

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Barnaby Lake Fuels Mitigation: Forests in Focus Grant Project
Proposed Implementation Date:	May 2015
Proponent:	DNRC Stillwater State Forest
Location:	Olney, MT
County:	Flathead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

MT DNRC, through the Forests in Focus Grant Project, is granting the DNRC Stillwater State Forest funds to conduct forest stewardship and forest fuels reduction work on MT State Trust Lands located within the Stillwater State Forest. The work to be funded would harvest approximately 95 MBF of sawlogs and 150 tons of biomass (pulp) from approximately 70 acres within T35N, R26W, Section 16. Funds from the Forests in Focus Project would allow the grantee to masticate understory material thereby improving the stand in a way that benefits and protects the adjoining private and federal landowners.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

The Montana DNRC conducted public scoping for the Forests in Focus Grant Project as a whole by soliciting comments at four public meetings, (held in Forsythe, Billings, Missoula, and Kalispell), and by publishing requests for comments in the legal advertisement sections of the following newspapers. The Miles City Star, the Billings Gazette, the Missoula Missoulian, and the Kalispell Daily Interlake. No comments on the project as a whole were received either written or at the meetings.

The Stillwater State Forest scoped this project proposal in Dec of 2014 and received no comments.

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

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action – Grant is awarded. The action alternative would treat 70 acres in two over-crowded stands of trees to promote overall stand health and reduce fire danger.

No Action – Grant is not awarded. No understory treatment would occur.

NOTE: This document was prepared using information developed for the Environmental analysis that was prepared by the Stillwater State Forest and Pete Evans, DNRC Forester. Please see the original document for additional information.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

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

The Project area is located on moderate to flat terrain on soils that are well suited for timber harvest. Two landtypes are present in the project area: landtypes 323 and 324 (USDA, 1995). Both landtypes are characterized with a silt loam surface layer over calcareous subsoil and both support vegetation indicative of a dry, mixed forest. Sediment delivery efficiency is low for the landtypes in the project area and soil erosion is generally moderate although there is a high erosion potential for skid trails and firelines located on this soil type.

No-Action Alternative - The No Action Alternative would be similar to existing conditions and have little effect on soil resources. There would be no ground disturbing impacts from timber harvest or fuels treatment operations and no additive direct, indirect or cumulative effects.

Action Alternative - Implementation of the Action alternative would harvest timber and treat forest fuel loads on approximately 70 acres. The analysis and levels of effects to soil resources are based on implementation of the following practices, rules and mitigation measures to minimize soil impacts.

- Harvest would implement all applicable Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP), SMZ requirements, and reasonable mitigation and erosion control practices during timber harvest and forest fuels treatments.

- Limit harvest equipment and hauling operations to periods when soils are relatively dry, (less than 20%), frozen or snow covered to minimize soil compaction and rutting, and maintain drainage features. Check soil moisture conditions prior to equipment start-up.

- Where practical target fine slash and large woody debris levels to retain 10-20 tons/acre well distributed on site while meeting the requirements of the slash law. Slash may be placed on main skid trails to protect soils and reduce erosion potential unauthorized ATV use as needed.

Based on implementation of BMP's and the planned mitigations and comparison to harvest monitoring of similar projects, there is moderate risk of direct impacts and low risk of in-direct or cumulative effects to soils.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

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

The No-Action Alternative would continue existing conditions for both short-term and cumulative effects and have little effect on water resources.

Action Alternative – There are no streams and/or wetlands within the harvest/treatment units. Based on implementation of BMP's is a very low to minimal risk of direct, in-direct or cumulative effects to water quality or quantity.

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.

A minor amount of particulate would be created when the slash piles are burned.

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.

Current species mix is predominately Douglas-fir with a smaller percentage of western larch, and the remainder of the trees in the stand Ponderosa pine and lodgepole pine. The stands are medium to well-stocked in the sawtimber-size class and multi-storied with multiple age classes. Stocking varies throughout stand due to past harvest operations. Regeneration from the mid-1980s harvest treatment is composed of pockets of Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine. Concentrations of regeneration occur where openings in the upper canopy exist and the tree diameters in the 1"-5" classes. These clumps tend to be distributed throughout the stands and are up to 0.5 acres in size.

