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From: McKay, Tod G -FS <tgmkay@fs.fed.us>
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Timber Contract Awarded on Meadow Vapor Project

Hamilton, Montana (August 8, 2018) – Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor Julie King announced today that Idaho Forest Group (formerly Tricon Timber) of St. Regis has been awarded a timber contract for the Meadow Vapor fuels reduction and watershed improvement project on the Darby/Sula Ranger District. The project includes over 3,200 acres of overstocked National Forest System lands east of Sula, surrounding the Springer Memorial and Bonanza communities in the upper East Fork of the Bitterroot River.

These communities (approx. 225 homes) were threatened by the 60,000 acre Meyers Fire last summer and were under an evacuation notice for several weeks.

The purpose of the project is to improve forest health and reduce hazardous fuels and lower crown fire hazards within the Wildland Urban Interface. In addition to the commercial and non-commercial timber harvests, the project also includes prescribed fire for fuels reduction. The Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan identified the project area as a 'high priority' for fuels reduction in the wildland-urban interface.

Project specifics include:

- Commercial timber harvest (logging) on 1,500 acres
- Non-commercial thinning to reduce tree densities
- Improve forest resilience to natural disturbances (fire, insects, disease)
- Manage timber to provide forest products, jobs, and income to local communities
- Improve watershed conditions and fisheries habitat
- Implement motorized recreation opportunities

The project will provide 8 million board feet of timber (1,600 truckloads) to Montana sawmills.

“We are excited to announce that we are awarding this timber contract to Idaho Forest Group,” said Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor Julie King. “Besides improving forest health and reducing hazardous fuels and the potential for crown fires, this project will provide jobs and economic benefits to our local communities.”

The East Fork drainage includes ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, and Douglas-fir stands. In many locations, there are dense pockets of dead and dying trees due to insect mortality as well as severe western spruce budworm damage.

The project responds to past requests from residents of the East Fork area to remove hazardous fuels near their homes and help protect their community from the devastating effects of a high intensity wildfire.

The project will also construct two new OHV (vehicles less than 50 inches in width) connector trails that were included in the 2016 Travel Management Plan to add additional recreation opportunities on the forest.

Work will likely begin this fall, but it is up to the contractor to determine a project start date. For more information, contact the Darby/Sula Ranger District at (406) 821-3913.

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