



Categorical Exclusion Review for HFRA Section 605, Wildfire Resilience Category

PROPOSAL INFORMATION

General Information

Proposal Name: West Truman

Proposal Tracking #: 68860

Responsible Official: Sarah Canepa, District Ranger

Unit: Swan Lake Ranger District, Flathead National Forest

Anticipated Implementation: Q4 FY2027

General Location of Proposal: Approximately 7 miles south of Kila, Montana, and three miles west of Blacktail Mountain. It is roughly bounded on the west and north by the Forest boundary, on the east by Truman Creek, and by Lake Mary Ronan-Ronan Creek, Truman Creek, and Mount Creek Watershed boundaries on the south.

Applicable Management Areas: MA 6c, General Forest High-Intensity Vegetation Management; MA 7, Focused Recreation Area

Project Webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r01/flathead/projects/68860>

Applicable Category

This project is categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS because it fits the following category: Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA), Section 605, Wildfire Resilience (16 U.S.C. 6591d)

This category is applicable for this project because:

- The project is in an area designated prior to March 23, 2018, in accordance with section 602(b) and (c) of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.
- The proposed treatments are located in wildland urban interface; **or** outside the wildland urban interface in Condition Classes 2 or 3 and Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III that contain very high wildfire hazard potential; **or both**.
- The project maximizes retaining old-growth and large trees as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote stand resilience to insects and disease; and reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, wildfires.
- The project is not located in:
 - congressionally designated wilderness or wilderness study areas;
 - areas where the removal of vegetation is restricted or prohibited by statute or by Presidential proclamation; or
 - areas where the activities described above will be inconsistent with the applicable land and resource management plan.

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- The project's number of acres treated does not exceed 3,000 acres.
- The project does not establish new permanent roads. Temporary roads may be constructed but must be decommissioned no later than three years after the project is completed.
- Public notice and scoping has been or will be conducted.
- The project was developed through a collaborative process.
- The best available scientific information is being considered to maintain or restore ecological integrity, including maintaining or restoring forested vegetation structure, function, composition and connectivity.
- All activities proposed under this project are consistent with the land and resource management plan.
- Extraordinary circumstances are being considered during the analysis and decision-making process.

Supporting Documentation

- HFRA & ESD Map
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\V_Supporting_Documentation\
V003_WestTruman_HFRA_ESD_Map_20251105.pdf
- WUI Analysis and Map
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\I_Fire_Fuels_Air\I003_West Truman WUI Analysis.docx
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\I_Fire_Fuels_Air\I005_West Truman WUI Map.pdf
- Vegetation Condition Class and Fire Regime Group Maps
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\I_Fire_Fuels_Air\I006_West Truman VCC Map.pdf
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\I_Fire_Fuels_Air\I007_West Truman FRG Map.pdf
- Silviculture Report
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\H_Silviculture\H002_WT_Veg Report.docx
- Old Growth & Proposed Treatments Map
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\H_Silviculture\H005_Existing Old Growth and Proposed
Treatments.pdf

Purpose and Need

The 2018 Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan (USDA 2018a), hereafter referred to as “forest plan”, provides management direction for all resources on the Flathead National Forest. The forest plan incorporates an active management strategy that promotes desired vegetation and habitat conditions, contributes economic benefits to local communities through forest management and other activities, and provides for a variety of recreational opportunities. The purpose and need of the West Truman project are derived from the differences between the existing landscape conditions and the desired conditions described in the forest plan. Following field review of the project area and interdisciplinary discussions, the following purposes and needs were identified: 1) reduce tree densities and fuel loadings within the wildland-urban interface; 2) improve the diversity and resilience of vegetative communities; and 3) contribute to continued timber production and economic sustainability. Each component of the purpose and need is described in more detail below.

Reduce tree densities and fuel loadings

A variety of stand conditions exist across the project area with influences from fire and vegetation management histories. Current stand conditions and fuel loadings influence potential fire behavior.

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Many stands are growing in high stand density conditions with competition for light, nutrients, and water resulting in decreased tree vigor, decreased resistance to insects and disease, increased tree mortality, and accumulating surface fuel loads. In other stands, overstory mortality and understory tree canopy layers create ladder fuels that would potentially allow a ground fire to move up into the tree canopy. Fuel conditions exist in the project area that could support crown fire and fire spread, which could threaten life and private property within the wildland-urban interface.

According to the forest plan, it is desirable to reduce fuels in areas where wildland fires on NFS lands pose a threat to communities and community assets. The West Truman project area is located directly adjacent to communities at risk from wildfire and is topographically aligned with prevailing wind patterns that may increase potential fire behavior. Reducing fuels and fuel continuity within the project area would reduce the risk of fire spread within the wildland-urban interface. It is also desirable to locate and maintain strategic fuel breaks across the forest and to improve ingress/egress to create a safer environment for firefighters should a wildfire start (FW-DC-FIRE-01, 02, and 07 and FW-DC-TE&V-13).

Improve the diversity and resilience of vegetative communities.

To improve the diversity and resilience of forest stands in the project area, vegetation treatments are needed to shift species composition and increase tree vigor, reduce stand density, and recruit and retain larger trees. Active management is needed to increase the presence of species like ponderosa pine, western larch, and western white pine to maintain and increase the presence of large long-lived trees over time, and to reduce impacts from insect attack and forest pathogens (including Douglas-fir beetle and root disease). Proposed treatments would result in an improved species mix, lower stand densities, decreased levels of insect and disease mortality, and less risk of loss due to wildfire in the wildland-urban interface, riparian management zones, timber production lands, and recreation areas (FW-DC-TE&V-07, -08, -11, -12, -13, -14, and -21; FW-DC-RMZ-01).

Contribute to continued timber production and economic sustainability.

Vegetation treatments produce a variety of timber products while contributing to ecological sustainability and vegetation desired conditions. Timber production contributes to jobs and income in local communities. Active forest management on timber production lands provides sustainable, regularly scheduled timber harvest into the future that result in more resilient conditions with less potential for loss of timber to natural disturbances like wildfire, insects, and disease (FW-DC-TIMB-01, -02, -03, -04, -06, and -07).

Proposed Action

The proposed action is a set of management actions intended to meet the purpose and need described above. The tables below provide summaries of the vegetation management and road management components of the proposed action. A summary of proposed vegetation management activities is provided in Table 1, and a summary of proposed road management activities is provided in Table 2. Additionally, a list of proposed unit-specific treatments is provided in Table 3, and a map of proposed units is provided below. Proposed vegetation treatment descriptions are provided in the next section of this document.

During the environmental review process, after the proposed action was released to the public, resource specialists made the following changes to units and their proposed treatments. Units 75 and 84 were removed because they did not meet the condition class requirements in HFRA. Units

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68, 78, and 95 were changed from seed tree (regeneration treatment) to improvement cut (intermediate treatment) to meet Forest Plan standards for old growth. These changes are reflected in the proposed action tables and figure below.

