



NEWS RELEASE

Lolo National Forest

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Forest Service
Lolo National Forest
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DeBaugan Fuels Reduction Project Draft EIS Released

Missoula, MT. – The draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the DeBaugan Fuels reduction project has been released for public comment and is available on the Lolo National Forest website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/lolo/projects/>. The public comment period will remain open for 45 days from the date of a Federal Register announcement, expected towards the end of this week.

The project specifically addresses the need for fuel reduction work within the wildland urban interface (WUI) near the communities of Saltese, Haugan, DeBorgia and Cabin City, approximately 80 miles northwest of Missoula on the Superior Ranger District. The entire analysis area is over 60,000 acres, with proposed project work only near private property on both sides of Interstate 90. Project activities are intended to reduce the potential for crown fires and reduce surface fire intensity near communities and out-lying homes. Project leaders and specialists have worked closely with members of these communities in developing a project that considers local resident needs.

“About two or three years ago a group of concerned citizens came in to visit us about worsening fuel conditions near their communities,” said Sharon Sweeney, Superior District Ranger.

Sweeney noted that there has been a history of high-intensity fire in the area and continued growth within the WUI. She said citizen concern about those conditions led to the creation of the DeBaugan Collaborative Group, which helped form the DeBaugan Fuels Reduction Project.

“It has truly been a joy to work with this group, and see their ideas grow into this project,” Sweeney said. “I look forward to getting back together again on the evening of February 28th at the DeBorgia Schoolhouse to share information about their project and discuss what’s next.”

Members of the local community, environmental groups, private landowners, and local elected officials have been working together on the DeBaugan project and have participated in the collaborative group since 2005. The project is consistent with the Mineral County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, which addresses fuel reduction needs to reduce threat of fire to people and property, and the Superior Ranger District’s long-term fuel reduction strategy.

The draft EIS displays the effects of the following proposed fuel treatments:

- Commercial harvest, consisting mostly of thinning, on 3,754 acres
- Pre-commercial thinning on 500 acres
- Slash and handpiling on 16 acres adjacent to private property
- Prescribed burning on 1,142 acres

Proposed activities also include road construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and closures.

Wildfire has been a natural, historic occurrence within the project area. Over the last 100 years wildfire has burned approximately 120,000 acres – or 55 percent -- of the St. Regis watershed in which the project area is located. But, since 1924, wildfire has not affected much of the land within the project area due to fuel characteristics. Specialists note, however, that those fuel characteristics have progressed and created an increased large fire potential. Specialists also estimate that approximately 180,000 lodgepole pine trees have been killed by mountain pine beetle in the project area since the mid-1990s.

Public comments on the draft EIS will be analyzed and considered as specialists prepare a final EIS, which Superior Ranger District officials expect to release later this summer. The project is being done under the authority of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA). For more information on HFRA please go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/field-guide/>.

For more information on this project, please contact Superior District Ranger Sharon Sweeney at (406) 822-3928, or project team leader, Pat Partyka, at (406) 826-4314.

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