

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Pine Park Timber Permit
Proposed Implementation Date: 2020-2021
Proponent: Missoula Unit, Southwest Land Office, Montana DNRC
County: Missoula

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Action:

The Missoula Unit of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is proposing the Pine Park Timber Permit. This project is located approximately 2.5 air miles east of Alberton, MT in Missoula County. (refer to vicinity & project maps in Attachment A) and includes the following sections:

Beneficiary	Legal Description	Total Acres	Treated Acres
Common Schools			
Public Buildings			
MSU 2 nd Grant			
MSU Morrill			
Eastern College-MSU/Western College-U of M			
Montana Tech			
University of Montana			
School for the Deaf and Blind	Section 6 T14N R22W	315	305
Pine Hills School			
Veterans Home			
Public Land Trust			
Acquired Land			

Objectives of the projects include:

- Remove trees that contain insects, disease, faded crowns, and/or poor form and vigor.
- Maintain forest productivity.
- Generate revenue for the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind.

Proposed activities include:

Action	Quantity
Proposed Harvest Activities	
Clearcut	
Seed Tree	
Shelterwood	
Selection	
Commercial Thinning	100
Salvage	
Sanitation	205
Total Treatment Acres	305
Proposed Forest Improvement Treatment	
Pre-commercial Thinning	
Planting	
Proposed Road Activities	
New permanent road construction	
New temporary road construction	
Road maintenance	1.5 miles
Road reconstruction	
Road abandoned	
Road reclaimed	
Other Activities	
Weed spraying	1.5 miles

Duration of Activities:	1.5 years-not continuous activity
Implementation Period:	2020-2021

The lands involved in this proposed project are held in trust by the State of Montana. (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11). The Board of Land Commissioners and the DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

The DNRC would manage lands involved in this project in accordance with:

- The State Forest Land Management Plan (DNRC 1996),
- Administrative Rules for Forest Management (ARM 36.11.401 through 471),
- all other applicable state and federal laws.

Project Development

SCOPING:

DNRC specialists were consulted, including: Andrea Stanley-Hydrologist, Soil Scientist, Garrett Schairer-Wildlife Biologist, & Patrick Rennie-Archeologist.

Scoping Notices were sent to 9 adjacent landowners and posted on the DNRC website in January of 2020.

Three responses were received (See attachment B for original letters and DNRC responses (if applicable)).

One letter indicated concerns about local elk herds, disagreed with current forest conditions as outlined in the scoping letter, didn't believe that creating openings and regeneration is necessary and wanted to know how post harvest fuels would be treated.

These issues and concerns are addressed in this EA.

A second letter outlined 7 specific concerns and was followed up with an email.

A response letter was sent 1/17/20 (See attachment B)

A telephone call and several emails were received from an adjacent landowner.

The Project Leader responded with follow up phone calls and emails (See attachment B)

Issues and concerns were incorporated into project planning and design and would be implemented in associated contracts.

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS

NEEDED: *(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

- **Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)-** DNRC is classified as a major open burner by DEQ and is issued a permit from DEQ to conduct burning activities on state lands managed by DNRC. As a major open-burning permit holder, DNRC agrees to comply with the limitations and conditions of the permit.
- **Montana/Idaho Airshed Group-** The DNRC is a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group which was formed to minimize or prevent smoke impacts while using fire to accomplish land management objectives and/or fuel hazard reduction (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). The Group determines the delineation of airsheds and impact zones throughout Idaho and Montana. Airsheds describe those geographical areas that have similar atmospheric conditions, while impact zones describe any area in Montana or Idaho that the Group deems smoke sensitive and/or having an existing air quality problem (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group 2006). As a member of the Airshed Group, DNRC agrees to burn only on days approved for good smoke dispersion as determined by the Smoke Management Unit.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action: The proposed commercial timber harvest would not occur. The stands would remain at overstocked levels with low production rates. The residual overstory stand would continue to decline and mortality rates would increase. Natural regeneration would only occur over time following disturbance caused by natural events such as fire or insect mortality. Increased mortality would cause fuel loads to continue to build.

Action Alternative (Provide a brief description of all proposed activities): DNRC would harvest predominately ponderosa pine (if Douglas-fir contains insects, disease, defect or declining growth and vigor it would be removed as well) overstory trees that contain one or more of the following: have been infested by insects, infected by disease, forked tops, crook, fading

crowns(including reduced crown ratio), sweep or bole damage. Timber would be harvested using ground-based methods. Unmerchantable portions of the butt ends of felled trees (longbutting) would be left in harvest units to retain large woody debris onsite. All western larch would be left and ponderosa pine would also be favored for leave trees. In addition to leave trees, post-harvest, the stand would contain 2 snags and 2 snag recruits per acre.

HARVEST PRESCRIPTIONS

A commercial thinning would take place on approximately 100 acres. This would occur in stands where tree diameters are similar in size and crowns are touching creating a closed canopy, which prohibits vegetation from growing freely on the forest floor. Trees would be selected for harvest based on the criteria outlined in the above paragraph.

A sanitation prescription would take place on approximately 205 acres of previously treated areas. These areas have a scattered overstory component and trees would be selected for harvest based on the criteria outlined in the paragraph above.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

Approximately 0.5 miles of existing road would be reopened in order to access the harvest unit. Kelly humps would be removed and the road would be widened and rolling drain dips would be constructed. Following harvest, the road would be Kelly humped. Road maintenance would take place on approximately 1.5 miles of existing roads (including the .5 miles of reopened road), as needed, to improve drainage and function.

Following harvest, weed spraying would occur on DNRC controlled roads.

An illegal jeep trail was identified during field reconnaissance. It would be blocked with slash during harvest operations to stop illegal traffic and to reduce erosion. If any additional illegal motorized use is discovered, additional Kelly humps/barriers would be constructed to block illegal access.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts of the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

VEGETATION:

Vegetation Existing Conditions:

There are two distinct stand types present within the project area.

