

## Winter Logging—Easy, Hard, or Both?

Mike Cole, Townsend District Ranger

It was something that Dave McCann had talked about and championed throughout his career. McCann, the Helena National Forest's Timber Sale Administrator, always felt that winter logging was a good method to reduce impacts to the forest, especially to soils. He also knew that it helped the economy by providing year-round employment to members of the timber industry who were often laid off during the winter months.

Over the past several years, McCann has been able to see winter logging become a reality on the Cave Gulch and Maudlow-Toston salvage projects, two ongoing efforts to provide economic benefit to local sawmills using trees burned during the fires of 2000. On the Maudlow-Toston project, he has also been overseeing the use of helicopters to salvage trees,

a first on the Helena National Forest. Helicopters provide another tool to reduce impacts to the surrounding forest and soils, especially on steep slopes.

During the winter, equipment can travel off constructed roads and move logs through the forest across a frozen "pavement" of ice and snow. Unless the snow pack gets too deep, operations can continue throughout the winter. Vegetation, including young tree seedlings, is better protected under the snow pack. According to McCann, "winter logging is hard on the workers and the equipment, but it is really easy on the ground."

The visual effects of winter logging are most dramatic in the spring. To the untrained eye, there is little indication that logging activity has taken place so recently on the landscape. Shrubs,



grasses and wildflowers cover the landscape. The snow and ice "travel routes" have all melted, leaving little or no evidence of the passage of heavy equipment except along constructed roads. Continued innovations to equi-

ment will allow logging to become yet more versatile and less impactful to the environment, and the public can expect to see even less disruption to the visual landscapes following timber harvest operations.

## High School Students Monitor Forest Health in the Scapegoat Wilderness

Liz Burke, YFMP Program Manager



YFMP students r-l: Marcus Silverthorne, Rachel Muscarelli, Jeremy Stringer, Lane Berg, Eric Leitzke, Brenna Kindrick, Liz Burke (instructor), Charlie Evanson, Dillon Martini. Not picture: Orrin Tiberi, Tom Pedersen (instructor)

Nine high school students spent the summer of 2003 monitoring forest health under the direction of Helena National Forest professionals. For seven weeks students measured water quality, stream health, vegetation, and soil quality at over 30 sites throughout the Helena National Forest. New in 2003 was a three-day monitoring trip into the Scapegoat Wilderness at Heart Lake, where students studied camping impacts at three sites. Students enjoyed backpacking into the wilderness and made valuable suggestions for minimizing camping impacts upon the land.

The Youth Forest Monitoring Program (YFMP) is a seven-week

program in which 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade students from area schools have the opportunity to learn forest health monitoring skills, network with forestry professionals, and present their opinions and data to the Forest Service as well as to the general public. Many alumni of the program return as seasonal employees of the Forest Service in subsequent years. YFMP is made possible through a partnership between the Helena National Forest, Helena Forest Foundation, and University of Montana-Helena.

For more information on YFMP 2004, and how to apply for a position, please call 449-5201 extension 213.