



Forest Service News Release

Media Contact: Tod McKay - (406) 363-7122

Facebook: [@discoverbitterrootnf](#)

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

Forest Seeks Comments on Project

Hamilton, MT, April 20 — The Bitterroot National Forest is inviting the public to review and make comments on a proposed fuels reduction, vegetation management, and forest health improvement project on the Stevensville and Darby Ranger Districts. The Bitterroot Front Project encompasses approximately 144,000 acres of the Bitterroot mountains from McClain Creek on the northern end of the forest to Trapper Creek on the southern end.

The Montana Forest Action Plan recently identified the area as having high wildfire risk to communities and infrastructure and significant forest health concerns. 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 Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan has also identified the project area as a 'high priority' for fuels reduction to reduce wildfire threats to lives, property, resources, and communities within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Objectives of the project include:

- Reduce the current and future wildfire risk to people, private lands, and resource values by reducing hazardous forest fuels.
- Improve forest resilience to natural disturbances (fire, insects, and disease) by modifying forest conditions.
- Improve wildlife habitat and forage for elk and other big game animals.
- Contribute to the local economy by providing timber products and related jobs.

Dense vegetation conditions in the project area have decreased the ability of the forest to recover from or adapt to future disturbances and stressors such as insects, disease, fire, and climate change. Fire suppression efforts since the early 20th century have caused a departure from historic fire frequencies, resulting in our current forest health crisis with high stem densities, hazardous fuels build up, and stressed tree conditions. Proposed treatments include prescribed fire, non-commercial thinning, and commercial harvesting.

Increased tree mortality from insects and disease is also a serious concern. The project area has dense pockets of dead and dying trees impacted by mountain pine beetle, Douglas-fir bark beetle, and western spruce budworm damage.

The project aligns with the recently released [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#) that works with partners to protect communities and improve the resilience of America's Forests. The strategy includes an increase in fuels and forest health treatments by up to four times current treatment levels in the West.

The Bitterroot Front Project is a landscape-scale proposal to accelerate the pace and scale of active forest restoration. It proposes a "Shared Stewardship Approach" to encourage vegetation treatments across boundaries and improve conditions across the entire landscape. Private landowners along the forest boundary will be invited to participate in the project through Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) and Good Neighbor Authority. The agreement supports partners working together to accelerate the pace of fuels reduction on National Forest lands with cross-boundary benefits.

Even though vegetative treatments would be primarily focused within the WUI, the project area boundary was left larger to allow the opportunity to address other resource issues within the area including roads, recreation, and scenery.

To learn more about the Bitterroot Front Project and to view maps visit www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot. Click on 'Land and Resource Management', then 'Projects'. Public comments specific to this project are valuable in helping the Forest Service identify potential issues and concerns. Comments are due by May 20, 2022.

To provide electronic comments and to subscribe for project updates, please visit the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57341> (click on Comment/Object on right side of the page).

If you wish to comment in writing, please address comments to: Bitterroot National Forest, Stevensville Ranger District Front Desk, 88 Main Steet, Stevensville, MT 59870. Fax: 406-777-7423. Comments may also be hand delivered weekdays 8:00am – 4:30pm.

Comments should include: 1) name, address, phone number, and organization represented, if any; 2) substantive comments including specific facts and supporting information for the Forest Supervisor to consider. Please include "Bitterroot Front Project" in the email subject line. All comments are open to public inspection and will be posted to the Forest Service website.

Only individuals or entities who submit timely and specific written comments about the proposed project during the public comment period will be eligible to file an objection.

For more information or questions concerning the project, please contact Steve Brown, Stevensville District Ranger at (406) 777-5461 or Abbie Jossie, Darby-Sula District Ranger at (406) 821-3913.

###

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.