Table 1. Summary of proposed vegetation management activities

| Proposed Vegetation Treatments | Acres |
|--|--------------|
| Commercial thin | 736 |
| Improvement cut | 939 |
| Shelterwood | 346 |
| Seed tree | 802 |
| Total proposed vegetation treatment acres | 2,823 |

Table 2. Summary of proposed road management activities

| Proposed road management | Miles |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| National Forest System haul routes | 67.5 |
| Temporary road construction | 5.6 |

Table 3. List of proposed vegetation treatments by unit

| Unit | Acres | Harvest Treatment | Harvest System |
|------|-------|-------------------|----------------|
| 002 | 34 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 003A | 1 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 003B | 9 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 003C | 7 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 004 | 15 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 005 | 85 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 006 | 58 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 007 | 37 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 008 | 24 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 010 | 53 | Shelterwood | Ground Based |
| 011 | 119 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 012 | 26 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 013 | 18 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 014 | 131 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 015 | 69 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 016 | 51 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 017A | 10 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 017B | 18 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 018A | 29 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 018B | 7 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 018C | 10 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 019 | 43 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 019A | 14 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |

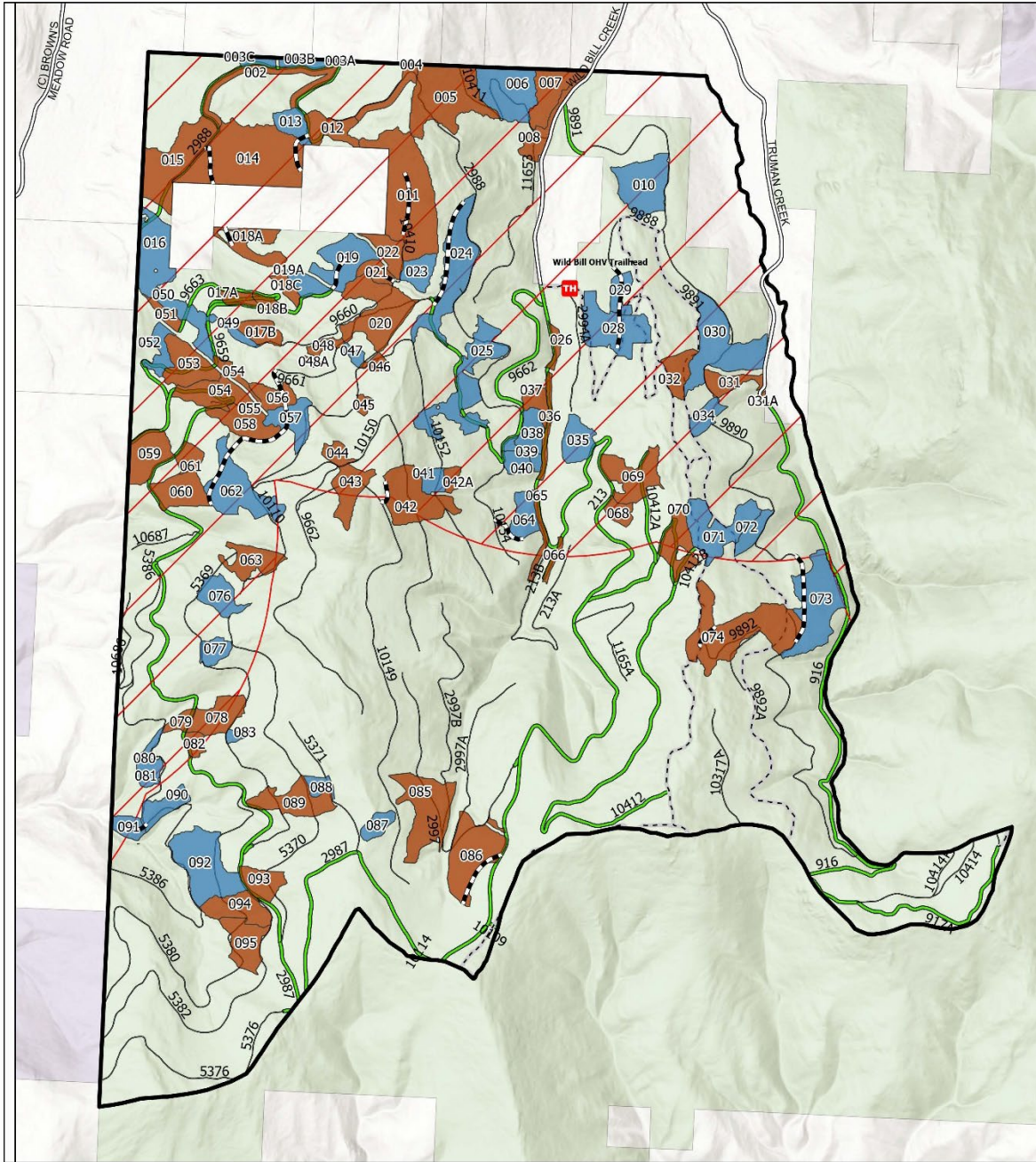
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| Unit | Acres | Harvest Treatment | Harvest System |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 020 | 66 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 021 | 13 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 022 | 19 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 023 | 19 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 024 | 69 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 025 | 71 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 026 | 7 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 028 | 56 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 029 | 16 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 030 | 76 | Shelterwood | Ground Based |
| 031 | 19 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |
| 031A | 1 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |
| 032 | 21 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 034 | 15 | Shelterwood | Skyline |
| 035 | 25 | Shelterwood | Skyline |
| 036 | 12 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 037 | 13 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 038 | 19 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 039 | 10 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 040 | 12 | Shelterwood | Skyline |
| 041 | 12 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 042 | 57 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |
| 042A | 7 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |
| 043 | 29 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 044 | 11 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 045 | 6 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 046 | 6 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 047 | 6 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 048 | 7 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 048A | 2 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 049 | 7 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 050 | 26 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 051 | 10 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 052 | 18 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 053 | 38 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 054 | 35 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 054 | 9 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 055 | 3 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 056 | 18 | Commercial Thin | Skyline |
| 057 | 27 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 058 | 31 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |
| 059 | 37 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |

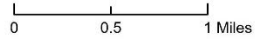
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| Unit | Acres | Harvest Treatment | Harvest System |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 060 | 33 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 061 | 13 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 062 | 59 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 063 | 29 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |
| 064 | 22 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 065 | 10 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 066 | 5 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 068 | 12 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 069 | 42 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 070 | 31 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 071 | 52 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 072 | 15 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 073 | 72 | Seed Tree | Skyline |
| 074 | 99 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 076 | 25 | Seed Tree | Ground Based |
| 077 | 15 | Shelterwood | Ground Based |
| 078 | 32 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 079 | 9 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 080 | 5 | Shelterwood | Skyline |
| 081 | 13 | Shelterwood | Skyline |
| 082 | 8 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 083 | 5 | Shelterwood | Ground Based |
| 085 | 66 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 086 | 65 | Commercial Thin | Ground Based |
| 087 | 13 | Shelterwood | Ground Based |
| 088 | 9 | Shelterwood | Ground Based |
| 089 | 40 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 090 | 21 | Shelterwood | Skyline |
| 091 | 13 | Shelterwood | Skyline |
| 092 | 71 | Shelterwood | Ground Based |
| 093 | 23 | Improvement Cut | Ground Based |
| 094 | 33 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |
| 095 | 34 | Improvement Cut | Skyline |

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Vicinity Map



| Legend | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| West Truman Project Boundary | Temporary Roads |
| HFRA WUI | Wild Bill OHV Trails |
| Vegetation Treatments | Forest Service Roads |
| Intermediate | Open |
| Regeneration | Closed |
| | Other Roads |
| | Ownership Title |
| | PRIVATE |
| | FOREST SERVICE |
| | STATE |

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Proposed Vegetation Treatment Descriptions

Intermediate Treatments

Commercial thin and improvement cut are intermediate treatments that result in a generally well-stocked stand composed of the healthiest trees with large, well-formed crowns and with reduced fuel loading. The objectives of these treatments are to reduce ladder fuels and overall stand density while improving forest growth, resilience, species composition, and structure. Commercial thinning is proposed where improving growth rate to recruit larger trees is emphasized. Improvement cut is proposed where improving species composition and stand structure are emphasized.

