

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Meyers Blowdown Alternative Practice

Proposed

Implementation Date: January 2026 through April 2026

Proponent: Quality Forest Management on Meyer Company Ranch

Location: S29,32 T14N R12W

County: Powell

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Eric Hoberg of Quality Forest Management is requesting an Alternative Practice (AP) to allow the salvage of wind thrown/compromised trees along Frazier Creek and an unnamed tributary of Frazier Creek following a wind event in December 2025. This area has had recent timber harvest and fuels mitigation work, and the AP would facilitate the safe removal of wind thrown/compromised trees in line with landowner objectives of reducing wildfire risk.

Quality Forest Management is requesting an AP to the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) Law along Frazier Creek (class 2 stream) and an Unnamed tributary (class 2 stream) to Frazier Creek in the Sections of 29 and 32, T14N R12W. Lineal extent along the streams is 5280 feet with an SMZ area of approximately 12 acres. AP is primarily for the two sites of concentrated blowdown marked on attached map as well as diffuse blowdown throughout the project area. The AP requested is to operate wheeled or tracked equipment within the SMZ (SMZ Rule 4 (36.11.304)), and to deviate from tree retention requirements (SMZ Rule 5 (36.11.305)).

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 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 otherwise be lawful and continue to conserve or not significantly diminish the integrity and function of the SMZ. This AP would allow for the requests listed above. Additional stipulations of this request would include:

- Notify Service Forester at beginning and end of Alternative Practice Operations.
- Operations would be done during dry or frozen soil conditions or with enough snow cover to minimize soil disturbance.
- The lead end of logs will be suspended above the ground during skidding.
- Operations would be done during dry or frozen soil conditions or with enough snow cover to minimize soil disturbance.
- Equipment operations within the SMZ would be only to the extent necessary, and equipment would not operate within 20' of the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM).
- Any logs that have fallen across a stream must be **FULLY SUSPENDED** if removed.
- Any scarified areas within the SMZ would be grass seeded with a seed mixture of proponents choosing.
- All stumps are to be left in place.
- Forestry BMPs would be applied during operations.
- No disturbance to the stream bed and banks would be permitted under this AP.

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.

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Clearwater service forester was consulted in January 2026 by proponent. This activity is on private property where current timber harvest and hazardous fuel mitigation work is occurring. Project Manager Eric Hoberg met on site with DNRC service forester on 01/09/2026. No public involvement is deemed necessary.

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.

DNRC Forestry Assistance has Jurisdiction over the SMZ law and any alternative practices, Powell County Conservation District has jurisdiction over the bed and banks of Frazier creek and the Unnamed tributary of Frazier creek.

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.

Scope of Analysis and Definition of Project Area: The following document describes conditions within the stretch of Frazier creek and an Unnamed tributary to Frazier creek that passes through the project area. The project area is defined as those portions of the SMZ on which the applicant has requested an Alternative Practice. Potential effects analyzed under the action and no action alternatives are limited to this project area.

Alternative A - No Action

Do not issue AP. This alternative would not allow operation of machinery within the SMZ.

Alternative B- Action:

This alternative would allow for the timber salvage actions outlined under *Type and Purpose of Action* above.

Issue AP that allows operation of ground-based equipment within the SMZ (SMZ rule 4) to facilitate the removal of wind thrown/compromised trees within the SMZ, including those that have fallen across the stream (SMZ rule 5). This would allow landowners to meet their stated needs. Mitigate by operating within the SMZ only to the extent necessary to safely conduct work and under frozen snow-covered soil conditions to minimize impacts. Protect sub merchantable trees and brush to fullest extent possible and retain trees that are not a hazard or otherwise compromised and apply forest best management practices (BMP) during operations.

The following mitigations would be part of the Alternative Practice:

- Operations would be done during dry or frozen soil conditions or with enough snow cover to minimize soil disturbance.
- Equipment operations within the SMZ would be only to the extent necessary, and equipment would not operate within 20' of the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM).
- Any logs that have fallen across a stream must be **FULLY SUSPENDED** if removed.
- Leading edge of logs would be suspended during skidding operations.
- SMZ understory shrubs and herbaceous plants would be retained to the fullest extent possible.

