2010 McGregor Lake Fishing Access Fuels Reduction Project Public Draft Environmental Assessment

April 2010

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to conduct fuels reduction work on four timbered parcels of department-owned lands on McGregor Lake in Flathead County. A total of 390 acres are targeted, and all these parcels are contained within the Thompson Chain of Lakes Fishing Access Site, which is managed by FWP for recreational use.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

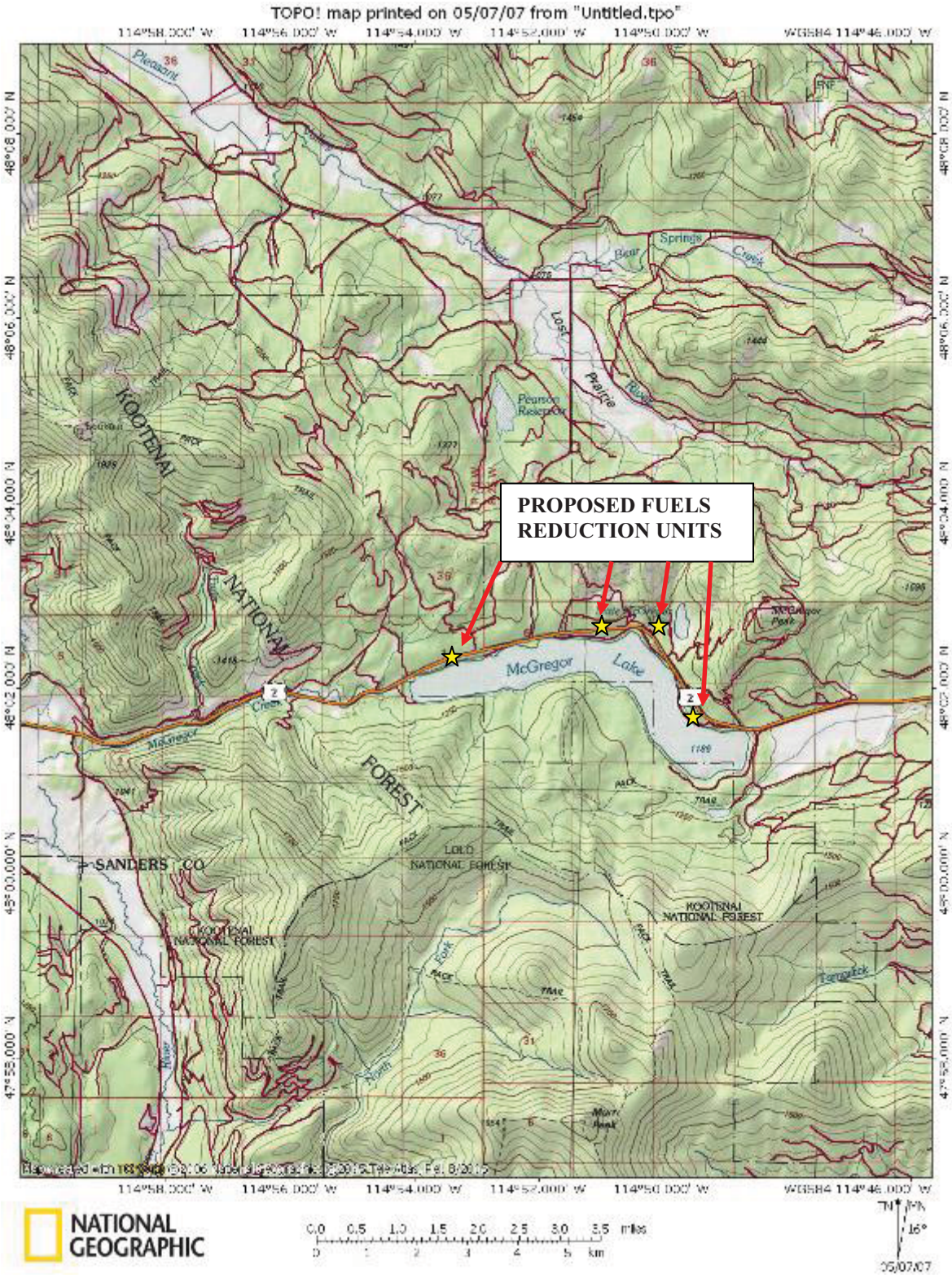
State Statutes 23-1-102 and 23-1-110 MCA guide public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides.

3. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated commencement date: June 1, 2010
Estimated completion date: December 31, 2010
Current status of project design (% complete): 100%

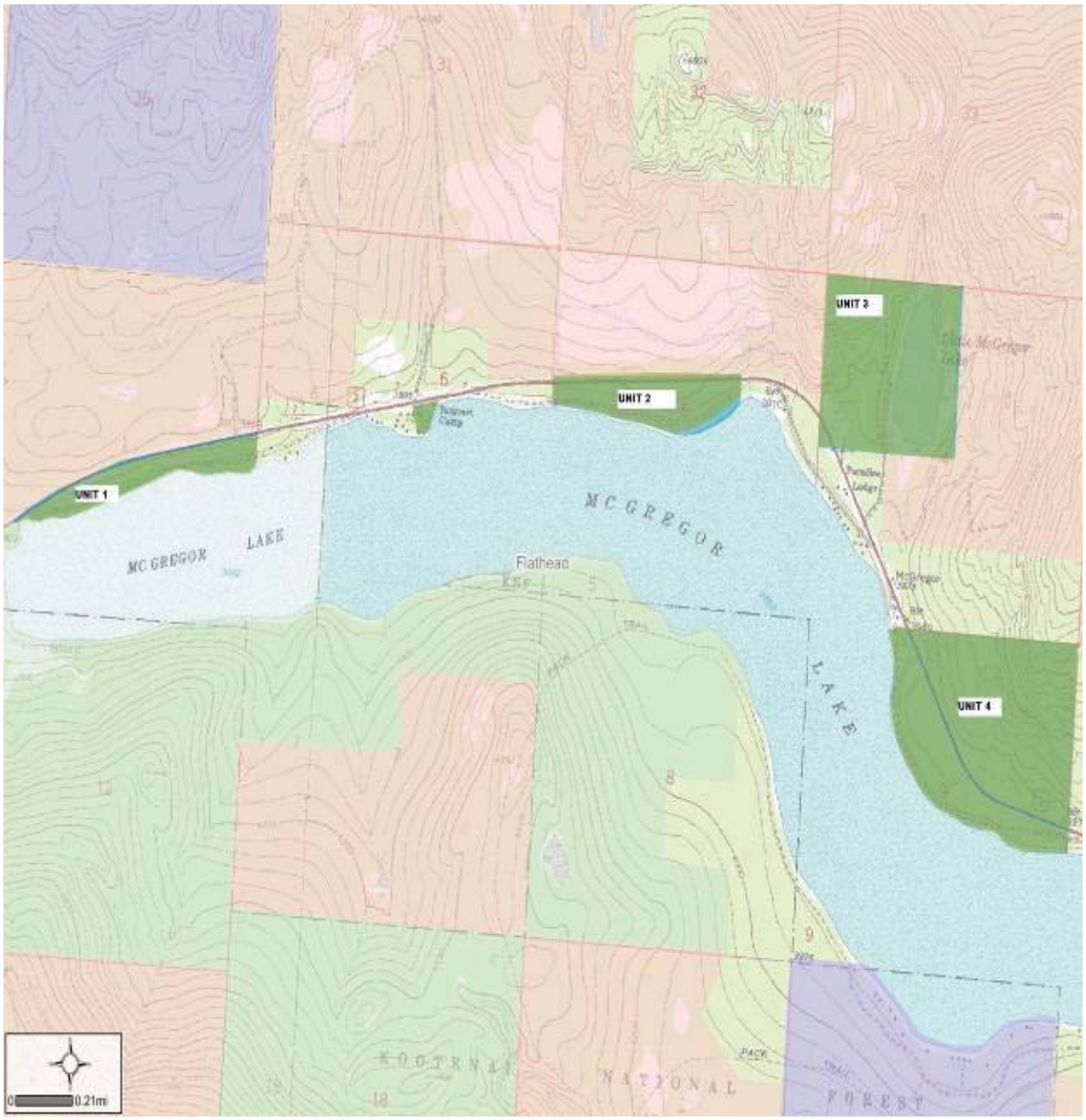
4. Location affected by proposed action:

