

# CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION FOR DNRC FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Project Name: Burnt Prairie Fire Salvage

Proposed Implementation Date: November 2017

Proponent: Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Northwest Land Office, Plains Unit

Type and Purpose of Action: The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) proposes to sell approximately 1,165 tons (165 MBF) of salvage timber from Section 12, Township 23 North, Range 27 West, approximately 23 air miles north of Plains, Montana. This action would produce estimated revenue of \$15,000.00 for the Public Buildings (P.B.) Trust Grant; and \$3,960.00 in Forest Improvement funds. Under the proposed action, DNRC would salvage timber affected by the McCully Ridge Fire, reduce excessive fuel loading and the related risk of wildfire, reduce insect infestations, and promote timber types historically found in the area, maintain and improve forest health, and increase forest productivity beneficial to future trust actions (See Attachment 1, Vicinity and Project Maps).

Location: Section 12, T23N, R27W

County: Sanders

Category (refer to ARM 36.11.447 (3)(a) through (w) for additional detail):

- a)  Temporary Uses of Land with Negligible Effects
- b)  Plans and Policies
- c)  Leases and Licenses
- d)  Acquisition of Land or Interest in Land
- e)  Road Maintenance and Repair
- f)  Bridges and Culverts
- g)  Crossing Class 3 Streams
- h)  Temporary Road Use Permits
- i)  Road Closure
- j)  Material Stockpiles
- k)  Backfilling
- l)  Gathering Forest Products for Personal Use
- m)  Regeneration
- n)  Nursery Operations
- o)  Water Wells
- p)  Herbicides and Pesticides
- q)  Other Hazardous Materials
- r)  Fences
- s)  Waterlines
- t)  Removal of Small Trees
- u)  Removal of Hazardous Trees
- v)  Cone Collection
- w)  Timber Harvest (<100 MBF green or 500 MBF salvage)

By process of the adoption of the Forest Management Rules on February 27, 2003, pursuant to ARM 36.2.523(5)(a), the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Trust Land Management Division, has adopted the above categorical exclusions for activities conducted on state forested trust lands. "Categorical Exclusion" refers to a type of action that does not individually, collectively, or cumulatively require an EA or EIS unless extraordinary circumstances occur (ARM 36.2.522(5)).

**Extraordinary Circumstances:**

Will the proposed action affect one or more of the following resources, species or situations in the project area? If the resource, species, or situation is present, but project design avoids potential adverse effects on the resource, the answer is "No". One "Yes" answer indicates that Categorical Exclusion is not appropriate for the project, and an EA or EIS must be conducted.

YES NO

- YES  NO a) Sites with high erosion risk.
- YES  NO b) Federally listed threatened and endangered species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered species as designated by the USFWS.
- YES  NO c) Municipal watersheds.
- YES  NO d) The SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes, except for modification or replacement of bridges, culverts and other crossing structures.
- YES  NO e) State natural area.
- YES  NO f) Native American religious and cultural sites.
- YES  NO g) Archaeological sites.
- YES  NO h) Historic properties and areas.
- YES  NO i) Several related projects that individually may be subject to categorical exclusion but that may occur at the same time or in the same geographic area. Such related actions may be subject to environmental review even if they are not individually subject to review.
- YES  NO j) Violations of any applicable state or federal laws or regulations.

The project listed above meets the definition of the indicated categorical exclusion, including specified conditions and extraordinary circumstances, as provided in the Forest Management Rules (ARM 36.11.447).

Prepared by: Dale Peters \_\_\_\_\_ 10/17/17  
(Name) (Date)

Decision by: David Olsen \_\_\_\_\_ Program Manager  
(Name) (Title)

*David Olsen* \_\_\_\_\_ 10/18/2017  
(Signature) (Date)

# MEMORANDUM

To: Dale Peters

From: David Olsen, Plains Unit Manager, MT DNRC

Subject: Burnt Prairie Fire Salvage

Date: September 30, 2017

## **Primary Objective:**

The primary objective of salvage operations is to effectively recover value of timber killed, damaged, or otherwise injured by the McCully Fire. Loss to the associated trusts is to be minimized. Administrative rules as applicable to salvage operations shall be applied to this project.

## **Secondary Objective:**

The secondary objective for this project is to promote timber regeneration and vegetative recovery on Trust Lands. Measures to promote natural regeneration as well as tree planting will be addressed in prescriptions for this project.