The first is a single story, single species stand of ponderosa pine. Diameter breast height (DBH) range is 6-12" with a closed canopy condition persisting uniformly across the stand. Bole spacing is 4-10' with little to no vegetation growing on the forest floor. This could be due in part to very little sunlight reaching the ground, as well as years of accumulated needle cast. No regeneration is present and tree leader growth indicates that overall growth has begun to slow down. Faded crowns (in color and/or crown ratio) can be found in individual trees throughout the stand. Old, rotted, small stumps indicate portions of the stand have been pre-commercially

thinned. Mountain Pine Beetle evidence can be found in individual trees across the stand. This includes current and past beetle activity.

The second stand is also dominated by ponderosa pine, however Douglas-fir is represented in approximately 20-30% of the stand. The topography is broken with intermittent cliffs and swales and the result is less overall density than the first stand. Trees are present in groups and are more scattered across the hillside. Thick pockets of sub-merchantable ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir can be found existing under the dripline of mature overstory trees. This area was harvested before, leaving a residual stand of good quality overstory trees mixed among trees with forked tops, crook and sweep. Average diameter is 6-24"+ dbh and spacing varies from clumps of 5-10 trees with an average spacing of 4-6 feet to single trees 40' apart. Similar to the first stand, Mountain Pine Beetle can be found in this stand as well. During field reconnaissance, beetle impacted trees were found on both ends of the unit. This activity was limited to single trees.

There is no Old Growth in the treatment area.

Knapweed, Houndstongue, Mullein and Sulphur Cinquefoil can be found in the area, especially along areas of past disturbance.

No rare plants were identified during field reconnaissance or within the Montana Natural Heritage Program dataset.

Vegetation	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Noxious Weeds		X				X				X				
Rare Plants	X				X				X					
Vegetative community		X				X				X				2
Old Growth	X				X				X					
Action														
Noxious Weeds		X				X				X			y	1
Rare Plants	x				x				X					
Vegetative community	x				x				X					
Old Growth	x				x				X					

Comments:

- Existing weeds are present along existing roads. Increased activity in the project area, as well as a more open canopy, could lead to an increased risk of noxious weeds.
- Competition among conifers would be reduced, allowing the remaining stands to capture more water, sunlight and nutrients, thereby having a positive direct, secondary and cumulative impact.

Vegetation Mitigations:

- DNRC systematically completes roadside spraying on its ownership, yet noxious weeds continue to occur, spread by disturbance, equipment operations, animals and wind. DNRC controlled roads (Roads behind the gate) would be sprayed post harvest.

- Equipment would be washed prior to harvest activities.
- Temporary roads would be grass seeded following reclamation in order to limit noxious weed spread.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions:

The project is located on the southern flank of the Ninemile Divide range. Underlying geology is the Garnet Range Formation (Belt sedimentary formation), composed of argillite and quartzite beds tilted shallow to the north. Slopes within the proposed harvest areas are 45% or less and soils are gravelly sandy loams to silt loams with occurrences of an ashy layer.

Seven 100-foot transects (completed in March 2020) in the project area averaged 2.7 tons/acres of coarse woody debris (CWD).

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	X				X				X					
Erosion	X				X				X					
Nutrient Cycling	X				X				X					
Slope Stability	X				X				X					
Soil Productivity	X				X				X					
Action														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)		X				X				X			Y	1, 2, 3
Erosion		X				X				X			Y	1, 2, 3
Nutrient Cycling		X				X				X			Y	1, 2, 3, 4
Slope Stability	X				X				X					
Soil Productivity		X				X				X			Y	1, 2, 3, 4

Comments:

1. Direct impacts by physical disturbance would likely occur when using ground-based yarding. All direct impacts are expected to be less than 12.2% and would be minimized through the use of existing skid trails.
2. Equipment would be operated on slopes less than or equal to 45%.

3. Applicable state plans, rules, and practices have guided project planning and would be implemented during project activities, including the Montana Code Annotated (specifically Title 77, Chapter 5), the Administrative Rules of Montana (specifically Rule Chapter 36.11), the Montana Forest Best Management Practices, and the State Forest Land Management Plan.
4. According to Graham et al. (1994), a minimum of 4.5 tons/acre of CWD would be a desired post-harvest condition to maintain forest productivity for this forest habitat type.

Soil Mitigations:

- Operation of ground-based equipment would be limited to dry, frozen, or snow-covered conditions.
- Where harvest occurs, augment existing CWD concentrations to achieve a minimum average distribution of 4.5 tons/acre of CWD for nutrient cycling.

Soil References:

Graham, R.T., Harvey, A.E., Jorgensen, M.F., Jain, T.B., and Page-Dumrose, D.S., 1994, Managing Course Woody Debris in Forests of the Rocky Mountains. U.S., Forest Service Research Paper INT-RP-477. Intermountain Research Station. 16p.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions: The project is located in the Clark Fork River watershed, north of the Clark Fork River and east of Kirchey Creek. Harvest boundaries would be located no less than 500 feet from streams and rivers. An isolated pond and adjacent wetland are located in the northwestern portion of the project area.

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Water Quality	X				X				X					
Water Quantity	X				X				X					
Action														
Water Quality	X					X				X			Y	1, 2
Water Quantity	X					X				X			Y	1

Comments:

1. No foreseeable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisheries resources are anticipated under the Action or No Action Alternative due to the scale of the proposed project activities and the distance of the project area to fisheries. The factors considered in making this conclusion are listed below:
 - Waterbodies are not located within or adjacent to the project area.
 - The harvest area is approximately 305 acres and the Clark Fork watershed area upstream of the project area is approximately 8,000 square miles.