Unit 1 - Flathead County, Section 01, T26N, R26W (23 acres)
Unit 2 - Flathead County, Sections 04, 05, and 09, T26N, R25W (65 acres)
Unit 3 - Flathead County, Section 04, T26N, R25W (80 acres)
Unit 4 - Flathead County, Section 09 T26N R25W (221 acres)


TOPO! map printed on 05/07/07 from "Untitled.tpo"
PROPOSED FUELS REDUCTION UNITS
McGregor Lake
KOOTENAI
NATIONAL
FOREST
SANDERS CO
LOLO NATIONAL FOREST
KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST
Pleasant
Springs
Bear
Creek
Lost
Prairie
Pearson Reservoir
McGregor Peak
Mount Hawk
114°58.000' W
114°56.000' W
114°54.000' W
114°52.000' W
114°50.000' W
WGS84 114°48.000' W
48°08.000' N
48°06.000' N
48°04.000' N
48°02.000' N
48°00.000' N
47°58.000' N
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
0.0 0.5 1.0 1.5 2.0 2.5 3.0 3.5 miles
0 1 2 3 4 5 km
TN MN 16°
05/07/07

PARCEL MAP SHOWING UNITS 1-4:

= FWP Lands on McGregor Lake & Little McGregor Lake



5. Project size - estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/	390	Dry cropland	0
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	0	Rangeland	0
Areas		Other	0

6. Listing of any other local, state or federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: Permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

(b) Funding: MT Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation administered federal Jump Start II Grant - $224,431

(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:
Montana State Historical Preservation Office - Archeological & Cultural Site Protection
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation - Wildfire response

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to conduct fuels reduction work on four timbered parcels of department-owned lands on McGregor Lake in Flathead County. These parcels are contained within the Thompson Chain of Lakes Fishing Access Site which is managed by FWP for recreational use. These sites are utilized year-round for angling, day use, and camping in designated campsites. The proposed project area is within the urban wildland interface, and residential development borders all of the individual parcels. This project would be conducted in cooperation with Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and private contractors. The federal Jump Start II grant program would be the primary funding source.

Treatment Units

Unit 1 is located in Section 01, T26N, R26W. This 28.6-acre parcel is located between US Hwy 2 West and the north shore of McGregor Lake. A county road bisects the parcel from west to east, and residential development is situated on the east boundary. In 2007, fuel reduction work occurred on the eastern-most four acres of this unit. Proposed treatment in this unit would consist primarily of roadside fuels reduction on 23 acres.

Unit 2 is located in Section 05, T26N, R25W. This 65-acre unit is also located between US Hwy 2 West and the north shore of McGregor Lake. A county road also provides access through this undeveloped parcel. Residential development is present near the west

and east boundaries. FWP proposed roadside fuels reduction and thinning of overstocked lodgepole pine, Douglas fir, and ponderosa pine stands to reduce fuels.

Unit 3 is located in Section 04, T26N, R25W. FWP proposes fuels reduction treatment on the 157-acre parcel, with approximately 80 acres targeted. The area to be treated is located to the west of Little McGregor Lake. Treatment would take place immediately adjacent to a developed campground and day use area and would consist of fuels reduction work to decrease ladder fuels and increase crown spacing.

