

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Forests In Focus Grant Opportunity on NFS lands

Proposed implementation State Funds obligated by 6/30/2015.

Date: Projects implemented will have varying Timelines.

Proponent: USFS-Region 1

Location: Statewide

County: Statewide

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed action is part of the Forests in Focus (FIF) grant program to United States Forest Service (USFS) lands in Montana. The state is proposing to grant up to one million dollars of state funds to the USFS for projects that meet some or all of the criteria put forward in Governor Bullock's Forest in Focus Initiative. Project proposals submitted must meet the intent of this Initiative and illustrate that the pace and outcomes of the proposed project will benefit from state funding. Projects must meet some or all of the following criteria: designated Priority Landscapes under the 2014 Farm Bill; developed collaboratively at the local level; provide restoration of vegetation, watersheds and wildlife habitat; enhance recreational opportunities; produce commercial timber volume; and are financially viable.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

MEPA Scoping was conducted for 30 days, from January 7th, 2015 to February 5th, 2015 using several methods.

- a) A Scoping Notice was emailed out to over 150 individuals and groups, including: MT forest collaborative groups, DNRC's Timber Project Scoping Group, DNRC Area and Unit Managers, environmental groups, the United States Forest Service, timber industry representatives, Montana's Congressional delegation and Montana Forest Products Roundtable.
- b) The DNRC published a request for comments in the legal advertisements sections of the following newspapers: the Montana Standard, Ravalli Republic, Billings Gazette, Daily Interlake, Bozeman Chronicle, Independent Record, Great Falls Tribune and Missoulian. The ad ran once. These papers are the United States Forest Service's official newspaper of record for corresponding National Forests in Montana.

- c) The MEPA Scoping Notice was uploaded on the DNRC Notices/ Public Interest webpage for 30 days. <http://www.dnrc.mt.gov/PublicInterest/Notices/Default.asp>
- d) In addition, the project coordinator presented this information at several meetings around the state.

The three individual comments received during scoping are listed with the DNRC response in Appendix A.

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

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

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

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

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

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

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

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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

Alternative A: No direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to geology or soils would be expected at this programmatic level. After project selection, project specific impacts will be analyzed, as

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

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

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

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

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

6. AIR QUALITY:

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

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

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

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

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

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

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

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

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

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

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

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

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

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

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

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

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

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

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

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

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

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

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

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

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *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.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

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

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

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

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

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

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

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

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

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

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

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

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

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

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

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

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

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

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

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

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

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

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

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

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

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Maureen Bookwalter	Date: 2/18/2015
	Title: DNRC-USFS Liaison	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action Alternative

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

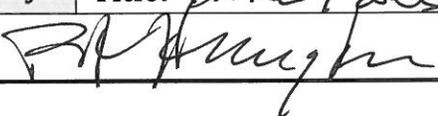
None

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Robert Harrington	
	Title: DNRC Forestry Division Administrator	
Signature:		Date: 3/3/15

Appendix A: Scoping Comments and Responses

Comment 1: Received on February 3, 2015

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Attn: Maureen Bookwalter
2705 Sprugin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Re: Forest in Focus Initiative

Dear Maureen Bookwalter:

I am commenting on the governors Forest in Focus Initiative and the proposal for the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) spending up to one million dollars of on US Forest Service projects.

Some of the best spent DNRC money over the last 5 years was the Jump Start programs. This put dollars directly into projects on the ground. Many of these projects were, proposed, designed, funded and started within several months. These dollars went directly to on the ground forest management on private and DNRC lands. It kept loggers working and supplied mills with logs.

I would only be supportive of this funding on Forest Service lands **IF** the US Forest Service utilizes the new tools that are available to them due to latest Farm Bill.

In that I mean:

- A) Large landscape level projects, analyzed as large landscape projects, using the new Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion (CE).
- B) Commercial sawlogs as the priority and non-saw as a by-product.
- C) Fuels reduction projects that will actually slow down a wildfire.
- D) Collaborative designed projects NOT watered down by extreme environmental groups throwing their usual BS against the wall and seeing what sticks.
- E) Financially viable projects.

