

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION FOR DNRC FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Project Name:Cliff Lake Salvage 2015

Proposed Implementation Date: April 2015

Proponent: Flathead Timber

Type and Purpose of Action: To generate revenue for the Deaf & Blind, School of Mines, and the Public Building Trusts by salvaging dead and bug infested timber before it loses economic value as directed in MCA 77-5-207.

Location: sections 30, 31, and 32; T30N; R22W

County: Flathead

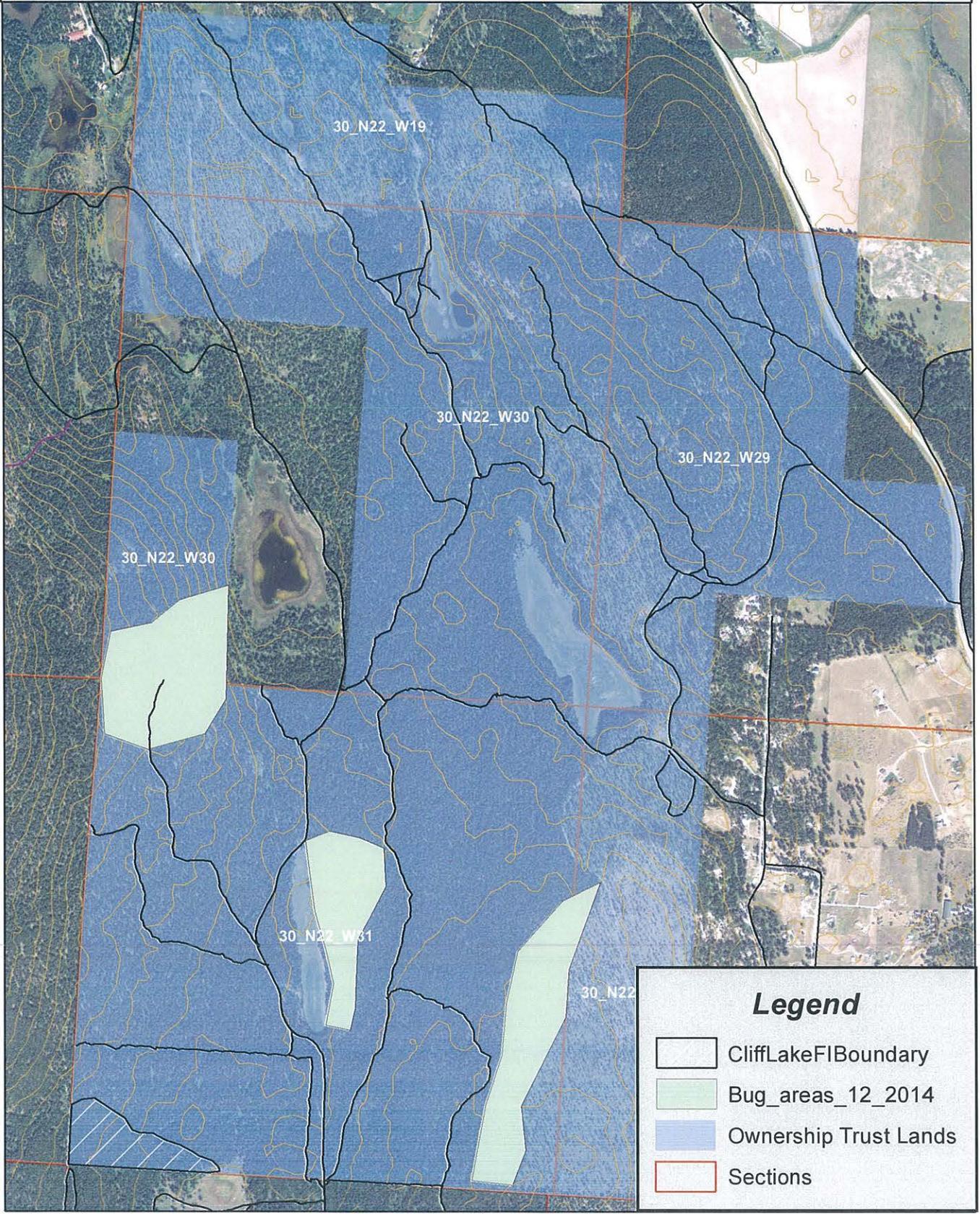
Category (refer to ARM 36.11.447 (3)(a) through (w) for additional detail):

- 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

Cliff Lake Bug Salvage 2015 2015

Attachment A



Legend

-  CliffLakeFIBoundary
-  Bug_areas_12_2014
-  Ownership Trust Lands
-  Sections

Memorandum

To: Pete Seigmund, Project Leader
CC: Tony Nelson
From: Chris Forristal, Wildlife Biologist
Date: February 24, 2015
Re: Bowser-Cliff Salvage Timber Permit -wildlife comments