Unit 4 is located in Section 09, T26N R25W. This 221-acre parcel is located between US Hwy 2 West and the northeast shoreline of McGregor Lake, with approximately 100 acres targeted. This parcel contains eight developed campsites, and residential development is located near the east and west boundaries. Fuels reduction work occurred on six acres along the western boundary of this site in 2007. FWP proposes a continuation of that project by further reducing severely overstocked Douglas fir and ponderosa pine stands to increase crown spacing and decrease ladder fuels. FWP proposes to also treat within 100 feet of the southern and eastern boundary of the piece of this parcel located on the north side of Hwy 2.

Need for Action

The lands involved in this proposal are located within the FWP management area known as the Thompson Chain of Lakes Fishing Access Site. This area, which includes 316 acres on McGregor Lake and 157 acres on Little McGregor Lake, is managed for recreation with primitive camping facilities. On McGregor Lake FWP parcels are intermingled with residential development, including home sites, public utilities, and public roadways. All of the proposed treatment units display an accumulation of downed woody fuels and/or ladder fuels. In several cases, these conditions occur between designated campsites and developed residential areas.

FWP is directed to manage the lands on McGregor Lake under the guidelines of the Thompson Chain of Lakes Management Plan Update approved by the FWP commission in 2006. The plan provides the following goal and action items regarding forest management at the site.

GOAL: Manage TCL's forests to promote stand health, species diversity, and wildlife habitat, and to enhance public safety from hazardous trees and wildfire.

Objective:
Manage TCL's forests for forest health, quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitats, and fuels mitigation according to recognized defensible space criteria.

Action Item:
Monitor and prioritize forest management projects for the purpose of reducing fire risk to adjacent landowners and for providing wildlife habitat.

Implementation:
Continually monitor forest health, identifying areas of concern based on the following criteria:

• Fire risk to adjacent landowners.
• Overall forest vitality.
• Diversity of wildlife habitat, including but not limited to white-tailed deer thermal cover, snag recruitment, and mature forest stands.
• Shoreline and stream protection for fish habitat.

Objectives and Desired Outcomes and Conditions of the Proposed Action: State of Montana Water Quality Best Management Practices (BMP) and Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) guidelines will be followed when accomplishing all hazardous fuels reduction practices. The objectives are to remove diseased, dead and dying, and hazardous trees; reduce fuel loadings and the risk of crown fires; reduce tree density; and reduce competition for light, water, and nutrients. The following prescriptions would be used:

Sanitation/Salvage Logging: Using cut-to-length logging equipment, remove some recently dead, dying, and diseased trees within treatment acreage. Older dead trees, if not a public hazard, may be retained for snags and wildlife habitat.

Thinning: In all size and age classes, select the most vigorous trees for retention while providing open air space between tree crowns. Treat fuels between the ground and crowns of larger trees by removing ladder fuels to reduce the chances of a ground fire from becoming a crown fire.

Tree size and slopes dictate use of variable spacing between trees to reduce fire risk sufficiently. Larger trees require a minimum of 10-to-20 feet between crowns, while smaller trees can be spaced with 8-to-10 feet between crowns. On steeper slopes the wider spacing should be used. Pockets of sapling-to-pole-size tree thickets dominated by Douglas fir may be retained for thermal cover. Pocket size should not exceed ¼ acre or be within 100 feet of a residence. The cut-to-length logging equipment will be used to space trees from 5 inches in diameter and up, while the processor grinder will be used to treat less than 5 inches. Pulp-size material would be transported to a stockpile area. This would reduce the amount of slash to chip on-site and provide easily accessible firewood and/or marketable chips.

Grinding (mastication): Existing ground fuels will be treated with the grinder in conjunction with the newly created slash from thinning and salvage logging operations. On-site chipping with grinder will disperse chips throughout each unit, not exceeding a depth of 2 inches. Up to 50 pieces of larger-diameter (6-inch-plus) downed woody material that is 6 feet or longer may be left on each acre.

8. Alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Under the no-action alternative, fuels reduction work and defensible space work would not be initiated on the four subject parcels on McGregor Lake. This alternative would leave existing forest conditions intact and would not increase crown spacing or reduce downed and woody debris from the project areas. This alternative would prevent ground disturbance resulting from slash treatments such as masticating and would thus result in

fewer noxious weed issues. This alternative would also fail to address defensible space in the interface between these four recreation parcels and neighboring residential areas. The outcome could potentially result in higher risk to residential areas resulting from wildfire that originates on FWP lands.