2. Applicable state plans, rules, and practices have guided project planning and would be implemented during project activities, including the Montana Code Annotated (specifically Title 77, Chapter 5), the Administrative Rules of Montana (specifically Rule Chapter 36.11), the Montana Forest Best Management Practices, and the State Forest Land Management Plan.

Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations:

No project-specific mitigations are necessary. The existing low risk of secondary and cumulative effects would be further reduced by the implementation of applicable state plans, rules, and practices as listed above.

FISHERIES:

No foreseeable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisheries resources are anticipated the Action or No Action Alternative due to the distance and scale of the proposed project activities. The factors considered in making this conclusion are listed below:

- Fishbearing waterbodies are not located within or adjacent to the project area.
- The project is located in the Clark Fork watershed which does support fish. However, project harvest areas, forest haul roads, and road reconstruction would be located greater than 500 feet from the river.
- The harvest area is approximately 305 acres and the Clark Fork watershed area upstream of the project area is approximately 8,000 square miles.

No further analysis or mitigation is necessary for fisheries resources for this project.

WILDLIFE:

Existing Conditions: The project area contains a variety of ponderosa pine stands. Grizzly bears have been documented in the vicinity of the project area in the past; the project area is outside of the grizzly bear recovery zone and the 'non-recovery occupied habitat' as mapped by grizzly bear researchers and managers to address increased sightings and encounters of grizzly bears in habitats outside of recovery zones. Potential habitat exists for flammulated owls and pileated woodpeckers in the project area. White-tailed deer (326 acres; 100%), mule deer (17 acres; 5%), and elk (155 acres; 48%) winter range exists in the project area; considerable summer use by deer and elk likely occurs. The project area is in the Petty Creek bighorn sheep herd area and use is likely. No big game security habitat exists solely in the project area, but portions of the project area may contribute to a larger block of big game security habitat in the vicinity.

No-Action: Existing stands would continue to mature in a moderately dense condition; stand growth and maturation would continue at relatively slow speeds. No further potential for disturbance to any wildlife species would be anticipated. Continued wildlife use at levels similar to present conditions would be anticipated.

Action Alternative (see Wildlife table below):

Wildlife	Impact								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Threatened and Endangered Species										
Grizzly bear <i>(Ursus arctos)</i> Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity		X				X			Y	1
Canada lynx <i>(Felix lynx)</i> Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zone	X				X					2
Yellow-Billed Cuckoo <i>(Coccyzus americanus)</i> Habitat: Deciduous forest stands of 25 acres or more with dense understories and in Montana these areas are generally found in large river bottoms	X				X					2
Sensitive Species										
Bald eagle <i>(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water		X				X			Y	3
Black-backed woodpecker <i>(Picoides arcticus)</i> Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	X				X					2
Coeur d'Alene salamander <i>(Plethodon idahoensis)</i> Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus	X				X					2

Wildlife	Impact								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
near cascading streams										
Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (<i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i>) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture	X				X					2
Common loon (<i>Gavia immer</i>) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	X				X					2
Fisher (<i>Martes pennanti</i>) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	X				X					2
Flammulated owl (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest		X				X			Y	4
Gray Wolf (<i>Canis lupus</i>) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities	X				X					2
Harlequin duck (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	X				X					2
Northern bog lemming (<i>Synaptomys borealis</i>) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs,	X				X					2

Wildlife	Impact								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
fens with thick moss mats										
Mountain plover (<i>Charadrius montanus</i>) Habitat: short-grass prairie & prairie dog towns	X				X					2
Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	X				X					2
Pileated woodpecker (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest		X				X				5
Townsend's big-eared bat (<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	X				X					2
Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo</i>)	X				X					2
Big Game Species										
Elk		X				X			Y	6
Whitetail		X				X			Y	6
Mule Deer		X				X			Y	6
Bighorn Sheep		X				X			Y	6
Other										

Comments:

1. The project area is outside of the grizzly bear recovery zone and the 'non-recovery occupied habitat' as mapped by grizzly bear researchers and managers to address increased sightings and encounters of grizzly bears in habitats outside of recovery zones. Occasional use by grizzly bears could occur as bears continue moving out of the recovery zone to the northeast of the project area and grizzly bears have been documented in the vicinity in the past. Activities would occur during the non-denning period, thus disturbance to grizzly bears could occur. Negligible changes to grizzly bear habitats would occur. No changes to open

road densities, security habitats, or human-related food, garbage, or other unnatural grizzly bear attractants would occur.

2. The project area is either out of the range of the normal distribution for this species or suitable habitat is not present. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated.
3. The project area is within the home ranges associated with the Ninemile and Alberton bald eagle territories. Both nest sites are more than 1.5 miles from the proposed activities and partially screened by topography from the proposed units. These territories experience considerable levels of human disturbance associated with Highway 90, the railroad, human residences, agricultural operations, timber management, and various forms of summer and winter recreation. Proposed activities could occur during the nesting season (February 1 – August 15), or the non-nesting (August 16-February 1) season. Negligible levels of disturbance to bald eagles could occur should any activities be conducted during the nesting period. Conversely, should activities be conducted during the non-nesting period, no disturbance to bald eagles would be anticipated. Negligible reductions in the availability of large snags or emergent trees that could be used as nest or perch trees could occur in the home range.
4. Roughly 305 acres of flammulated owl habitats would be treated, which would further open the canopy while favoring ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. The more open stand conditions, the retention of fire adapted tree species, and the maintenance of snags would move the proposed project area toward historical conditions, which is preferred flammulated owl habitat. Proposed activities could occur during the flammulated owl nesting season, which could introduce some disturbance of nesting owls, but proposed activities would not affect nesting structures.
5. Roughly 22 acres of low quality and discontinuous pileated woodpecker nesting habitat exists in the project area; another 297 acres of potential foraging habitats exist in the project area. Disturbance to pileated woodpeckers could occur if proposed activities occur during the nesting period. Proposed activities would reduce forested habitats for pileated woodpeckers in the project area. Roughly 22 acres of potential nesting habitats and 297 acres of foraging habitats would be opened up with proposed treatments. Some potential continued use as foraging habitats would be possible depending on density of trees retained. Elements of the forest structure important for nesting pileated woodpeckers, including snags, coarse woody debris, numerous leave trees, and snag recruits would be retained in the proposed harvest areas. Since pileated woodpecker density is positively correlated with the amount of dead and/or dying wood in a stand (McClelland 1979), pileated woodpecker densities in the project area would be expected to be reduced on 305 acres.
6. Elk and deer likely use the project area much of the non-winter period; some use by bighorn sheep would also be anticipated given the location in the Petty Creek herd area. Approximately 305 acres of white-tailed deer winter range, 17 acres of mule deer winter