- Trees that are not a hazard or compromised would be retained.
- No material may be cast into the stream channel. If branches or materials do enter the stream channel, they would be required to be removed immediately.
- All stumps are to be left in place.
- Any scarified areas within the SMZ would be grass seeded with a seed mixture of proponents choosing.
- Forestry BMPs would be applied during operations.

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 Action:

No Anticipated impacts.

Alternative B- Action:

A query of physical soil properties using the NRCS Wed Soil Survey showed that the harvest area is primarily in the gravelly and cobbly loam soils, most areas have a moderate risk of erosion, with approximately 150 feet on one side of the Unnamed tributary having a severe risk of erosion. Over the entire project area, the soils are well suited for mechanical forestland harvesting. Harvesting suitability and the mostly diffuse nature of the blowdown clean up, mitigation measures outlined below and standard Forestry Best Management Practices would likely protect soils. Any impacts would be expected to be minor and temporary.

Mitigation measures would include:

- Restrict operation to periods when ground disturbance can be minimized as outlined in Type and Purpose of Action.
- The lead end of logs will be suspended above the ground during skidding.
- Operations would be done during dry or frozen soil conditions or with enough snow cover to minimize soil disturbance.
- Equipment operations within the SMZ would be only to the extent necessary, and equipment would not operate within 20' of the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM).
- Any logs that have fallen across a stream must be **FULLY SUSPENDED** if removed.
- Any scarified areas within the SMZ would be grass seeded with a seed mixture of proponents choosing.
- All stumps are to be left in place.
- Forestry BMPs would be applied during operations.
- No disturbance to the stream bed and banks would be permitted under this AP.

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.

Is it possible that implementing this alternative practice would impact the integrity of the SMZ and these specific functions?

- Ability to act as an effective sediment filter.
- Ability to provide shade to regulate stream temperature.
- Protection of stream channel and banks.
- Ability to provide large woody debris for eventual recruitment into the stream to maintain riffles, pools, and other elements of channel stability.

Existing Condition

The project area consists of both sides of Frazier Creek and both sides of an Unnamed tributary of Frazier Creek located on private ground in Powell County. Timber harvest and wildfire fuels mitigation work has been completed in the majority of stands adjacent to the SMZ. No prior SMZ harvest has occurred. Approximately 2 miles of roads are located within the SMZ on both creeks. The length of the creeks in the project area have moderate to high stocking levels of overstory trees.

Potential Environmental Effects

Alternative A- No Action:

No equipment operation would be allowed inside the 50' SMZ. Any harvesting/salvage would be completed using hand felling and skidding by cable. Minimal direct, indirect and cumulative impacts to water quality would be expected and no measurable change in water quantity would be expected from this alternative.

Alternative B- Action:

Equipment operation in the SMZ would not be expected to introduce sediment to the stream due to mitigation measures described in section 1. The removal of the wind thrown/compromised trees would not be expected to increase stream temperatures as the trees are spread out across the project area and low enough in number that the tree retention standards of the SMZ law would be maintained.

- The ability of the SMZ to act as an effective sediment filter would be maintained as no additional ground disturbance would be expected within 20 feet of the OHWM beyond the no-action alternative, and any disturbed areas would be grass seeded.
- The ability of the SMZ to provide shade would be maintained by leaving all existing brush and submerchantable trees as well as healthy merchantable trees. Pre-blowdown event down woody debris is also contributing to stream shading and would be left in place.
- Stream channel and bank integrity would be protected by keeping equipment a minimum of 20 feet away from the OHWM. No stream bed or bank disturbance would be allowed under this AP.
- Down woody debris (DWD) would be removed with the stumps left in place or wholly left in place. Stems removed from across the stream are fresh blowdown. Within the project area there is an existing component of DWD contributing to stream complexity.
- The potential recruitment of large woody debris would be maintained as only trees that have fallen or are root compromised would be removed. – Resulting stand would retain a greater number of trees than minimum retention requirements.
- The ability of the SMZ to promote floodplain stability would not be impacted.

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.

