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Montana Forests in Focus Initiative

Implementation Update

January 2015

<http://dnrc.mt.gov/forestry/forestsinfoocus.asp>

MT DNRC Financial Investments in USFS Projects - 2015 Update

Project Title: Little Eddy

- **Location:** Lolo National Forest, Mineral County
- **Treatment area:** 130 acres in the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion (CE)*. Decision Memo is signed. Project implementation 2015.
- **Wood fiber output:** 400 mbf (commercial) 200 mbf (non-commercial)
- **Restoration Objections:** The project area is within the wildland-urban interface (WUI). There are homes within yards of the FS boundary. The planned treatments within the project area will reduce the fire hazard from stand replacement, high intensity to low intensity. The treatment will remove ladder fuels, and break up the crown continuity by harvesting and reduce the surface fuels by under burning. The Little Eddy project will reduce future tree mortality from root disease and improve resilience to insect infestation. Douglas-fir trees are at risk to insect infestation due to high tree density and disease-induced stress. The restoration objective is being met by removing the root disease susceptible Douglas fir in the existing root rot pockets and converting these areas to ponderosa pine by planting.
- **Collaboration:** The Forest used a collaborative process that included multiple interested persons representing diverse interests and was transparent and non-exclusive, as required by the Farm Bill. The collaboration discussion led to the development of the proposed action.
- **State funding:** A total of \$47,375 of state funding will be used for sale preparation and field work, contract package, post-harvest activities including underburning, fireline construction in the WUI, tree planting and soil monitoring.

*First Farm Bill CE in the Nation.

Project Title: Fire Cracker Annie

- **Location:** Lolo National Forest, Mineral County
- **Treatment area:** 225 acres in the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** Categorical Exclusion. Decision Memo is signed. Project implementation 2015.
- **Wood fiber output:** 750 mbf (commercial) 200 mbf (non-commercial)
- **Restoration Objections:** The purpose of this salvage and timber stand improvement proposal is to apply treatments to stands affected by overstocking and Mountain Pine Beetle infestation. Healthy productive forests will be restored on approximately 225 acres. Effects of treatment include: increased stand age class and size class diversity, increased timber growth and increased landscape resilience to natural disturbances. The project will improve wildlife habitat on 217 acres for forage for large carnivore and big game.
- **Collaboration:** The project design is a result of collaboration with the Mineral County Resource Coalition, a diverse group of people representing all facets of Mineral County.
- **State funding:** A total of \$83,250 of state funding will be used for collaborative training and monitoring, sale preparation and field work, reforestation, Road BMPs, weed treatment and soil and wildlife monitoring.

Project Title: Westside Collaborative Vegetation Management

- **Location:** Bitterroot National Forest, Ravalli County
- **Treatment area:** 2,000 acres in the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** NEPA Scoping will begin in March 2015; NEPA Decision likely in early 2016; Contract award Spring of 2016. Likely use of Farm Bill Authority to accelerate project implementation timeframe.
- **Wood fiber output:** 6.3 mmbf (commercial) 1 mmbf (non-commercial)
- **Restoration objectives:** This project will improve timber stand health on about 2,000 acres in the Ponderosa Pine/Douglas-fir cover types; lower risk of wildfire along 9 miles of the WUI; reduce wildfire hazard through intensive non-commercial thinning on 472 acres within the WUI; reduce wildfire hazard on an additional 1,500 acres of the project area through commercial harvest; introduce prescribed fire on 1,900 acres of the project area; improve fire suppression access along the WUI; remove conifer encroachment and treat 30 acres of remnant aspen clones to stimulate suckering and rejuvenation of deciduous woody species for multi-species benefits; promote re-vegetation of 115 acres disturbed sites in order to enhance native plant diversity, density and resistance to invasion treat and monitor 100 acres of designated disturbed sites, road locations and landings.
- **Collaboration:** Strong leadership by the Bitterroot Restoration Committee has assisted with this project. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Confederated Salish Tribes and National Wild Turkey Federation will assist through an existing Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the Bitterroot Forest with vegetation management specification design and implementation. Hundreds of citizens along the WUI will benefit from the lowered risk of catastrophic wildfire attributable to better managed fuel loadings on the Forest side of the boundary
- **State funding:** A total of \$135,990 of state funding will be used timber sale preparation and silviculture prescription field work and design, road survey and design, native and rare plant habitat enhancement and invasive plant prevention.