# **ATTACHMENT I**

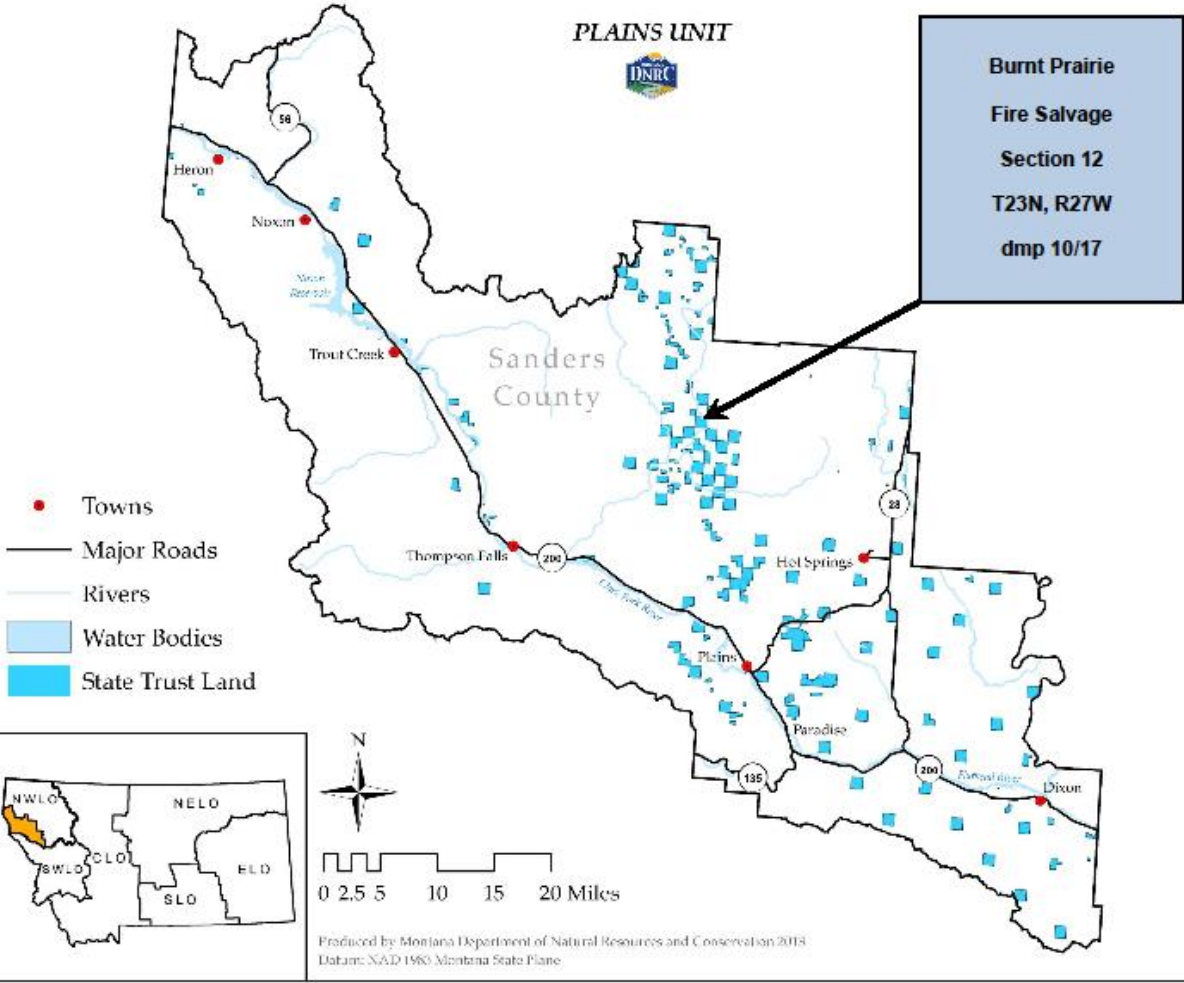
**Vicinity Map**

**Harvest Units**

PLAINS UNIT



Burnt Prairie  
Fire Salvage  
Section 12  
T23N, R27W  
dmp 10/17



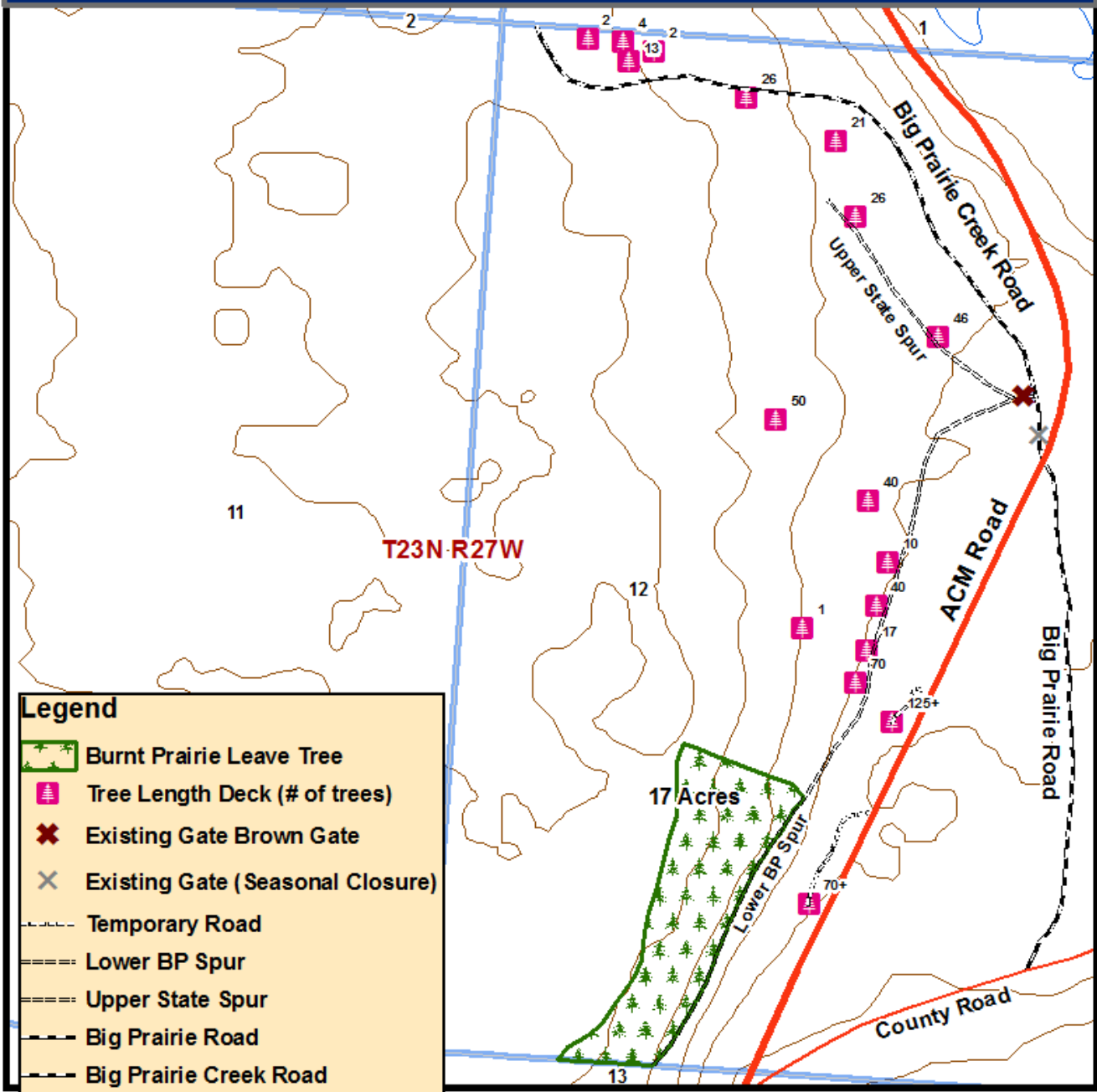
- Towns
- Major Roads
- Rivers
- Water Bodies
- State Trust Land



0 2.5 5 10 15 20 Miles

Produced by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation 2013  
Datum: NAD 1983 Montana State Plane

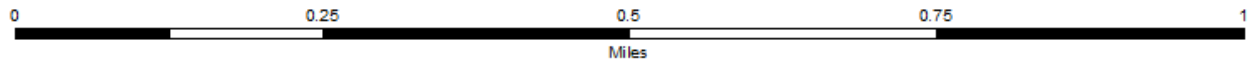
# Burnt Prairie Fire Salvage Proposed Harvest Plan Section 12, T23N, R27W



