United States Department of the Interior

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In Reply Refer To:
1790

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
Marshall Fred Vegetation Management Project

Environmental Assessment No. DOI-BLM-MT-B010-2016-0005-EA

I have reviewed the Marshall Fred Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-MT-B010-2016-0005-EA and the factors listed by the Council on Environmental Quality which need to be considered in determining if a federal action is significant. The EA considered information gathered during public scoping and a public comment period. The EA has assessed the environmental effects of the Proposed Action and the No Action alternatives and determined that the Proposed Action is consistent with the Record of Decision for the Garnet Resource Area Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (January 10, 1986) as amended.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the Marshall Fred Vegetation Management Project EA and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. No adverse impact on the production of energy will result from either alternative. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.

Approved by: Joe L. Ashor

Joe L. Ashor
Field Manager

Date 7/20/16

Decision Record
for the
Marshall Fred Vegetation Management Project

Environmental Assessment No. DOI-BLM-MT-B010-2016-0005-EA

The Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), has reviewed the EA for the proposed Marshall Fred Vegetation Management Project, which was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The proposed project would encompass 509 acres of public land on two separate BLM parcels located near Philipsburg, Montana and includes a combination of: timber harvest to improve forest vegetation health, provide timber for local industry, and reduce hazardous fuels within the wildland urban interface; removal of conifer encroachment to promote big game winter forage within existing mountain meadows; and a mixture of selective thinning and prescribed fire to promote whitebark pine vigor and to encourage seedling recruitment. The proposal and the environmental assessment was developed and reviewed by an interdisciplinary team.

The EA has assessed the environmental effects of the proposed action and documents that implementation of the proposed action with the identified mitigation measures will not result in significant environmental effects to the biological, physical, or social/cultural environment.

DECISION:

It is my decision to authorize the Marshall Fred Vegetation Management Project as described in the proposed action. This decision is in conformance with the Record of Decision for the Garnet Resource Area Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (January 10, 1986), as amended; and is contingent upon meeting all stipulations, mitigations, and project design features as listed in the EA and reproduced below. This decision does not have any adverse effects on energy development, production, or distribution.

The following actions will be taken:

Marshall Grade Timber Harvest:

The BLM-Missoula Field Office is proposing a timber harvest in the Marshall Grade area northwest of Philipsburg, Montana (Sections 10 and 11 of T. 7 N., R. 15 W. PMM). The project encompasses 138 acres of public land that would be treated using mechanized harvesting systems. The project would be implemented over the course of a 24 month period beginning in the summer of 2016. Proposed Actions include:

- Utilize a shelterwood silvicultural system to move the existing stand toward the objective of a two aged stand, which will promote heterogeneity in stand composition and structure. The proposed shelterwood harvest would move the existing stand toward the objective of a two aged stand by creating retention groups and cut groups; areas with live lodgepole pine that have low susceptibility to mountain pine beetle attack would be retained in groups and areas with dead lodgepole pine or lodgepole pine that have a

moderate to high susceptibility to mountain pine beetle attack (based on the Region 1 Forest Insect Hazard Rating Criteria) would be harvested, leaving growing space for lodgepole pine regeneration (a second age class).

- Harvest dead lodgepole pine and live lodgepole pine that have a moderate to high susceptibility to future mountain pine beetle attack (based on the Region 1 Forest Insect Hazard Rating Criteria) over 40% (~55 acres) of the proposed 138 acre harvest area.
- Harvest lodgepole pine that is moderately to highly infected with lodgepole pine dwarf mistletoe.
- Retain lodgepole pine that have a low susceptibility to mountain pine beetle attack. Defer treatment adjacent to big game foraging areas and travel corridors to maintain spatial connectivity and habitat integrity.
- Retain vegetation in 0.5 to 5 acre patches over 30% (~40 acres) of the proposed 138 acre harvest area to maintain big game thermal and hiding cover.
- Harvest within the Douglas-fir component of the project area through single tree selection and group selection silvicultural methods that promote tree vigor and forest health with a desired structure that incorporates a mixture of openings (0.5-1.0 acres in size), unaffected areas (0.5-5 acres in size), and light thinning treatments. The objective is to remove 10% of the basal area of the Douglas-fir component over 30% (~40 acres) of the proposed 138 acre harvest area.
- Pile and burn slash resulting from harvest activities.
- Broadcast burning may be conducted if adequate lodgepole pine regeneration does not occur after harvest.