Project Title: Whitefish Municipal Watershed Fuels Reduction

- **Location:** Flathead National Forest, Flathead County
- **Treatment area:** 1,300 acres within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** NEPA will begin in 2015; Decision and Implementation likely late in 2016. Potential use of Farm Bill Authority to accelerate project timeframe.
- **Wood fiber output:** 150 mbf (commercial) 100mbf (non-commercial)
- **Restoration objectives:** The project is within a municipal watershed, in the wildland urban interface and high on the priority list under the DNRC's State Action Plan. The project will perform fuels reduction activities on approximately 1300 acres of National Forest land within the municipal watershed of the City of Whitefish. The proposed fuel reduction activities will break up the continuity of hazardous fuels within the watershed and increase the chance of successful initial attack during a potential wildland fire within the watershed. This area is also adjacent to a natural population of whitebark pine that is genetically resistant to white pine blister rust. Fuel reduction activities will provide a seedbed for whitebark pine germination and opportunities to restore a more robust population of this important tree species within the watershed.
- **Collaboration:** The City of Whitefish presented the Forest Service with a signed resolution in support of a fuel reduction project within the Whitefish Municipal Watershed designed to reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildland fire in 2004. Recommendations for fuels reduction activities and new non-motorized trails are in the process of being developed collaboratively by the Whitefish Face Working Group. Fuels reduction activities within the municipal watershed are also supported by the Haskill Basin Watershed Council (HBWC).
- **State funding:** A total of \$80,000 of state funding will be used for botany and soil surveys, transportation analysis, fuel and stand diagnostics and sale preparation and planning.



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Project Title: Pseudotsugae Douglas-Fir Beetle Project

- **Location:** Flathead National Forest, Flathead County
- **Treatment area:** 500 acres within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** NEPA will begin on 2015; implementation 2016. Likely use of the Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion to expedite the project timeframe.
- **Wood fiber output:** 2.5 mmbf of commercial product
- **Restoration objectives:** The project will treat Douglas-fir stands currently affected by Douglas-fir beetle on up to approximately 500 acres. Populations of Douglas-fir beetles are building up on National Forest Lands. The adjacent landowner (F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber) is concerned that the building populations will expand onto their ownership and cause economic damage to their standing timber resources. Removing infested Douglas-fir from National Forest lands will promote favorable conditions for maintaining and establishing long-lived, early seral species ponderosa pine and western larch. Both of these species are more resilient to wildland fire, forest insects, and root disease than Douglas-fir. Rapid response is needed to reduce this infestation and treat accumulations of forest fuels in these areas. State of Montana investments when combined with the efficiencies of Farm Bill authorities will propel this project forward at a rapid pace and facilitate more effective and timely treatment of these areas.
- **Collaboration:** Representatives of F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber met with the Tally Lake Ranger District in August of 2014 to voice their concerns about the building populations of Douglas-fir Beetle on National Forest Lands adjacent to their ownership and to propose a project to address these concerns. This meeting was followed up by a letter from F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber to the Tally Lake District Ranger urging the Forest Service to address the problem along with maps of potential treatment areas.
- **State funding:** A total of \$30,000 of state funding will be used for collaboration, botany and soil surveys, old growth surveys, transportation analysis, stand diagnostics and sale preparation and planning.

Project Title: Taylor Hellroaring Resource Management Project

- **Location:** Flathead National Forest, Flathead County
- **Treatment area:** 2,700 acres within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** NEPA will begin in 2015; Decision and Implementation likely late in 2016. Potential use of Farm Bill Authority to accelerate project timeframe.
- **Wood fiber output:** Almost 4 mmbf
- **Restoration objectives:** The project will perform vegetation management activities northwest of the Whitefish Mountain Resort. Vegetation management activities will promote the establishment and persistence of long-lived, early seral species including western larch and western white pine. Activities will also break up the continuity of hazardous fuels to the west of Whitefish Mountain Resort. Openings created in the higher elevations of the project area could be used to establish white pine blister rust-resistant whitebark pine. Treatment within the watershed also provides positive economic benefits by reducing the risk of a stand-replacement wildland fire. Upon project completion, the risk of a stand-replacement wildland fire in the Taylor and Hellroaring watersheds will be reduced. The State of Montana has fire protection responsibilities in this area so these treatments will directly reduce fire suppression costs to the State in the event of a future wildfire.

- **Collaboration:** The City of Whitefish presented the Forest Service with a signed resolution in support of a fuel reduction project within the Whitefish Municipal Watershed designed to reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildland fire in 2004. Recommendations for fuels reduction activities and new non-motorized trails are in the process of being developed collaboratively by the Whitefish Face Working Group. Fuels reduction activities within the municipal watershed are also supported by the Haskill Basin Watershed Council (HBWC).
- **State funding:** A total of \$50,000 of state funding will be used for botany and soil surveys, transportation analysis, fuel and stand diagnostics and sale preparation and planning.

