

File Code: 1950
Date: June 9, 2017

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JUN 12 2017

Ravalli County Commissioners

Five empty rectangular boxes for signatures.

Ravalli County Commissioners
215 S. 4th Street, Suite A
Hamilton, MT 59840

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Bitterroot National Forest is proposing vegetation management, fuels reduction, and road improvements in the Gold Butterfly project area on National Forest System lands (Fig. 1). The Gold Butterfly project is on the east side of the Bitterroot Valley and extends from the confluence of Gold Creek and the Burnt Fork of the Bitterroot River south to Saint Clair Creek, and from the Bitterroot National Forest boundary east to the boundaries with the Lolo and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests. Most of the project area is on the Stevensville Ranger District but units in the St. Clair drainage overlap the Darby Ranger District.

The Forest Service proposes commercial timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, piling slash, and prescribed burning on about 10,500 acres of the Bitterroot National Forest in Ravalli County (legal location: T.6N. R.18W. sec.1-12, 16-20, 29, 30, T.6N. R.19W. sec. 1, 2, 10-15, 22-27, T.7N. R.18W. sec. 1-36, T.7N. R.19W. sec. 1, 2, 11-14, 22-27, 34-36, T.8N.R.18W. sec. 20, 21, 28-34). Some of the proposed treatments overlap into the Stoney Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA), however, no roads would be constructed in the IRA to access the treatment areas.

The purpose of this letter is to share information about the proposed Gold Butterfly project and to gather your information and knowledge about the project area related to the proposed activities. In this letter, I provide a brief description of the project, the need for treatment, proposed activities, and how you can participate in the process and comment on the proposal.

Project Development

The Gold Butterfly project proposal was developed from recommendations in two ecosystem analyses at the watershed scale (EAWs) – the Burnt Fork EAWs (2004) and the Daly-Gold EAWs (2008). In these analyses, resource conditions were evaluated for future management opportunities. The Gold Butterfly Interdisciplinary Team field reviewed the recommendations made in these analyses, defined the preliminary purpose and need for the project, and proposed actions that would fulfill the project’s purpose and need.

The Need for Action

The Interdisciplinary Team determined there is need to:

- Improve landscape resilience to disturbances (such as insects, diseases, and fire) by modifying forest structure and composition, and fuels
• Provide timber products and related jobs
• Reduce chronic sediment sources in Willow Creek and Burnt Fork of the Bitterroot River watersheds to improve water quality and bull trout habitat in the long-term
• Restore or improve key habitats, such as meadows, aspen, and whitebark pine

The Proposed Action

The proposed action was developed in response to the needs listed above. Elements of the proposed action include:



Road Decommissioning

The Bitterroot National Forest proposes to decommission roads no longer needed for long-term forest management. Up to 33 miles of National Forest System roads would be decommissioned and about 8 miles of undetermined roads would be decommissioned. Most of the roads proposed for decommissioning are currently closed to motorized use. Roads that are stable and vegetated will typically not require treatment other than culvert removal and entrance closure with berms or recontouring to prevent illegal motorized travel. Specific segments of roads may require recontouring or decompacting to resolve erosion, water infiltration, or slope stability issues. Rehabilitation treatments and entrance closures will be designed to accommodate continued non-motorized uses.

Healthy Forest Restoration Act

The Gold Butterfly project will be analyzed under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) authorities, as amended in 2014. The HFRA has several titles that apply to the Gold Butterfly project:

- Title I provides for hazardous fuel reduction on Federal land
- Title IV provides for systematic information gathering and research on applied silvicultural treatments to address the effects of insects, disease, and their interactions on forests
- Title VI provides for the designation of insect and disease treatment areas to increase forest resilience to insect or disease infestations

About 9,500 acres of the Gold Butterfly treatment areas are within the insect and disease designated treatment area (Title VI). This area is affected by mountain pine beetle, Douglas-fir bark beetle, Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe, and western spruce budworm to various degrees. The designated treatment area overlaps the wildland-urban interface (WUI), which cover 6,600 acres of the treatment units. The Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan (2006), developed through a collaborative process, identified much of the WUI as high priority for treatment.

The higher elevations in the project area contain whitebark pine, a sensitive tree species that is weakened and killed by white pine blister rust and mountain pine beetle. This occurrence provides an opportunity to study treatment methods to promote the retention and development of healthy whitebark pine forests.

