

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Trojan Defense Temporary Road use Agreement
Proposed Implementation Date:	June, 2024
Proponent:	United States Forest Service
Location:	W2, Section 36, T31N, R34W
County:	Lincoln

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Grant Temporary Access to the United States Forest Service, to roads on state land, allowing them to meet specific land management goals for their land, including the shared goals of forest health and fuels mitigation, affecting both ownerships.

The USFS proposed action includes use of 1.12 miles of existing road and the construction, and use of 0.27 miles of new road, comprising 1.39 miles of total road on state land.

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.

See Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Trojan Defense Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project of the USDA Forest Service, Kootenai Natl. Forest, Three Rivers District, signed May 30, 2024.

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

The Project Area includes white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, and elk winter range (DFWP 2008). Construction of the proposed new road would affect approximately 2 acres of big game winter range and non-winter range habitat, which would not be expected to provide snow intercept or thermal cover for the long term. This is a relatively minor impact given the surrounding availability of habitat. Disturbance from road construction activities would be relatively short-term, and disturbance from increased motorized use associated with forest management activities would exist for the duration of the TRUP but be concentrated within a 3-year period (USDA 2024). Disturbance from motorized use could extend 500 meters or more beyond the road corridor (Wisdom et al. 2018, McCorquodale 2013, Witmer and deCalesta 1985, Czech 1991) which could reduce big game security and habitat effectiveness. Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on big game is expected to minor.

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.

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The proposed project is within grizzly bear non-recovery occupied habitat associated with the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem (USFWS 1993, Wittinger 2002). Grizzly bears may occasionally use this area. Construction of approximately 0.27 miles of new road would impact approximately 2 acres of grizzly bear habitat. Existing habitat at the site of proposed road construction is not preferred habitat (e.g. avalanche chutes, riparian areas) and does not currently provide hiding cover for bears. Activity associated with road construction could disturb or displace bears within 500 meters of the road corridor (Procter et. al. 2019). To minimize potential disturbance to grizzly bears, road construction activities will be permitted only during the denning season (November 16 through March 31) and/or limited to 15 days from June 16 through November 15. Increased motorized use of approximately 1.39 miles of new and existing road on DNRC land could disturb or displace bears, should they be present in the area. To minimize potential disturbance during the spring period, motorized use of new and restricted roads for all commercial and most administrative purposes would be prohibited from April 1 through June 15. Roads would remain restricted to public motorized access. Human-related attractants at adjacent private home sites would continue to be the greatest risk factor to grizzly bears in the area. Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on grizzly bears is expected to be minor.

The construction of 0.27 miles of new road would occur in temporarily non-suitable Canada lynx habitat. If left undisturbed this area would continue to grow and become suitable lynx habitat. Therefore, construction of new permanent road would remove approximately 2 acres of lynx habitat. Removal of this habitat is unlikely to appreciably alter overall habitat quality or connectivity at the broader scale. Should lynx be present in the parcel, increased motorized activities could disturb and displace lynx during periods of road building and increased motorized use which would be concentrated during a 3-year period (USDA, 2024). Due to the large home range size of lynx and the small amount of suitable habitat that would be removed the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed action would be negligible.

No potentially suitable wolverine denning habitat exists within the proposed Project Area. The Project Area does not maintain deep snow into late spring and does not contain high-elevation alpine habitat. Given the large home range area wolverines occupy (average over 150 square miles) and the long distances wolverines typically cover during their movements, it is possible that wolverines may occasionally use the Project Area during the non-denning season. However, the proposed activities are not expected to measurably affect use of the area by wolverines. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to wolverines would be expected to occur under the proposed action.

Habitats for sensitive species are either not present (MTNHP, 2024) and or would not be appreciably affected by the proposed activities.

Wildlife Mitigations

- Motorized commercial and administrative forest management activities, including road building and log hauling, are restricted during the spring period from April 1 through June 15 per GB-CY3 (USFWS and DNRC 2010).
- New road building is permitted during the denning season, November 16 through March 31. Alternatively, minor project days can be used for new road building from June 16 through November 15. There are 15 operating days that can be used on the parcel and these days must be tracked.
- Log hauling is permitted from June 16 through March 31.
- Restrict public access at all times on restricted roads that are opened for harvesting activities; signs should be used during active periods and a physical closure must be used during inactive periods (nights, weekends, etc.).