<u>Alternative B:</u> Proposed Action - Treatment of Units One, Two, Three, and Four
FWP, through the assistance of private forestry contractors, would utilize grant monies that exist to fund fuels reduction work by the DNRC-administered federal Jumpstart II grant program. Due to economy of scale, the project would utilize grant money more efficiently if all units are treated as opposed to separate mobilizations. It is also unknown if grant monies will be available for future projects. This alternative would increase the amount of acreage on which FWP will need to address potential noxious weed issues.

Under this alternative contract forest workers would treat the following FWP Parcels:

Unit 1
This 28.6-acre unit is the western-most unit in the proposed project area. This unit borders residential development on Violet Bay Road and is upwind from these homes during prevailing westerly winds. The parcel is characterized by a large volume of downed and woody debris, consisting mainly of lodgepole pine. This proposed work in Unit 1 would entail the use of masticating equipment to grind downed lodgepole pine in place, thus eliminating the need for slash burning. Treatment would be primarily aimed at creating defensible space between access road, power lines, and campsites on the eastern edge of the FWP property and residential developments. Streamside management zone practices would be utilized on the portion of this unit that borders McGregor Lake. Roadside thinning along .65 miles of access road would reduce heavily stocked Douglas fir stands within 100 feet of the roadside to reduce fire danger. These stands are characterized by small-diameter thickets of Douglas fir saplings. The four most eastern acres were treated in the 2007 project.

Unit 1 - McGregor Lake

Unit 2
This 65-acre parcel is located approximately one mile east of Unit 1 on the north shore of McGregor Lake. This unit borders residential development on private property to the east and west. The parcel is characterized by mature ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, and Douglas fir stands, with dense thickets of Douglas fir, lodgepole, and ponderosa pine saplings. Ladder fuels are prevalent in this treatment area, and treatment would be aimed at reducing fire danger. This alternative would entail thinning of small-diameter saplings to increase crown spacing and reduce ladder fuels. This unit is located between private residential developments. Prevailing winds are from the west in this unit, so wildfire danger is a significant concern.

Unit 2 - McGregor Lake as viewed along access road that bisects parcel. Note overstocked ponderosa pine and Douglas fir stands bordering the roadway.

Unit 3
This 157-acre site is the northern-most unit in the proposed project area. Approximately 80 acres have been identified for treatment to the west of Little McGregor Lake. This unit borders private property to the south and Plum Creek Timber Company land to the west and north. The parcel is characterized by mature ponderosa pine and Douglas fir stands, with dense thickets of Douglas fir and ponderosa pine saplings. Ladder fuels are prevalent in this treatment area, and treatment would be aimed at reducing fire danger. This alternative would entail thinning of small-diameter saplings to increase crown spacing and reduce ladder fuels. This unit is located between designated campsites in the Little McGregor Lake site of the Thompson Chain of Lakes Fishing Access and Plum Creek Timber Company land. Prevailing winds are from the west in this unit, so wildfire danger is slightly less than Units One and Two, but still present.

Unit 3 - Little McGregor Lake. Note ladder fuel prevalent to designated camping area.

Unit 4

This 222-acre site is the eastern-most unit in the proposed project area. This unit borders residential development on private property to the west and east. The six most western acres of this unit were treated in the 2007 fuel reduction project.

FWP proposes development of a 100-foot shaded fuel break on FWP property parallel to US Hwy 2 West right of way and adjoining private property boundaries. The parcel is characterized by mature ponderosa pine and Douglas fir stands, with dense thickets of Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, and ponderosa pine saplings. Ladder fuels are prevalent in this treatment area, and treatment would be aimed at reducing fire danger. This alternative would entail thinning of small-diameter saplings to increase crown spacing and reduce ladder fuels. This unit is located between designated campsites in the Thompson Chain of Lakes Fishing Access and private residential developments. Prevailing winds are from the west in this unit, so wildfire danger is just as significant as in Units One and Two.