Leave tree selection would favor early seral and fire-tolerant species, including ponderosa pine, western larch, western white pine, and Douglas-fir on most sites. Remaining trees would have more growing space, light, nutrients, and water to allow them to grow more quickly into large trees with improved insect, disease, and fire tolerance. These activities would be completed using commercial harvest methods and post-harvest fuels methods (see descriptions in Treatment Methods section below). Approximately 50 acres of intermediate treatment will occur within stands that contain old growth characteristics. Treatments will retain large trees and promote old-growth forest characteristics in accordance with forest plan standard FW-STD-TE&V-01.

Regeneration Treatments

Seed tree and shelterwood treatments are even-aged regeneration treatments that alter the forest from a mature stand to a seedling stage. The objectives of these treatments are to regenerate preferred tree species such as ponderosa pine, western white pine, and western larch, reduce fuels, minimize future loss from forest pathogens, and create openings consistent with those that would be caused by natural disturbances. Seed tree harvest is planned where existing trees of preferred species such as western larch are available to naturally reseed the site. Shelterwood harvest is planned where retention of existing overstory trees is needed, due to aspect and slope, to provide shading and protection of newly established seedlings.

Seed tree and shelterwood harvests would generally be reforested using a combination of natural regeneration from seed and planting. All treatments would retain large overstory trees of preferred species for long-term stand structure, snag replacements, and downed wood recruitment. Treatments would also retain existing large, downed wood, where available. These activities would be completed using commercial harvest methods, post-harvest fuels methods, and site preparation and reforestation methods (described in Treatment Methods section below). Approximately 13 of the regeneration harvest treatments may create openings larger than 40 acres in size, but none of them will exceed the maximum opening size specified in forest plan standard FW-STD-TIMB-07. These resulting patterns would contribute to and maintain desired conditions (FW-DC-TE&V-03), while the increased forest resilience would prevent the potential loss of timber within lands suitable for timber production (FW-DC-TIMB-07).

Treatment in Riparian Management Zones

Riparian management zones (RMZs) are areas adjacent to and surrounding streams, wetlands, and other water features. The project includes approximately 81.5 acres of commercial treatment of upland vegetation (conifer forest) within outer riparian management zones as defined in FW-STD-RMZ-01. These treatments would improve tree growth, improve species composition, and reduce fuel loads in upland stands. Project activities in riparian management zones would follow forest plan standards.

Treatment Methods

Commercial harvest methods

Commercial harvest methods consist of tree removal through ground-based mechanized systems, cable systems, or a combination of those systems. Ground-based mechanized systems include

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cutting and staging trees with tracked mechanized felling equipment and moving cut trees to landings for processing with rubber-tired skidders; and using cut-to-length equipment where a harvester fells and processes trees and a forwarder carries processed logs to a landing. Cable systems include skyline harvest systems where trees are mechanically or manually felled and then dragged to the landing via a suspended cable for processing; and use of cable-tethered ground-based equipment to fell, yard, and complete other project activities. Landings are areas adjacent to roads where logs are sorted, processed, and loaded for hauling. These systems would be used to meet objectives for each treatment type described above.

Commercial harvest methods will create localized noise during operations. There may be short-term closures of roads or trails during to the implementation of project activities. This may include temporary closure of the Wild Bill OHV trail for public safety during the implementation of project activities.

Post-harvest fuels methods

Once harvest activities are completed, post-harvest fuels treatments would occur. Understory trees, damaged trees, and brush may be slashed. Downed wood (in excess of retention requirements) may be excavator-piled, chipped, masticated, broadcast burned, or underburned. Piles within units and at landings would be burned following treatment. Where prescribed burning is used post-harvest, fire line and fuel breaks would be constructed by hand or using machines.

Prescribed burning of units includes application of fire to reduce accumulated fuels, and maintains or promotes development of a diverse mosaic of vegetative conditions. Prescribed burning may include pile burning or broadcast burning, following commercial harvest. Prescribed burning and pile burning may create a short term increase in local smoke during implementation.

Site preparation and reforestation methods

A combination of natural regeneration (allowing trees to naturally reseed) and planting would occur following regeneration treatments. To create a favorable seed bed for reforestation, methods like understory slashing, broadcast burning, or machine scarification may be used to create areas of bare soil with reduced competing vegetation. Planting would occur where insufficient natural regeneration of desired species is anticipated, or where restoring insect and disease-resistant species is an objective.

Descriptions of Proposed Road Management

Haul routes on National Forest System roads

National Forest System roads used as haul routes would be maintained in accordance with best management practices (BMP) both prior to and after use for project activities (FW-STD-WTR-02 and FW-DC-IFS-07). The objectives of road maintenance are reducing concentrated runoff, minimizing road surface erosion, filtering ditch water before it enters streams, and decreasing risk of culvert failures during peak runoff events. Maintenance work could include installing culverts, replacing existing culverts with larger culverts, installing drainage dips and surface water deflectors, placing riprap to armor drainage structures, replenishing road surface aggregate, placing aggregate to reinforce wet areas, constructing and cleaning ditches, and blading road surfaces. These actions would maintain the roads to current BMP standards, better accommodate public and project-related traffic, and reduce deferred maintenance. Log hauling on forest roads may result in a temporary increase in traffic and dust during project implementation.

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Temporary roads

Temporary roads would be constructed to the minimum standards necessary for log hauling on NFS roads. Approximately 5.6 miles of temporary roads are proposed to conduct activities. All temporary roads would be rehabilitated following timber harvest activities (within 3 years) and would cease to function as roads.

Project Design Features

Air Quality

PDF-AIR-01: Prescribed fire should only occur when the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group and Flathead County determine that airshed conditions are within acceptable dispersion parameters. Prescribed burning requires a permit from the Montana DEQ and the burn must be implemented within the regulatory framework. This includes daily approval from Flathead County and the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. More information on the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group can be found online at <http://mi.airshedgroup.org/> (FW-DC-AQ-01, FW-DC-AQ-02, FW-DC-AQ-03; Applies to prescribed fire).

Aquatics

PDF-AQ-01: Application of site appropriate best management practices (BMPs) for water quality and forestry management would follow guidance detailed in volume 1 of the National Core BMP Technical Guide (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012) and associated Forest Service manual and handbook direction, Montana Guide to the Streamside Management Zone Law & Rules, and Montana Forestry BMPs. (FW-STD-WTR-01, FW-STD-WTR-02, FW-GDL-WTR-01, FW-GDL-WTR-05, FW-GDL-WTR-07, FW-GDL-RMZ-13, FW-GDL-RMZ-15, FW-STD-RMZ-01, FW-STD-RMZ-02, FW-STD-RMZ-03, FW-STD-RMZ-06, FW-GDL-RMZ-15, FW-STD-IFS-06, FW-STD-IFS-07, FW-GDL-IFS-03, FW-GDL-IFS-04, FW-GDL-IFS-05, FW-GDL-IFS-06, FW-GDL-IFS-07, FW-GDL-IFS-09, FW-GDL-IFS-10) Applies to all actions.