Project design features:

- Reduce slash depths to <18 inches.
- Leave trees – Select trees with >40% crown-cover; select a mix of best formed live trees and decadent trees that are hollow, and/or with forked and broken tops.
- Snags and replacement snags – For dispersed spatial pattern leave 5-10 snags (soft and hard snags; Class 1, 2, and 3) >10" DBH/acre (a mix of sizes) and leave preferably in clumps when available. Select snags with existing nest cavities, snags with broken tops, and hollow snags with a species preference for Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, quaking aspen, and lodgepole pine. Where available retain Douglas-fir at 4-snags/acre at least 20" DBH. Live leave trees will function as replacement snags.
- Logs – For dispersed spatial pattern leave 10-20 logs/acre >10" DBH and 10-40 feet long. Retain all Douglas-fir logs >20 inches when available. Select a range of logs from hard to soft and retain all hollow logs. Replacement snags and snags will eventually become logs. For aggregate spatial pattern retention leave all logs.
- Prevailing wind – Consider retaining uncut areas to prevent blowdown along edges with prevailing wind conditions.
- Utilize prescribed fire where practical.
- Defer livestock grazing for two seasons if necessary in association with broadcast burning.
- Spot-treat weeds before and after treatment.
- Retain all 5-needle pines when and where possible.
- Promote lodgepole pine regeneration by ensuring adequate site scarification through the utilization of ground based harvesting techniques or post-harvest site preparation.

Mitigation:

- Timber management activities will be designed to maintain or improve big game winter range.
- Timber sale contract will prohibit most sale activity during winter and spring to prevent disturbance of animals on winter range.
- Timber will be harvested, slash treated, and roads closed within two summer seasons.
- Timber sale units, except single or group selection, will generally be 5-30 acres.
- Unit shapes will be irregular with reserve blocks within harvest units where necessary to increase edge effect and maintain proper sight distances.
- Reserve areas between harvest units will be as wide as the harvest units or a minimum of 600 feet wide.
- Timber harvest adjacent to past harvest units will be deferred until harvest units constitute hiding cover with a minimum of 200 TPA 8-feet high.
- Cover areas will be managed to maximize thermal cover with the remainder in hiding cover.
- Thermal cover should be provided on both low and high energy aspects adjacent to forage areas.
- Timber harvest will be designed to maintain or develop thermal cover adjacent to big game forage areas.
- Retention groups will be located adjacent to 1-5 acre parks, meadows, and grasslands.
- For parks, meadows, and grasslands over 5-acres, timber harvest may remove cover from up to 25% of the park perimeter. The remainder of the perimeter will be maintained in existing cover.
- An interdisciplinary review of silvicultural prescriptions, unit layout, and marking guidelines would occur to evaluate effectiveness of treatments in providing thermal cover.
- Monitoring, prevention, and control of noxious weeds would be implemented through an integrated, cooperative strategy as directed by BLM's "Integrated Weed Management Plan" (USDI, 2003).
- Timber harvest and road construction contracts would stipulate that all off-road equipment would be power-washed prior to arriving on public land. The successful bidder would be required to contribute funds for weed control.
- Weed detection, monitoring, and management actions would be conducted before, during, and after implementation of the Proposed Action based on site-specific conditions and need. Herbicide application would continue under and conform to the Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (USDI, 2007).
- To better prevent the establishment of new noxious weeds, and to detect and eradicate any new populations, special precautions will be taken. Existing roads used to transport heavy equipment and haul forest products will be treated with herbicides to control all detectable noxious weeds prior to logging operations. All temporary roads will be carefully inspected for noxious weeds and other undesirable vegetation prior to rehabilitation or obliteration. Herbicides would be applied to kill any known weeds prior to final dirt work. Soil will be re-vegetated with a certified weed-free seed mixture of forbs and grasses to cover the site until trees re-establish.