Unit 4 boundary with US Hwy 2 West. Note heavy volume of dead standing timber.

Unit 4 fuels loading.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

The analysis of the physical and human environments discussed on the following pages is limited to Alternative B as the proposed action and preferred alternative.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?			X		Y	1a
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		Y	1b
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			X		Y	1d
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

1a, b, and d: Timber removal will be done utilizing masticating and hand sawing techniques to minimize ground disturbance, compaction, erosion, and siltation. Masticated chips will help minimize erosion and noxious weed invasion in disturbed areas. Slash burning will be nonexistent to reduce impacts on vegetation and soils. Any disturbed areas will be reseeded with annual grasses to reduce erosion and compaction. Any invading noxious weeds will be managed through the Regional Noxious Weed Program. All equipment will be used only when environmental conditions permit. The contractor will clean all equipment used off roads.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)			X		Y	2a
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		Y	2b
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				

2a and b: Machinery used during the timber removal project will create noise and emissions during the project period. Care will be taken to limit working hours to minimize disturbance to adjacent neighbors. Chipping will be utilized for slash treatment. Air quality is expected to return to pre-project levels upon the completion of the proposed fuel reduction efforts.

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				

This project is anticipated to have no impact on water resources. Stream management practices will be followed, eliminating any work within 100 feet of McGregor Lake and Little McGregor Lake.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X			
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X			
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X			
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				

4a and b: One of the goals of this project is to reduce the amount of overstocked Douglas fir and ponderosa pine thickets. The impacts are considered positive, as this will reduce dense areas to more historic levels, thereby improving the health and vigor of remaining trees. This will make them more resistant to insect and disease infestations and reduce the risk of stand replacement fire. With the reduction of overhead cover, existing undergrowth is anticipated to regenerate. Where little undergrowth is present, opened, disturbed areas will be reseeded with native species.

4e: There is a possibility for the introduction of noxious weeds in disturbed soils. Disturbed soils will be reseeded with native vegetation and monitored. The area is managed under Region One's noxious weed management program, and any occurrence of noxious weeds will be treated chemically, biologically, or mechanically under that program.

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X		N	5a
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				

Wildlife species that have been observed around or in project area are: common loon, westslope cutthroat trout, gray wolf, fisher, wolverine, and Canada lynx,

5a. A minor alteration of bird and small mammal habitat may occur as a result of this project. All treatment units are small and located in areas of larger, similar habitat types, thus limiting the impact.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		Y	6a
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?			X		Y	6b
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

6a and b: Machinery used during the timber removal project will create noise and emissions. Workers will be exposed to intermittent noise levels that will require use of hearing protection. In addition, care will be taken to limit working hours to minimize disturbance to adjacent neighbors.

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

There are no anticipated impacts on land use in the project area as a result of this proposal.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X			
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?			X			
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X			8c.
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)			X			

This proposal is anticipated to reduce the potential for property-threatening forest fires to residential dwellings immediately adjacent to the project area.

8c. Timber removal is hazardous. Precautions will be taken to close roads during the project to prevent vehicles from entering. Signs will be prominently displayed informing visitors of the project and hazardous conditions. Areas will be closed to public access while work is being performed and machinery is operated, or if conditions are deemed unsafe.

Chemical spraying is part of FWP's weed management plan to limit the infestation of noxious weeds on its properties per the guidance of the 2008 Integrated Weed Management Plan. Weed treatment and storage and mixing of the chemicals would be in accordance with standard operating procedures.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?			X		N	9c
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?			X		N	9d
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X		Y	9e

9c and d. This project will have a positive effect on employment and commercial activity. Work will be conducted by contract, thus providing economic opportunity. Any revenue generated from this project would be used in FWP's Forest Management Special Revenue account to potentially fund future forest management projects.

9e. There will be a minor and temporary alteration of traffic flow and camping opportunity within the project area.