PDF-AQ-02: Construction equipment that comes in contact with a waterbody will be cleaned prior to use in that watershed to prevent the spread of aquatic non-native species. (FW-GDL-WTR-07; Applies to all in-stream activities)

PDF-AQ-03: To protect spawning fish, eggs, and embryos, in-stream management activities (culvert installation, replacement, or removal) that may disturb native salmonids or that have the potential to directly deliver sediment to their habitats should be limited to times outside of spawning and incubation seasons for those species: Westslope cutthroat trout (known spawning streams) inoperable activity period is May 1 through July 15. (FW-GDL-WTR-05; Applies to all in-stream activities in Truman Creek)

Botany

Non-Native Invasive Plant Species

PDF-NNIS-01: Off-road equipment would be power-washed or steam cleaned on the undercarriage and chassis before transport to the project area. Off-road equipment includes all logging and construction machinery for vegetation treatments, except for log trucks, chip vans, service vehicles, water trucks, pickup trucks, cars, and similar vehicles. This cleaning shall remove all soil, plant parts, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds. All subsequent equipment entries from outside the project area back to the project area shall be treated in the same manner as the initial entry. (FW-DC-NNIP-02; Applies to all project activities)

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PDF-NNIS-02: Herbicides will be sprayed within the road prism along designated haul routes before log hauling begins and after all purchaser activities are completed. Treatments would only occur from June 1 to July 15 or September 1 to September 30. Treatment of invasive plants would be consistent with the strategy outlined in the 2001 Noxious and Invasive Weed Control Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. Specific roads and mileage would be prepared in consultation with the Forest Invasive Species Coordinator. (FW-DC-NNIP-02; Applies to all project activities)

PDF-NNIS-03: To reduce the probability of establishment of new non-native invasive plant populations, areas where soils are disturbed by construction activities (e.g., road construction, landings, and skid trails) conducted or authorized by the Forest Service, should be reseeded as soon as practical, during the appropriate time of year, using certified weed-free seed mixes. (FW-GDL-NNIP-01; Applies to all project activities)

At-Risk Plant Species

PDF-PLANTS-01: If individuals or populations of any undocumented at-risk plant species¹ are discovered during implementation, work will immediately stop in that area until the Forest Botanist can evaluate the site. Newly discovered individuals or populations will be protected as necessary to retain population viability. (FW-GDL-PLANT DIV-02, FW-DC-PLANT-01, FW-DC-PLANT-03, FW-DC-PLANT-04)

Cultural Resources

PDF-CR-01: If any newly discovered heritage resources are identified during project implementation, work in the area will stop and heritage staff will be contacted.

PDF-CR-02: To protect cultural resources, provisions shall be included in applicable contracts, agreements, and special-use permits for properties that are unevaluated, eligible for, or listed in the National Register of Historic Places (FW-STD-CR-01).

Fuels

PDF-FUEL-01: Hazard trees, defined as a tree that has potential to cause property damage, personal injury or fatality in the event of failure, should be removed within two tree lengths of structures, private property, administrative sites, fuel breaks, and portions of units along open roads to increase suppression safety and effectiveness. (FW-DC-FIRE-01, FW-DC-FIRE-05, FW-DC-FIRE-07, FW-GDL-FIRE-04; Applies to the following units: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17A, 18, 19, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 40, 50, 52, 53, 54, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 78, 79, 82, 86, 89, 92, 93, 94)

PDF-FUEL-02: To prevent unauthorized motorized travel routes, newly constructed fire lines will be rehabilitated for the first 100 feet or to a distance that is effective where fire lines intersect with trails or open roads, or boarder private land. (FW-GDL-FIRE-03; Applies to units 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 30)

PDF-FUEL-03: Burn plans will be prepared prior to the use of prescribed fire. These plans will determine the environmental conditions and resources necessary to meet objectives and minimize the possibility of escape. (FW-DC-FIRE-05)

¹ At-risk plant species include those listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (i.e., whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) and Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*)), all plant species of conservation concern (SCC), and state-listed plant species of concern (SOC) documented in the Montana Natural Heritage Program database.

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PDF-FUEL-04: Should aerial ignition be used for prescribed burn operations, which involves multiple trips/passes each day consisting of low-altitude flights (< 500 meters above ground level), they shall not continue for a duration longer than 48 consecutive hours (USDA 2018b).

PDF-FUEL-05: Appropriate signing or other cautionary measures will be implemented in conjunction with prescribed burning and commercial harvest operations to ensure public safety. Public notice will be given prior to prescribed burning activities.

PDF-FUEL-06: Prior to conducting prescribed burns, the Swan Lake Ranger District will conduct the following activities to notify the local public of burning projects. These include but are not limited to posting news releases on social media sites, displaying maps and burn information at the local Forest Service office, and preparing a list of contacts for each prescribed burn to be notified by phone, site visit, or mail.

PDF-FUEL-07: Reforestation activities in regeneration units will limit stocking densities to maintain fuel breaks within 200 feet of a primary control line, open road, or private property boundary. (FW-DC-FIRE-07, FW-GDL-FIRE-05, FW-STD-TIMB-02; Applies to the following units: 3, 6, 10, 13, 16, 19, 30, 38, 39, 73, 78, 91)

PDF-FUEL-08: Planting for reforestation activities will favor late seral and/or fire adapted species, such as Ponderosa Pine, Western Larch, and Western White Pine. (FW-DC-FIRE-07, FW-GDL-FIRE-05)

Recreation

PDF-REC-01: Any damage that occurs to National Forest System trails and/or signage during logging, prescribed fire, or associated post-harvest fuels or site preparation will be repaired. Where temporary roads impact trails, the trail would be restored. (Units 10, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 71, 72, 74, 75)

PDF-REC-02: Temporary road and/or skid trail crossings across designated forest trails would be kept to a minimum. Any crossings would be perpendicular to designated forest trails. Minimize overlaying skid trails/haul roads on nonmotorized system trails. (Units 10, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 71, 72, 74, 75)

PDF-REC-03: When activities are occurring in improved recreation sites and along trails, slash would be treated within 50 ft of the site or trail corridor and improved recreation sites and trail tread would be cleared of all slash within specified timeframes (coordinated with recreation staff).

PDF-REC-04: For public safety, workers will be required to post signs at access points warning the public of vegetation management activities and any closures. Closures impacting the OHV trails will be coordinated with the district recreation staff to ensure communication with OHV clubs.

Soil

PDF-SOIL-01: All mechanized units that remove commercial products will be logged using designated skid trails. Equipment would occasionally leave the trails to access trees or accomplish other activities. (FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to all mechanized treatment units.

PDF-SOIL-02: Skid trail spacing must average at least 75 feet in all tractor harvest units. The goal is to occupy less than 15 percent of the treatment area with disturbance from skid trails, temporary

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roads and landings associated with past and proposed activities. (FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to all mechanized treatment units.

PDF-SOIL-03: All existing roads and skid trails will be reused to the extent feasible unless doing so would adversely affect resources. If roads or trails cannot be reused, their extent and location must be considered when laying out additional skid trails. (FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to all mechanized treatment units.

PDF-SOIL-04: In Units 6, 7, 26, and 51 all mechanical activities will be treated under winter conditions to minimize detrimental soil disturbance and impacts to soils. Winter logging will be restricted to frozen ground or snow cover conditions. Winter logging requires that there be enough snow to prevent muddy water from mixing into the snow where equipment operates. This generally requires about ten inches of settled snow, but required depth varies with the snow conditions. It takes more dry powder snow than wet dense snow to protect the soil surface. Soils must be frozen enough to prevent deformation of the soil surface where equipment operates. (FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to Units 6, 7, 26, and 51, and all other mechanical units harvested utilizing winter logging.

PDF-SOIL-05: Units not harvested under winter conditions will be harvested when soils are dry as determined by the hand feel method. Sale Administrators or Contracting Officer's Representatives will monitor soil moisture conditions prior to allowing equipment to begin operations in summer. This monitoring must be documented in the Timber Sale Inspection Report or Daily Diary. (FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to all mechanized treatment units.

