

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	James Ditch Alternative Practice
Proposed Implementation Date:	September 20 - December 31, 2022
Proponent:	Pyramid Mountain Lumber
Location:	Section 30 Township 16 North Range 13 West
County:	Powell

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Pyramid Mountain Lumber (PML) has applied for a Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) Alternative Practice for approximately 900 feet on both sides of the James ditch on private land owned by Teresa James. Downstream of the project area the ditch contributes directly to Black Canyon Creek, therefore this ditch segment is an Other Body of Water under the Streamside Management Zone Law. The applicant seeks an Alternative Practice to operate equipment to within 15 feet of the ordinary high water mark.

The primary purpose of this treatment is to clean up existing slash produced inside of the SMZ and to harvest overstory trees.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

DNRC was scoped internally, and the bordering neighbor was contacted.

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

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Scope of Analysis and Definition of Project Area: The following document describes conditions within and nearby the James Ditch, known as the "project area". Potential effects analyzed under the action and no action alternatives are limited this project area. Ongoing forest operations exclusive of the Alternative Practice request are considered part of base line conditions.

No Action Alternative: Timber harvest would likely occur and meet all SMZ rules. Most merchantable trees within 30 feet of the ditch would likely be harvested and existing slash and downed woody debris would be left in place.

Action Alternative: Under this alternative, an Alternative Practice to allow the operation of equipment within the SMZ would be granted. The primary purpose of this Alternative Practice is to remove existing slash from a previous project that poses a fire risk and that may negatively affect the function of the ditch. The following mitigations would be a part of the Alternative Practice.

- On any side of the ditch equipment may operate no closer than 15 feet of the ordinary high water mark at perpendicular intervals of 50 feet
- Commercial tree harvest will follow all SMZ laws.
- Harvest shall be done during dry or frozen soil conditions.
- SMZ understory shrubs and herbaceous plants which do not impede the ditch would be retained to the extent practicable.

- No excavation or pulling of roots shall occur on the bank or fillslope to maintain ditch integrity.
- No material may be cast into the stream channel. If branches or materials do enter the stream channel, they will be required to be removed immediately.

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 any cumulative impacts to soils.

Soils in the project area are gravelly loams on slopes ranging from approximately 0 – 10 percent. Generally, these soils are resistant to compaction. They have a varying rutting hazard ranging from slight to severe. Numerous adjacent wetlands exist within the project area and it is these areas that are most susceptible to adverse soil impacts. Under either alternative, operations would only take place under dry or winter conditions. Under the action alternative any disturbed areas would be grass seeded and installation of erosion control measures such as slash-filter windrows would be required. Considering the operation restrictions and mitigation measures, minimal direct, indirect or cumulative impacts would be expected under either alternative.

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 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

In the project area the James Ditch is constructed across a slope ranging in steepness from 0-5 percent. Numerous large and small trees are growing out of the ditch cut slope and fill slope. These trees are utilizing water from the ditch. In some instances, trees growing out of the fill slope are causing some instability to it. Downstream from the project area the ditch goes through an enclosed siphon to move the water uphill, then the ditch flows into Black Canyon Creek which is a Class 1 stream. See Attachment A-1 for an overview map of the project area and ditch segment.

The project area adjacent to the ditch is mostly heavily forested with small to medium sized ponderosa and Douglas-fir trees. Forest health in the area is suffering due to overstocking, mountain pine beetle, and spruce budworm damage. Downstream from the project area Black Canyon Creek goes through forestland, native grassland, and irrigated agricultural fields.

Potential Environmental Effects

No Action Alternative: The SMZ law would be followed during commercial activities therefore it is unlikely there would be impacts to water quality, quantity, distribution or to the functionality of the SMZ during commercial activities. However, after commercial activities the ditch owner could remove the slash and some of the trees.

Action Alternative:

Under the action alternative an Alternative Practice would be granted to allow the PML to enter the SMZ to remove slash and harvest commercial trees. PML would be required to follow mitigation measures outlined in this document. Due to the current low stocking levels in this portion of the ditch, there would be little-to-no impact on water flow and yield with the removal of slash and some overstory trees.

-The ability of the SMZ to act as an effective sediment filter would be maintained as no additional ground disturbance would be expected beyond the no-action alternative.

-The ability of the SMZ to provide shade would be maintained. Trees located on the ditch edges would be left at adequate stocking levels to provide shade.

-Mitigation measures would provide protection of the stream channel and banks at the same levels as the no action alternative. The operator may cross the stream as a pre-approved alternative practice in accordance with MCA 36.11.304(3). This could result in minor impacts to irrigation ditch channel and banks.

-The potential recruitment of large woody debris would be maintained as some trees would be left close to the SMZ channel.

-The ability of the SMZ to promote floodplain stability would not be impacted by either alternative.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Slash created from the project would need to be disposed of in accordance with all applicable laws. Impacts would be the same 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 cumulative effects to vegetation.