I reviewed the Kalispell Unit timber permit proposed in T30N, R22W, Sections 30-32, which are parcels included in the DNRC's HCP. The proposed salvage harvest would include four areas totaling approximately 115 acres. The project would harvest approximately 10 loads (~50 MBF) of dead and dying trees, primarily Douglas-fir. These trees are undergoing mortality due to beetle activity and are located in scattered patches within the proposed harvest areas. Harvesting activities would be approximately one month in duration and occur when soil/road conditions allow in 2015. No new roads would be constructed under the proposed permit.

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

THREATENED & ENDANGERED SPECIES	
SPECIES/HABITAT	DETERMINATION – BASIS
Canada lynx (<i>Felis lynx</i>) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zones	No potential lynx habitat types occur within the proposed harvest areas. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Canada lynx would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
Grizzly bear (<i>Ursus arctos</i>) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	The proposed project area occurs outside of grizzly bear Recovery Areas and over three miles from non-recovery occupied habitat (USFWS 1993, Wittinger 2002). Appreciable use of the project area by grizzly bears is very unlikely due to high levels of recreational activity in the parcels and surrounding occupied home sites. Duration of proposed activities would be relatively short and would not appreciably affect preferred bear habitat (e.g. berry patches, riparian areas). Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
SENSITIVE SPECIES	
Bald eagles (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	The proposed project area occurs on the outer edge of the Spring Prairie Road bald eagle territory. Current status of the territory is unknown; however the territory was active in 2009. Proposed harvest units are located outside of the home range of this bald eagle territory and would not appreciably affect areas near preferred habitat (e.g. lakes or meadows). Appreciable use of the project area by bald eagles would not be anticipated. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative
Black-backed woodpeckers (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>) Habitat: Mature burned or beetle-infested forest	No recently (less than 5 years) burned areas are in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be expected to occur as a result of the action alternative.
Coeur d'Alene salamanders (<i>Plethodon idahoensis</i>) Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams	No moist talus or streamside talus habitat occurs in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Coeur d'Alene salamanders would be anticipated.

<p>Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (<i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i>) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture</p>	<p>No suitable grassland communities occur in 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>Potential fisher habitat occurs within the project area. Approximately 724 acres of DNR lands in the vicinity of the project area contain the habitat conditions currently suitable for use by fishers. The proposed project would reduce snags, snag recruits and coarse woody debris on 115 acres (15.9%). Snags and coarse woody debris would be maintained to meet ARMs 36.11.411 through 36.11.414. Crown closure of live trees would not be appreciably reduced, as only dead and imminently dead trees would be harvested. Overall habitat conditions would remain suitable for fishers; however appreciable use of the area by fishers is not likely given the amount of recreational use (with off-leash dogs), nearby home sites and lack of riparian habitat preferred by fishers. The closest observation of fishers to the project area was documented over 5 miles away in 1988 (MNHP 2015). No new roads would be constructed that could fragment habitat or increase access for trapping. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to fishers would be anticipated as a result of the action alternative.</p>
<p>Flammulated owls (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest</p>	<p>Potentially suitable habitat types are present in the project area. Most of the areas proposed for harvest are currently well-stocked with trees and likely too dense for appreciable use by flammulated owls. The proposed harvesting would reduce stocking levels while retaining mature trees; improving structural conditions for flammulated owls. Snag densities would be reduced, however snags and snag recruits would be maintained according to ARM 36.11.411. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.</p>
<p>Gray wolves (<i>Canis lupus</i>) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities</p>	<p>The proposed project area does not occur within a known wolf pack home range (Bradley et al. 2014, MNHP 2014). While use of the area by wolves is possible, high levels of recreational activity and surrounding occupied home sites likely limit the suitability of the area for wolves. Appreciable use of the area by wolves would not be expected. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to gray wolves would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.</p>
<p>Harlequin ducks (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates</p>	<p>No potentially suitable habitat occurs within the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to harlequin ducks would be expected to occur as a result of the action alternative.</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 in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to northern bog lemmings would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Peregrine falcons (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands</p>	<p>No known cliffs suitable for peregrine falcon nesting exist within the project area. Recent or historical records of peregrine falcons within 5 miles the project area are lacking (MNHP 2015). Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated as a result of either alternative.</p>
<p>Pileated woodpeckers (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest</p>	<p>Potentially suitable pileated woodpecker habitat is present in the project area. The proposed harvesting would reduce the number of snags and snag recruits in small scattered patches over 115 acres, however snags and snag recruits would be maintained according to ARM 36.11.411. Preferred snag species (western larch, ponderosa pine) of large diameter (>21 inches dbh) would be prioritized for retention. Existing levels of coarse woody debris would not be expected to be appreciably effected. Habitat quality for pileated woodpeckers would be reduced by a minor degree in this relatively small area. Although pileated woodpeckers are generally tolerant of disturbance, harvesting could temporarily displace individual woodpeckers in the immediate vicinity of the harvest units. Thus, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to pileated woodpeckers would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Townsend's big-eared bats (<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines</p>	<p>No suitable caves or mine tunnels are known to occur in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Townsend's big-eared bats would be anticipated.</p>