range, and 155 acres of elk winter range exists in the proposed units. Moderate reductions to the thermal cover attributes in these stands would be anticipated with the proposed activities. No changes to existing open roads and efforts to reinforce areas where illegal motorized access may be occurring could reduce potential disturbance to big game in the area. Negligible reductions in visual screening associated with the proposed harvesting could reduce hiding cover on portions of the project area close to open roads. Thus, negligible reductions in overall quality of big game security habitats would be anticipated.

Wildlife Mitigations:

- A DNRC biologist will be consulted if a threatened or endangered species is encountered to determine if additional mitigations that are consistent with the administrative rules for managing threatened and endangered species (ARM 36.11.428 through 36.11.435) are needed.
- Motorized public access would be restricted at all times on restricted roads that are opened for proposed activities.
- Contractors and purchasers conducting contract operations would be prohibited from carrying firearms while on duty.
- Food, garbage, and other attractants would be stored in a bear-resistant manner.

Wildlife References:

McClelland, B.R. 1979. The pileated woodpecker in forests of the Northern Rocky Mountains. Pages 283-299 in Role of insectivorous birds in forest ecosystems. Academic Press.

AIR QUALITY:

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Smoke	X				x				X					
Dust	x				X				X					
Action														
Smoke	X				X				x				y	1
Dust		X			x				X				y	2

Comments:

1. Under the Action Alternative, slash piles consisting of tree limbs and tops and other vegetative debris would be created throughout the project area during harvesting.
2. Dust may be produced along the haul route if wood is hauled during summer months.

Air Quality Mitigations:

- Slash piles would be burned after harvesting operations have been completed. Burning within the project area would be short in duration and would be conducted when conditions favored good to excellent ventilation and smoke dispersion as determined by

the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group.

- The DNRC, as a member of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group, would burn only on approved days.
- Because of the small project area, hauling would be short in duration.
- The Forest Officer may impose speed restrictions to limit dust along the haul route behind the gate as needed.

Will the No-Action or Action Alternatives result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				x					
Aesthetics		X			X				X					
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	X				x				X					
Action														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				X					1
Aesthetics		X			X					X				2
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	X				X				X					

1. A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, but it should be noted that Class III level inventory work has not been conducted there to date.

Because the topographic setting and geology suggest a low to moderate likelihood of the presence of cultural or paleontologic resources, proposed timber harvest activities are expected to have *No Effect to Antiquities*. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

2. Stands would appear more open than what currently exists. Scattered slash would be present.

Mitigations:

- If previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.
- Scattered slash will usually settle after 1-2 years of snowload. As the slash settles and decomposes it becomes less noticeable. Trees would be whole tree skid so residual slash would be limited to limbs and tops that break off during harvest operations. The majority of the slash would be burned.

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.*

Impacts on the Human Population

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Human Population.

Will the No-Action or Action Alternatives result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
No-Action														
Health and Human Safety	x				x				x					
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	x				x				x					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	x				x				x					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	x				x				x					
Demand for Government Services	x				x				x					
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	x				x				x					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	x				x				x					
Social Structures and Mores	x				x				x					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	x				x				x					

Will the No-Action or Action Alternatives result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number	
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative						
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High			
Action															
Health and Human Safety	X					X				X				N/A	1
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	X				X					X					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment		X			X					X				N/A	2
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	X				X					X					
Demand for Government Services	X				X					X					
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X				X					X					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X				X					X					
Social Structures and Mores	X				X					X					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X					X					

1. How much noise will be generated? What are the hours of operation? What types of noise and noise levels will be generated?
 - Hours of operation would vary depending on the season. Generally, operations don't occur on weekends or evenings. That said, if fire restrictions or other weather-related events occur, purchasers may work weekends to meet production timelines. There will be no hour of operation restrictions in the contract.
 - Although noise from harvesting is audible, given the proximity to the Interstate, the railroad tracks and the frontage road, noise from harvest operations would be additive and would not create the only vehicle generated noise in the area. Harvest operations produce distinct sounds, and these will be noticeable if attempts are made to find the source of the sound. For these reasons noise generated from the project area would have a low impact for short durations to health and human safety
2. The proposed projects size is of a scale that would not have a large effect on local employment; however, each unit may provide a private contractor(s) with 1 month-1 year of employment for his/herself and his/her employees.

Mitigations:

- Traffic associated with the proposed projects would be expected to follow all traffic laws and speed limits.
- Signs would be posted indicating harvest activities are taking place to warn people of log hauling and harvest.

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.*

None

Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances:

No Action: The No Action Alternative would generate no cost to the trust at this time, existing forest conditions would persist.

Action:

Commercial harvest would generate approximately \$14,500 for the School of the Deaf and Blind Trust. An additional Forest Improvement Fee would be charged on a per ton basis for all sawlog loads.

