



FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST

NEWS RELEASE

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Record of Decision Signed for Robert-Wedge Post-Fire Project

Flathead National Forest has completed a record of decision for the Robert-Wedge Post-Fire Project. Forest Supervisor Cathy Barbouletos made a decision to salvage trees on 3022 acres yielding approximately 23.3 million board feet from the 2003 Robert and Wedge Canyon Wildland Fires. Helicopter, skyline/cable and tractor equipment will be used and some winter logging will be required to address wildlife and soil concerns. Trees will be planted on approximately 2400 acres throughout the project area. Approximately .6 miles of new temporary road, 5.5 miles of snow road and 6.8 miles of temporary roads on existing templates will be constructed. Studies to test the effects of vegetation recovery and huckleberry production will take place, and some insect and disease treatments will be applied as needed.

Project-specific forest plan amendments for grizzly bear subunits are included in this decision to change open motorized and total motorized access, and security core standards associated with Amendment 19. Barbouletos said, "The amendments are appropriate, given the specific access conditions in these subunits and the need to improve grizzly bear security." She continued, "I believe this decision balances access to public lands and improves wildlife habitat."

Following the Robert and Wedge Canyon Fires, the Flathead National Forest initiated an environmental analysis process in January 2004. A draft environmental impact statement was released in June 2004 followed by the final environmental impact statement in November 2004. Special legislation related to the project, The Flathead and Kootenai National Forest Rehabilitation Act, was approved in November 2003 by President Bush. The purpose of the Act is to accomplish the planning and rehabilitation of the Robert and Wedge Canyon Fires within a collaborative environment.

Extensive public involvement was conducted with this project. The forest hosted a collaborative planning process that hosted 88 individuals representing diverse interests in January 2004, as well as hosting several public meetings, field trips and presentations.

The project received an exemption of stay authorization that allows 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.

The first salvage sale bid opening related to this project is anticipated the last week of December. For more information about the Robert-Wedge Post-Fire Project, contact 406-387-3800 or visit the forest's website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead.

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