

File Code: 1950
Date: August 15, 2023

Dear Interested Party,

The Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Bitterroot Front Project is available for review and comment. You can access an electronic copy of the document on the Bitterroot National Forest website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/bitterroot/?project=57341>.

The project area is approximately 144,000 acres in size and is located primarily within Ravalli County, Montana, with a small portion located within Missoula County, Montana.

This project is a landscape-scale proposal to address the wildfire risk to communities and promote forest restoration using a wide range of tools including tree thinning, harvest, and prescribed burning on National Forest System lands administered by the Stevensville and Darby-Sula Ranger Districts. The project's primary purpose has been refined since the initial scoping notice to focus on restoring a healthy and resilient forest ecosystem through fire and fuels treatments. Some issues identified during scoping, such as recreation improvements, are not being carried forward in this analysis in order to focus management activities on the immediate need for fire and fuels treatments.

This project is proposing project specific forest plan amendments to the 1987 Bitterroot Forest Plan for elk habitat objectives, old growth, coarse woody debris, and snag retention. This project-specific amendment will be approved as part of the decision for the project and will only apply to this project (36 CFR § 219.15(c)).

The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the Forest Service may carry out Authorized Emergency Actions under section 40807 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (PL 117-58) on National Forest System lands in 250 identified High Risk Firesheds, four of which are within the project area. Emergency actions are taken to achieve relief from threats to public health and safety, critical infrastructure, and/or to mitigate threats to natural resources. The Chief of the Forest Service has approved the Bitterroot Front Project to be implemented as an Emergency Action Determination project. This project therefore will not be subject to the pre-decisional objection review process, and it is critical that you provide feedback on this project during the designated comment period described below, as the public will not be able to raise additional project concerns during an objection period.



How to comment

Substantive formal comments specific to the proposed action must be submitted during this 30-day comment period following publication of this notice in the Ravalli Republic. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. Specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider.

Other requirements include name, postal address, the title of the project, and signature or other verification of identity upon request and identification of the individual or entity who authored the comments. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Names and contact information (including addresses and e-mail addresses) submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Please submit comments to Matt Anderson, Forest Supervisor, using one of the following methods:

Submit comments online via the project's public participation portal (preferred method): <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/bitterroot/?project=57341> on the right hand side of the page under "get connected" tab select "comment/object on project".

Mail comments to: 1801^N 1st St, Hamilton, MT 59840. Hand deliver comments to the same address. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

Thank you for your involvement in this planning process. If you have any questions or if you need additional information regarding this proposal, please contact Stevensville District Ranger, Steve Brown at steve.brown2@usda.gov, 406-777-7410; or Darby-Sula District Ranger, Abbie Jossie at abbie.jossie@usda.gov, 406-821-4244.

Sincerely,

MATTHEW D. ANDERSON
Forest Supervisor