Meadow restoration:

The BLM-Missoula Field Office is proposing light thinning and prescribed fire treatment on approximately 132 acres in the Marshall Grade area northwest of Philipsburg, Montana (Sections 2, 10, and 11; T. 7 N., R. 15 W., PMM). The project would be implemented by utilizing hand felling with chainsaws and hand piling techniques. The project would be implemented over the course of a 24 month period beginning in the summer of 2016. Proposed Actions:

- Mimic the effects of high frequency, low intensity fire.
- Thin to reduce conifer encroachment around sagebrush and other shrubs.
- Large diameter Douglas-fir would be favored for retention; thin small diameter lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir; lop and scatter slash.
- Broadcast and/or pile burning would be implemented if needed upon completion of thinning.

Project design features and mitigation measures:

- Retain 1-2 snags/acre >20" DBH, if available.
- Retain logs at their current level.
- Defer livestock grazing for two seasons if necessary in association with broadcast burning.
- Spot treat weeds before and after treatment implementation.
- Retain all 5-needle pines where possible.

Whitebark pine release:

The BLM-Missoula Field Office is proposing thinning and prescribed fire treatment on approximately 150 acres along the southern end of Black Pine Ridge in the Marshall Grade area northwest of Philipsburg, Montana (Sections 2 and 11; T. 7 N., R. 15 W., PMM). The project would be implemented by utilizing hand felling with chainsaws and hand piling techniques. The project would be implemented over the course of a 24 month period beginning in the summer of 2016. Proposed Actions include:

- Thin approximately 150 acres along Black Pine Ridge to alleviate competition and improve the health and vigor of established whitebark pine.
- Create conditions favorable for whitebark pine seedling recruitment by creating seed caching sites through pile burning slash.

Project design features:

- Retain all whitebark pine.
- Cut, lop, and scatter or pile lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir within 50-60 feet from mature whitebark pine.
- Mimic the behavior and effects of infrequent, low intensity fire.

Mitigation:

- Retain all large snags within 50-60 feet from mature whitebark pine; additional snags and replacement snags should be located outside of the 50-60 foot limit for mature whitebark pine.
- Retain logs at their current level; snags and replacement snags will eventually become logs.

Fred Burr Timber Harvest:

The BLM-Missoula Field Office is proposing a timber harvest near Fred Burr Creek southeast of Philipsburg, Montana (Section 12, T. 6 N., R. 14 W.,PMM). The project encompasses 89 acres of public land that would be treated using mechanized harvesting systems. The project would be implemented over the course of a 24 month period beginning in the summer of 2016. Proposed Actions include:

- Salvage dead lodgepole pine within harvest unit boundaries with an objective of regenerating lodgepole pine.
- Use group selection and single tree selection silvicultural systems to thin the Douglas-fir component to promote resilience and improve forest health of the remaining stand.
- Scarify or broadcast burn after harvest to provide for lodgepole regeneration.
- Complete a timber stand improvement treatment on non-merchantable trees after harvest.
- Within 300 feet of the local swimming hole remove all snags. Retain all live trees.

