



Bitterroot National Forest

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News Release

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Tod McKay

Forest Releases Draft Decision on Project

Hamilton, Montana (April 1, 2015) – The Bitterroot National Forest has released an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact (DN/FONSI) for the Darby Lumber Lands Watershed Improvement and Travel Management Project. The project encompasses approximately 28,758 acres in the South Fork Sleeping Child and Rye Creek drainages in the Sapphire Mountains east of Darby.

The project is designed to improve watershed and stream health while also creating a sustainable motorized access system and loop-based motorized routes. Several sites with substantial aspen regeneration would also be thinned to reduce competition and promote long-term aspen stands for wildlife habitat. The purpose of the project is to:

- Reduce chronic sediment from the road system and return land to a productive status by using various treatments on roads
- Address the immediate and long-term access needs within the project area
- Improve recreation access and forest diversity

The project area had extensive road systems built decades ago for timber management. Many roads on acquired Darby Lumber Company sections were built without water resources in mind and are negatively impacting local watersheds by chronically elevating sediment levels. There are approximately 275 miles of roads and 15 miles of single-track trail within the project area. About 66 miles of road are proposed for decommissioning, and about 55 miles are proposed for storage.

The project includes an overall reduction of about 5 miles of routes open to motorized access, when all proposed road and trail activities are considered. Most of the roads proposed for decommissioning and storage treatments are currently closed to motorized access.

Existing closed roads are also proposed for opening to OHVs 50" or less in width, along with construction of connector trails to create recreational loop routes.

The EA and DN/FONSI are available online at www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php/?project=36615. The documents are also available for review at the Supervisor's Office in Hamilton and the Darby Ranger District.

The decision is subject to public objection under Code of Federal Regulations §218. Objections may only be filed by those who previously submitted comments specific to the project. All objections must be submitted to the Forest Service by May 12, 2015.

Objections may be mailed to: USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, ATTN: Objection Reviewing Officer, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807 OR hand delivered to: USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, ATTN: Objection Reviewing Officer, 200 East Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802, Office Hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Electronic objections may be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Faxed objections may be submitted to (406) 329-3411. Please specify "Darby Lumber Lands Project Objection" in the subject line.

For more information contact Ed Snook at (406) 363-7103 or esnook@fs.fed.us. Stay in touch with the Bitterroot National Forest through www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheBitterroot and www.twitter.com/BitterrootNF.

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