



Forest Service News Release

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Bitterroot National Forest and NRCS Hamilton Field Office Receive Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Award

Hamilton, MT, January 26 — The Bitterroot National Forest and Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Hamilton field office have received the USDA's Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Award. The award was announced last week by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the Forest Service and NRCS are working together to protect communities from wildfires, improve water quality, and restore forest ecosystems on public and private lands.

The three-year project and associated funding for public and private lands will support *Fire Adapted Bitterroot (FAB)*, which seeks to address forest health concerns and reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners in Ravalli County. The project will actively treat over 10,000 acres of overstocked National Forest lands that border private property or are near homes.

Fuel reduction efforts will include prescribed fire, non-commercial thinning, and commercial timber harvests to effectively treat fuels at the landscape scale. Much of the work will occur in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), the private lands where homes adjoin or intersect with the forest. Unprecedented growth and new home construction that extends to the boundary of the forest highlights the need for action across all ownerships.

The funding will also build on NRCS efforts to implement forestry treatments on overstocked stands within private forestlands, many of which have been identified as high fire risk areas. The agency will work closely with the Bitterroot Conservation District and Bitter Root RC&D on private landowner outreach and assistance with fuel reduction projects on private property.

The Montana Forest Action Plan recently identified the project area as having high wildfire risk to communities and infrastructure and significant forest health needs. Ravalli County currently has the greatest risk from wildfires in Montana, with six communities in the top 10 of all Montana communities with structures at risk from wildfire. The project will be a critical step in decreasing wildfire risk in areas of rapid growth and residential development.

Matt Anderson, Bitterroot Forest Supervisor said, “We are excited to begin this important project in partnership with NRCS. It will enable us to work across boundaries to improve forest health and wildlife habitat, reduce fire risk to communities, provide for public and firefighter safety, and contribute to community viability with forest products and jobs. This project includes the right work, in the right place, at the right scale.”

Stacy Welling, NRCS District Conservationist said, “Fire Adapted Bitterroot is an excellent example of interagency partnerships and collaboration. We’re excited for this opportunity to continue to work with forestland owners in Ravalli County and expand on cross boundary treatments to improve forest health and reduce fuel loads. The need for treatments is significant and this opportunity will really give us the resources to get treatments on the ground.”

Byron Bonney, Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development Community Forester said, “This is a great opportunity for the Bitterroot National Forest and Bitter Root RC&D to work together to reduce fire risks on private land and National Forest lands near private land to protect lives, property and any values at risk from threatening wildfires. This will be done through joint planning and implementation to promote cross boundary projects to meet that goal.”

FAB partners include Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Ravalli County, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), Bitterroot Conservation District, Bitter Root RC&D, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Ravalli County Collaborative, and the Ravalli Resource Advisory Committee.

[Click here to learn more about Fire Adapted Bitterroot \(FAB\)](#) and other 2022 Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership projects.

For additional information please contact Steve Brown, Stevensville District Ranger at (406) 777-5461 or Stacy Welling, NRCS District Conservationist at (406) 361-6186.

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