

From: McKay, Tod G -FS <tgmkay@fs.fed.us>
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Subject: News Release: Forest Seeks Comments on Project
Attachments: Threemile GNA Project - Scoping.docx

Forest Seeks Comments on Project

Hamilton, Montana (February 5, 2019) – The Bitterroot National Forest is inviting the public to review and make comments on a proposed vegetation management and fuels reduction project in the Sapphire Mountains northeast of Stevensville. The Threemile GNA proposed treatment area encompasses approximately 238 acres within and adjacent to the Threemile Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in the upper Wheelbarrow and Spring Creek watersheds on the Stevensville Ranger District.

Objectives of the project include:

- Improve forest health and resilience to natural disturbances (fire, insects, and disease) and restore historic structure in dry pine stands.
- Manage timber to provide forest products, jobs and income to local communities.
- Reduce hazardous fuels and lower crown fire hazards within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is currently proposing approximately 1,500 acres of vegetative treatments to improve elk habitat in the WMA. Road upgrades proposed by FWP in their project will provide improved access to adjacent FS lands increasing the feasibility of treatments. The project is a three agency partnership between the USFS, FWP, and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), using a Good Neighbor Authority Agreement.

Long time fire exclusion and suppression and subsequent development of shade-tolerant species have resulted in high tree densities in the project area. The current conditions are more likely to support stand-replacing fires which would threaten the WUI and areas that have old growth tree characteristics. The project also includes pockets of dead and dying trees due to insects and disease including western spruce budworm, dwarf mistletoe, and bark beetles.

The Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan has identified this area as a 'high priority' for fuels reduction within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

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 2007, the forest has treated more than 30,000 acres of overstocked National Forest System lands that border private property or are near homes.

To learn more about the project and to view maps visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55246>.

Public comments specific to this project and/or to individual sites and resources are valuable in helping the Forest Service identify concerns, develop alternatives, and refine the analysis to focus on issues. Comments are due by March 11, 2019.

Submit comments to: Jo Christensen, Stevensville Ranger District, by one of the following methods; mail: 88 Main Street, Stevensville, MT 59870. Fax: (406) 777-7423, or email: melissajchristensen@usda.gov. 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) specific facts and supporting information for the responsible official to consider.

The Stevensville Ranger District is hosting an open house next week to share more information about the project and to further collect comments and ideas. The open house will take place on Wednesday, February 13th from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the North Valley Public Library in Stevensville. Please RSVP to Jo Christensen at (406) 777-7425 or the email above if you are interested in attending.

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