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From: McKay, Tod G -FS <tgmkay@fs.fed.us>
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Subject: News Release: Meadow Vapor Project Moving Forward
Attachments: Meadow Vapor DN-FONSI - signed.docx

Meadow Vapor Project Moving Forward

Hamilton, Montana (September 25, 2017) – Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor Julie King has signed the final Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Meadow Vapor fuels reduction and watershed improvement project. The decision authorizes the forest to move forward on plans to thin approximately 3,200 acres of overstocked National Forest lands east of Sula, surrounding the Springer Memorial and Bonanza communities in the upper East Fork of the Bitterroot River.

These communities (approx. 255 homes), were recently threatened by the 60,000 acre Meyers Fire and were under an Evacuation Warning for several weeks.

The project includes commercial timber harvests, non-commercial thinning, slash piling, and prescribed burning. Objectives include:

- Reduce hazardous fuels and lower crown fire hazards within the Wildland Urban Interface.
- Improve forest resilience to natural disturbances such as fire, insects, and disease.
- Manage timber to provide forest products, jobs and income to local communities.
- Improve watershed conditions and fisheries habitat.
- Implement motorized recreation opportunities.

The Meadow Vapor project area is approximately 11,100 acres and includes numerous drainages which flow into the East Fork of the Bitterroot River including Meadow Creek, Vapor Creek, Needle Creek, Lick Creek, Reynolds Creek, and Tepee Creek.

The Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan identified the area as a 'high priority' for fuels reduction within the Wildland Urban Interface. Over the past 10-years the Bitterroot National Forest has completed numerous fuels reduction projects in a large portion of these 'high priority areas'.

The East Fork drainage includes ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, and Douglas-fir stands. In many locations, there are dense pockets of dead and dying trees due to insect mortality as well as severe western spruce budworm damage.

The proposal responds to past requests from residents of the East Fork area to remove hazardous fuels near their homes and help protect their community from the devastating effects of a high intensity wildfire.

The project will provide nearly 5 million board feet of timber (1,000 truckloads) to Montana sawmills.

The project also proposes to construct two new OHV (vehicles less than 50 inches in width) connector trails that were included in the recent Travel Planning Record of Decision to meet recreation needs in the area. It also proposes road improvements, and decommissioning and storage of routes to improve watershed conditions by reducing sediment sources.

The Meadow Vapor Project was subject to public objection under Code of Federal Regulations §218. The Objection Reviewing Officer who reviewed the project found that it complied with all applicable laws and the Forest Plan.

The DN and FONSI are available online at www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot. Click on "NEPA Projects". Paper copies or CDs are also available at the Darby Ranger Station or Supervisor's Office in Hamilton. For additional information contact Eric Winthers, District Ranger, Darby/Sula Ranger District at (406) 821-3913.

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