PDF-SOIL-06: Machine piling treatments to reduce fuel loadings shall be implemented to minimize soil disturbance as follows:

- All mechanical piling will be accomplished with excavators.
- Restrict piling machinery to designated routes used for harvest operations where fuel loads are moderate or low. Where fuel loads are high (or designated routes do not exist), limit off-trail machine travel to no more than two passes on any piece of ground.
- Operators shall plan travel paths to make full use of the machine's capability (e.g., using full boom reach of machine) to limit ground disturbance and minimize number of off-trail passes needed to achieve treatment objectives.
- Where feasible, pile fuels on existing disturbances (e.g., skid trails and landings) to minimize additional detrimental soil impacts from burning.

(FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to all mechanized treatment units.

PDF-SOIL-07: Mastication treatments to reduce fuel loadings shall be implemented to minimize soil disturbance as follows:

- When using a boom-mounted implement, operator shall plan necessary off-trail travel paths to make full use of the machine's capability (e.g., using the full boom reach of the machine) to limit ground disturbance and minimize the number of passes needed to achieve treatment objectives.
- When using a machine with a front-mounted fixed masticating head, work in long, linear swaths to the extent practicable to avoid unnecessary pivoting and turning, which results in soil displacement damage. Excavator-mounted implements are preferred.

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- Operator should not allow masticating heads to contact the soil surface, which can result in detrimental churning and mixing of the soil.
- Machines shall make no more than two passes over any piece of ground (when not on primary skid trails or landings).
- Depth of masticated material should not exceed three to six inches depth, on average, to allow regeneration of the herbaceous layer and prevent detrimental soil heating in the event of wild- or prescribed fire. If greater depths are expected, use another removal method.

(FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to all mechanized treatment units.

PDF-SOIL-08: Sustained slopes greater than 40% will be: 1) excluded from unit boundaries; 2) treated by hand; or 3) completed with cable systems or other mechanized approaches that adequately protect soils. (FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02, FW-GDL-SOIL-01). Applies to all mechanized treatment units.

PDF-SOIL-09: Prescribed burning prescriptions would be prepared and implemented to not exceed moderate burn severity conditions (Parsons et al. 2010). (FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02). Applies to all prescribed burn units.

PDF-SOIL-10: All temporary and obliterated roads would be reclaimed by any site-appropriate combination of the following:

- Removing any installed culverts or temporary bridges;
- Recontouring the entire template to natural ground contour (as shown in the typical road section diagram, below);
- Pulling in berms and placing the topsoil back on the road surface;
- Where re-contouring is unnecessary due to lack of slope, scarifying with excavator teeth to a depth sufficient to ameliorate detrimental soil compaction (usually between two and 12 inches);
- Seeding with a native plant mix specified by the Forest Botanist;
- Placing woody material on the template; and
- Planting native shrubs/trees to augment natural vegetation.

(FW-DC-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-01, FW-STD-SOIL-02, FW-STD-SOIL-03, FW-STD-SOIL-04). Applies to all temporary and obliterated roads.

Transportation

PDF-TRANS-01: After the completion of project activities all proposed system roads with barrier closures would be evaluated for road storage treatments to protect forest infrastructure and aquatic resources. Minimum treatments shall include:

- Placing waterbars near stream aligned and cross drain culverts
- Stream aligned culverts left in place shall meet the 100-year stream flow (Q) or be removed
- Blocking the road entrance
- In addition, other treatments could include any combination of the following: partial recontouring to fill ditches or remove unstable road shoulders, placing waterbars at regular intervals along the road surface, outsloping the road prism, and seeding and fertilizing disturbed soil.

(FW-STD-WTR-02, FW-STD-IFS-07) Applies to existing NFS roads used for haul and proposed system roads, closed by barriers.

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PDF-TRANS-02: All culvert installations, replacements or removals on scoured streams will secure a 124 permit from the State of Montana prior to work and comply with all requirements provided. A 124 permit is not needed for ditch relief pipes, ephemeral draws or non-scoured streams.

PDF-TRANS-03: New culvert installations or replacements on perennial streams shall have water diverted by a coffer dam into a bypass channel (or pipe) during work. If the new culvert includes stream substrates, upon completion of work, water will be re-introduced to the channel gradually over several hours.

PDF-TRANS-04: Public motorized access will be prohibited on roads and skid trails currently closed to public motorized use.

Vegetation

PDF-VEG-01: All piles would be built in a fashion to facilitate full consumption, be free of dirt to the extent practical and built with an excavator-based machine or by hand. Applies to post-harvest fuels treatments and areas where piling is the primary site preparation method.

PDF-VEG-02: In areas proposed to treat old growth the treatment will not “modify the characteristics of the stand to the extent that the stand density (basal area) and trees per acre above a specific size and age class are reduced below the minimum levels specified in Green et al. (2011). (FW-STD-TE&V-01) Applies to units: 17A,17B,18A,18B,18C,20,31,31A, 48, 48A,53, 58,63,68,78 and 95.

PDF-VEG-03: All units will receive individual marking guidelines to describe trees to be selected for cut and leave. Marking guidelines will be especially important in old growth stands and stands with large/old individuals where those trees are to be retained. Silvicultural prescriptions will comply with W-GDL-TE&V 06, which requires the retention of certain old growth forest structure and composition components if present in the adjacent stands within at least 300 feet of old growth forest patches. Applies to units or portions of units: 19, 21, 28, 30, 34, 35, 46, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 62, 65, 69, 73, 79, 82,83, 85, 90, 91, 92, 93, and 94.

PDF-VEG-04: In old growth areas prescribed with under-burning, jackpot burning pile burning allowable mortality is less than 10 percent for conifers greater than 15 inches in diameter. In non-old growth areas under-burning, jackpot burning and pile burning have an upper mortality limit of 20 percent. These parameters will be tracked through detailed silvicultural prescriptions and burn plans.

PDF-VEG-05: Throughout the project area, snags will be retained to meet the desired ranges provided in table 44 of the forest plan (GA-SM-STD-02). Exceptions to the snag retention standard may occur in areas where there are issues of human health and safety (e.g., developed recreation sites, adjacent to landings). These parameters will be tracked through detailed silvicultural prescriptions and timber sale contract.

PDF-VEG-06: Temporary road construction should be located such that old and large trees will not be felled to access the units, where feasible. This will be accomplished by a qualified sale administrator before road construction begins.

PDF-VEG-07: In unit 18A, the proposed temporary road is currently located such that the proposed segment passes through an old growth stand. This segment should be carefully flagged in by a qualified sale administrator prior to the construction of that road. Questions about old growth and temporary road locations in unit 18A should be brought forward to the District Silviculturist prior to construction to ensure the effects of the location do not impair the old growth status. Based on where this segment begins there are no other alternatives to where the road can be located.

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PDF-VEG-08: Hardwood trees should not be targeted for removal and would be left intact to the extent possible, considering operational feasibility. (FW-OBJ-TE&V-04).

PDF-VEG-09: Existing snags and decayed, decadent trees greater than 15 inches DBH will be maintained within 300 feet of verified old growth stands affecting portions of units that share a common boundary with the following units: 19, 21, 28, 30, 34, 35, 46, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 62, 65, 69, 73, 79, 82,83, 85, 90, 91, 92, 93, and 94. Exceptions to this guideline may occur to protect human health and safety and within portions of the wildland-urban interface where decreased fuels are determined necessary to protect values at risk.

PDF-VEG-10: All existing live trees greater than 17 inches DBH will be maintained within 300 feet of verified old growth stands affecting portions of units that share a common boundary with those listed in PDF-VEG-03.

PDF-VEG-11: Large pieces of downed wood 9 inches and greater will be retained where present and feasible in the longest pieces available within 300 feet of verified old growth stands affecting portions of units that are adjacent to Units or portions of units; 07, 08, 011, 014, 015, 018A, 020, 032, 053, 056, 058, 059, 060, 074, 086, 089, 093, 094. (FW-GDL-TE&V-06).