There is no Old Growth in the project area.

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

No Action Alternative – No harvest. Current conditions would be maintained.

Action Alternative – The action alternative would thin the merchantable species, primarily Douglas-fir, leaving nearly all of the mature, large trees found on the site. The project would use a masticator to treat the understory and overcrowded sapling stands to reduce the heavy fuel loads and to open up the stands for recreational use. This type of treatment would retain characteristics which are indicative of historic and desired future conditions. No adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts are anticipated from implementation.

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.

No Action Alternative – No harvest. Current conditions would be maintained.

Action Alternative - Terrestrial Wildlife: The project area provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Deer and elk likely use the project area during much of the non-winter period; White-tailed deer, elk winter range exists in the project area. Under the action alternative Douglas-fir would be harvested and saplings thinned leading to more open areas in portions of the project area. This would alter habitats for wildlife species requiring mature forested conditions, while creating habitats for species needing more open stands. Additionally, habitats for species that utilize snags could be reduced. Thus, a low risk of adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to species requiring mature forested stands, big game, or snags would be anticipated with the proposed activities.

Aquatic life and fisheries: No streams are in or near the project area therefore no impacts are anticipated.

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.

No Action Alternative – No harvest. Current conditions would be maintained.

Action Alternative - Terrestrial Wildlife: Endangered species are present or may transit the project area. The following mitigations would be incorporated into the project:

- 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)*.
- Contractors will adhere to food storage and sanitation requirements as described in the timber sale contract. Ensure that all attractants such as food, garbage, and petroleum products are stored in a bear-resistant manner.
- Operations are prohibited from April 1 - June 15 to provide seasonal security for grizzly bears.
- Restrict public access at all times on restricted roads that are opened for harvesting activities; effectively close all legacy roads to the extent possible.
- Retain visual screening along roads where possible to increase security for wildlife.
- Retain at least 2 large snags and 2 large snag recruits (≥21 inches dbh) per acre, particularly favoring ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. If snags are cut for safety concerns, they must be left in the harvest unit. Retain 10-20 tons/acre of coarse woody debris and emphasize retention of large downed logs >15 inches dbh where they occur.

Aquatic life and Fisheries: No threatened or endangered aquatic life or fish are in or near the project area.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

DNRC Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie was contacted. There are no known archaeological sites in the project area. As such, no cultural resource concerns associated with implementation of the project are anticipated.

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.

This treatment will potentially improve the aesthetics of the project area through thinning providing more of a park-like appearance. Primary public use of the area is recreational which is expected to increase after treatment. No un-acceptable impacts are anticipated with either alternative.

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.

None

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.

Jim Beaver Checklist Environmental Assessment (EAC) (December 2009) Trego Environmental Assessment (USFS, 2007), Final HCP/EIS (USFWS/DNRC) (September 2011)

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
--

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

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

None identified.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

None identified.

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 proposed project would create employment for one logging company for approximately 2 months.

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.

No measurable impact.

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

None identified.

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.

In December 2011, the Land Board approved the ROD for the Montana DNRC Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Approval of the ROD was followed by the issuance of an Incidental Take Permit (Permit) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The HCP is a required component of an application for a Permit which may be issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service to state agencies or private citizens in situations where otherwise lawful activities might result in the incidental take of federally-listed species. The HCP is the plan under which DNRC intends to conduct forest management activities on select forested state trust lands while implementing specific mitigation requirements for managing the habitats of grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and three fish species: bull trout, Westslope cutthroat trout, and Columbia redband trout.

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.

This project would enhance the recreational opportunities of the treated area for use by the local residents of Fortine and Trego, MT and the public at large.

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.

N/A

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

N/A

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

N/A

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.

N/A

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Roger Ziesak	Date: 4/10/15
	Title: Forest Practices Program Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED: Action Alternative: Funds will be granted to complete the proposed project.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS: Minimal to none.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS More Detailed EA No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Paula Short
	Title: Forestry Assistance Bureau Chief
Signature: 	Date: 4/13/15