References

DNRC 1996. State forest land management plan: final environmental impact statement (and appendixes). Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Forest Management Bureau, Missoula, Montana.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

NO

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

NO

Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:

Name: Amy Helena

Title: Forest Management Supervisor

Date: 4/2/20

Finding

Alternative Selected

The Action Alternative

Significance of Potential Impacts

- A. The Action Alternative meets the specific Objectives of the Proposed Action as described on page 1 of the EA. The Action Alternative is likely to produce an economic return to the Common Schools Trust in the long run, while providing a mechanism whereby the existing timber stands would be moved towards conditions more like those which existed historically.
- B. The analysis of identified issues did not disclose any reason compelling the DNRC to not implement this pre-commercial thinning project.
- C. The Action Alternative includes mitigation activities to address environmental concerns identified during the project analysis.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

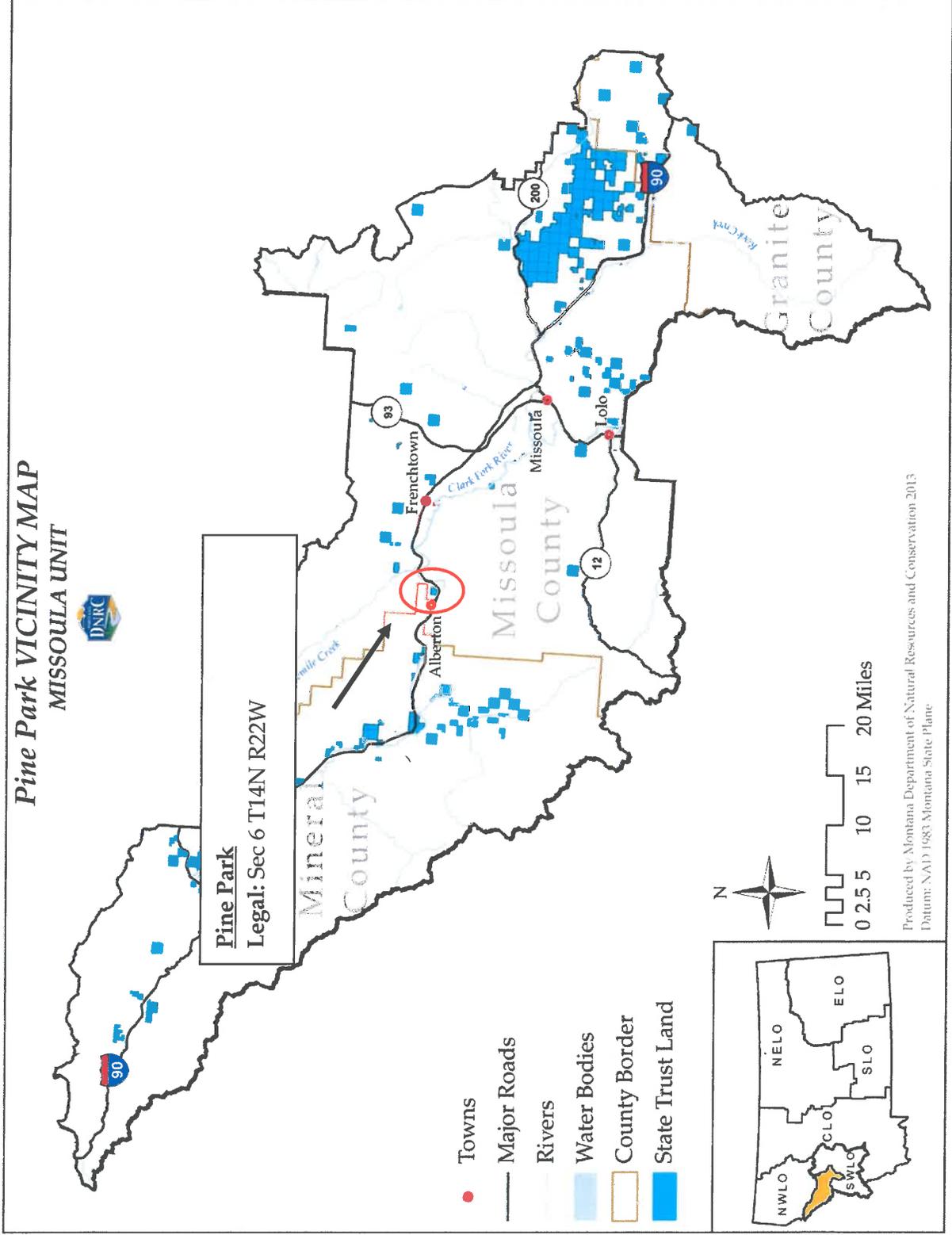
Name: Jonathan Hansen

Title: Missoula Unit Manager

Date: April 7, 2020

Signature: /s/ *Jonathan Hansen*

Attachment A- Maps





**Pine Park Timber Permit
Section 6 T14N R22W
Missoula Unit**



Legend

- Roads
- ▨ Pine Park Project Area
- Streams



A. Helena
1/22/20

Attachment B- Scoping comments

February 6, 2020

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Attention: Amy Helena
Missoula Unit
3206 Maverick Lane
Missoula, MT 59804

Dear Amy,

Thank you for the notification letter for the Initial Proposal Pine Park Timber Permit 1/27/2020, (Section 6 T14N R22W). This parcel of land adjoins with property that my husband and I own, GEO CODE: 04-2323-06-1-01-08-0000, 04-2323-06-1-01-07-0000, on which we also have a house where we live part time throughout the year.

Because of the proximity of this work to our property, I have listed my questions and concerns below.