Wildlife

Operations

PDF-WL-01: If any of the following are found within 0.25 miles of any vegetation management or burn unit or road location, operations within that unit or on that road would cease until the Sale Administrator is notified, and activities are modified if necessary, with the inclusion of the Wildlife Biologist (FW-GDL-WL DIV-05):

- Active denning sites used by grizzly bears, wolves, lynx, fishers, or wolverines.
- Active nesting sites used by bald eagles, golden eagles, American goshawks, common loons, black-backed woodpeckers, or flammulated owls.
- Active rendezvous (pip rearing) sites used by wolves.

PDF-WL-02: To reduce the likelihood of interaction between people and bears, the project will avoid seeding or planting palatable forage species to grizzly bears in areas of high human activities (i.e. trailheads, along open roads).

PDF-WL-03: Contractors, operators, and their employees should be informed of procedures for safely working and recreating in grizzly bear country and of food and wildlife attractant storage special order prior to beginning work and annually thereafter, in order to reduce the risk of grizzly bear-human conflicts (FW-GDL-WL-01, FW-GDL-REC-01, FW-STD-WL-02).

PDF-WL-04: If a contractor or others implementing the project elects to camp on NFS lands other than in a developed recreation site, the site should be evaluated and written authorization (i.e. campsite agreement that includes the food/attractant storage order) should be provided before the campsite is established to reduce the risk of grizzly bear-human conflict (FW-STD-WL-02).

PDF-WL-05: In order to resolve a grizzly bear-human conflict situation, project activities would be modified, cancelled, suspended or temporarily ceased, as needed (FW-STD-REC-02, FW-GDL-TE & V-04).

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PDF-WL-06: Personal use firewood gathering will not be allowed by contractors or other workers on newly constructed temporary roads or any other roads not open to motorized use by the general public.

PDF-WL-07: Provisions will be included in the contract to cease activity or otherwise protect populations and individuals of threatened, endangered or sensitive species. This allows for modification of the project should an unforeseen issue(s) be identified during operations. Standard contractual requirements used in all contracts provide for modification or termination of the contract to avoid impacts and protect threatened, endangered, or sensitive species.

PDF-WL-08: To maintain RMZ cover conditions and connectivity, if outer RMZs are to be harvested the outer RMZ will retain at least 50 percent of the existing canopy cover and snags. Applies to ALL units to maintain cover and connectivity within the RMZs for a variety of species.

PDF-WL-09: To provide snow intercept cover for wintering ungulates (white-tailed deer), improvement cuts and commercial thin (units 007, 008, 11, 14, 15, & 18A) will maintain, approximately 50% of existing overstory canopy cover within a portion of each unit where site specific conditions allow to maintain cover for wintering ungulates.

Roads, Trails, and Infrastructure

PDF-WL-10: Administrative motorized use may occur on restricted roads during the non-denning season. Motorized activities on restricted roads in the project not included in project activities must be completed at or below motorized administrative use levels.

PDF-WL-11: Any vehicle collisions or other incidents with grizzly bears or Canada lynx will be reported to the sale administrator who will immediately report to the district Wildlife Biologist and to the District Ranger.

PDF-WL-12: Barriers (e.g. rows of immature trees, rocks, logs, mounded earth) will be retained around berms and gates on roads in units and on roads used for project motorized access, where needed, to maintain closure effectiveness.

PDF-WL-13: If berms are removed for access to treatment units, temporary gates will be installed. Except for roads with berms, berms must be replaced or improved following implementation to maintain closure effectiveness.

PDF-WL-14: Public motorized access will be restricted on existing restricted roads, temporary roads and skid trails currently closed to public motorized use. Motorized public access would remain restricted on closed roads and temporary roads on NFS lands project activities. If berms are removed to access treatment units, the purchaser would install temporary gates or effective barriers as needed and berms would be reinstalled once project activities are complete.

PDF-WL-15: All temporary roads will be rehabilitated within 3 years following project activities. Rehabilitated temporary roads will be left in manner that meets the Land Management Plan definition of impassable.

PDF-WL-16: Access management conditions in the project GBAU should be restored to pre-project levels within one year after completion of project activities in order to reduce the duration of grizzly bear disturbance due to project-related activities (FW-GDL-IFS-02). Exceptions may be made to accommodate prescribed burning, best management practices to protect water quality and required reforestation activities that are consistent with (FW-GDL-IFS-02).

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PDF-WL-17: Contractors working under contract on Forest Service lands are prohibited from hunting, transporting hunters, or transporting game on roads closed to public motorized use.

PROJECT SCREENING

Legal and Regulatory Considerations

Given the nature of the project, the responsible official is requesting documentation to demonstrate compliance with the following legal and regulatory considerations:

Law, Regulation, Policy:

- NFMA/Land Management Plan
- Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)
- Tribal Consultation
- Clean Air Act (CAA)
- Clean Water Act (CWA)
- Pertinent Executive Orders

Special Management Areas:

- Wilderness
- Roadless
- Wild & Scenic River Corridor
- Recommended Wilderness
- Research Natural Areas
- National Scenic & Historic Trails
- National Recreation Areas

Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted

Given the nature of the project, the responsible official is requesting the following agencies, organizations and/or persons be contacted to provide input to, or to be made aware of, the project. A brief overview of feedback or comments received is included.

Collaboration

To meet the requirements for projects categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS under Section 605 of HFRA (16 U.S.C. 6591d) (FSH 1909.15, 32.3(9)) (Wildfire Resilience), this project was developed through *“a collaborative process that is transparent and non-exclusive and includes multiple interested persons representing diverse interests”*.

Table 4. Summary of collaboration and public engagement

| Group/Organization | Description of Collaborative Engagement |
|----------------------|--|
| Firesafe Flathead | August 2025: The district ranger discussed the West Truman project at the Firesafe Flathead monthly meeting, which is a group of individuals, neighborhood/homeowner associations, local/state/federal agencies, utility companies, emergency service providers, elected officials, and non-profit organizations. As a result of this discussion, additional contacts (including Smith Valley Fire District) were identified for future public engagement efforts. |
| Big Sky Fourwheelers | September 2025: District recreation staff met with the Big Sky Fourwheelers to provide updates on proposed projects related to OHV use and motorized access; no concerns were identified by the group. |

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| Group/Organization | Description of Collaborative Engagement |
|--|--|
| Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks | October 2024: During development of the proposed action, a MTFWP wildlife biologist joined Swan Lake Ranger District resource specialists (silviculture, wildlife, timber, fuels/fire) for a field visit to discuss ungulate winter range, thermal cover, snow intercept, and habitat connectivity within the project area. October 2025: The district ranger sent an email to Montana FWP in October 2025 to share project information and solicit feedback. |
| Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation | October 2025: The district ranger sent an email to Montana DNRC to share project information and solicit feedback. |
| Flathead County | October 2025: The district ranger sent an email to Flathead County to share project information and solicit feedback. |
| Smith Valley Fire District | October 2025: The district ranger called the Smith Valley Fire Chief and sent an email to Smith Valley Fire District to share project information and solicit feedback. |

The proposed action was posted to the Flathead National Forest’s public-facing project webpage (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r01/flathead/projects/68860>) on October 17, 2025 for a 14-day comment period. The Forest Service received 10 comment letters which were parsed into 50 individual comments most commonly related to NEPA/planning, silvicultural treatments, timber harvest, and wildlife. Comments from F.H. Stoltze, the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC), Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and other individuals expressed support for the project. Swan View Coalition (SVC) and Friends of the Wild Swan (FOWS) also provided comments. Copies of all comment letters and consideration of comments by specialists are available in the project record.

