

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Two Creek Alternative Practice
Proposed Implementation Date:	December 18, 2023 through December 30 2024
Proponent:	Wayne Slaght
Location:	Section 7, Township 15 North, Range 13 West
County:	Powell County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Wayne Slaght of Two Creek (Monture Ranch) Company has applied for a Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) Alternative Practice for approximately 3500 feet along both sides of an unnamed tributary (UT) (Class 1 SMZ) to Dick Creek (Class 1 SMZ) on his private property. The applicant seeks an Alternative Practice to cut additional trees within the SMZ, remove sub-merchantable trees and brush within the SMZ, and to operate equipment inside of the SMZ.

The purpose for this proposed Alternative Practice is to mitigate a high fuel load of dead trees and remove downed woody debris (DWD) which contributes to a high fuel load. The goal is to mitigate the high fire hazard that currently exists along the tributary.

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.

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 the stretch of the UT 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.

No Action Alternative: Timber harvest would likely occur and meet all SMZ rules. Some DWD would likely be removed from the SMZ.

Action Alternative: Under this alternative, an Alternative Practice to cut additional trees within the SMZ, remove sub-merchantable trees and brush within the SMZ, and to operate equipment in the SMZ would be granted, to assist in DWD removal, equipment operation in the SMZ would be allowed under specific circumstances, dead/diseased overstory and some sub-merchantable trees and brush would be allowed to be removed to facilitate skidding and to reduce fire severity risk.

The following mitigations would be a part of the Alternative Practice:

- Equipment may operate to within 30 feet of the ordinary high-water mark OR to the break in the slope whichever is greater.

- Operations would be done during dry or frozen soil conditions or with enough snow cover to minimize soil damage.
- SMZ understory shrubs and herbaceous plants would be retained within 30 feet of the stream channel.
- A minimum of 10 trees per 100-foot stretch would be left in the SMZ.
- 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.
- Any scarified areas within the SMZ would be grass seeded with a seed mixture of Two Creek (Monture Ranch) Company's choosing.
- DWD that is in contact with the stream ordinary high-water mark would be left in place or severed in such a manner that no bank disturbance occurs.

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.

Based on information gathered from: Web Soil Survey, soils in the project area are mostly 479B-Baggs sandy loam on slopes ranging from 0-4%. Generally, these soils have medium resistance to compaction. They have a moderate rutting hazard. Under either alternative, operations would likely take place under dry or winter conditions. Under the action alternative any disturbed areas inside the SMZ would be grass seeded. 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

The project area consists of both sides of an un-named tributary to Dick Creek. The unnamed tributary runs through a lower area, that is moist to marshy, within a larger incised area between slope breaks. The slope breaks vary in distance separated by a width of approximately 50 feet to 150 feet. 50-foot SMZ width slopes range from 0-20% then from the slope break into the project area the slope is between 0-4% averaging 2%. Engelmann spruce, lodgepole pine and some Douglas-fir are throughout the SMZ. Brush is mostly concentrated within 30 feet of the channel and in the bottom between the slope breaks, providing most of the shade to the water surface. Some fallen trees can be found in and near the channel with multiple concentrations of DWD along the outer edges of the SMZ.

Above the project area the creek is fed by the same creek emerging from the ground below a marshy area. Below the project area the creek flows into Dick Creek.

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. DWD that is reachable from without the SMZ would likely be removed.

Action Alternative:

Under the action alternative, an Alternative Practice would be granted to allow machinery to enter the SMZ to facilitate DWD clean up and skidding operations. The equipment operator would be required to follow mitigation measures outlined in this document.

-The ability of the SMZ to act as an effective sediment filter would be maintained as no additional ground disturbance would be expected within 30 feet of the SMZ beyond the no-action alternative.

-The ability of the SMZ to provide shade would be maintained by leaving all existing brush and submerchantable trees as well as most healthy merchantable trees within 30 feet of the stream channel.

-Stream channel and bank integrity would be protected by keeping equipment a minimum of 30 feet away from the high-water mark OR the slope break whichever is greater.

-DWD that is in contact with the stream ordinary high water mark would be left in place or severed in such a manner that no bank disturbance would occur.

