surveys. Identified old growth and large trees will be retained, as appropriate for the forest type and to the extent trees promote stands that are resilient to insects and disease, to preserve wildlife habitats and add valuable structural and successional diversity of the forest. The additional workforce capacity meant a greater collection of data to help ensure the project would produce the greatest outcomes to the ground and for the surrounding community.

The project was developed through a collaborative process involving multiple interested persons representing diverse interests (e.g., local land/homeowners, private business owners, timber industry professionals, recreation interest groups, local government representatives and State wildlife agency biologists) who assisted Forest Service resource specialists in identifying issues, refining management options and areas and developing the treatment types to meet resource management objectives.

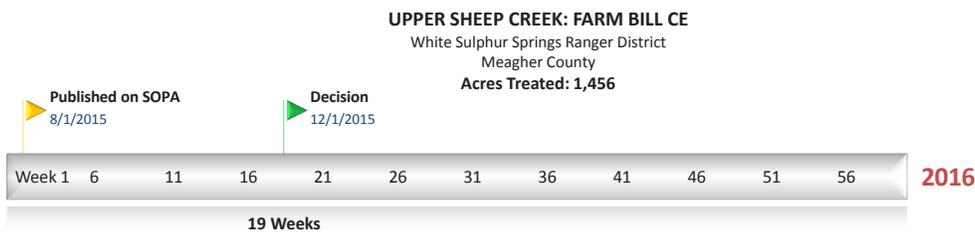
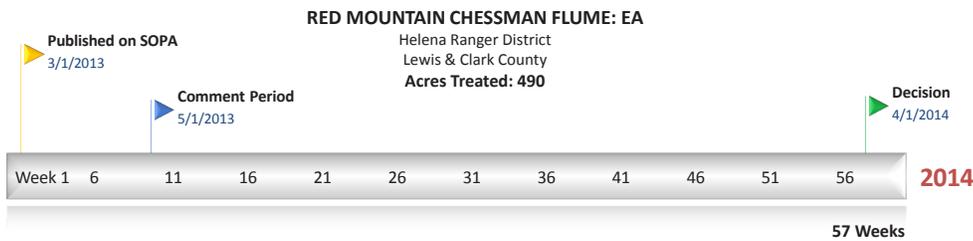


Figure 1: MCC interns learn to age a tree (top) and complete old growth surveys (bottom) in the project area.

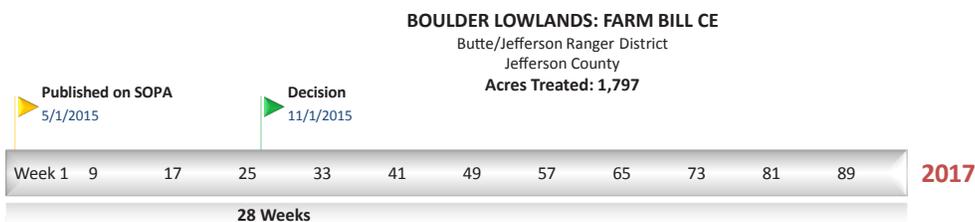
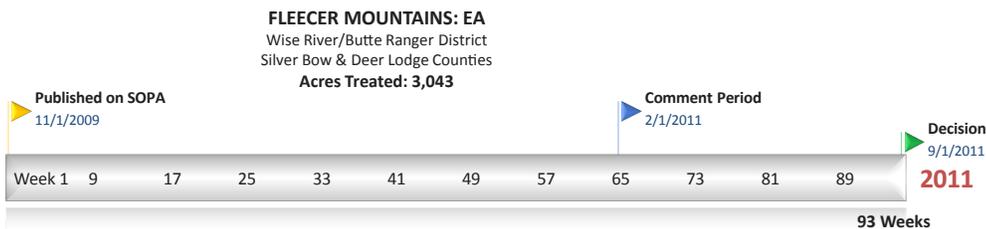
REGION 1: Montana Farm Bill Project Update

Project Timeline Comparisons*

HELENA/LEWIS & CLARK NATIONAL FOREST



BEAVERHEAD-DEERLODGE NATIONAL FOREST

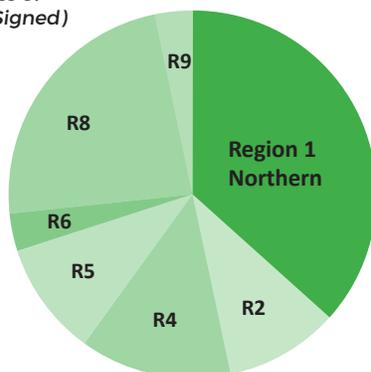


INTEGRATED RESTORATION PROJECTS

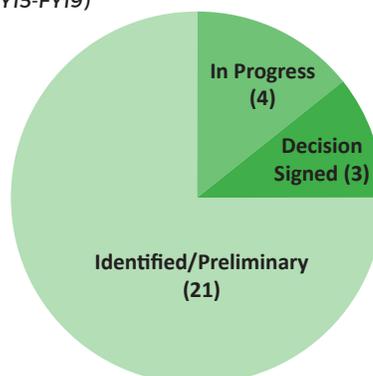
Farm Bill projects can incorporate a suite of restoration outcomes in addition to the insect and disease and hazardous fuel reduction components. Examples of other activities that have been included in the proposed actions for R1 Farm Bill projects include **road maintenance and relocation** to reduce sediment contribution to streams, **road decommissioning** (in addition to temporary road decommissioning), **aquatic organism passage replacement** and **wildlife habitat improvement** (e.g. conifer encroachment in aspen stands).

Farm Bill Project Counts

Forest Service Farm Bill Projects by Region
(In Progress or Decision Signed)



State of Montana Farm Bill Projects
(FY15-FY19)



*Project timelines are based on the time from publishing the project on a forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) to a decision being signed. It does not capture the amount of time spent on project development and public engagement/ collaboration prior to publishing on the SOPA.