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources		X				
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						10f

10f. Annual maintenance costs will be determined by the extent of any invasive weeds in disturbed areas. All areas could be treated in two-to-three days by one-to-two seasonal staff. If treatment is necessary, the projected cost is estimated to be $550 per year for chemicals and labor in the first two years, with costs decreasing in subsequent years as native species regenerate and become dominant.

11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X			11a
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?			X			11b
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				

11a and b. Treatment Unit 1 will be dealing primarily with downed lodgepole pine and roadside thinning. The views from within the site or from neighboring residential areas will not be altered. Treatment Unit 2 will result in greater visibility distances through forest stands, but will not affect scenic vistas. Treatment Unit 3 will result in greater visibility distances through forest stands, but will not affect scenic vistas. Treatment Unit 4 will be roadside thinning. There will be temporary visual alterations typical with those from forestry operations, but these will be mitigated over time as revegetation of disturbed areas occurs.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				

This proposed project is designed to mitigate recent changes in forest conditions (i.e., dense regeneration following timber harvest and exclusion of fire) that resulted from previous forest management activities. The units will not be altered in such a way as to damage any historic resources that may be present in the project areas. FWP will ensure that the contractor is aware of the cultural concerns in the project area. FWP consulted Montana State Historical Preservation Office, and at this time SHPO does not recommend a cultural resource inventory. Their recommendation is based on previous inventories conducted in the project area, and their assessment is that there is a low likelihood of cultural properties being impacted by the project. If cultural materials are discovered during the project, SHPO will be contacted for further investigation.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?			X			13b
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

13b: Timber removal is hazardous. Precautions will be taken to close roads during the project to prevent vehicles from entering. Signs will be prominently displayed, informing visitors of the project and hazardous conditions. Areas will be closed to public access while work is being performed and machinery is operated, or if conditions are deemed unsafe.

Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

Forestry prescription, harvest plan, harvest techniques and job site rehabilitation will be monitored by FWP for compliance with the Thompson Chain of Lakes Management Plan.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The cumulative effects of this proposal are anticipated to be positive. In all of the treatment areas the effect would be a reduction of overstocked Douglas fir and ponderosa pine stands, and a reduction in the volume of dead and down fuels. The anticipated result is a reduction in potential for damage to neighboring properties as a result of wild fire. The secondary effect would be an improvement in stand condition as a result of reduced inter-competition resulting from dense thickets of conifer saplings. Ground disturbance would provide an opportunity for increased spread of noxious weeds, while simultaneously encouraging native plant regeneration. Noxious weed spread would be mitigated through the application of herbicides by FWP staff.

Due to the amount of acreage (390 acres of 1,085 total), the alteration of wildlife habitat is considered to be minimal. Additionally, the impacts to aesthetic qualities would be extremely minimal. Best management practices would be utilized to limit ground disturbance and subsequent cleanup efforts.

Finally, the duration of the project is considered to be short. FWP estimates that contractors would be able to treat all of the units before the end of December 2010, making the total project duration approximately six months. Impacts to recreationists and neighboring homeowners would be minimal in the peak season of July and August.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

Scoping was conducted in 2007 with neighbors who border the project area to the evaluate opinions or concerns regarding this type of proposal. Comments received were in favor of this project. Following the successful completion of the 2007 fuels mitigation project on McGregor Lake, FWP did extensive scoping of landowners and of visitors to the TCL area to discuss large-scale forest management projects throughout the chain. Public scoping continued to show strong support for forest management projects aimed at fuels reduction, insect and disease mitigation, and forest restoration. These scoping efforts resulted in several large parcels being treated throughout the complex in the following three years, including the recently completed Crystal Lake/Upper Thompson Lake fuels reduction project.

Following the release of this draft EA for public review, a 14-day comment period will ensue. Following the release of a decision notice, a 30 day appeal period will be observed prior to any action being taken in the event that Alternative B is selected as the preferred alternative.