**Legend**

- Burnt Prairie Leave Tree
- Tree Length Deck (# of trees)
- Existing Gate Brown Gate
- Existing Gate (Seasonal Closure)
- Temporary Road
- Lower BP Spur
- Upper State Spur
- Big Prairie Road
- Big Prairie Creek Road
- County Road
- ACM Road
- Ownership Trust Lands

Montana DNRC  
Trust Land Management Division  
Northwestern Land Office  
Plains Unit  
dmp 10/17



# **ATTACHMENT II**

## **RESOURCE ANALYSIS**

### **WILDLIFE ANALYSIS**

### **SOILS & HYDROLOGY ANALYSIS**

# Memorandum

**To:** Dale Peters  
**Cc:** Marc Vessar  
**From:** Leah Breidinger, Wildlife Biologist  
**Date:** October 11, 2017  
**Re:** Burnt Prairie Salvage -wildlife comments

I reviewed the Burnt Prairie Salvage, which would occur in T23N, R23W, Section 12. The area burned in the approximately 607-acre McCully Fire in the summer of 2017. The proposed salvage would remove approximately 200 MBF of decked trees cut to create a fuel break during firefighting operations and standing dead trees burned in a 17-acre portion of the wildfire. The proposed salvage harvest would retain at least 4 snags/trees  $\geq 21$  inches diameter per acre, any green trees, and all sub-merchantable trees to the extent possible. The timber sale contract would be for a brief period in the winter of 2017/2018, with motorized activities prohibited from April 15- July 1 to protect black-backed woodpeckers during the nesting period.

The attached table summarizes the anticipated effects of the proposed activities on each Threatened or Endangered species, sensitive species, or big game species.

SPECIES/HABITAT	DETERMINATION – BASIS
THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES	
Canada lynx ( <i>Felis lynx</i> ) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zones	Suitable Canada lynx habitat would not be affected by the proposed activities. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Canada lynx would be anticipated.
Grizzly bear ( <i>Ursus arctos</i> ) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	The Project Area is located outside of grizzly bear recovery zone and non-recovery occupied habitat ( <i>USFWS 1993, Wittinger 2002</i> ). Thus, no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be anticipated.
SENSITIVE SPECIES	
Bald eagles ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> ) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	Bald eagles nest on the Thompson River. However, the log decks and proposed cutting unit are located outside of primary use habitat associated with nests. Additionally, the Thompson River Road receives a high amount of traffic and nesting eagles are likely habituated to logging and hauling. Thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.



<p>Black-backed woodpeckers (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest</p>	<p>The Project Area was burned in the 607-acre McCully Fire in the summer of 2017. Approximately 267 acres (44% of available habitat) burned on state lands and these acres provide suitable black-backed woodpecker habitat. Most of the salvage volume would come from decked logs cut during firefighting operations; however, 17 acres of standing burned timber would also be logged. To provide habitat for black-backed woodpeckers a 122-acre area (46% of habitat available on DNRC lands) would be left uncut. The acres identified for retention contain high quality, large diameter trees for nesting, are representative of the burn, and located adjacent to additional burned timber stands on Weyerhaeuser lands. Additionally, the proposed activities would occur outside of the breeding season for a brief period and all sub-merchantable materials that do not pose a risk to human safety would be retained. Thus, minor adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be anticipated under the Action Alternative. No effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be anticipated under the No Action Alternative.</p>
<p>Coeur d'Alene salamanders (<i>Plethodon idahoensis</i>) Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams</p>	<p>No moist talus or streamside talus habitat occurs within the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Coeur d'Alene salamanders would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (<i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i>) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture</p>	<p>No suitable grassland communities occur within the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Columbian sharp-tailed grouse would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Common loons (<i>Gavia immer</i>) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation</p>	<p>No suitable lake habitat occurs within 500 feet of the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to common loons would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Fishers (<i>Martes pennanti</i>) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian</p>	<p>The proposed activities would not affect suitable fisher habitat. Thus, no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisher would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Flammulated owls (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest</p>	<p>The Project Area does not contain suitable flammulated owl forest types. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Gray wolves (<i>Canis lupus</i>) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities</p>	<p>Gray wolves may use the Project Area at any time. However, the proposed activities would not occur in areas likely to be used as denning or rendezvous sites and are not anticipated to have adverse effects on wolf prey. Thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to gray wolves would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Harlequin ducks (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates</p>	<p>No suitable high-gradient stream or river habitats occur near the Project Area. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to harlequin ducks would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Northern bog lemmings (<i>Synaptomys borealis</i>) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats</p>	<p>No suitable sphagnum bogs or fens occur within the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to northern bog lemmings would be anticipated.</p>