<p>Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo</i>) Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal and coniferous forests that maintain deep persistent snow into late spring</p>	<p>No suitable wolverine denning habitat exists within the proposed project area. The project area does not maintain deep snow into late spring and does not contain high-elevation alpine habitat. While a wolverine could pass through the project area during its extensive movements, appreciable use of the area is not expected. Given the large home range area (average 150+ sq. miles) wolverines occupy, and long distances wolverines typically cover during their movements, the proposed activities would not be expected to measurably affect use of the area by wolverines. Existing recreational activities in the area also likely decreases the likelihood of wolverine presence. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to wolverines would be expected.</p>
BIG GAME	
<p>Elk (<i>Cervus canadensis</i>)</p>	<p>Year-round use of the project area by big game is likely. The project area contains winter range habitat for moose, elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer (DFWP 2008). Harvesting would focus on removing dead, dying, and recently infested trees, which do not currently provide or will not be providing appreciable snow intercept or thermal cover. Hiding cover would be impacted to a minor degree with the removal of some trees over 115 acres, however understory vegetation would be retained as much as possible and the forest stand would remain well-stocked. Disturbance of big game species caused harvest activities would be localized and occur for a relatively short period of time. Motorized access to the project area would remain restricted to authorized personnel during and after harvesting. No new roads would be built in the project area. Thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game are anticipated.</p>
<p>Mule Deer (<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>)</p>	
<p>White-tailed Deer (<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>)</p>	

General Wildlife:

Overall, given the existing habitat characteristics, limited harvest area and short duration of activities; negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to wildlife would be anticipated.

List of Mitigations:

- Cease all operations if a threatened or endangered species is encountered. Consult a DNRC biologist and develop additional mitigations that are consistent with the administrative rules for managing Threatened and Endangered Species (*ARM 36.11.428* through *36.11.435*).
- Close roads and skid trails used by proposed activities to reduce the potential for unauthorized motor vehicle use. Maintain closed gates and signage to prevent unauthorized motorized use, especially during the big game hunting season. Close additional unauthorized motorized trails where feasible.
- Minimize skid trails originating from roads to prevent unauthorized motorized use and maintain existing visual screening.
- Manage for snags, snag recruits, and coarse woody debris according to *ARM 36.11.411* through *36.11.414*, particularly favoring western larch and ponderosa pine over 21 inches dbh.
- Prohibit contractors and purchasers conducting contract operations from carrying firearms while on duty as per GB-PR2 (*USFWS AND DNRC 2010, Vol. II p. 2-5*).
- Contractors will adhere to food storage and sanitation requirements as per GB-PR3 (*USFWS AND DNRC 2010, Vol. II p. 2-6*).
- Retain understory vegetation to the maximum extent practicable.

Conclusion:

In general, with the identified mitigations, the potential for effects to threatened and endangered species is low and overall negligible effects to wildlife would be anticipated. Thus, none of the extraordinary circumstances listed under *ARM 36.11.447 (2) (b) and (i)* affecting the wildlife resources would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion for this proposal.

Literature Cited:

Bradley, L., J. Gude, N. Lance, K. Laudon, A. Messer, A. Nelson, G. Pauley, M. Ross, T. Smucker, and J. Steuber. 2013. Montana Gray Wolf Conservation and Management 2012 Annual Report. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Helena, MT. 55 pp.

DFWP 2008. Maps of moose, elk and mule deer distribution in Montana. Individual GIS data layers. August 12, 2008. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Helena, MT. <http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionElk.jpg>.
<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionMuleDeer.jpg>.
<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionWhiteTailedDeer.jpg>

MNHP. 2015. Tracker data. Montana Natural Heritage Program online database query for the Bowser-Cliff Salvage timber permit application. <http://mtnhp.org/Tracker/NHTMap.aspx>

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.T. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum on file at U.S. Forest Service, Region 1, Missoula, Montana.