



Bitterroot National Forest

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News Release

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Piquett Creek Project – Moving Forward

Hamilton, Montana (May 27, 2020) – West Fork District Ranger Seth Carbonari has signed the Decision Memo for the Piquett Creek Project. The decision authorizes the forest to move forward on the fuels reduction and vegetation management project encompassing approximately 5,800 acres in the Piquett Creek and West Fork Bitterroot River – Lloyd Creek watersheds. The project is located five miles southwest of Conner, MT.

Adjacent to the project are approximately 96 private structures, Triple Creek Ranch and Trapper Creek Job Corps Center. Nearly 70% of the project area is in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Wildfire Risk to Communities (<https://wildfirerisk.org/>) identifies Conner, MT as the most at risk community in all of Montana based on fire risk and exposure to homes and the likelihood of wildfire occurrence.

The project was first identified in 2018 because existing conditions across the area have deteriorated from desired conditions. Fire exclusion has created stands characterized by high stem densities and hazardous fuels build-up, including ladder and crown fuels susceptible to severe fire behavior. Dense stand conditions have stressed trees causing high susceptibility to current and future insect and disease mortality. In many locations there are pockets of dead and dying trees due to western spruce budworm, dwarf mistletoe, Douglas-fir beetle, and previous mountain pine beetle mortality.

Treatments may occur on up to 3,000 acres within the project area. Objectives include:

- Improve landscape resilience to disturbances (fire, insects and disease)
- Reduce hazardous fuels and potential fire severity (WUI, warm dry forest types)
- Improve habitat diversity, forage quality and quantity for mule deer, elk, and bighorn sheep

Proposed treatments include commercial timber harvests, non-commercial thinning, and prescribed burning to reduce fuels and improve forest health. Road maintenance activities, including the resurfacing of Forest Road #49 with gravel, installing drainage on bridge approaches that cross Piquett Creek and the graveling of stream crossings are also planned to reduce sediment sources and improve fish habitat.

No permanent road construction is proposed in the project and all temporary roads will be decommissioned after the project is completed.

The Bitterroot National Forest utilized a collaborate process to help develop the Piquett Creek Project including numerous public field trips, meetings with local landowners, and presentations to partners, the Ravalli County Collaborative (RCC) and Bitterroot Restoration Committee (BRC).

Overall, there was support and agreement that actions are needed to address current conditions and reduce fire risk in the area.

The Forest is inviting all groups and the public to stay involved and continue to provide input during project implementation. Initial plans of holding public meetings and workshops are not possible now due to COVID-19. However, it is still important for us to receive your input and feedback on the draft project implementation plan.

On the project website there is a draft implementation map and draft unit tables that are to be used in combination with the project activity cards to provide detail about the potential activities proposed for each unit. Forest staff developed the draft units and proposed activities as a starting point based on existing conditions and the parameters of the decision. None of this is set, so there is ample opportunity to change or adapt unit locations and activities with your feedback. Our goal is to gather input from the public, collaborators, and partners so that we can develop a strong implementation plan that will meet the purpose and need for the project.

Desired feedback and potential changes to the draft implementation proposal should focus on how well the activities meet the purpose and need and move the area toward the desired conditions. If possible, please submit feedback by June 19, 2020.

If you wish to provide input or feedback in writing, address your comments to: Piquett Creek Project, Attn: Seth Carbonari District Ranger, 6735 West Fork Road, Darby, MT 59829.

Send electronic input or feedback to seth.carbonari@usda.gov.

All project documents including area maps are available on the Piquett Creek Project website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56774>. Hard copies of the decision or draft implementation materials are available by calling the West Fork Ranger District at 406-821-3269.

For additional information contact Seth Carbonari, District Ranger at 406-821-1212 or David Fox, Project Manager at 406-821-1226.

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