Peregrine falcons ( <i>Falco peregrinus</i> ) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	Suitable cliffs and rock outcrops were not observed near the Project Area and the proposed activities would occur outside of the breeding season. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated.
Pileated woodpeckers ( <i>Dryocopus pileatus</i> ) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	The proposed activities would not affect suitable pileated woodpecker habitat. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to pileated woodpeckers would be anticipated.
Townsend's big-eared bats ( <i>Plecotus townsendii</i> ) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	No suitable caves or mine tunnels are known to occur within the Project Area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Townsend's big-eared bats are anticipated.
Wolverine ( <i>Gulo gulo</i> ) Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal and coniferous forests that maintain deep persistent snow into late spring	The Project Area is located outside of areas that retain snow into late spring. Thus, not adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to wolverines would be anticipated.
<b>BIG GAME SPECES</b>	
Elk ( <i>Cervus canadensis</i> )	The proposed activities would occur in potential white-tailed deer and elk winter range habitat. However, the proposed harvest would remove dead trees that do not provide thermal cover for big game, thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game are anticipated.
Mule Deer ( <i>Odocoileus hemionus</i> )	
White-tailed Deer ( <i>Odocoileus virginianus</i> )	

**Conclusion:**

The potential for adverse effects to threatened and endangered wildlife species is low. None of the extraordinary circumstances listed under ARM 31.11.447(2) affecting wildlife resources would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion for this project.

**List of Mitigations**

- If a threatened or endangered species is encountered, consult a DNRC biologist immediately. Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors or wolf dens are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area contact a DNRC biologist.
- Prohibit contractors and purchasers conducting contract operations from carrying firearms while on duty as per ARM 36.11.444(2) and GB-PR2 (USFWS and DNRC 2010).
- Minimize mechanized activity within 0.25 miles of burned forested stands in the Project Area from April 15-July 1 to reduce disturbance to black-backed woodpeckers.
- Close any road or skid trails opened with proposed activities to reduce the potential for unauthorized motor vehicle use.
- Retain at least 2 snags and 2 snag recruits per acre >21 inches dbh or the next available size class, particularly favoring sound Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, or western larch for retention. If snags are cut for safety concerns, they must be left in the harvest unit. If snag recruits are unavailable due to the burn snags may be substituted. Retain a minimum of 10-15 tons/acre of coarse-woody debris.
- Retain sub-merchantable burned trees where soil, slope stability, and human safety concerns allow.

**Literature Cited**

USFWS. 1993. Grizzly bear recovery plan.  
 USFWS and DNRC. 2010. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volumes I and II. U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6, Denver, Colorado, and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Missoula, MT. September 2010.  
 Wittinger, W. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum. Report on file at Unpublished memorandum on file at USDA Forest Service, Region 1, Missoula, MT.

# Memorandum

**To:** Dale Peters, Project Leader  
**CC:** Leah Breidinger, Wildlife Biologist  
**From:** Marc Vessar, Forest Hydrologist  
**Date:** October 12, 2017

**Subject:** Burnt Prairie Fire Salvage

---

The proposed salvage harvest of fire-killed trees and trees removed for fireline construction would occur on the Plains Unit in section 12, T25N, R27W. The decked trees and approximately 17 acres would be harvested using conventional ground-based equipment. Approximately 200mbf would be removed from the project area. No streams have been identified near the proposed harvest unit. All work would be completed under frozen and/or snow-covered conditions.

According to ARM 36.11.447 (w), the project meets the criteria necessary to be nominated as a Categorically Excluded project. To ensure the soil, water and fisheries resources present in the project area do not preclude the CatEx designation; this document will assess the risk to existing resources including addressing the extraordinary circumstances listed in ARM 36.11.447 (a) (b) (c) (d) and (i).