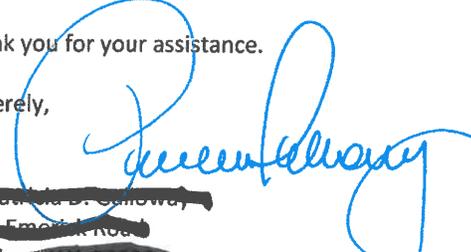
1. When is the project expected/scheduled to begin? What is the expected duration of the project? Would you confirm that the work will not be done during fire season?
2. Who will be undertaking the thinning and the spraying? Will it be state resources or a third-party contractor performing the work? If the later, has the company/persons been selected or contracted?
3. Will you be spraying or performing any type of treatment besides logging and, if so, can my property be included?
4. Is this project a routine thinning or is there a noticeable insect infestation in that area?
5. How much impact will the logging have to the area? Are you planning on burning the slash?
6. Given the proximity to my property, will scarification from the equipment and/or road damage be fixed?
7. If there will be a road grader or other equipment used, those of us on Rosco Road would appreciate being able to contact them to assist in repairing our road up the mountain. Could this information be made available to us? Please advise.

In closing, the letter mentions, "if unauthorized access occurs within the project area, roads and access points would be kelly-humped and made impassable." Even though we have orange and No Trespassing posted on our boundaries, unauthorized access is already happening, without the roads being improved so it is not a question of if. I would request that making the roads impassable after the work is finished, be part of the plan from the inception, if not, this will seriously impact the security relative to access to our property.

I look forward to an ongoing conversation concerning this project.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,



~~Mr. Patrick D. Conway~~
~~3206 Maverick Lane~~
~~Missoula, MT 59804~~
~~509-857-2000~~
~~Missoula, MT 59804~~

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION

Southwestern Land Office - Missoula Unit



STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

STATE OF MONTANA

PHONE: (406) 542-4201
FAX: (406) 542-5807

3206 MAVERICK LANE
MISSOULA, MT 59804

1/17/2020

Dr. Patricia Galloway

1750 Emerick Road
Ste Elum, WA 98922

Dr. Patricia Galloway,

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) received the letter regarding your concerns about the Pine Park proposal. I will write out each of your questions in **bold** and respond in *italics* to ensure I adequately address each one.

“When is the project expected/scheduled to begin?”

If the Action Alternative is selected, the project could begin as early as this spring (as soil conditions allow). That said, current pulp and ponderosa pine markets are limited. This proposal would include both of those products. An appraisal would be used to estimate the value of the products. If the appraised value is higher than what the purchaser can afford, it may not be sold until later. If the contract is sold this spring, the contractor would have 3 years to complete the work.

“What is the expected duration of the project?”

The duration of the project will be 3-5 years from the scoping period-slash mitigation and weed spraying would occur following harvest activities.

“Would you confirm that work would not be done during fire season?”

There is no set “fire season” in Montana. Each year varies because of many factors. There would not be any operating restrictions in place for a set “fire season” date range. However, if there are fire restrictions in effect due to increased fire danger/activity, we would follow those restrictions. In addition, our contracts include the Montana Forest Fire Regulations and following those regulations is a condition of our contracts.

“Who will be undertaking the thinning and spraying? Will it be state resources or a third-party contractor performing the work? If the later, has the company/persons been selected or contracted?”

If the Action Alternative is selected, timber harvest would be conducted by a purchaser using the 612 process. In January, DNRC was approached by a potential purchaser who noticed that the ponderosa pine in the stands were experiencing varying levels of insect infestations, as well as showing signs of limited growth. Field verification by DNRC staff confirmed this was in fact true

and that the stands are in need of treatment. If the Action Alternative were selected (and following an appraisal an agreement on price can be made) the contractor that identified the project would be awarded the contract. Weed spraying would take place following harvest activities. The purchaser would be responsible for weed spraying and they must use a licensed applicator and provide DNRC with application rates and a detailed report of environmental conditions (temperature, wind, etc.) the day application occurred. If the timber sale were not to sell, weed spraying would be conducted as unit budgets and priorities allow. If budgets and priorities did allow, application would be bid out or handled by DNRC licensed applicators. No agreements or contracts will be implemented until the Environmental Analysis (also known as a MEPA document) is complete.

“Will you be spraying or performing any type of treatment besides logging and, if so, can my property be included?”

If the Action Alternative is selected, this MEPA document would cover commercial harvest, road maintenance (as needed to harvest timber) and weed spraying. This MEPA analysis only covers activities on Trust Lands. As a land manager for DNRC Trust Lands, I do not manage private property. The proposed projects and their direct effects analysis are limited to DNRC owned parcels identified during the Pine Park Scoping letter. If you are interested in thinning or harvesting your property, DNRC has Private Assistance Foresters that can help you get started. If you would like more information on Private Assistance Forestry contact Bill Burdick at (406) 542-4313.

“Is this project a routine thinning or is there a noticeable insect infestation in that area?”

As mentioned earlier in this letter, this project was identified by a purchaser and then field verified by DNRC staff. There are small scattered pockets of insect activity present throughout the stand. This includes areas that have died and fallen over as well as more recent activity. I would not say that this area is experiencing mass insect infestations. However, some of the stands within the proposed project area are overstocked. Overstocked stands compete for limited nutrients and water, the result is trees showing signs of limited growth (annual leader growth is limited, thinning crowns, limited diameter growth). If these conditions persist, it is more likely that insects or disease will have greater impacts in the stand because it isn't able to fend off these attacks like a healthy stand could.

“How much impact will logging have to the area?”

Impacts will be identified and measured in the Pine Park Environmental Assessment. The ID Team for the project will measure impacts to their specific resource and a Decision Maker will select an Alternative and outline how that alternative was selected in the finding. Upon completion of the EA, I will email you a copy.

“Are you planning on burning the slash?”

Yes, slash will be piled and burned. DNRC-Missoula Unit generally burns in the fall. The decision when to burn is based on environmental factors in conjunction with the approval of the smoke management system.

“Given the proximity to my property, will scarification from equipment and/or road damage be fixed?”