- If a threatened or endangered species is encountered, consult a DNRC biologist immediately. Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors or wolf dens are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area, contact a DNRC biologist.
- Contractors will adhere to food storage and sanitation requirements as described in USFS food storage orders. Ensure that all attractants such as food, garbage, and petroleum products are stored in a bear-resistant manner.
- Prohibit contractors and purchasers conducting contract operations from carrying firearms while on duty.

Literature Cited

- DFWP. 2008. Maps of moose, elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer distribution in Montana. *In* Individual GIS data layers. Available online at:
<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionElk.jpg>
<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionMoose.jpg>
<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionMuleDeer.jpg>
<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionWhiteTailedDeer.jpg>
- MNHP. 2024. Natural Heritage Map Viewer. Montana Natural Heritage Program. Retrieved on March 21, 2024, from <http://mtnhp.org/MapViewer>.
- McCorquodale, S. 2013., A brief review of the scientific literature on elk, roads and traffic. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia, WA.
- Proctor et. al. 2019. Effects of roads and motorized human access on grizzly bear populations in British Columbia and Alberta, Canada. *Ursus*. (30e2), 16-39.
- USDA. 2024. Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Trojan Defense Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project of the USDA Forest Service, Kootenai Natl. Forest, Three Rivers District, signed May 30, 2024.:
- USDA, 2024. Trojan Defense Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project; Terrestrial Wildlife Report. USDA Forest Service, Kootenai National Forest, Three Rivers Ranger District.
- USFWS. 1993. Grizzly bear recovery plan. Missoula, Montana. 181 pp.
- USFWS and DNRC. 2010. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volumes I and II., U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6, Denver, Colorado and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Missoula, MT.
- Wittinger, W. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum. Report on file at USDA Forest Service, Region 1, Missoula, MT.
- Wisdom, M.J., Preisler, H.K., Naylor, L.M., Anthony, R.G., Johnson, B.K. and Rowland, M.M., 2018. Elk responses to trail-based recreation on public forests. *Forest Ecology and Management*. 411, pp.223-233.
- Witmer, G. W., and D. S. deCalesta. 1985. Effects of forest roads on habitat use by Roosevelt elk. *Northwest Science* 59:122-125.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

See Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Trojan Defense Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project of the USDA Forest Service, Kootenai Natl. Forest, Three Rivers District, signed May 30, 2024.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

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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.

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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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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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.

See Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Trojan Defense Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project of the USDA Forest Service, Kootenai Natl. Forest, Three Rivers District, signed May 30, 2024.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

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23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

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

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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.

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EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Dave Marsh	Date: 6-3-2024
	Title: Forest Management Supervisor, Libby Unit	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

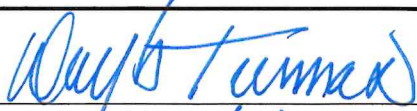
Upon review of the Checklist EA and appendices I find the Action Alternative as proposed meets the intent of the project objectives as stated on page 1, Type and Purpose of Action. It complies with all pertinent environmental laws, DNRC Forest Management Rules and Habitat Conservation Plan, and a consensus of professional opinion on limits of acceptable environmental impact. The No Action Alternative does not meet the project objectives. For these reasons I have selected the Action Alternative for implementation on this project.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After a thorough review of the Department policies, DNRC Forest Management Rules and Habitat Conservation Plan, I find all the identified resource management concerns have been fully addressed in this Checklist EA and it's appendices. Specific mitigation measures for each resource concern are listed in the USFS NEPA document. The action alternative promotes the development of a healthy, biologically diverse, and productive forest landscape. It also provides the opportunity to improve access and road maintenance within the project area. I find there will be no significant impacts to the human environment as a result of implementing the action alternative. Specific project design features and various resource management specialist recommendations have been implemented to ensure that this project will fall within the limits of acceptable environmental change and result in no significant effects.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS
 More Detailed EA
 No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Doug Turman	
	Title: Libby Unit Manager	
Signature:	Date: 6/5/24	