Issue	Assessment	Meet Criteria for CatEx?
High erosion risk soils? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(a)	The inventoried soil types in the project area are listed as 13U7B, 14JD and 30U8B in the Plains Unit Soil Survey (Collins and Ottersberg 1985). Harvest is proposed on. Neither of these soils are considered highly erodible. Because no surface water is located near the harvest area, the risk of sediment delivery to a stream would be very low.	Yes
Federally listed threatened and endangered <i>aquatic</i> species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered <i>aquatic</i> species as designated by the USFWS? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(b)	This portion of the Thompson River has <u>not</u> been designated as Bull Trout Critical Habitat per the USFWS website. <a href="https://www.fws.gov/pacific/bulltrout/Habitat.cfm">https://www.fws.gov/pacific/bulltrout/Habitat.cfm</a>	Yes
Within a municipal watershed? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(c)	No.	Yes
SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes...? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(d)	No SMZ harvest is proposed.	Yes
Cumulative effects? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(i)	Due to the small scale of this project, the gentle terrain and the limited surface water resources in the parcel, the risk of additional cumulative impacts would be very low and likely immeasurable. Therefore, cumulative impacts would remain acceptable for this watershed.	Yes

**Conclusion:**

This project meets watershed, soils and fisheries criteria for a categorical exclusion because the potential for impacts to these resources would be very low.

**References:**

Collins, Jeff and Ottersberg, R. 1985. Plains Unit Soil Survey. Montana Department of State Lands. Missoula, MT.

**Recommended Mitigations:**

ARM 36.11.422 (2) and (2)(a) state that appropriate BMPs shall be determined during project design and incorporated into implementation. To ensure that the incorporated BMPs are implemented, the specific requirements would be incorporated into the DNRC Timber Sale Contract. As part of this alternative design, the following BMPs and recommendations are considered appropriate and, would be implemented during harvesting operations:

- 1) Limit equipment operations to periods when soils are relatively dry, (less than 20 percent oven-dry weight harvest units), frozen, or snow-covered to in order to minimize soil compaction and rutting, and maintain drainage features. Check soil moisture conditions prior to equipment start-up. In order to prevent soil resource impacts, logging activities would be restricted to periods when one or more of the following conditions occurs, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Forest Officer.
  - a. Soil-moisture content at 4-inch depth is less than 20% of oven-dry weight
  - b. Minimum frost depth of 3 inches
  - c. Minimum of 16 inches loose snow or 8 inches packed snow adequate to avoid soil displacement
- 2) On ground-based units, the logger and sale administrator would agree to a skidding plan prior to equipment operations. Skid-trail planning would identify which main trails to use and how many additional trails are needed. Trails that do not comply with BMPs (i.e. trails in draw bottoms) would not be used unless impacts can be adequately mitigated. Regardless of use, these trails may be closed with additional drainage installed, where needed, or grass-seeded to stabilize the site and control erosion. Additional requirements include:
  - a. Skid trails would be located at least 75 feet apart unless on snow.
  - b. Skid trails would have erosion control installed where needed as directed by the forest officer.
- 3) Tractor skidding should be limited to slopes of less than 40 percent. Based on site review, short, steep slopes may require a combination of mitigation measures, such as adverse skidding to a ridge or winchline, and skidding from more moderate slopes of less than 40 percent. Ground-based logging systems (tractor, skidders, and mechanical harvesters) would be limited to slopes less than 40% on ridges, convex slopes, and concave slopes when winter conditions exist; and less than 35% on concave slopes without winter conditions.
- 4) Keep skid trails to 20 percent or less of the harvest unit acreage. Provide for drainage in skid trails and roads concurrently with operations.
- 5) As much slash, long butts and cull material as feasible should be return skidded or left within the harvest unit. Slash should be returned at the landing to the unit and distributed evenly throughout the unit. Slash would be returned to the unit as it is created and worked onto the skid trails. Large amounts of slash shall not be allowed to accumulate at the landings before it is returned in the unit. Slash shall be scattered on skid trails as skidding progresses on each trail. Within the harvest units operations should retain 10-20 tons per acre of downed woody material larger than 3 inches diameter to be left scattered throughout the sale units. Material will be aligned predominately perpendicular to the slope. While sub-merchantable trees may be retained, all sub-merchantable trees felled, must be left predominately perpendicular to the slope to reduce surface runoff and erosion.
- 6) Install and maintain adequate road drainage to control erosion and comply with forestry Best Management Practices and maintain concurrent with hauling operations. To maintain drainage features and avoid rutting, the department would limit the season of road use to dry, frozen or adequately snow covered conditions.
- 7) Limit crossing of draws to a minimum spacing of 200 feet. Do NOT skid down draws.