Limited amounts of scarification are desired in those portions of the stand that have large pine. Scarification removes grass competition and provides a seed bed for ponderosa pine seedlings. Rutting and other long-term soil damage is not desirable and would be minimized based on mitigations in the contract that limit activity to dry or frozen conditions. Soil impacts and mitigations will be included in the EA. Other than County roads used for hauling, only roads within the DNRC section would be used for this project. Hauling would not take place when conditions are susceptible to rutting and following harvest, roads would be repaired to the standard in which they were found.

“If there will be a road grader or other equipment used, those of us on Rosco Road would appreciate being able to contact them to assist in repairing our road up the mountain. Could this information be made available to us? Please advise.”

Yes. I will pass along the purchaser information if the Action Alternative is selected and a contract is assigned.

Illegal motorized use concerns.

Last fall we had a contractor place trenches and Kelly humps in areas where vehicles were getting around existing gates and barriers. From what I can tell, I haven't seen where they have been able to get around our new barriers. This concern will be incorporated into project design. Road status would not change, any gates currently in place would be left that way. Kelly humps and any other barriers to prevent illegal motorized use would be maintained unless they are located on a road needed to access harvest units. If this were to occur, they would be replaced immediately following harvest. DNRC shares your concerns about illegal use and the resulting damage to resources. I would ask that if you notice that illegal use is still occurring on DNRC land, please notify me immediately.

Thank you for taking the time to comment on the Pine Park proposal. A copy of the Final EA will be emailed to you.

Sincerely,



Amy Helena
Forest Management Supervisor
Missoula Unit, Montana DNRC

Helena, Amy

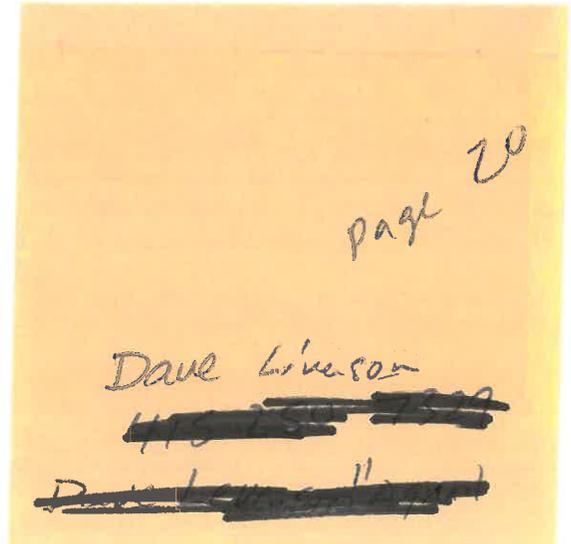
From: Helena, Amy
Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2020 9:54 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Pine Park Timber Permit

Mr. Levenson,

I received your message about the Pine Park timber permit. If the Action Alternative is selected timber harvest would be conducted by a purchaser using the 612 process. In January DNRC was approached by a purchaser who noticed the ponderosa pine in the stands were experiencing varying levels of insect infestations, as well as showing signs of limited growth. Field verification by DNRC staff confirmed this was in fact true and the stands are in need of treatment. If the Action Alternative were selected (and following an appraisal an agreement on price can be made) the contractor that identified the project would be awarded the contract. If you have any other questions feel free to email or call. Thanks.

Amy Helena
Forest Management Supervisor
Missoula Unit
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
(406) 542-5803
ahelena@mt.gov

- called twice
- concerned about noise
- wants his logger to log it



Helena, Amy

From: Helena, Amy
Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2020 9:54 AM
To: ~~David Levenson~~
Subject: Pine Park Timber Permit

Mr. Levenson,

I received your message about the Pine Park timber permit. If the Action Alternative is selected timber harvest would be conducted by a purchaser using the 612 process. In January DNRC was approached by a purchaser who noticed the ponderosa pine in the stands were experiencing varying levels of insect infestations, as well as showing signs of limited growth. Field verification by DNRC staff confirmed this was in fact true and the stands are in need of treatment. If the Action Alternative were selected (and following an appraisal an agreement on price can be made) the contractor that identified the project would be awarded the contract. If you have any other questions feel free to email or call. Thanks.

Amy Helena
Forest Management Supervisor
Missoula Unit
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
(406) 542-5803
ahelena@mt.gov

Amy Helena
Forest Management Supervisor
Missoula Unit
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
(406) 542-5803
ahelena@mt.gov

From: Dave Levenson <davelevenson11@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2020 10:44 AM
To: Helena, Amy <AHelena@mt.gov>; ~~Stacy Levenson <stacylevenson11@gmail.com>~~
Subject: [EXTERNAL] comments and suggestions on initial proposal Pine Park Timber permit

Dear Ms Helena,
As per your letter, here are my comments and suggestions.

1. I do not think it is appropriate for you to award this project without an open bidding process. You cite a state statute 77-5-222MCA, and that sounds like you are following state statutes, so why not an open bidding process?
2. I and my team would like to also bid and think it fair, and appropriate for us as the neighbor with interests next door, to have the opportunity. Thompson Ranch has been here for 125 years. Doesn't that give us some standing?.
3. Should anyone get the contract we would like there to be a buffer of at least 100 yards from our boundary with no work being done in that buffer.
4. We would like to have hours of operation negotiated so that the noise does not affect our camping business which we are in the process of developing right adjacent to this acreage.
5. We do not want roads improved up to our boundary as per your plans. again 100 yard buffer or more on that too.

Thank you for considering these comments and we do hope and expect to be able to bid.

--
Best,

Dave Levenson
~~Thompson Ranch~~
~~Stacy Levenson~~

Helena, Amy

From: Helena, Amy
Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2020 2:18 PM
To: ~~Mr. Levenson~~
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] comments and suggestions on initial proposal Pine Park Timber permit

Mr. Levenson,

My responses to your questions can be found below in **bold** and *italics*.