I'll elaborate of each of my points.

Large landscape level projects, analyzed as large landscape projects.

Way too often, I have seen the US Forest Service design "Postage stamp" size projects or units that in my opinion are way too small. (Examples upon request). Projects should be designed from the ground up with the new CE as their guide. Analyze the project as an entire project and limit details that can pin you in a corner. Example, instead of saying there needs to be 16" of settled snow or 4" of frost, say "winter conditions to protect resources". Once a number is put in writing, it's there for everyone to measure. Don't just analyze by unit boundaries, analyze by project area. I hear way too often, "It wasn't analyzed for that". (Examples upon request) It seems the process gets in the way of the end results.

Commercial sawlogs as the priority and non-saw as a by-product

So many times due to delays, (Threats, appeals, lawsuits, etc) what once were viable timber sales with green sawlogs, are now dead, rotten, or checked timber sold as non-saw. Our Montana

sawmills are some of the most advanced in the country, but they are very expensive chippers. They were designed for green, solid sawlogs, not firewood. It takes the same time to run a dead and checked non-saw log through a sawmill as it does a green log. If all you get out of the logs is low value economy grade, short lumber, that mill won't be around very long. There are post and pole and chip plants that can use dead and checked non-saw timber, but the sawmills need green, solid sawlogs to survive. Design these projects for green sawlogs, and you'll get plenty of non-saw material as a by-product to supply the other mills. The biggest threat to the remaining mills in Montana is **LOG SUPPLY!** There are sawmills in Montana hauling or railing logs 400 plus miles to supply their mill. There is enough federal timber in Montana to run these mills for generations.

Fuels reduction projects that will actually slow down a wildfire

I have seen projects with "Fuels Reduction" in their sale name so lightly harvested, a wildfire wouldn't even slow down when it burned through these units. (Examples upon request)

Collaborative designed projects NOT watered down by extreme environmental groups throwing their usual BS against the wall and seeing what sticks

I have seen way too many projects that start out as a large landscape projects, only to be downsized and watered down due to threats of appeals/lawsuits from the usual serial litigants. I believe strongly in the local collaborative groups, but when it takes years to develop a single project only to be appealed/litigated by an outside group, these collaborative groups will not last. That is why these new projects must use the CE and other tools given to the Forest Service in the last Farm Bill.

Financially viable projects

This means cutting Green sawlog size trees! Also, all roads built or reconstructed do not need to be build to the Platinum standard. "Design roads to the minimum standard necessary to accommodate anticipated use and equipment" (Directly from the Montana BMP guidebook) (Many examples upon request)

If these Forest Service projects meet the above criteria, I would support the DNRC investing in these projects. Otherwise, I would suggest another round of Jump Start style funding (Less the 20% matching funds)

I would suggest that the regional Forest Service and DNRC meet with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF). The NWTF is one of the largest purchasers of Forest Service timber sale and Stewardship Projects in the United States. From talking with several representatives from that group, it sounds like they have been doing this successfully for years.

Sincerely



Scott Kuehn
Certified Forester

DNRC Response:

Dear Mr Kuehn,

Thank you for your comment for the FIF grant opportunity on USFS lands in Montana. Thank you for expressing your support for the funding opportunity on USFS lands and referencing the evaluation criteria you feel are most important to consider. The evaluation committee will take your comments into consideration during project selection.

We appreciate you taking the time to comment and for your valuable input.

Sincerely,

Maureen Bookwalter

Comment 2: Received on February 3, 2015

To: Maureen Bookwalter

From: Jake Kreilick

Re: Forest in Focus Initiative

The Lolo Restoration Committee (LRC) would like to offer its support to the Governor's Forest in Focus Initiative. The stated goal of increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration in Montana is one that the LRC shares. We believe that this effort can provide more momentum with forest restoration but do have some concerns and qualifications.