Supporting Documentation

- Comment Summary & Analysis
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\E_Public_Comment\E001_West Truman Comment Summary & Analysis.pdf
- Public comments and attachments
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\E_Public_Comment
- Collaboration materials
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\D_Public_Involvement

Consultation with Federally Recognized Tribes

The Flathead National Forest heritage program initiated program-to-program level consultation regarding the West Truman project with respective Tribal Historic Preservation Offices in May 2025. No areas of concern or inherent issues with the project location or proposed activities were identified at that time. In November 2025, the district ranger initiated project-specific tribal consultation by sending emails to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Blackfeet Nation to provide project information and solicit feedback on the project and the consultation process. No comments were received from tribes.

Supporting Documentation

- Email to Tribes (November 7, 2025)
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\C_Project_Consultation\C1_Tribal Consultation

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The following documents compliance with relevant environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA) Land Management Plan Consistency

The pertinent specialist has reviewed the proposed action including design features and provided supporting analysis and rationale for determinations in the project record. The following are specialist determinations regarding project consistency with applicable land management plan direction, standards, and guidelines:

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Botany: Consistent | Range: N/A |
| Cultural/Heritage: Consistent | Recreation: Consistent |
| Engineering: Consistent | Scenic Resources: Consistent |
| Fisheries: Consistent | Soils: Consistent |
| Fuels: Consistent | Silviculture: Consistent |
| Hydrology: Consistent | Special Management Areas: N/A |
| Lands and Special Uses: Consistent | Wildlife: Consistent |
| Minerals: N/A | Other Resources: N/A |

Supporting Documentation

- West Truman Consistency with the 2018 Forest Plan
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\V_Supporting_Documentation\
V001_WestTruman_ForestPlanConsistency.pdf
- Regulatory Framework and Consistency – At-Risk Plant Species
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\K_Botany\K001_WT_PlantsFPConsist.pdf

Other Law, Regulation, and Policy Consistency

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

This project falls within the Emergency Situation Determination under Section 40807 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), as determined under the Secretary’s Memorandum 1078-006 signed on April 3, 2025, by Secretary of the U.S Department of Agriculture, Brooke L. Rollins. The Secretary delegated authority to the forest supervisor to approve a project’s use of this emergency situation determination. On March 17, 2026, the Flathead National Forest Supervisor, Anthony Botello, approved its use for the West Truman Project. This project qualifies because the majority (78%) of areas proposed for treatment fall within the landscape identified in the Secretary’s Memorandum. In addition, the proposed actions align with the emergency determination as they will improve forest health and resilience and reduce potential wildfire impacts to important values at risk.

Supporting Documentation

- HFRA & ESD Map
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\V_Supporting_Documentation\
V003_WestTruman_HFRA_ESD_Map_20251105.pdf

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- ESD Portal Approval Letter
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\V_Supporting_Documentation\
V004_WestTruman_ESDPortal_ApprovalLetter_20260317.pdf
- Secretarial Memo 1078-006
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\V_Supporting_Documentation\V005_USDA_Secretarial
Memo1078-006_20250403.pdf

Endangered Species Act

The pertinent specialists reviewed the proposed action and made the following determinations for threatened, endangered and/or proposed species:

Table 5. Threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate species and critical habitat effect determinations

| Species/Habitat | Status | Proposed or Designated Critical Habitat Present? | Determination | Brief Rationale (or project file reference) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|--|---------------|--|
| Grizzly bear | Threatened | No | LAA | See terrestrial wildlife BA in Wildlife project record |
| Canada lynx | Threatened | No | NLAA | See terrestrial wildlife BA in Wildlife project record |
| Canada lynx critical habitat | Not Present | No | NE | See terrestrial wildlife BA in Wildlife project record |
| Wolverine | Threatened | No | NLAA | See terrestrial wildlife BA in Wildlife project record |
| Yellow-billed cuckoo | Threatened | No | NE | See yellow-billed cuckoo BA in Wildlife project record |
| Bull trout | Threatened | No | NE | See aquatics BA in Aquatics project record |
| Bull trout critical habitat | Not Present | No | NE | See aquatics BA in Aquatics project record |
| Meltwater Lednian stonefly | Threatened | No | NE | See aquatics BA in Aquatics project record |
| Spalding's catchfly | Threatened | No | NE | See plants BA in Botany project record |
| Whitebark pine | Threatened | No | NE | See plants BA in Botany project record |
| Monarch butterfly | Proposed Threatened | No | NE | See pollinators BA in Wildlife project record |
| Suckley's cuckoo bumblebee | Proposed Endangered | No | No Jeopardy | See pollinators BA in Wildlife project record |

NE – no effect; **NLAA** – may affect, not likely to adversely affect; **LAA** – may affect, likely to adversely affect; **No Jeopardy** - not likely to jeopardize the continued existence or adversely modify critical habitat

Forest Service biologists have made a determination of “*may affect, likely to adversely affect*” (LAA) for grizzly bears due to the environmental baseline, including low amounts of secure habitat and existing levels of motorized use in the analysis area (Island Unit GBAU). Given these factors and the rare occurrence of grizzly bears in the project area, potential for disturbance or displacement of bears is low.

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Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the “*likely to adversely affect*” determination is made if any adverse effect to a listed species may occur as a direct or indirect result of the proposed action, even if the overall effect of the proposed action is beneficial to the listed species. A “*likely to adversely affect*” determination requires formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) but does not preclude the use of a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Based on the emergency action determination under USDA Secretarial Memorandum 1078-006, the Forest has requested emergency consultation procedures under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Under emergency circumstances, the consultation with the USFWS can occur informally through alternative procedures prior to implementation. The informal consultation facilitates compliance with section 7(a)(2) but does not replace the formal consultation requirement. Formal consultation is still required and must be completed, but federal actions to alleviate the emergency can occur prior to formal consultation being completed. When using emergency consultation procedures, agencies must still comply with section 7(a)(2) of the ESA by ensuring their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or result in the adverse destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. Pursuant to emergency consultation procedures, the Forest has provided the USFWS with Biological Assessments for the West Truman project (listed below), which include a detailed description of the project activities, an evaluation of the impacts to affected species, and a detailed list of design features to minimize the impact of activities to affected listed species.

Supporting Documentation:

- Aquatics Biological Assessment
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\J_Aquatics\J006_WT_Bull Trout BA_final.pdf
- Botany Biological Assessment
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\K_Botany\K002_WT_PlantBA.pdf
- Terrestrial Wildlife Biological Assessment
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\G_Wildlife\
G014_FNF_WildlifeBA_RevisedLMP_WestTruman_signed.pdf
- Yellow-Billed Cuckoo Biological Assessment
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\G_Wildlife\
G009_WT_YellowBilled_Cuckoo_NoEffect_FNFActivities.pdf
- Pollinators Biological Assessments
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\G_Wildlife\G010_WT_SuckleysCuckooBumblebee_BA.pdf
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\G_Wildlife\G011_WT_MonarchButterfly_BA.pdf
- Emergency Consultation Request Letter
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\C_Project_Consultation\C2_USFWS Consultation\
C2_004_West Truman_USFWS Emergency Consultation Request Letter.pdf

National Historic Preservation Act – Section 106 Review

Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act required heritage inventory of the proposed area of potential effect and documented several heritage resources that are not considered to be significant. Consultation with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office has determined the sites “not eligible” for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). As such, the proposed action of the project will have no anticipated adverse effects to heritage resources. Design features have been incorporated into the proposed action to prevent potential impacts to any unknown resources.