Project design features:

- Reduce slash depths to <18 inches.
- Quaking aspen – where possible create a 50:50 ratio of young to mature structure in aspen stands by cutting a portion of the above ground stems; retain all aspen snags and logs; regenerated stems may need to be fenced due to winter elk browsing; the timber harvest may release dormant aspen clones.
- Leave trees – retain 1-2 large live decadent lodgepole pine or Douglas-fir wildlife trees (forked tops, broken tops, etc.) where such trees exist.
- Retain lodgepole pine in areas that have a low mountain pine beetle rating.
- Snags and replacement snags – where a sufficient number of snags exist, retain 5-10 snags (soft and hard snags; Class 1, 2, and 3) >10" DBH/acre (a mix of sizes) and leave preferably in clumps. Select snags for retention that have existing nest cavities, snags with broken tops, and hollow snags with a species preference for Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, quaking aspen, and lodgepole pine. Live leave trees will function as replacement snags. In areas outside of regeneration groups retain all snags.
- Logs – For dispersed spatial pattern leave 10-20 logs/acre >10" DBH and 10-40 feet long. Retain all Douglas-fir logs >20 inches. Select a range of logs from hard to soft and retain all hollow logs. Replacement snags and snags will eventually become logs. In areas outside of regeneration groups leave all logs.
- Utilize prescribed fire where possible to reduce ground fuels and stimulate aspen suckering.
- Spot-treat weeds before and after project implementation.

- Retain all 5-needle pines where possible.
- Promote lodgepole pine regeneration by ensuring adequate site scarification through the utilization of ground based harvesting techniques or post-harvest site preparation.
- Prevailing wind – Consider retaining uncut areas to prevent blowdown along edges with prevailing wind conditions.
- Class 1 Streamside Management Zones were delineated for Fred Burr Creek and no activity will occur within these SMZs. These were 50 feet for slopes <35% and 100 feet for slopes >35% (Montana DNRC, 2006).
- To prevent soil compaction, limit equipment activity to when soils are dry or frozen, or operate equipment over slash. Otherwise, designate equipment trails and rip/till compacted trails after use.

Mitigation:

- Stream Management Zones around Fred Burr Creek were delineated by the Missoula Field Office Fisheries Biologist and the Hydrologist.
- Cutting units will be treated to maximize the visual resource qualities of the project area.
- Timber harvest and road construction contracts would stipulate that all off-road equipment would be power-washed prior to arriving on public land. The successful bidder would be required to contribute funds for weed control.
- Weed detection, monitoring, and management actions would be conducted before, during, and after implementation of the Proposed Action based on site-specific conditions and need. Herbicide application would continue under and conform to the Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (USDI, 2007).
- To better prevent the establishment of new noxious weeds, and to detect and eradicate any new populations, special precautions will be taken. Existing roads used to transport heavy equipment and haul forest products will be treated with herbicides to control all detectable noxious weeds prior to logging operations. All temporary roads will be carefully inspected for noxious weeds and other undesirable vegetation prior to rehabilitation or obliteration. Herbicides would be applied to kill any known weeds prior to final dirt work. Soil will be re-vegetated with a certified weed-free seed mixture of forbs and grasses to cover the site until trees re-establish.

Timing of Implementation

Implementation of this Decision is contingent on funds being available. Project work would begin in summer of 2016.

Protest Period

This decision is subject to protest in accordance with 43 CFR 5003 – Administrative Remedies. A Protest must be filed in this office within 15 days of the effective date of this decision. For purposes of protest, the effective date of this decision is July 20, 2016.

The whitebark pine release and meadow restoration treatments are now open for protest as of the effective date of this decision which is July 20, 2016. The decisions to sell forest products associated with timber harvest treatments do not become protestable until the Timber Sale Notice is published in a newspaper of local circulation at which time the decision becomes final according to BLM regulation and 43 CFR 5003.3. As interpreted by BLM, the regulations do not authorize the acceptance of protests in any form other than a written hardcopy that is delivered to the physical address of this office.

The EA and supporting documentation are available for review at the BLM- Missoula Field Office, 3255 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, Montana.

Joe L. Ashor — 7/20/16
Joe L. Ashor — Date
Field Manager
BLM-Missoula Field Office, Missoula, Montana