

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Project Name:** Forest in Focus Grant Opportunity on NFS lands  
**Proposed Implementation Date:** State Funds obligated by 6/30/2017. Projects implemented will have varying Timelines.  
**Proponent:** USFS-Region 1  
**Location:** Statewide  
**County:** Statewide

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed action is part of the Forests in Focus (FIF) grant program to United States Forest Service (USFS) lands in Montana. The state is proposing to grant up to one million dollars of state funds to the USFS for projects that meet some or all of the criteria listed in the State of Montana's Forest in Focus Initiative. Project proposals submitted must meet the intent of this Initiative and illustrate that the pace and outcomes of the proposed project will benefit from state funding. Projects must meet some or all of the following criteria: designated Priority Landscapes under the 2014 Farm Bill; developed collaboratively with interested stakeholders; provide restoration of vegetation (including fuels reduction), watersheds and wildlife habitat; enhance recreational opportunities; produce forest products; and complement cross-boundary management activities and partner investments.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.*

MEPA Scoping was conducted for 30 days, from April 19th, 2016 to May 18th, 2016.

- a) A Scoping Notice was emailed out to over 150 individuals and groups, including; MT forest collaborative groups, DNRC's Timber Project Scoping Group, DNRC Area and Unit Managers, environmental groups, the United States Forest Service, timber industry representatives, and Montana's Congressional delegation.
- b) The MEPA Scoping Notice was uploaded on the DNRC Notices/ Public Interest webpage for 30 days. The MEPA Scoping Notice as well as the Request for Grant Proposals was posted on the DNRC Forests in Focus website throughout the comment period and in the months following the deadline.
- c) In addition, the project manager presented this information at several meetings around the state.

Comments Received: During the 30 day public comment period, DNRC received five individual comments. All commenters were supportive of the proposed action. Please refer to Attachment I, Response to Public Comments on page 9.

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

*Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.*

No permits are needed with this proposed action. Once projects are selected, the United States Forest Service will conduct project specific analysis using federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures. Other state and federal laws, policies and regulations that are required for individual projects will be followed.

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**3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:**

*Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.*

**Alternative A (action):** The Action alternative, as described within this document, would provide funding (partial or full), through the Forests in Focus grant program, for forest restoration projects on National Forest System lands in the State of Montana.

**Alternative B (no action):** No funding would be granted under the Forest in Focus grant program to USFS restoration projects. The USFS projects may still occur but would likely result in longer timelines due to a lack of project funding and potentially with fewer restoration benefits.

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



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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to geology or soils would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to water quantity, quality and distribution would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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**6. AIR QUALITY:**

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to air quality would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to vegetation cover, quantity and quality would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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## **8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

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

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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## **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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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## **10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to historical and archaeological sites would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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## **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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to aesthetics would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

**Alternative A:** No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to demands on environmental resources of land, water, air and energy would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures. Projects using state funding must be in compliance with all federal and state laws, regulations and policies.

**Alternative B:** No funding would be provided, therefore, no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected.

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**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.*

Individual federal Forest Plan guidelines for each of the National Forests in Montana that receive funding will be utilized at the project level. Other documents needed to determine cumulative impacts will be determined at the project level.

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

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**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

The proposed action could increase human health and safety when grant dollars are spent on reducing fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), removal of hazardous trees and increasing access for wildland firefighters. These are all allowable activities based on the criteria and guidelines for this funding. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

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

One of the criteria for this funding is the production of forest products. As such, the proposed action could help maintain or increase the availability of commercial timber for use by the forest products industry. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

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

The intent of this funding is to increase the pace, scale and quality of forest restoration activities on USFS lands. As such, the number of direct and indirect jobs could increase as a result of the proposed action. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

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

At this programmatic level, impacts to local and state tax base and revenues cannot be analyzed. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services*

At this programmatic level, impacts to the demand for government services cannot be analyzed. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**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.*

Individual federal Forest Plans guidelines for each of the National Forests in Montana that receive funding will be utilized at the project level.

