

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION

Northwestern Land Office - Swan Unit

GREG GIANFORTE, GOVERNOR



STATE OF MONTANA

PHONE: (406) 754-2301

34925 MT HWY 83
SWAN LAKE, MT 59911

DECISION NOTICE
Squeezer Meadow Multiple Timber
Sale Project
May 20, 2024

INTRODUCTION

I have reviewed all the information and comments received during the preparation of the Squeezer Meadow Multiple Timber Sale Project.

I have reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), including comments received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the responses to those comments as presented in the FEIS.

I have compared the alternatives to the project objectives and evaluated their advantages and disadvantages.

I have reviewed each identified issue and the analysis of environmental effects for each alternative displayed in the FEIS.

I have carefully compared the Proposed Decision with philosophy and direction contained within Department policies, the State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP), the Administrative Rules for Forest Management (ARMs), and the DNRC Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan.

DECISION

I have chosen to implement Action Alternative B, as described in the *FEIS PROPOSED DECISION* (*FEIS, Chapter II, pages 44 through 55*) without modification. Action Alternative B would implement all recommended mitigations in the Squeezer Meadow Multiple Timber Sale Project FEIS.

Action Alternative B consists of several timber sales and smaller permits totaling 39.9 million board feet (MMbf), spread over a 5 to 7 year period. If harvested over a three-year period, this project would represent approximately 13 percent of the state's harvest for the years of 2025 through 2029.

Instead of doing analysis for each individual timber sale, the FEIS was designed to analyze and display the cumulative effects for multiple timber sales, resulting in a more complete and accurate effects analysis.

Action Alternative B meets the *PURPOSE AND NEED* for the proposed action and *PROJECT OBJECTIVES* (*FEIS Chapter I, page 1*) as displayed within the *FEIS PROPOSED DECISION*. The proposed mitigations are adequate and feasible. In addition, Action Alternative B complies with the philosophy of the SFLMP and all department policies, state laws, and administrative rules.

Overall, Action Alternative B strikes the best balance between protection of ecological values and addressing insect and disease problems with revenue generation for the Common School Trust. Action Alternative B earns an estimated \$1,346,433 in total trust revenue, or about \$14 more per acre treated than Action Alternative C. Stands with the greatest amounts of mortality are identified for harvest with treatments that focus on providing for the best long-term forest health and vigor. Action

Alternative B captures potential value loss by treating 39 more acres of high-risk old growth more intensively than Action Alternative C. In addition, the proposed project and harvest treatments move Swan River State Forest toward desired future conditions while limiting effects to other valuable resources such as watersheds, wildlife, and soils. Action Alternative B moves 212 acres into the 0- to 39-year age class, and 118 more acres of mixed-conifer cover type into western white pine, western larch/Douglas fir, and ponderosa pine cover types than does Action Alternative C. This moves the Swan River State Forest towards how age classes and cover types were historically represented on the general landscape.

Because of the above-mentioned reasons, Action Alternative B best complies with the Department's legal requirement to manage these lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions.

The complete rationale for choosing Action Alternative B is displayed in the *FEIS PROPOSED DECISION (FEIS, Chapter II, pages 44 through 55)*.

Upon execution of this decision, I will recommend that the first Squeezer Meadow Timber Sale Project Contracts be submitted to the Board of Land Commissioners for approval.

Thank you,

Dave Marx
Unit Manager
Swan River State Forest
3925 MT HWY 83,
Swan Lake, MT. 59911
(406)-754-2301