The HFRA modifies the analysis process prescribed in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the administrative review process, and the judicial review process. The modification of the analysis process under NEPA limits the range of alternatives to the proposed action, the No Action, and an additional alternative proposed during scoping or the collaborative process. If more than one additional alternative is proposed, the Forest Supervisor shall select which additional alternative to consider and describe her reasons for selecting that alternative (HFRA §104(c)(2)(A)(B)).

Collaboration

HFRA requires the Forest Service to facilitate collaboration among State and local governments, Indian Tribes, and participation of interested persons to encourage meaningful public participation during the preparation of the HFRA project. It also requires the public comment opportunities specified in NEPA and administrative guidelines during the preparation of the environmental impact statement. Collaboration on the Gold Butterfly project includes early opportunities for public engagement as well as opportunities specified in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Administrative Review Act (ARA).

The Bitterroot National Forest held a public meeting to describe the preliminary Gold Butterfly project proposal and the analysis process on April 18, 2017. The purpose of the meeting was to present the project proposal to the public, describe the sideboards for the collaborative process, gather information from the public about the project area and their views on the proposal, and to explain the authorities under which the project would be analyzed. The Bitterroot National Forest held an open house on May 17, 2017 to present more specific information about resources in the project area, discuss concerns with

timber would be cut and one or more roadless characteristics (36 CFR 294.11) would be maintained or improved. No roads would be constructed or reconstructed to facilitate logging.

Your Opportunity to Comment

The Forest Service is accepting comments on the Gold Butterfly proposed action for 30 days following the publication of the proposal in the Federal Register. We anticipate the project will be published June 9, 2017.

Projects authorized under the HFRA are subject to the Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process (referred to as the "objection process") pursuant to 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and C. Objections will only be accepted from those who have submitted written comments specific to the proposed project during the scoping period or other public involvement opportunity where written comments are requested by the responsible official (36 CFR 218.5).

A comment form has been enclosed for your convenience but you are not required to use it. The comment form also provides the opportunity for you to choose whether you would like to have your name kept on the list to receive future mailings about the Gold Butterfly project, or to have your name removed from the mailing list for this particular project.

Comments should include:

1. Name, address, phone number, and organization represented, if any
1. Title of project on which the comments are being submitted
2. Substantive comments including specific facts and supporting information for the Forest Supervisor to consider.

Written comments must be mailed or hand-delivered to the Stevensville Ranger District Office, Attention: Tami Sabol, 88 Main St., Stevensville, MT 59870. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The facsimile number is 406-777-7423

Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), Word (.docx) or Word Perfect format to: comments-northern-bitterroot-stevensville@fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments (Gold Butterfly). For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record, and will be available for public inspection. If you have questions regarding the Gold Butterfly project, please contact Project Leaders Sara Grove (telephone 406-375-2608, email: sgrove@fs.fed.us) or Marilyn Wildey (telephone 406-363-7101, email: mwildey@fs.fed.us).

