

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Swindlehurst Salvage
Proposed Implementation Date: January 2026
Proponents: Dennis Davaz, Consulting Forester
Landowner: Joseph T Swindlehurst
County: Gallatin
HRA #: 16-E-49835
Expiration Date: 12/31/2026

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Alternative Practice Action

Dennis Davaz is proposing an alternative practice. The harvest area is located 15 miles northeast of Bozeman within the following section: NE4NE4NW4 and W2NW4NE4 of T1N R7E Sec. 9. The owner's property is located along Brackett Creek, a class 1 stream.

Dennis Davaz representing Joseph Swindlehurst applied for an HRA for a project to remove windthrow around Joseph's cabin on January 5th, 2026. Two class 1 streams run through this harvest area, and there are extensive pre-existing roads shown in application maps. A class 1 tributary of Brackett Creek runs within 50ft of multiple structures and improvements including a pumphouse and two cabins. This property has been harvested multiple times under by Dennis. He has applied for an alternative practice before operation begins on this project and service forester Eli Davis conducted a site visit on 1/5/2025.

December marked a wind event that caused significant damage across Montana. The objective of this project is to remove the windthrow surrounding structures, roadways, and irrigation infrastructure. Along with standing trees damaged by wind or close enough to structures to cause future damage. The majority of trees marked for removal are outside of the SMZ although some are located within the marked SMS. The majority of windthrow inside SMZ can be removed by machinery from existing roadways. There is a specific area west of the cabins that may require extension of an existing roadway. Activities involving road construction would impact ~50ft of SMZ more than 25ft from OHWM. There is potential for an alternative adverse skid up to a landing outside the SMZ, but it is uncertain if a contractor will be able to operate on the steep slope. Area operated outside of existing roads within SMZ will occur in four 100ft segments, the majority of SMZ tree removal will be achieved from operations on a existing road. Removal of damaged or windthrown trees within the SMZ, bordering retaining walls, irrigation infrastructure and domiciles would result in SMZ retention below standards. The volume of merchantable wood will be less than 5 thousand board feet.

Objectives of this project include,

- Dennis Davaz is requesting an alternative practice to remove slash on five 100ft segments of class 1 SMZ. Four segments will require single skids to drag trees to existing roads.
 1. Operate Equipment in the SMZ (Rule 4: 36.11.304)
 2. Retention of Tress in the SMZ (Rule 5: 36.11.305)
 3. *Road Construction in the SMZ (rule 6: 36.11.306)*- *Will be avoided if possible*
- According to MCA 77-5-301 through 307, DNRC is authorized to administer and enforce the provisions of the SMZ Law. This Law was developed to protect the public interest of water quality and quantity within forested areas; provide for standards, oversights and penalties to ensure forest practices conserve the integrity of SMZ's; provide voluntary guidelines for wildlife management within SMZ's; and allow operators necessary flexibility to use practices appropriate to site-specific conditions in the SMZ. ARM 36.11.301 through 313 further specify the design of SMZ boundaries, allowable activities, and prohibitions within the SMZ, penalties and other related provisions.
- According to MCA 77-5-304 and ARM 36.11.310, DNRC *may* approve alternative practices that are different from practices required by the SMZ Law only if such practices would be otherwise lawful and continue to conserve or not significantly diminish the integrity and function of the SMZ.

Mitigation measures associated with this AP would include:

1. *Ground conditions would be dry to less than 20% moisture content or frozen conditions.*
2. *Equipment should not be operated closer than 25 feet from ordinary high-water mark unless on existing road*
3. *Trees across stream should be moved to minimally disturb riparian vegetation*
4. *Willow stakes or other riparian species shall be planted where overstory trees are removed to aid in bank stabilization and provide shade to the stream.*

Proposed activities include:

Rule	Action	Quantity
	Proposed Alternative Practices	
4	Operation of Equipment in SMZ	200 feet
5	Retention of Trees in SMZ	200 feet
6	Road Construction in SMZ	50 feet
Duration of Activities:	Winter	
Implementation Period:	2/15/2026-3/15/2026	

The MT-DNRC's implementation of the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) law and rules protects and maintains the functions of a SMZ. The six functions of an SMZ, as identified in the SMZ law (77-5-301[1] MCA), are:

- Acts as an effective sediment filter to maintain water quality.
- Provides shade to regulate stream temperature.
- Supports diverse and productive aquatic and terrestrial riparian habitats.
- Protects the stream channel and banks.
- Provide large woody debris that is eventually recruited into a stream to maintain riffles, pools, and other elements of channel structure.
- Promotes floodplain stability.