-DWD across and within the stream channel would be left in-place.

-The potential recruitment of large woody debris would be maintained as most standing trees would be maintained and DWD

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

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 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 cumulative effects to vegetation.

Existing Condition

This section of the Unnamed tributary SMZ is a medium-stocked forest with a mix of ages and size classes consisting of Engelmann spruce, lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir. The surrounding forest is mainly Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine.

Potential Environmental Effects

No Action: Harvest would follow the SMZ law. Some DWD near the outer edge of the SMZ that could be reached would be removed.

Action Alternative:

Under the action alternative, an Alternative Practice to cut additional trees within the SMZ, remove sub-merchantable trees and brush within the SMZ, and to operate equipment inside of the SMZ, to facilitate DWD clean up, fire hazard reduction and skidding operations. The equipment operator would be required to follow mitigation measures outlined in this document.

- The ability of the SMZ to act as an effective sediment filter would be maintained as no additional ground disturbance would be expected within 30 feet of the SMZ beyond the no-action alternative.

- The ability of the SMZ to provide shade would be maintained by leaving all existing brush and sub-merchantable trees as well as most healthy merchantable trees within 30 feet of the stream channel.

- Stream channel and bank integrity would be protected by keeping equipment a minimum of 30 feet away from the high-water mark OR the slope break whichever is greater. DWD that is in contact with the stream ordinary high-water mark would be left in place or severed in such a manner that no bank disturbance occurs.

- The potential recruitment of large woody debris would be maintained as most standing trees would be maintained and. DWD that is in contact with the stream ordinary high water mark would be left in place or severed in such a manner that no bank disturbance occurs.

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

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. On field visits no nests or dens of any animals were discovered. The project area is located within the home range of the Sperry Grade bald eagle territory.

No Action: Harvest would follow the SMZ law. Some DWD near the outer edge of the SMZ that could be reached would be removed.

Action Alternative:

Under the action alternative, an Alternative Practice to cut additional trees within the SMZ, remove sub-merchantable trees and brush within the SMZ, and to operate equipment inside of the SMZ, to facilitate DWD clean up, fire hazard reduction and skidding operations. The equipment operator would be required to follow mitigation measures outlined in this document. Due to the project area's proximity to timber harvest, and mitigation measures outlined in this document, the action alternative would be expected to have minor effects beyond the no action alternative.

The project area is partially within the home range associated with the Sperry Grade bald eagle territory. Negligible levels of disturbance to bald eagles could occur should any activities be conducted during the nesting period given the distance between the proposed unit and the nest along with the size of the proposed unit. Conversely, should activities be conducted during the non-nesting period, no disturbance to bald eagles would be anticipated.

Aquatic life and habitats:

DWD across and within the stream channel would be left in-place under either alternative. Shade is being supported by this debris and existing vegetation and there would be a minimum of 10 trees per 100-foot stretch to be used as down wood recruits. 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 transitionally use the project area. Effects would likely not differ substantially under either alternative. The creek likely contributes to a known bull trout rearing stream, and the effects to bull trout from any decreases in shading are expected to be very low.

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
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i> |
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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 2 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

No Action: Harvest would follow the SMZ law. Some DWD near the outer edge of the SMZ that could be reached would be removed. A high fire hazard would remain in the project area.

Action Alternative:

Under the action alternative, an Alternative Practice to cut additional trees within the SMZ, remove sub-merchantable trees and brush within the SMZ, and to operate equipment inside of the SMZ would be granted to allow machinery to enter the SMZ to facilitate DWD clean up, dead/diseased tree removal, and skidding operations. Most of the heavy fuel loading in the project area would be removed, adding to firefighter efficacy and safety.

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: Kyle Carpenter	Date: 12/18/2023
	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 equipment operation inside the SMZ.