Sincerely,

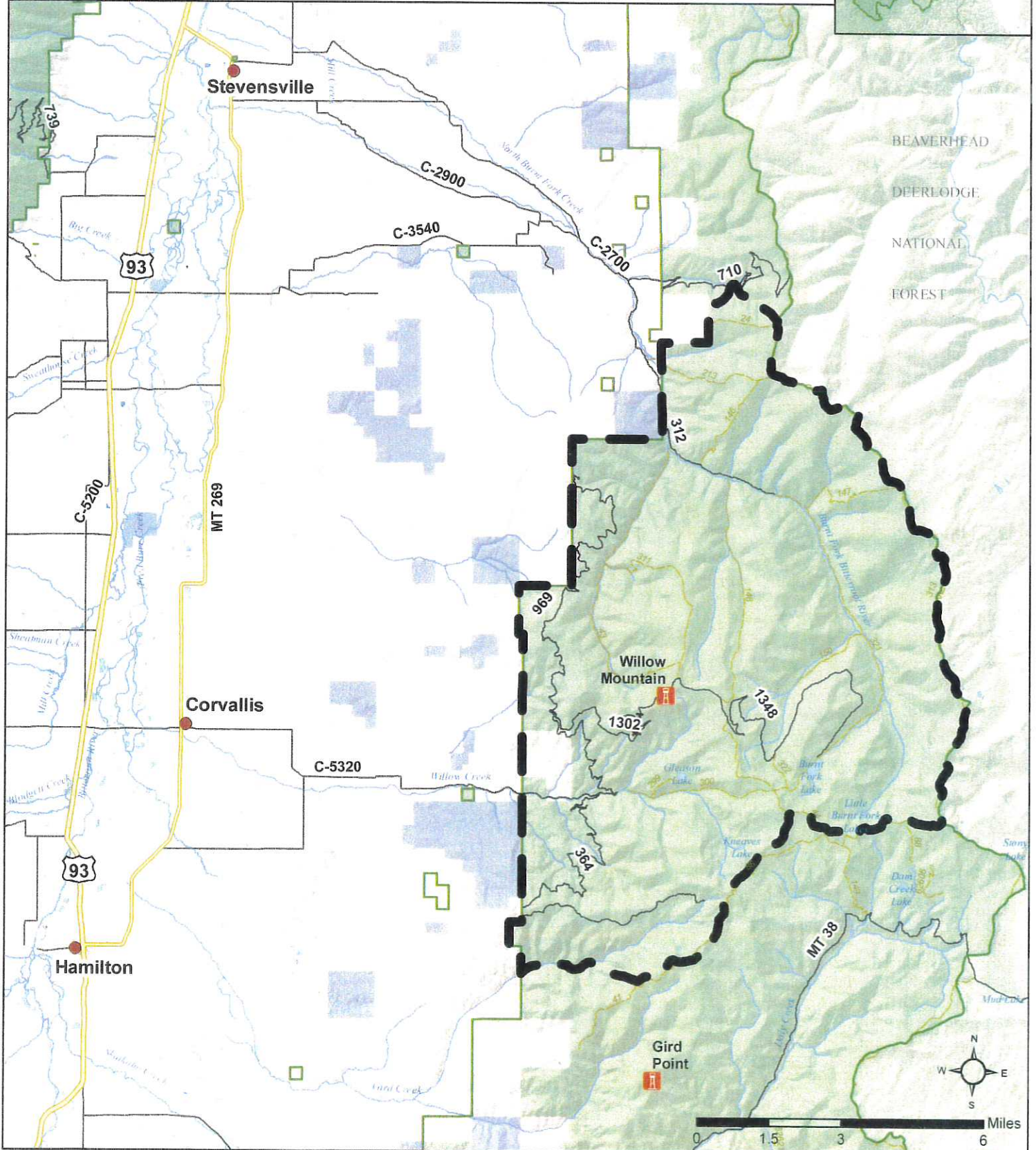
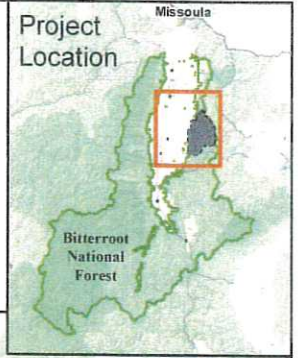

JULIE K. KING
Forest Supervisor

Figure 1: Gold Butterfly Project

Stevensville Ranger District
Bitterroot National Forest

Vicinity Map

-  Gold Butterfly Project Area
-  Forest Administrative Boundary
-  US Forest Service Land
-  State Managed Land
-  Other Ownership
-  Town
-  Main Road
-  Road
-  Trail
-  Stream





Forest Service

Stevensville Ranger District

88 Main Street
Stevensville, MT 59870

File Code: 1950

Date: June 7, 2017

Route To:

Subject: Gold Butterfly Field Trip

To: Interested Party

On June 21st, the Bitterroot National Forest is hosting a public field trip to the Gold Butterfly Project Area. We will be leaving the Supervisors Office in Hamilton (1801 N. 1st in Hamilton) at 1:00 in the afternoon and plan to return by 6:00. Please bring a water, snack, and wear comfortable clothes and shoes suitable for hiking in the forest. Be prepared for all types of weather! Transportation will be provided. We will carpool to the site because parking and turnarounds are very limited.

We will visit predetermined locations to address public concerns that have arisen during the collaborative process. Field trip stops will focus on:

- Water quality
- Fisheries
- Road improvements to reduce sediment runoff
- Forest stand conditions and potential treatments
- Road relocation, construction, and decommissioning

Please contact Marilyn Wildey (406-363-7101 or mwildey@fs.fed.us) by June 16th to reserve space on this field trip. Space is limited to 20 people. If there is more demand than capacity, a second field trip will be scheduled for Saturday June 24th.