Alternatives Considered:

No-Action Alternative: No equipment would be operated within the SMZ of the Class 1 Stream. Slash retrieval would be implemented outside of the SMZ and as far as machinery reach allows within the SMZ.

Action Alternative: Use machinery to operate inside the marked SMZ and remove slash and standing trees threatening structures.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

VEGETATION: Forest type is a mixed conifer forest, supporting dominant Douglas-fir, lodgepole, Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir.

Insects and Diseases: No major I&D attacks observed, lodgepole was impacted previously and has been salvaged

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions:

Soil consists of very gravelly loam; it is well drained, and the area of operation will have minimal soil disturbance within the SMZ as most logs can be retrieved from preexisting roads or single skids.

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?
	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			
Slope Stability	X				X					X			
Action													
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)		X			X					X			Y
Erosion		X				X				X			Y
Slope Stability		X				X				X			Y

Soil mitigation measure:

1. Equipment would be allowed no closer than 25 feet from the ordinary high-water mark.
2. Equipment operation would be limited to periods of dry or frozen soil, generally 20% or less.
3. No turning of equipment inside the marked SMZ. Straight in-straight out to minimize the risk of soils disturbance.
4. Planting willow stakes in riparian areas where overstory trees will be removed.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions: Proposed action would take place along approximately 500 feet of a class 1 tributary to Brackett Creek

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative				
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	
No-Action													
Water Quality	X				X					X			N
Action													
Water Quality		X				X				X			Y (1)

- (1) *Water Quality & Quantity Mitigations:* By restricting equipment operation to dry conditions and prohibiting equipment use within 25 feet of the OHWM as well as turning within the SMZ, the risk of disturbing soils would be minimized. Existing riparian vegetation will be protected to serve as an adequate filter. Additional plantings of willow

stakes would improve soil stabilization from minimize deposition from windthrown trees and would reduce the risk of erosion

FISHERIES:

Brackett Creek is fish bearing. Species composition includes a mixture of native and nonnative species. Multiple species of minnow, suckers and trout, in addition to the threatened native Yellowstone Cutthroat have been recorded in this stream. Alternative practice activity will have minimal impact on this class 1 stream, in segments where windthrown trees will be removed along the class 1 tributary to Brackett Creek, a single drag will be necessary pulling trees ~20 feet to the road. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with grass and willows, and other woody species will be planted in disturbed areas. Trees in the Brackett creek SMZ will be removed from a preexisting road. Four SMZ segments will be impacted by off road activity no closer than 25ft to OHWM. See attachment 1.

WILDLIFE:

No impacts anticipated. Action Alternative 1 will likely have no impact on any threatened or endangered species.

AIR QUALITY:

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative				
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	
No-Action													
Smoke	X				X				X				N
Dust	X				X				X				N
Action													
Smoke		X			X					X			Y (1)
Dust	X				X				X				N

Comments:

- (1) Action would result in burning <5MBF of additional slash. Slash outside of SMZ is already intended to be burned, volume burned originating from within SMZ would minimally increase volume burned.

Air Quality Mitigations: Gallatin County regulations will be followed in burning the slash. Consultation of DEQ air quality regulations before burning to mitigate impact of smoke on local communities.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?
	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				
Action													
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				X				
Aesthetics	X				X				X				

Comments: No historic sites identified. Aesthetics would be improved with windthrow removal

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.

None

Impacts on the Human Population

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

Will Alternative 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			Y	(1)

Will Alternative 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		
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					
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	X				X				X					

Will Alternative 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		
population and housing														
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X					

Comments: (1) No action would leave hazard trees in high traffic areas of this property risking personal injury, community infrastructure (power lines), and damage to values at risk.

Finding

Alternative Selected

The Action 1 Alternative is selected for implementation.

Significance of Potential Impacts

Overall impacts of slash removal will be minimal, majority of impact to SMZ has already occurred through the violations. Mitigation efforts in the form of planting trees will minimize further erosion and sediment deposition.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

Name: Kara Huyser

Title: Bozeman Unit Manager

Date:

Signature: Kara Huyser



