



Bitterroot National Forest

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News Release

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Forest Seeks Comments on Project

Hamilton, Montana (September 6, 2019) – The Bitterroot National Forest is inviting the public to review and make comments on a proposed vegetation management, fuels reduction, and transportation system project on the West Fork Ranger District, immediately downstream from Painted Rocks Reservoir. The Mud Creek Vegetation Management Project encompasses approximately 48,523 acres of the Mud Creek watershed and portions of Nelson Lake, Little West Fork, Lloyd Creek, Lower Blue Joint and Painted Rocks drainages.

Objectives of the project include:

- Improve forest resilience to natural disturbances (fire, insects, and disease) by modifying forest conditions and fuels.
- Conduct a programmatic Forest Plan Amendment related to Elk Habitat Objectives.
- Design and implement a suitable transportation system for long-term land management, including providing additional recreational opportunities by creating new motorized and non-motorized trails.

The project area currently has one of highest road densities found anywhere on the forest and field surveys have identified roads in need of repair and maintenance. There is also a need to address and reduce chronic sediment sources which are currently impacting water quality and fish habitat.

The Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan has identified the area as a 'high priority' for fuels reduction within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), including a need to reduce crown fire hazards adjacent to communities and private property.

There are 236 parcels of private land with 175 structures within or immediately adjacent to the project. Seventy-three percent (35,486 acres) of the project has been identified as a 'Community Protection Zone' in the 2016 Bitterroot Wildfire Risk Assessment.

The project may also include road decommissioning and storage of routes to improve elk security, along with improving habitat and forage for bighorn sheep, mule deer and other regionally sensitive species.

Proposed treatments include commercial timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, and prescribed burning to improve forest health and manage timber to provide forest products, jobs, and income to local communities.

Over the past 10 years, the Bitterroot National Forest has completed numerous fuels reduction projects in a large portion of 'high priority areas' in the WUI. Since 2009, the forest has treated more than 30,000 acres of overstocked National Forest lands that border private property or are near homes.

To learn more about the Mud Creek Vegetation Management Project and to view maps visit www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot. Click on 'Land and Resource Management', then 'Projects'. Printed copies are also available for review at the Hamilton Supervisor's Office and the West Fork Ranger District.

Public comments are due by October 7, 2019.

Submit comments to the Responsible Official: Matt Anderson, Forest Supervisor, by one of the following methods; mail: Bitterroot National Forest, 1801 N. First Street, Hamilton, MT 59840. Fax: (406) 363-7159, or email: www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55744 (click on Comment/Object on right side of page). Hardcopy comments can also be mailed or delivered to the West Fork Ranger District office.

Comments should include: 1) name, address, phone number, and organization represented, if any; 2) title of project on which the comments are being submitted; and 3) substantive comments including specific facts and supporting information for the Forest Supervisor to consider.

Only individuals or entities who submit timely and specific written comments about the proposed project during the public comment period will be eligible to file an objection.

For more information or questions concerning the project, please contact Seth Carbonari, West Fork District Ranger at (406) 821-3269 or Jeff Shearer, Forest ID Team Leader at (406) 375-2608.

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