



FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Denise Germann
406-758-5252
406-249-1714 cell

Flathead National Forest Completes FEIS for West Side Reservoir Post-Fire Project

The Flathead National Forest has completed a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) for the West Side Reservoir Post-Fire Project. The document is available for public review.

The project is located on the Hungry Horse and Spotted Bear Ranger Districts of the forest. Proposed activities occur within and near the Blackfoot, Doe, Beta, Doris, Ball, and Wounded Buck fire areas which burned from August through September 2003. These fire areas are located between the crest of the Swan Mountain Range and the Hungry Horse Reservoir. Approximately 30,000 acres burned in these fires, all of which are on National Forest System lands.

The forest proposed this project with an action to salvage burned timber and manage public access in February, 2004. This action and alternatives to this action were analyzed for environmental effects in a draft environmental impact statement released in August, 2004. This document, a final environmental impact statement, contains updated, field-verified information. A decision is anticipated in January.

The purpose of the project is to recover merchantable wood affected by the fires in a timely manner to support local communities and contribute to the long-term yield of forest products.

The document identifies four action alternatives, in addition to the no-action alternative. Proposed activities analyzed in the document include salvage on 3000-3300 acres with about 700-750 acres identified to be planted with trees. Removal of salvage wood would be by helicopters, cable and ground-based equipment. The various alternatives would require changes in road and trail access to improve grizzly bear security, including the decommissioning of between 49 – 69 miles of road.

The preferred alternative identified in the document, Alternative E, proposes activities on about 3300 acres with about 38 million board feet of burned timber salvaged. The

majority of the salvage would be by helicopter. The preferred alternative also would decommission 49 miles of road and would close some roads and trails to wheeled, motorized vehicles. The preferred alternative would require forest plan project specific amendments to change open motorized and total motorized access, and security core standards associated with Amendment 19.

Flathead Forest Supervisor Cathy Barbouletos said, “Alternative E was identified as the preferred alternative as I believe it is the best reflection of the need to balance the protection of resources with the need to continue to provide sufficient motorized access to National Forest System lands.” Barbouletos added, “All alternatives will be considered before a final decision is made after the first of the new year.”

The project received an exemption of stay due to an emergency situation relating to the potential loss of value of the burned wood products. This exemption allows for the implementation of the project to begin during the project appeal period. If an exemption was not granted, an appeal and appeal decision period would have to expire before any action could happen on the ground.

For more information about the document, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead/nepa/nepa.htm> or contact project leader Bryan Donner at 406-863-5408. Paper and CD copies of the document are available at the Hungry Horse District Office in Hungry Horse, the Tally Lake District Office in Whitefish and the Forest Supervisor’s Office in Kalispell.

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