Supporting Documentation:

- Heritage Report
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\M_Heritage\M001_WT_HeritageReport.pdf
- SHPO Consultation Letter
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\M_Heritage\M002_WT_ConsultationMemo.pdf

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- SHPO Concurrence Letter
Box\Planning\SLRD\West Truman\Project File\M_Heritage\M003_WT_SHPOConcurrence.pdf

Clean Water Act

All required permits will be acquired prior to project implementation. To comply with State and local nonpoint pollution controls, the Forest Service implements best management practices (BMPs) which are the primary mechanism to achieve water quality standards and included through design features of the proposed action (PDF-AQ-01). Where work is needed within a streambed, stream banks, floodplain, or wetland the Forest Service will submit a Joint Application (310 form 270) to all appropriate local, State and Federal agencies to acquire necessary permits. Exemptions from Clean Water Act permitting exist for “normal farming, silviculture, or ranching activities” as defined in Section 404(f)(1)(A) of the Clean Water Act.

These exemptions do not preclude the Forest Service from obtaining required non-Federal permits such as SPA 124 permits from Montana FWP, Floodplain Permits from City or County Floodplain Administrators, or Navigable Rivers Land Use License/Easements from Montana DNRC. Properly following the joint permitting process ensures compliance with applicable local, State and Federal laws that relate to protection of streams, wetlands, floodplains, and other water-related features.

Clean Air Act

The project will not result in permanent air emissions and no modifications or further coordination needs to occur to ensure compliance. The Flathead National Forest participates in the Montana-Idaho Airshed Group, which regulates prescribed burning within the state of Montana. Burning would occur when smoke dispersion forecasts were within Airshed Management Guidelines (PDF-AIR-01).

Special Management Area Considerations

No activities are proposed within or in the vicinity of special management areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, inventoried roadless, or national recreation areas.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Consideration of Extraordinary Circumstances

This categorical exclusion has been prepared in compliance with USDA NEPA requirements at 7 CFR 1b.3. Pertinent specialists have reviewed the proposed action and informed the following determinations made by the responsible official with regards to degree of potential effects for the resource conditions considered:

Table 6. Resource conditions considered for extraordinary circumstance determinations

| Resource Conditions Considered for Extraordinary Circumstances | Is there a degree of potential effect that raises uncertainty over its significance? Briefly explain. |
|---|---|
| Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat or species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat [7 CFR 1b.3(f)(1)(i)] | Botany: NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale: There are no known occurrences or suitable habitat for federally listed plant species within the project area. |
| | Fisheries: NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale: There are no known occurrences of bull trout or their critical habitat within the project area. |
| | Wildlife: NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale: Effects to federally listed species were considered and analyzed in biological assessments completed for this project. ESA determinations for all terrestrial species and critical habitats present are “Not Likely to Adversely Affect”, “No Effect”, or “Not Likely to |

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| Resource Conditions Considered for Extraordinary Circumstances | Is there a degree of potential effect that raises uncertainty over its significance? Briefly explain. |
|--|--|
| | <p>Jeopardize”, with the exception of the grizzly bear determination described below.</p> <p>The grizzly bear determination is “Likely to Adversely Affect” due to the environmental baseline, including low amounts of secure habitat and existing motorized use in the project area. Given the existing level of human activity, low habitat security, and rare occurrence of grizzly bears in the project area, the potential for disturbance or displacement of bears is low. The project activities and design features were developed to further minimize potential effects to the grizzly bear. Therefore, the proposed action would have minor impacts to grizzly bears due to the influence of project activities, and there is no uncertainty regarding the degree of effects.</p> |
| <p>Flood plains, wetlands, or other such sensitive areas; Special sources of water, such as sole-source aquifers, wellhead protection areas, municipal watersheds, or other water sources that are vital in a region [7 CFR 1b.3(f)(1)(ii), (iii)]</p> | <p>NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale: Wetlands have been excluded from treatment unit boundaries. There are no FEMA mapped floodplains in the project area. There are no municipal watersheds or other special sources of water present in the project area.</p> |
| <p>Areas having formal Federal or state designations, such as wilderness areas, parks, or wildlife refuges; wild and scenic rivers; marine sanctuaries; national natural landmarks; inventoried roadless areas; or national recreation areas [7 CFR 1b.3(f)(1)(iv)]</p> | <p>N/A, not present Rationale: There are no congressionally designated areas within or near the project area.</p> |
| <p>Specially managed areas, such as designated research or experimental areas, coral reefs, coastal barrier resources, or, unless exempt, coastal zone management areas [7 CFR 1b.3(f)(1)(v)]</p> | <p>NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale: There are no research natural areas or other specially managed areas within or near the project area.</p> |
| <p>Prime, unique, or important farmland as defined by and subject to the provisions of the Farm Protection Policy Act [7 CFR 1b.3(f)(1)(vi)]</p> | <p>N/A, not present Rationale: There is no farmland within the project area.</p> |
| <p>Property (e.g., sites, buildings, structures, and objects) of historic, archeological, or architectural significance, as designated by Federal, Tribal, State, or local governments, or property eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places; or American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites [7 CFR 1b.3(f)(1)(vii), (viii)]</p> | <p>NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale: Cultural resource survey and review found there would be no adverse effect on new or previously recorded sites, as all were determined to be not eligible for listing in the NRHP. Consultation between the Forest and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Blackfeet Nation did not identify any tribal cultural concerns or traditional cultural properties within the project area.</p> |

REFERENCES

- USDA. 2012. National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands. Volume 1: National Core BMP Technical Guide. FS-990a. April 2012. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Washington, DC. 165 p.
- USDA. 2018a. Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan. November 2018. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Flathead National Forest. Kalispell, MT. 170 p.
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r01/flathead/planning/forest-plan>
- USDA. 2018b. Volume 1 – Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land Management Plan, Flathead National Forest. Vol. 1, Final Environmental Impact Statement. December 2017. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Kalispell, MT. 422 p.
- USDA. 2018c. Volume 4 – Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land Management Plan, Flathead National Forest. Vol. 4, Appendices and Glossary. December 2017. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Kalispell, MT. 963 p.



Finding of Applicability and No Extraordinary Circumstances

This Finding of Applicability and No Extraordinary Circumstance (FANEC) incorporates the Categorical Exclusion Review form and relies on documentation in the associated proposal record.

Proposal Information

Proposal Name: West Truman (#68860)

Unit: Swan Lake Ranger District, Flathead National Forest

Responsible Official: Sarah Canepa, Swan Lake District Ranger, sarah.canepa@usda.gov

Contact: Alyssa Worsham, Planning Team Leader, alyssa.worsham@usda.gov

Categorically Excluded Activities

I have determined that the actions described in the “Proposed Action” section of the Categorical Exclusion Review form fit the HFRA Section 605 (16 U.S.C. 6591d), Wildfire Resilience, category.

Decisions that are categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement are not subject to an administrative review process (Agriculture Act of 2014 [Pub. L. No. 113-79], Subtitle A, Sec. 8006).

Determination of No Extraordinary Circumstances

As informed by an interdisciplinary review of all resources listed at 7 CFR 1b.3(f)(1), I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist based on the rationale provided in the “Consideration of Extraordinary Circumstances” section of the Categorical Exclusion Review form.

Decision

I am authorizing all project activities described under the Proposed Action in the CE Review Form, including the changes documented since the proposal was released for public comment. Authorized activities include 2,823 acres of commercial vegetation treatments, use of 67.5 miles of National Forest System haul routes, and construction of 5.6 miles of temporary roads. Implementation may begin as early as fall 2027.

Signature and Authorization Date

April 14, 2026

SARAH CANEPA

District Ranger



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