Existing Condition

The SMZ is a lightly stocked forest with multiple ages and size classes. Ponderosa pine and some young Douglas-fir are represented in this portion of the stand. SMZ harvest has previously occurred from a project in 2021 which has left a moderate amount of slash within the 50-foot SMZ. This slash accumulation is the main target of the project. Some large trees with poor form and vigor are located within the SMZ.

Potential Environmental Effects

No Action: Harvest would follow the SMZ law. It is likely all merchantable trees would be harvested from within 30 feet of the irrigation ditch. Moderate slash concentrations would be left within the SMZ.

Action Alternative: Machinery would be allowed to operate within 15 feet of the SMZ high water mark to facilitate slash removal and timber harvest. Harvest would include trees that have poor form, are dying, or that threaten the integrity of the ditch. The healthiest trees of all size classes would be retained at a spacing of approximately 15 – 30 feet between crowns. No roots shall be disturbed as to retain bank stability. Work shall be done under dry or frozen conditions. Throughout the SMZ understory shrubs and herbaceous plants would be retained as outlined by SMZ rules. It is expected this thinning would result in a healthier timber stand and individual trees that are healthier and more vigorously growing. Following thinning, the stand would more closely resemble historic conditions and be more resilient to insects, disease, and catastrophic wildfire.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

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

Terrestrial and Avian Life and Habitats:

The area is well used by numerous terrestrial and avian species including grizzly bears. On field visits no nests or dens of any animals were discovered. Considering that under the no action alternative the landowner could alter stand conditions similar to this under the action alternative effects to terrestrial and avian species would be expected to be minor under either alternative.

Aquatic life and habitats:

The headgate of the ditch has a fish screen to ensure fish are not utilizing the ditch. The volume and timing of water in irrigation ditch is dependent on the needs of the ditch owner and the ditch is only used seasonally. The action alternative is a minor action compared to other ditch maintenance that is allowed under Montana laws and regulations. Only minor 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 cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Grizzly bears are known to use the project area. Effects would not likely differ substantially under either alternative.

There are isolated and adjacent wetlands in the project area. Within these wetlands, no deviation from standard forestry BMP's or the SMZ law is requested under either alternative. Effects to wetlands would be expected to be minor under either alternative.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

No cultural resources have been identified within the project area. No impacts 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 cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Impacts to aesthetics would be the same under either alternative and would be perceived differently by different people. However, the treatment would be similar to other treatments that have recently taken place nearby and would be considered minimal to moderate by most people.

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 cumulative effects to environmental resources.

None.

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.

None.

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.

None.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

None.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

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

Under either alternative the project would be expected to provide approximately 10 or fewer short term jobs.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

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

None.

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 cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

None.

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.

None.

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 cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The project area is private property and public use is controlled by the landowner. No effects would be expected under either alternative.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

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

None.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

None.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

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

None.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Brad French	Date: 9/14/2022
	Title: Service Forester	

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 but is not limited to the need to remove trees that are negatively impacting the ditch and risking the integrity of the ditch.

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:

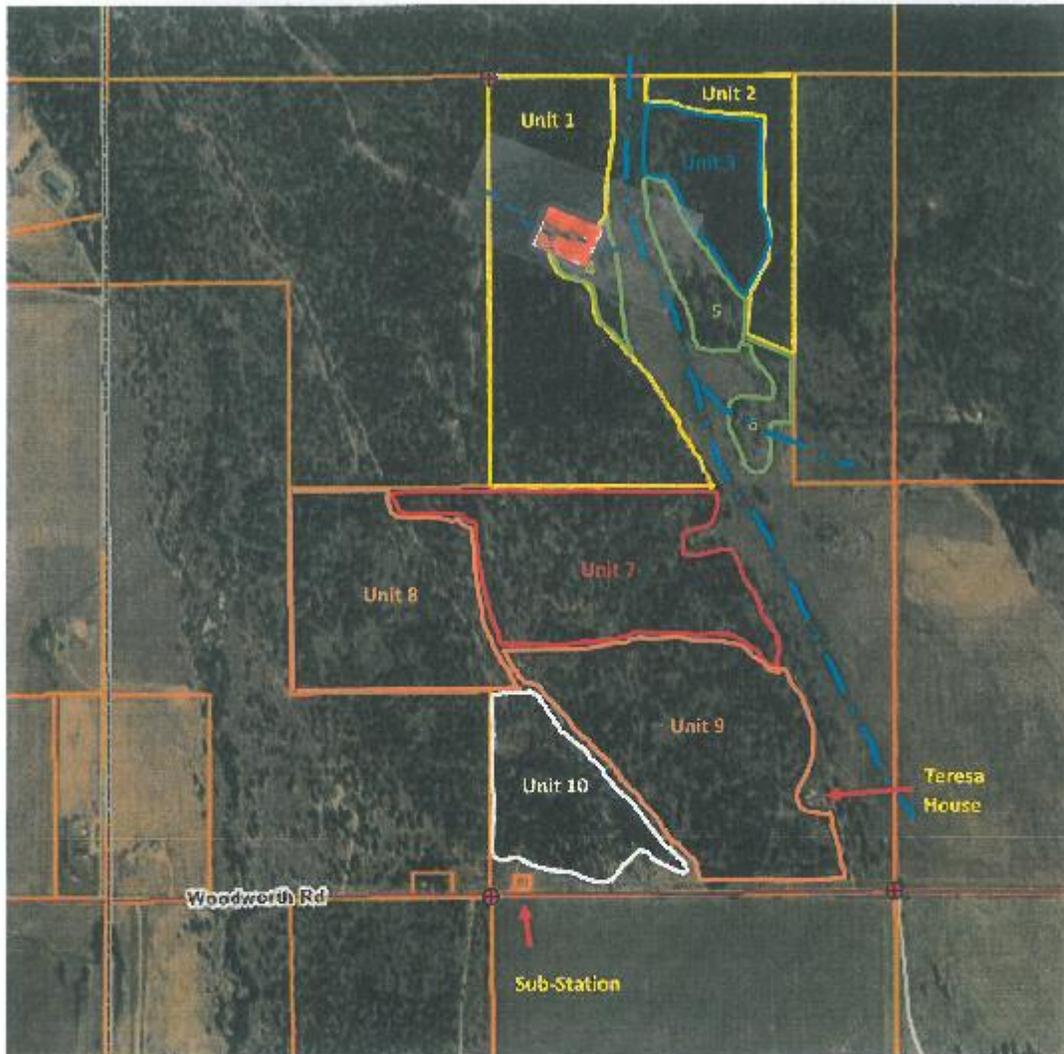
EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Kristen Baker-Dickinson
	Title: Unit Manager, Clearwater
Signature: /s/ K. Baker-Dickinson	Date: 9/14/2022

Teresa James, Parts of Section 30, T16N, R13W (238 acres)



Management Plan Units:

- 1 & 2: Yellow, Yellow on Map
- 3: Blue, Blue on Map
- 4, 5 & 6: Red, Light Green on Map
- 7: Red, Red on Map
- 8, 9: Black, Tan on Map
- 10: White, white on Map

 = ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE AREA

↑ NORTH

STATE OF MONTANA Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
SMZ ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE APPLICATION



Hazard Reduction Agreement (HRA) Number: _____

Application Date: 8/23/22

Landowner: **Teresa James**
 Address: P.O.Box 34, Ovando, MT. 59854
 Phone: 406-241-6047
 Email: _____

Contractor: **Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Inc.**
 Address: P.O.Box 549, Seeley Lake, MT. 59858
 Phone: 406-239-3145
 Email: gsanders@pyramidlumber.com

Person or Entity Legally Responsible for Compliance with SMZ Law: Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Inc.

Site Specific Alternative Practice Request:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operate Equipment | <input type="checkbox"/> Cut Additional Trees | <input type="checkbox"/> Construct or Reconstruct a Road |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Operate a Landing | <input type="checkbox"/> Remove Logs from Stream | <input type="checkbox"/> Broadcast Burn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yard Across the Stream
(Full Suspension) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

Justification for proposed Alternative Practice:

In order to improve overall forest health, merchantable trees along the ditch may need to be removed within the SMZ with feller buncher along with removing previous slash accumulations while protecting understory and submerchantable trees.

Planned Mitigation Measures:

Feller buncher would enter SMZ perpendicular to the ditch, occasionally harvest individual merchantable trees and leave SMZ on same track. Old slash would be removed with excavator or processor to locations outside of the SMZ. Activity within SMZ would occur on dry or frozen ground. Disturbed areas will be seeded as needed.

Estimated Starting Date: 8/6/22 Estimated Completion Date: 10/31/22 County: Powell

Legal Description: NE 1/4 Section _____ Section 30 Township 16N Range 13W

Estimated Lineal Extent Along Stream: Portions of 300' Estimated SMZ Width: 50'

Stream Class: One Two Three Wetlands Present: Yes No

IMPORTANT: Include map showing the logging unit boundaries, alternative practice site, streams, wetlands, and existing and/or proposed roads. Also include a plan-view map of the alternative practice site, including location and distance to stream, SMZ boundary, location of mitigation measures, and extent of activity requiring an alternative practice.

Approved alternative practices, including any additional conditions approved by DNRC, shall have the same force and authority as the standards contained in 77-5-303, MCA, and shall be enforceable by DNRC under 77-5-305, MCA, to the same extent as such standards.

cc: Applicant, DNRC Unit Office, DNRC Land Office, DNRC Forestry Assistance Bureau.