Slash created from the project would need to be disposed of in accordance with all applicable laws. Impacts are expected to be similar under either alternative and would be expected to be minor.

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.

Existing Condition

Project area consists of a 50' SMZ on both sides of both creeks. Adjacent stands have been harvested with no SMZ harvest occurring. Trees in the SMZ are largely comprised of spruce and Douglas-fir. A strong wind event has caused some of the trees within the SMZ to fall over or have their roots compromised. Wind thrown/compromised trees are largely diffuse across the project area occurring in groups of 1-5 trees with 50-100 feet between areas, with 2 exceptions (see map) where larger groups of trees fell. One of these groups is in an adjacent wetland.

Potential Environmental Effects

Vegetation communities, composition, and cover would not be expected to significantly differ under either alternative.

Alternative A- No Action:

Any harvest would follow the SMZ law.

Alternative B- Action:

An AP would be granted allowing equipment to operate within the SMZ to remove trees that have been wind thrown/compromised, this work would be implemented under frozen ground conditions. Due to operating restrictions and mitigation measures, no unacceptable impacts are anticipated with the action alternative.

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.

Terrestrial and Avian Life and Habitats:

The area is used by numerous terrestrial and avian species. On field visits no nests or dens of any animals were discovered.

Alternative A- No Action:

Any harvest would follow the SMZ law.

Alternative B- Action:

The action alternative would have minor impacts on terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats, through the removal of wind thrown/compromised trees which could potentially act as food, nesting sites, etc. Due to the residual stand and low volume of trees that would be removed minor and temporary impacts are expected.

Aquatic life and habitats:

Down Woody Debris (DWD) with bank contact and within the stream channel would be left in-place under either alternative. Residual stand will continue to be able to contribute DWD and shade. Shade is being supported by existing vegetation. Minor temporary impacts to aquatic life and habitat would be expected under either alternative.

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.

Threatened or endangered species such as grizzly bears, and Canada lynx may use the area. The proposed actions would be low impact on overall behavior, populations, or habitat.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

No impacts to historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be expected, under either alternative.

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.

Under the action alternative minimal impacts to aesthetics would be expected, through removal of trees that have fallen. Project aligns with landowner goals.

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.

No limited resources would be used for this project.

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.

Meyers Blowdown alternative practice is within the footprint of a greater timber sale and fuel reduction partly funded by Forestry Assistance funds.

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.

Under the Action Alternative, normal health risks associated with logging operations would be anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

The action alternative would add a minor amount of additional timber to the wood products industry.

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 action alternative would add a small amount of additional work and income to the contractor.

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.

The action alternative would generate minor additional income tax revenue from the additional work.

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

Under either alternative there would be no anticipated effects on the demand for local government services.

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.

The project area is covered by the Powell County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and Montana Forest Action Plan. This project would not be contrary to these plans.

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.

Project is located on private lands. Under either alternative, this activity would have no impact on access to or quality of recreational and wilderness activities for the public.

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.

Under either alternative, this activity would have no impact on density or distribution of population and housing.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Logging is an activity that would be considered a traditional lifestyle for this community and area, this activity would not disrupt social structures.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

Under either alternative, cultural uniqueness and diversity would not be affected.

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.

There are no unique social or economic qualities on this site.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Kyle Carpenter Title: Service Forester	Date: 1/21/2026
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V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Following a review of the document as well as the corresponding Department policies and rules, the Action Alternative has been selected because it meets the intent of the project objectives outlined in Section I – Type and Purpose of Action. This includes to operate wheeled or tracked equipment within the SMZ (SMZ Rule 4 (36.11.304)), and to deviate from tree retention requirements (SMZ Rule 5 (36.11.305)).

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I find that the Action Alternative will not have significant impacts for the following reasons:

- The Action Alternative is in compliance with the existing laws, rules, policies, and standards applicable to this type of proposed action.
- Appropriate mitigations have been proposed to minimize potential impacts to resources such as vegetation, soil, and water quality.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Kristen Baker-Dickinson Title: Clearwater Unit Manager
Signature: <i>K. Baker-Dickinson</i>	Date: 2/6/2026

Meyer Company Ranch SMZ clean up map

