

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Project Name: Dalton Alternative Practice
Proposed Implementation Date: May, 2026
Proponent: Nathan Richardson
County: Missoula
HRA #: 32-B-49978
Expiration Date: May, 2028 Authorization to conduct AP is valid for 2 years from the date of approval or for such period as may be specified by the Department.(77-5-307 and 302)(ARM 36.11.310)

Type and Purpose of Action

Description of Proposed Alternative Practice Action:

Nathan Richardson is proposing an Alternative Practice in the Streamside Management Zone of Pierce Creek. This project is located approximately 10 air miles south of Condon MT (refer to Attachment's vicinity map A-1 and project map A-2) and includes the following sections:

Landowner/Contractor	HRA#	Legal Description	Total Acres Affected	Stream class
Jeffery Dalton	32-B-49978	S21, T19 N, R16 W, C.O.S. 338, PARCEL 1, IN NE4	2.5	1

Objectives of the project include:

- Nathan Richardson is requesting an Alternative Practice to operate equipment, as well as deposit slash within the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) of Pierce Creek, a Class 1 stream (see attached map). Total linear extent along the stream is 1000 feet.
- In the last couple of windstorms, Jeffery's property has had significant blowdown, much of it across Peirce Creek. The contractor and landowner would like to remove some of the blowdown laying in and around the creek.
- The landowner, Jeffery, has obtained a 310 permit from Missoula County for the same project.
- 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 be otherwise lawful and continue to conserve or not significantly diminish the integrity and function of the SMZ. The proximity of the trees to homes, cabins, roads, and recreation areas has created safety issues that will require treatments outside of the allowances of the SMZ law.
- Allowances of this request would include:
 1. *The use of equipment through portions of the Streamside Management Zone, an exception to Rule 4 (36.111.304)*
 2. *Deposit slash in the SMZ. Removing the blowdown from the stream will result in unintentional, minor slash deposition. (Rule 9: 36.11.309).*

Mitigation measures associated with this AP would include:

1. *Ground conditions would be dry to less than 20% moisture content.*
2. *All sub-merchantable trees and brush will be retained.*
3. *Grass seeding all disturbed areas once work has been completed.*
4. *Contractor will minimize equipment operations within the SMZ. Equipment will stay 10ft from high water mark and will utilize existing road to the greatest extent possible.*

Proposed activities include:

Rule	Action	Quantity	
	Proposed Alternative Practices		
1	Broadcast burning		acres
2	Operation of Equipment in SMZ	1000	feet
3	Clearcutting		acres
4	Road construction		feet
5	Hazardous Materials		feet
6	Side Casting of Material		feet
7	Depositing Slash	1000	feet

Rule	Action	Quantity	
	Total Treatment Acres	2	acres
Duration of Activities:	2 years		
Implementation Period:	May 2026-May 2028		

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.

Project Development

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED: *(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

- **Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)**
- **Local Conservation District-**
The property has a 310 permit.
- **Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (DFWP)**

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative: The trees that have blown down will stay in the creek, potentially causing flooding issues in the future.

Action Alternative: Salvage operations would remove blowdown in and around the stream as also allowed with 310 permit.

Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

VEGETATION:

Vegetation Existing Conditions:

This property has a stream flowing through it that has experienced significant blowdown.

The minimum retention requirements for a Class 1 SMZ Salvage are 10 trees per 100-foot segment and all trees that have fallen across or in streams must be retained.

The Action Alternative would potentially remove some trees that have fallen in or across the stream.

Vegetation Mitigations: All sub-merchantable trees and shrubs will be retained.

SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions:

A query on the Web Soil Survey Website shows that the harvest area has a "Medium" risk rating for soil compactibility. Soils are "well suited" for Harvest Equipment Operability. Planned mitigation measures (listed above) would help ensure minimum impacts to soils.

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								
Erosion	X				X								
Slope Stability	X				X								
Action													
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)		X			X					X			
Erosion		X			X					X			
Slope Stability	X				X				X				

Comments:

Soil Mitigations: Work will take place during times of low soil moisture to reduce soil compaction.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions:

The landowner currently has a 310 permit to work along the stream banks.

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				
Action													
Water Quality		X				X				X			

Water Quality Mitigations: Increases in sedimentation from equipment operation due to forest management activities would be expected to be minimal and temporary due to application of mitigation measures outlined in Type and Purpose of Action. Maintaining vegetation to the best extent possible while completing work on the stream bank would serve as a filter until disturbed areas revegetate adequately.

FISHERIES:

Fisheries Existing Conditions: The MTFWP fisheries map indicates the stream is suitable habitat for Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

No-Action: Equipment operation within the SMZ will not take place.

Action Alternative: The blowdown around the stream, as well as some crossing the stream will be removed. Existing stream features will not be disturbed.

Comments:

Fisheries Mitigations: All sub merch and shrubs will be retained. Existing stream structure will not be disturbed.

WILDLIFE:

A query of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identifies several species that are either endangered, threatened, sensitive or of special concern that have potential habitat in this township. The proposed actions may cause minor changes in use of project area by listed species. Long term or cumulative effects are not anticipated.

No-Action: Equipment operations within the SMZ will not take place. Other land use would continue as normal.

Action Alternative (see Wildlife table below):

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative				
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	
Threatened and Endangered Species													
Grizzly Bear <i>(Ursus arctos)</i> Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity		X			X					X			
Lynx (<i>Felis lynx</i>) Habitat: mosaics--dense sapling and old forest >5,000 ft. elev.		X			X					X			
Sensitive Species													
Bald eagle <i>(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional forest within 1 mile of open water		X			X					X			
Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo</i>) Habitat: high elevation areas that retain high snow levels in late spring		X			X					X			
Fisher <i>(Martes pennanti)</i> Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian		X			X					X			
Pileated woodpecker		X			X					X			

Wildlife	Impact												Can Impact be Mitigated?
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative				
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	
<i>(Dryocopus pileatus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest													
Fringed myotis <i>(Myotis thysanodes)</i> Habitat: low elevation ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and riparian forest with diverse roost sites including outcrops, caves, mines		X			X					X			
Townsend's big-eared bat <i>(Plecotus townsendii)</i> Habitat: caves, caverns, old mines		X			X					X			
Big Game Species													
Elk		X			X					X			
Whitetail		X			X					X			
Mule Deer		X			X					X			
Bighorn Sheep	X				X								
Other													

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				
Dust	X				X				X				
Action													
Smoke		X			X					X			
Dust	X				X				X				

Comments: Some slash will be generated from harvest operations

Air Quality Mitigations: Slash burning will take place during the appropriate season and with appropriate permits.

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			
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	X				X				X				
Action													
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				X				
Aesthetics		X			X					X			
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	X				X				X				

Comments:

Mitigations:

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.*

- A 310 permit from Lake County Conservation District has been issued.

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														

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

Comments:

Mitigations:

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.*

- NA

References

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

- No

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

- No

Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:

Name: Jack White
Title: Service Forester
Date: 5/7/2026

Finding

Alternative Selected

Action alternative if the mitigations in section 1 are implemented during operations.

Significance of Potential Impacts

No significant impacts to the integrity and function of the SMZ will occur with the implementation of operating restrictions and mitigation measures.

Need for Further Environmental Analysis

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:

Name: David Marx
Title: MT DNRC Swan Unit Manager
Date: 5/14/2026

Signature: 

/Attachment A - Maps





