



Forest Service News Release

Media Contact: Tod McKay

(406) 363-7122

tod.mckay@usda.gov

Facebook: [@discoverbitterrootnf](https://www.facebook.com/discoverbitterrootnf)

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot>

Gold Butterfly Project Update

Hamilton, MT, July 1 — The Bitterroot National Forest has released its Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) for the Gold Butterfly Project. The project is a proposed vegetation management and fuels reduction project in the Sapphire Mountains east of Corvallis between St. Clair and Burnt Fork Creeks.

The DSEIS assesses the effects of amending the Bitterroot Forest Plan regarding old growth management and supplements the Gold Butterfly Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

In 2019, the Forest released the FEIS and draft Record of Decision (ROD) for the Gold Butterfly Project. An administrative review (objections) process was also conducted at that time. The Gold Butterfly Project final (ROD) was signed by Forest Supervisor Matt Anderson on November 15, 2019.

After the signing, it was determined that a project specific amendment to the Bitterroot Forest Plan was needed to address management within old growth stands in the project area. The Forest Supervisor withdrew his decision on August 28, 2020 with a letter directing forest personnel to conduct additional review and analysis regarding the needed amendment.

The project would make the forest more resilient to threats including fire, insects, and disease as well as improve water quality and bull trout habitat in the Willow Creek watershed. It also would improve key habitats including meadows, aspen, and whitebark pine while managing timber to provide forest products, jobs, and income to local communities.

Approximately 90 percent of proposed treatments areas have dense pockets of dead and dying trees because of insect infestations and parasitic plants like the dwarf mistletoe. Insects include mountain pine beetles, Douglas-fir bark beetles, and western spruce budworm.

The Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan also identifies the treatment area as a high priority for fuels reduction to reduce wildfire threat to lives, property and resources within the Wildland Urban Interface.

Proposed treatments include commercial timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, and prescribed burning. Treatment areas with old growth timber would retain their status as old growth areas by selectively removing trees already succumbing to insect infestations or disease, further improving forest health, and protecting healthy trees from these threats.

To learn more about the project visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59262>. Comments will be accepted for 45 days following publication of the Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register* and legal notice in the Ravalli Republic. Public comments are due by August 9, 2021.

Submit comments to the Responsible Official: Matt Anderson, Forest Supervisor, by one of the following methods: mail: Bitterroot National Forest, Gold Butterfly Project SDEIS, 1801 N. First Street, Hamilton, MT 59840, or online: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=59262>.

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.

For more information or questions concerning the project, contact Steve Brown, Stevensville District Ranger at (406) 777-5461 or steve.brown2@usda.gov.

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