Sincerely,

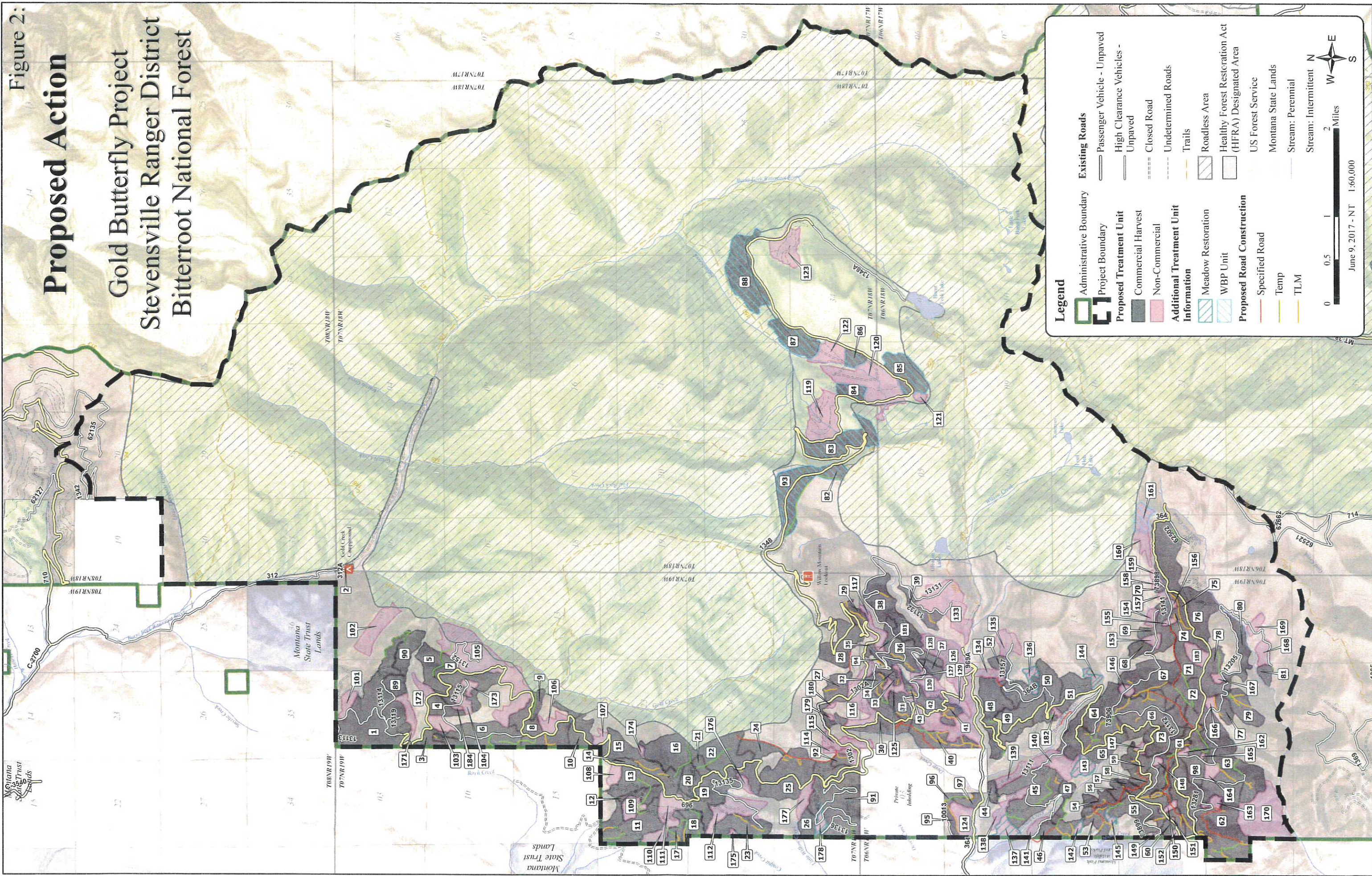
/s/ Tami Sabol
TAMI SABOL
District Ranger



Figure 2:

Proposed Action

Gold Butterfly Project Stevensville Ranger District Bitterroot National Forest



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June 9, 2017 - NT 1:60,000