First and foremost, many members of the LRC believe that the designation of the Priority Landscapes should have been a more open process. The fact that the collaborative group that formed around these issues on the Lolo N.F. was never consulted or offered input didn't sit well and remains an area of concern. We certainly feel like we have areas and projects that are deserving of inclusion.

In general, the LRC is supportive of the state issuing up to one million dollars of state funding to the USDA Forest Service (USFS) for projects that will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- ☐ Is the project within the Priority Landscapes designated under the 2014 Farm Bill
- ☐ Is the project developed collaboratively with interested stakeholders;
- ☐ Does the project provide restoration of vegetation, watersheds and wildlife habitat;
- ☐ Does the project produce commercial timber volume;
- ☐ Does the project enhance recreational opportunities; and
- ☐ Is the project financially viable.

The LRC believes using these criteria as a guide is fine, but all the merits of a project should be considered. This is particularly true of projects that may not pay for themselves because of low

or marginal timber values. A good example of this is the Marshall-Woods project on the Missoula District, a forest restoration and fuel reduction project located in a high-risk WUI area and within portions of the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area (RNRA).

The LRC believe this funding would be very appropriate for this project which we have been working on with the Lolo National Forest since 2009. Due to the relatively low timber volumes, it was shelved in 2012 despite it being one of the highest risk neighborhoods in the Missoula WUI. It also includes extensive restoration in two former Plum Creek sections (#31 & #33) that the Forest Service acquired as well as within the most heavily used portions of the Rattlesnake RNA. This work will be more expensive than average because of the sensitive nature of this recreation area.

To conclude, we are hopeful that the Forest in Focus initiative will help jumpstart restoration efforts that the LRC has been part of and that we wish to see implemented. We look forward to discussing this with you in more detail as the Initiative moves forward.

Thank you

Jake Kreilick | LRC Co-Chair | 406.544.4962
jkreilick@wildrockies.org

DNRC Response:

Dear Mr Kreilick,

Thank you for your comment regarding the FIF grant opportunity on USFS lands in Montana. Thank you for expressing your support for increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration in Montana and for the proposed action of issuing up to one million dollars of state funding to USFS projects based on the stated criteria. We will certainly take into considerations all the merits of the proposed projects submitted to the state. Financial viability is only one evaluation criteria. Projects that may not pay for themselves but show future economic benefits and meet other stated criteria will be considered. The evaluation committee will take your comments into consideration during project selection.

We appreciate you taking the time to comment and for your valuable input.

Sincerely,

Maureen Bookwalter

Comment 3: Received February 3, 2015

To: Maureen Bookwalter

From: Gordy Sanders

Re: Forest in Focus Initiative

The Montana Forest Restoration Committee (MFRC) would like to offer its support to the Governor's Forest in Focus Initiative. The stated goal of increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration in Montana is a goal that the MFRC shares with this initiative.

However, some members of the MFRC believe that the designation of the Priority Landscapes should have been a more open process.

The MFRC is also supportive of the state issuing up to one million dollars of state funding to the USDA Forest Service for projects that will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Is the project within the Priority Landscapes designated under the 2014 Farm Bill
- Is the project developed collaboratively with interested stakeholders;
- Does the project provide restoration of vegetation, watersheds and wildlife habitat;
- Does the project produce commercial timber volume;
- Does the project enhance recreational opportunities; and
- Is the project financially viable.

The MFRC believes using these criteria as a guide is good, but all the merits of a project should be considered.

Thank you



Gordy Sanders | MFRC-Chair | 406.239-3145

DNRC Response:

Dear Mr Sanders:

Thank you for your comment regarding the FIF grant opportunity on USFS lands in Montana. Thank you for expressing your support for increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration in Montana and for the proposed action of issuing up to one million dollars of state funding to USFS projects based on the stated criteria. We will certainly take into considerations all the merits of the proposed projects submitted to the state.

We appreciate you taking the time to comment and for your valuable input.

Sincerely,

Maureen Bookwalter