1. I do not think it is appropriate for you to award this project without an open bidding process. You cite a state statute 77-5-222MCA, and that sounds like you are following state statutes, so why not an open bidding process? ***This permit would be what we refer to as a 612 timber permit. The 612 timber permit process is not an open bid process. 612 permits fall under 77-5-212 of the MCA Commercial permits for timber sale. Here is a link to the MCA code:***

https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0770/chapter_0050/part_0020/section_0120/0770-0050-0020-0120.html

2. I and my team would like to also bid and think it fair, and appropriate for us as the neighbor with interests next door, to have the opportunity. Thompson Ranch has been here for 125 years. Doesn't that give us some standing?. ***A latter application in the same area would be denied because the timber is part of another proposal already being reviewed by the DNRC.***

3. Should anyone get the contract we would like there to be a buffer of at least 100 yards from our boundary with no work being done in that buffer. ***DNRC would manage to the section line in order to increase productivity on its lands. This management would follow all rules and regulations as they pertain to wildlife, soils and water.***

4. We would like to have hours of operation negotiated so that the noise does not affect our camping business which we are in the process of developing right adjacent to this acreage. ***Hours of operation would vary depending on the season. Generally operations don't occur on weekends or evenings. Although noise from harvesting is audible, given the proximity to the interstate, the railroad tracks and the frontage road, noise from harvest operations wouldn't be the only noise being produced in that area and would be short in duration.***

5. We do not want roads improved up to our boundary as per your plans. again 100 yard buffer or more on that too. ***DNRC follows the State Forest Land Management Plan(SFLMP and associated Administrative rules for Forest Management), The Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and State Best Management Practices. These rules and regulations govern the improvements we make to road systems. If roads within the section do not meet standards they will be improved to mitigate any potential impacts to soil and water quality. Current road closures will remain the standard post harvest. Kelly humps and other barriers that may need to be removed during harvest operations would be replaced to minimize illegal motorized use. If any other illegal motorized use is found during operations additional barriers would be constructed.***

Thank you for your comments.

Helena, Amy

From: Helena, Amy
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 1:08 PM
To: 'Dave Levenson'
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL]

Mr. Levenson

The name of the contractor that submitted the application is Ottman Forestry Consultants.

The proposed prescription will include thinning to the section line to increase productivity in the stand and help minimize potential insect activities. Ottman Forestry Consultants would be doing the work, but the decision on where and what type of harvest occurs rests with the DNRC.

Thanks,

Amy Helena
Forest Management Supervisor
Missoula Unit
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
(406) 542-5803
ahelena@mt.gov

From: Dave Levenson <davelevenson11@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 9:46 AM
To: Helena, Amy <AHelena@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Amy,

Can I get the name and number of the bidder. I'm hoping I can get information on his timing and maybe pay him for some bufferzone

--

Best,

Dave Levenson

~~George Sater~~

~~Al~~

From: Dave Levenson <dlevenson11@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 9:46 AM
To: Helena, Amy <AHelena@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Amy,

Can I get the name and number of the bidder. I'm hoping I can get information on his timing and maybe pay him for some bufferzone

--

Best,

Dave Levenson
Govt Services Montana

~~416-210-7229~~

Helena, Amy

From: Helena, Amy
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 2:17 PM
To: 'Dave Levenson'
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL]

Usually following the EA we will know what restrictions (if any) there will be. Once we know what those are we can figure out operating seasons. Short answer is we won't know until the EA is finished. It varies quite a bit by location because of the different wildlife species present. That drives a lot of our seasonal restrictions. Another factor is rain/spring runoff. Regardless of location we shut down when soils are susceptible to excessive rutting. For example usually a couple weeks every spring we will be shut down and then if we get enough rain during the year that the soils are easily rutted we would shut down until they dry out.

Amy

From: Dave Levenson <dlevenson11@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 1:10 PM
To: Helena, Amy <AHelena@mt.gov>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL]

Thank you

How and when do you decide the timing?

Dave

On Feb 26, 2020, at 12:07 PM, Helena, Amy <AHelena@mt.gov> wrote:

Mr. Levenson

The name of the contractor that submitted the application is Ottman Forestry Consultants.

The proposed prescription will include thinning to the section line to increase productivity in the stand and help minimize potential insect activities. Ottman Forestry Consultants would be doing the work, but the decision on where and what type of harvest occurs rests with the DNRC.

Thanks,

Amy Helena

Forest Management Supervisor

Missoula Unit

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

(406) 542-5803

ahelena@mt.gov

2-8-2020

To the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

This letter is in response to the Initial proposal pine park timber permit letter we received recently For Section 6T14N R22W

We feel that the proposed harvest will result in a level of timber removal that will impact the local elk herd that inhabits the area. This area provides critical winter range for the herd. High levels of canopy removal may result in changes to use by the herd. This area, as well as the adjacent National Forest Lands also provide elk security, as well as security for other big game. Harvest activities will compromise the area and push the herd out of this high quality fall and winter habitat. We ask that consideration be given to the effects harvest will have on elk winter range quality as well as habitat security and the effects fully disclosed in the environmental assessment.

We ask that intermediate harvest be considered so as to retain sufficient thermal and hiding cover for the resident elk herd.

We do not feel that the scoped proposal accurately represented the conditions on the ground as we are very familiar with the area and there are few trees experiencing "insects, disease and faded crowns" that are mentioned. Maintaining forest health is important but can be attained with a moderate amount of timber removal. Harvests that result in large openings and regeneration are not necessary.

We also ask that the State treat all post-harvest fuels as our property lies immediately adjacent to the proposal. Harvest without subsequent slash treatments increase hazardous fuels and subsequent risk of wildfire. Please reference the hazardous fuels research done by Russ Graham and others. Please discuss in the environmental assessment how post-harvest slash will be treated to reduce the risk of hazardous fuels in the project area.

Sincerely

Andy and Ruthie Kulawinski 