Project Title: Golden Anchor Bridge - Telegraph Vegetation Project

- **Location:** Helena National Forest, Powell County.
- **Treatment area:** 3,500 acres within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** Engineering plans have already been designed, and the construction of the bridge will continue once full funding is received. With the state funding a large portion of the total cost we are confident the bridge construction will begin this year (2015).
- **Wood fiber output:** The Bridge is part of a key haul route for the Telegraph vegetation project and its construction will expedite the removal of approximately 16-17 million board feet.
- **Restoration objectives:** The addition of the Golden Anchor Bridge will aid in restoring the floodplain of the Little Blackfoot River. Existing access across the Little Blackfoot River in this area is a native material ford that is a chronic source of sediment to an already sediment-impaired stream. Fish habitat, including Bull trout, continues to degrade from chronic road sedimentation and direct vehicular disturbance to spawning/rearing habitat associated with the ford crossing. Bridge installation will also allow for the eventual removal of a high-impact segment of road with the river's floodplain, while maintaining existing access in the drainage. The construction of the Bridge will also assist in connecting a planned summer and winter travel route for ATV and snowmobile use.
- **Collaboration:** The Golden Anchor Bridge is supported by the Capital Trail Vehicle Association, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks, and Montana State Parks, and Trout Unlimited as noted in the attached letters of support. Development of the Golden Anchor Bridge has been a consistent request from the public during travel planning.
- **State funding:** A total of \$125,000 of state funding will be used for bridge construction (contracted).

Project Title: Greater Red Lodge Area Vegetation and Habitat Management Project

- **Location:** Custer Gallatin National Forest, Carbon County
- **Treatment area:** 1,807 acres within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** The project Record of Decision is expected to be signed in February/March of 2015. Field preparation activities have started on this project with the expectation that the Greater Red Lodge Stewardship contract will be offered for sale in August of 2015.
- **Wood fiber output:** Approximately 8.3 MMBF of commercial timber.
- **Restoration objectives:** The project is within the Wildland Urban Interface and within a municipal watershed. Treatments include 1,051 acres of commercial harvest, 756 acres of non-commercial treatments (thinning, prescribed burning, mastication and hand piling) and removal of 3.9 miles of road. Commercial and non-commercial treatments are also designed to: maintain and/or improve Aspen, reduce fuel loadings and stand density, improve resiliency of forested stands to insects and disease, and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in treated stands.
- **Collaboration:** The District underwent an extensive public involvement process during its NEPA analysis. The District held field trips and reviewed draft alternatives with the public to provide information, discuss issues of concern, provide an opportunity for the public to interact with resource specialists, and provide an additional opportunity for people to provide comments on the alternatives before they were finalized. After the Draft EIS was signed additional meetings were held to address remaining concerns. The forest collaborative, Custer Gallatin Working Group (CGWG), formed when the Greater Red Lodge Area Vegetation



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and Habitat Management Project NEPA was near completion. The CGWG has been briefed on the project twice and is working with the Forest on the project moving forward.

- **State funding:** A total of \$60,000 of state funding will be used for field working within planned commercial and non-commercial stands; specifically for leave tree mark, unit layout and timber cruising.

Project Title: North Hebgen Integrated Vegetation Management Project

- **Location:** Custer Gallatin National Forest, Gallatin County
- **Treatment area:** Almost 8,000 acres. Roughly half of the proposed treatment area is within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area with the remaining lands adjacent.
- **Timeline:** The NEPA process will occur in 2015/16 with potential project implementation in 2017.
- **Wood fiber output:** The estimated commercial timber volume is 6.5 MMBF.
- **Restoration objectives:** The North Hebgen Project is an integrated management proposal and has multiple purposes including: fuels reduction in the wildland urban interface, along evacuation routes and a power line; wildlife habitat improvement such as restoration and maintenance in aspen and white bark pine habitats; management to enhance forest health and resiliency; and treatments to improve visibility along Highway 191 and near the Rainbow Point Campground to reduce wildlife/vehicle collisions and unintended bear encounters.
- **Collaboration:** State funding will directly support the Custer Gallatin Working Group in the collaborative development of the North Hebgen project. Over the course of 2015 and early 2016 the CGWG will hold monthly meetings for member participation. Each meeting will include agenda items to update and advance the work associated with the Hebgen Lake project. CGWG activities supporting the North Hebgen project will be undertaken in concert with Forest Service plans. Using Forests in Focus Initiative facilitation funds, the CGWG will organize outreach efforts to help with community engagement and to increase the level of technical knowledge within the Working Group, and the project area communities. Associated expenses will include advertised community meetings to provide information on planned activities, involving subject matter experts to address questions and explain some of the technical aspects of the project.
- **State funding:** A total of \$60,000 of state funding will be used to support the Custer Gallatin Working Group collaborative as well as support field data collection for the project.

