



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Stevensville
Ranger
District

RECEIVED

88 Main Street
Stevensville, MT 59870
406-777-5461

JUL 21 2014

July 17, 2014

Ravalli County Commissioners

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Dear Interested Party:

The Stevensville Ranger District is proposing vegetation management activities located in the Mill Creek and Tag Alder Creek drainages, adjacent to and south of, the Mill Creek Trailhead (see enclosed map).

I am requesting your comments on the proposed vegetation treatments outlined below. This letter begins the coordination and public scoping process.

The proposed action encompasses approximately 75 acres in the Bitterroot mountain range, west of Corvallis, Montana. The project area is located in Township 6 North, Range 21 West, Section 4. The purpose of this project is to control the spread of mountain pine beetle and improve the long-term resilience of trees within the project area. We expect to implement this project in 2015.

Mountain pine beetle has been active within the project area for several years and increasing mortality in the Ponderosa pine is evident. Treatment would include the removal of infested trees and the thinning of adjacent unaffected trees. The thinning would involve the removal of suppressed and intermediate trees to achieve an average residual basal area of 50 square feet per acre. The thinning would result in forest conditions less favorable for the spread of mountain pine beetle including: 1) increased air movement and light penetration through the canopy and 2) reduced tree density resulting in healthier residual trees.

Commercial treatment would include ground-based logging and up to one half mile of temporary road construction. Whole trees would be skidded to a landing and the slash piled and burned. Non-commercial treatment would involve cutting of smaller diameter trees. Slash from the non-commercial work would be disposed of through lopping and scattering or piling and burning.

We are interested in any specific information you believe should be considered; particularly any effects from the proposed project and any reasonable mitigations you think might help limit those effects. This project is being considered as categorically excluded (CE) from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The information you provide during this scoping period will help to further refine the project and determine whether there are extraordinary circumstances that would preclude categorically excluding the project from documentation in an EA or EIS.

I want to take this opportunity to inform you of recent legislation as it pertains to categorically excluded projects documented with a decision memo and new instructions issued on March 5, 2014, by Forest Service Chief Thomas Tidwell.

On January 17, 2014, the President signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Pub. L. No. 113-76). Section 431 of that Act directs that the 1992 and 2012 legislation establishing the 36 CFR 215 (post-decisional appeals) and 36 CFR 218 (pre-decisional

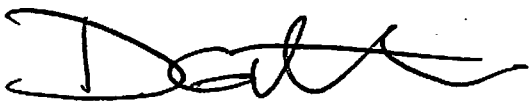


objections) processes "shall not apply to any project or activity implementing a land and resource management plan ... that is categorically excluded ... under the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA]." On February 7, 2014, the President signed into law the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) (Pub. L. No. 113-79). Section 8006 of the 2014 Farm Bill repealed the Appeals Reform Act (ARA) (Pub. L. No. 102-381). The ARA's implementing regulation was 36 CFR 215. The 2014 Farm Bill also directs that the pre-decisional objection process established in the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2012 shall not be applicable to categorically excluded projects or activities.

As a result of these two statutes, the Forest Service will no longer offer formal notice, comment and appeal opportunities for categorically excluded projects. The Forest Service will continue to offer public involvement opportunities for categorically excluded projects as provided for in the agency's NEPA Procedures. For example, we will continue to have the scoping process such as the one being provided now on this project.

If you wish to comment on this project, please address your comments to: Dan Ritter, District Ranger, Stevensville Ranger District, 88 Main Street, Stevensville, Montana 59870. Comments should include: 1) name, address, phone number, and organization represented, if any; 2) title of project on which the comment is being submitted; and 3) specific facts and supporting information for the responsible official to consider. Comments may also be hand delivered weekdays 8:00 am - 4:30 pm at the above stated address. Commenter names, addresses and e-mail addresses will become part of the public record. Comments must be received or postmarked by August 8, 2014. For additional information, contact Nate Barber at the Darby Ranger Station, (406) 821-3913.

Sincerely,











Daniel G. Ritter
District Ranger

Enclosures:

Project Vicinity map

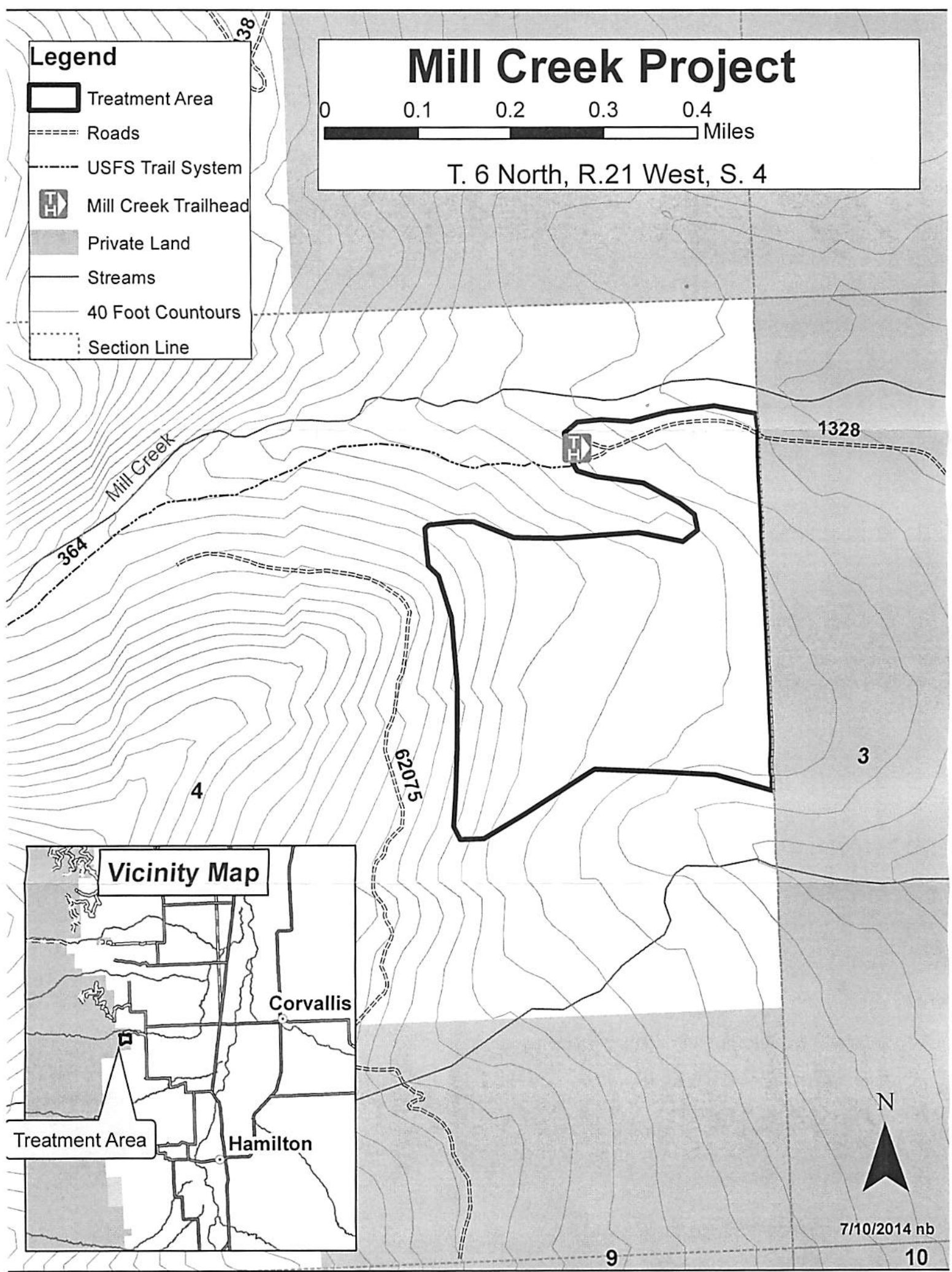
Legend

-  Treatment Area
-  Roads
-  USFS Trail System
-  Mill Creek Trailhead
-  Private Land
-  Streams
-  40 Foot Countours
-  Section Line

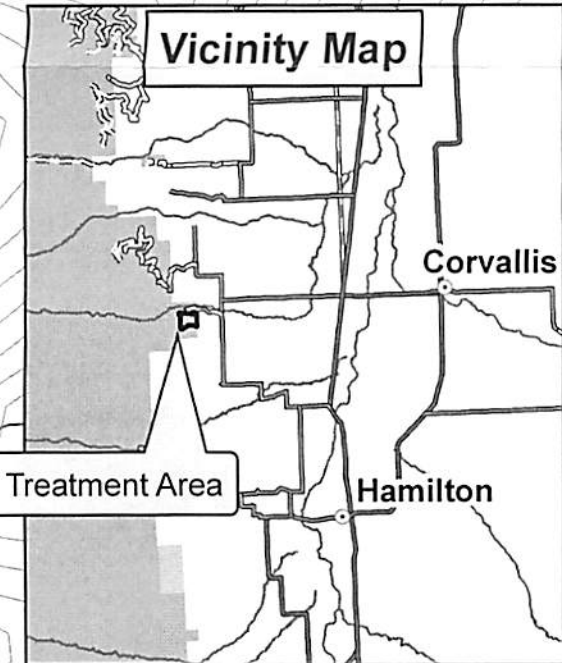
Mill Creek Project

0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles

T. 6 North, R.21 West, S. 4



Vicinity Map



7/10/2014 nb

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