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**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

One of the criteria for this funding is the enhancement of recreational opportunities. As such, the proposed action could increase recreational opportunities. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.*

At this programmatic level, impacts to density and distribution of population and housing cannot be analyzed. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

At this programmatic level, impacts to social structures cannot be analyzed. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

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**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

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

At this programmatic level, impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity cannot be analyzed. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

**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 direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

At this programmatic level, other social and economic circumstances cannot be identified. After project selection, other social and economic circumstances will be analyzed, as appropriate, for the type of analysis required under NEPA procedures.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Maureen Bookwalter <b>Title:</b> DNRC-USFS Liaison	<b>Date:</b> 6/30/2016
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**V. FINDING**

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

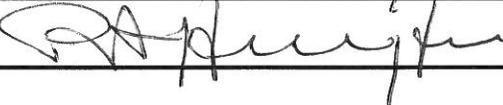
Action Alternative

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

None

**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

EIS       More Detailed EA       No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Robert Warriner <b>Title:</b> Forestry Division Administrator	<b>Date:</b> 7/1/16
<b>Signature:</b>		

## Attachment I: Response to Public Comments

The following is a summary of comments received by the DNRC during scoping for this environmental assessment. All five comments received were favorable of the proposed action. The comments listed below include those that offer concerns and/or suggestions in how funds are allocated based on the criteria listed in the proposed action. Any comments received that were outside of the scope of the proposed action were not included in the DNRC responses below.

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### **Comment 1: Received by Ravalli County Commissioners**

*Ravalli County does not feel that USFS projects funded by this one million dollars that have a road decommissioning component to them are consistent with the authority under 76-13-150 MCA. We believe projects that decommission roads in our National Forests not eliminate recreational opportunities for our citizens, but directly conflict with 76-13-150 MCA, which creates a fire suppression fund. Road decommissioning (especially through obliteration) removes existing road infrastructure which is used to assess for vegetation management, emergency services and fire suppression. This law has an underlying emphasis on public health and safety, but it does not provide funding for water quality, wildlife habitat or road decommissioning.*

#### **DNRC Response:**

76-13-150- the state's fire suppression account—fund transfer states that “ (4) Money in the account may be used only for the purposes of paying expenses for fire prevention, including fuel reduction and mitigation, forest restoration, grants for the purpose of fire suppression equipment for county cooperatives, and fire suppression costs.” Based on the language in this law, Forests in Focus criteria were established to increase fuel reduction and mitigation while simultaneously increasing forest restoration outcomes. Both activities are cited in the law and are complementary. The language in the law does not preclude investing in projects that include road decommissioning. When selecting projects for state funding, projects were selected that met a wide range of forest management and restoration objectives with a large emphasis on fuels reduction outcomes and vegetation management outputs including commercial product. We believe that our selections meet the intent of the law and will benefit the land and communities where investments are being made.

### **Comment #2: Received by the Lolo Restoration Committee**

- ***Allow FIF funds to be used for contract preparation--efforts to increase the pace and scale of work being accomplished can make it difficult for agencies to develop contracts that meet the needs and capacity of local purchasers and vendors--especially stewardship contracts. Under 'Assistance Needed' add language indicating that FIF funds can be utilized to increase capacity of Forests or Units to prepare stewardship contracts or other contracts designed to meet the needs of local businesses.***

- ***Make full use of best value contracting***—until recently, stewardship contracting was the only tool with which the Forest Service could include local rural community benefit in its evaluation criteria. Within the FY15 appropriations bill, congress provided authority for the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to extend the use of best value criteria to all acquisitions. *In the USFS Forest In Focus Call for Proposals, include the language asking agencies to indicate what strategies or authorities it will use to create local benefit and/or jobs.*

**DNRC Response:**

The restoration economy in Montana and retaining the state’s skilled workforce is a key part of the Forests in Focus Initiative.

Although the criteria as stated does not make it clear that Forests in Focus funds can be used to increase the capacity for contract preparation, this is in fact an allowable activity. If future funds become available we will consider making that clearer under allowable activities.

If future funds become available to grant to the United States Forest Service, we will consider including language in our Request for Proposals that asks for the strategies or authorities that will be used to create local benefit and/or jobs.