Project Title: Boulder Lowlands Farm Bill CE

- **Location:** Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Jefferson County
- **Treatment area:** 1,900 acres within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion. The NEPA process is being initiated early in 2015 with a Decision anticipated by the end of 2015
- **Wood fiber output:** Anticipated 5 mmbf of commercial timber volume.
- **Restoration objectives:** This project is in the Wildland Urban Interface and the primary objective is to reduce fuels and increase forest resiliency. The outcomes include 1900 acres of fuels reduction in the urban interface and numerous improvements to the road system.
- **Collaboration/State funding:** In support of the Boulder Lowlands project, \$17,000 of state funding will support facilitation and coordination services for the coming year for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working

Group (BDWG). State funding will also support technical assistance for the BDWG. This investment will leverage existing BDWG technical resources, and support the development of collaborative science capacity, understanding and application of available information to the development, implementation and monitoring of the Boulder Lowlands project. The Forest requested these collaborative funds to help keep the collaborative group viable and functioning at a high level, which will, in turn, help move this project through to a timely decision.

Project Title: Kootenai National Forest Young Growth Vegetation Management

- **Location:** Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln County
- **Treatment area:** The entire Kootenai National Forest was designated under the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape area. The project will analyze 400,000 acres of previously harvested forest.
- **Timeline:** The NEPA analysis will begin early in 2015. The Forest expects to have a signed Decision by March 2016.
- **Wood fiber output:** The forest wide environmental decision will help to support a ten year consistent supply of timber. It will be additive to the Forests existing program of work. Commercial product and non-saw products will be produced over the ten year period.
- **Restoration objectives:** Overall project benefits associated with young-growth vegetation management is to improve the resiliency of the timber stands to insects and disease, improve wildlife habitat, address impacts from climate change and to decrease risk of stand-replacing wildfire. Managing these stands is important in order to reach a healthier stocking rate and to increase overall growth and vigor of the stand by reducing competition and stress on remaining conifers. Management of these stands will also increase quantities of grasses, forbs, and shrubs that many wildlife species utilize in the early stage of forest development. The project will allow for adaptive management over the next ten years in order to best respond to changing forest and economic conditions.
- **Collaboration:** The overall development of the project will be conducted through a collaborative process with interested parties, including the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition, Lincoln County, Sanders County, and the Montana timber industry.
- **State funding:** A total of \$100,000 of state funding will be used for field validation, environmental analysis, field trips and increasing collaborative involvement and outreach.

Project Title: Upper Sheep Creek Farm Bill CE

- **Location:** Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Meagher County
- **Treatment area:** 1400 acres within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area
- **Timeline:** The NEPA Decision will be completed in FY15 with outputs being implemented as part of the Lewis and Clark NF in FY16.
- **Wood fiber output:** This project is expected to produce approximately 6 MMBF
- **Restoration objectives:** The purpose of the project is to address the recent mountain pine beetle outbreak, continued western spruce budworm defoliation, and dense stand conditions resulting from past harvest. The project will focus on improving age class and structural diversity, promoting whitebark pine, and reducing fuels and fire risk in and around cabins (WUI) and on the landscape. The resulting landscape will be more resistant to and resilient in the face of future disturbance events. The project will improve big game species forage and over time increase elk hiding cover.
- **Collaboration:** The Forest will undergo a collaborative process outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill. The Forest will invite interested stake holders to the table to participate in open dialog to assist and guide the Forest Service in developing treatment design features to best meet the needs of the resource. The Forest is seeking community ownership and engagement throughout project development and implementation.
- **State funding:** A total of \$75,000 of state funding will be used for Resource Surveys, BMP design and planning.



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Project Title: Showdown Vegetation Management Plan

- **Location:** Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Meagher County
- **Treatment area:** 563 acres in a special use area. The project area is within the 2014 Farm Bill Priority Landscape Area.
- **Timeline:** Planning will occur with Implementation occurring in 2015 and 2016.
- **Wood fiber output:** An expected volume of approximately 500 mbf
- **Restoration objectives:** The goal of the project is to create healthy, sustainable, and resilient forest conditions appropriate for recreational use. Implementation of the project would remove hazards due to dead and dying trees, address current and future insect and disease issues, promote regeneration of deteriorating stands, and increase species and structural diversity across the permit area. The project will also greatly enhance recreation opportunities in and around the Showdown Ski Area.
- **Collaboration:** The project has strong support from the Showdown Ski Area and the skiing public dispersed between Great Falls and White Sulphur Springs. Support for the project also comes from the local volunteer fire department which has fire suppression obligations for the ski area's infrastructure. The community of White Sulphur Springs and the Meagher County Commission are strong supporters of the project due to the economic benefits and local employment that the ski area provides.
- **State funding:** A total of \$30,000 of state funding will be used for Resource Surveys, BMP design and planning.