This includes but is not limited to removing more than half the small and medium sized trees per species per size class, removal of sub-merchantable material and brush, and equipment operation inside of the SMZ.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

I find that the Action Alternative would 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

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More Detailed EA

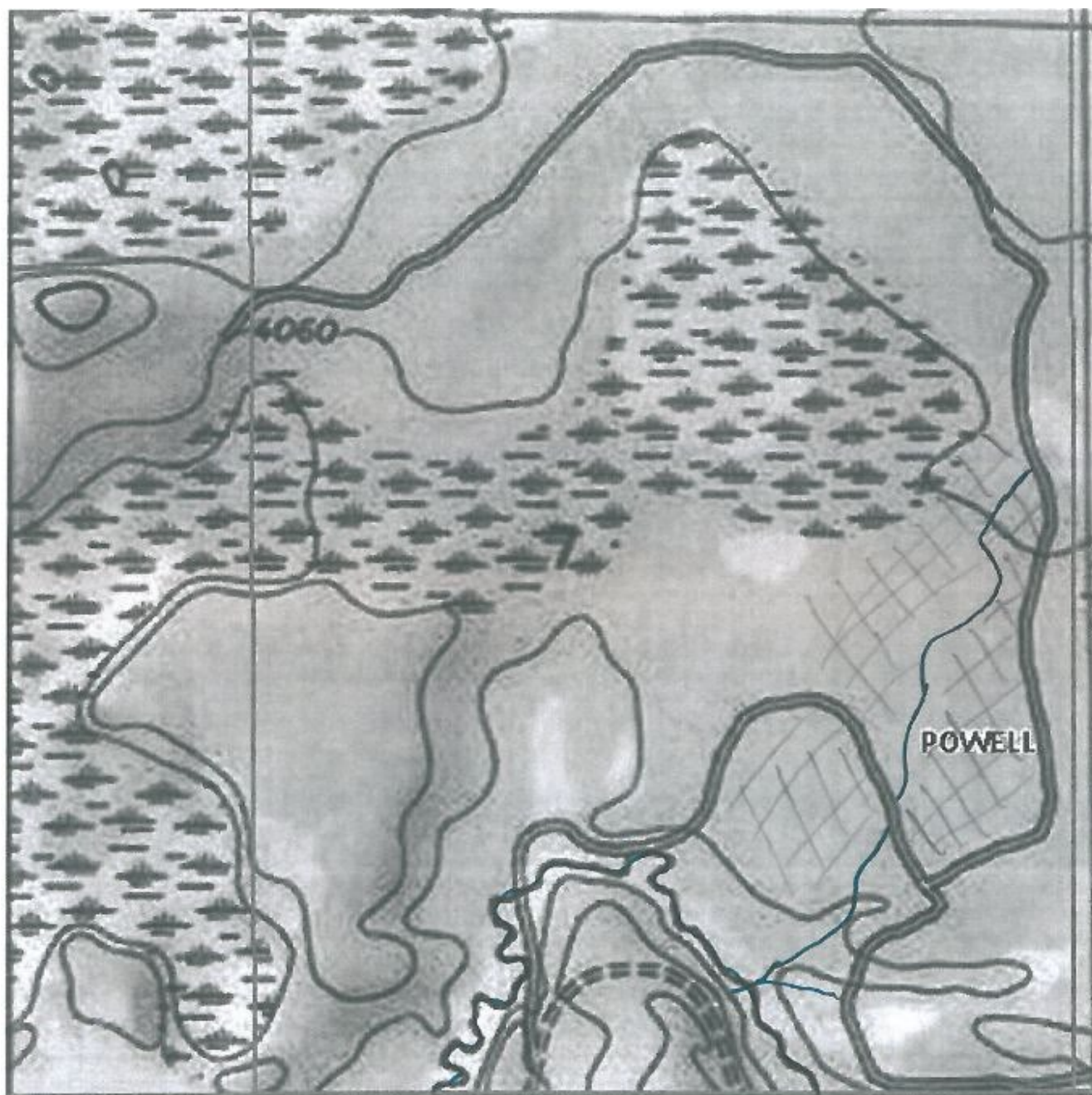
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No Further Analysis

Attachment A-1

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Kristen Baker-Dickinson
	Title: Clearwater Unit Manager
Signature: /s/ K. Baker-Dickinson	Date: 12/19/2023





/// TIMBER HARVEST