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: Kalispell *Daily Inter Lake* & Libby *Western News.*
- One statewide press release.
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: *http://fwp.mt.gov* .
- Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed upon request to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

If requested within the comment period, the department may arrange a public meeting.
This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope, having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will be14 days from the date that the draft environmental assessment is available. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., May 10, 2010, and can be mailed to the address below:

2010 McGregor Lake Fuel Reduction Project
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or e-mail comments to: dbennetts@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? No

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.
The cumulative effects of this proposal are anticipated to have a positive impact on the human environment by reducing the potential for damage to private residential property resulting from forest fire on adjoining FWP lands. FWP also predicts a positive effect on forest conditions within the project area through reduction in overstocked Douglas fir and ponderosa pine stands.

2. Person responsible for preparing the EA:
David Bennetts
Region 1 NW District Park Management Specialist
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 751-4590

3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:

MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Parks Bureau
- Wildlife Bureau
- Fisheries Bureau
- Legal Bureau

Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)

APPENDICES

A. Glossary of Terms
B. Unit Maps and Identification of Proposed Fuel Reduction Acres
C. Species of Concern report

APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Affected Environment – The aspects of the human environment that may change as a result of an agency action.

Alternative – A different approach to achieve the same objective or result as the proposed action.

Categorical Exclusion – A level of environmental review for agency action that do not individually, collectively, or cumulatively cause significant impacts to the human environment, as determined by rulemaking or programmatic review, and for which an EA or EIS is not required.

Cumulative Impacts – Impacts to the human environment that, individually, may be minor for a specific project, but, when considered in relation to other actions, may result in significant impacts.

Direct Impacts – Primary impacts that have a direct cause and effect relationship with a specific action, i.e., they occur at the same time and place as the action that causes the impact.

Environmental Assessment (EA) – The appropriate level of environmental review for actions that either does not significantly affect the human environment or for which the agency is uncertain whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required.

Environmental Assessment Checklist – An EA checklist is a standard form of an EA, developed by an agency for actions that generally produce minimal impacts.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – A comprehensive evaluation of the impacts to the human environment that likely would result from an agency action or reasonable alternatives to that action. An EIS also serves a public disclosure of agency decision-making. Typically, an EIS is prepared in two steps. The Draft EIS is a preliminary detailed written statement that facilitates public review and comment. The Final EIS is a completed, written statement that includes a summary of major conclusions and supporting information from the Draft EIS, responses to substantive comments received on the Draft EIS, a list of all comments on the Draft EIS and any revisions made to the Draft EIS and an explanation of the agency's reasons for its decision.

Environmental Review – An evaluation, prepared in compliance with the provisions of MEPA and the MEPA Model Rules, of the impacts to the human environment that may result as a consequence of an agency action.

Human Environment – Those attributes, including but not limited to biological, physical, social, economic, cultural, and aesthetic factors that interrelate to form the environment.

Long-Term Impact – An impact, which lasts well beyond the period of the initial project.

Mitigated Environmental Assessment – The appropriate level of environmental review for actions that normally would require an EIS, except that the state agency can impose designs, enforceable controls, or stipulations to reduce the otherwise significant impacts to below the level of significance. A mitigated EA must demonstrate that: (1) all impacts have been identified; (2) all impacts can be mitigated below the level of significance; and (3) no significant impact is likely to occur.

Mitigation – An enforceable measure(s), designed to reduce or prevent undesirable effects or impacts of the proposed action.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) – The federal counterpart of MEPA that applies only to federal actions.

No Action Alternative – An alternative, required by the MEPA Model Rules for purposes of analysis, that describes the agency action that would result in the least change to the human environment.

Public Participation – The process by which an agency includes interested and affected individuals, organizations, and agencies in decision making.

Record of Decision – Concise public notice that announces the agency's decision, explains the reason for that decision, and describes any special conditions related to implementation of the decision.

Scoping – The process, including public participation, that an agency uses to define the scope of the environmental review.

Secondary Impacts – Impacts to the human environment that are indirectly related to the agency action, i.e. they are induced by a direct impact and occur at a later time or distance from the triggering action.

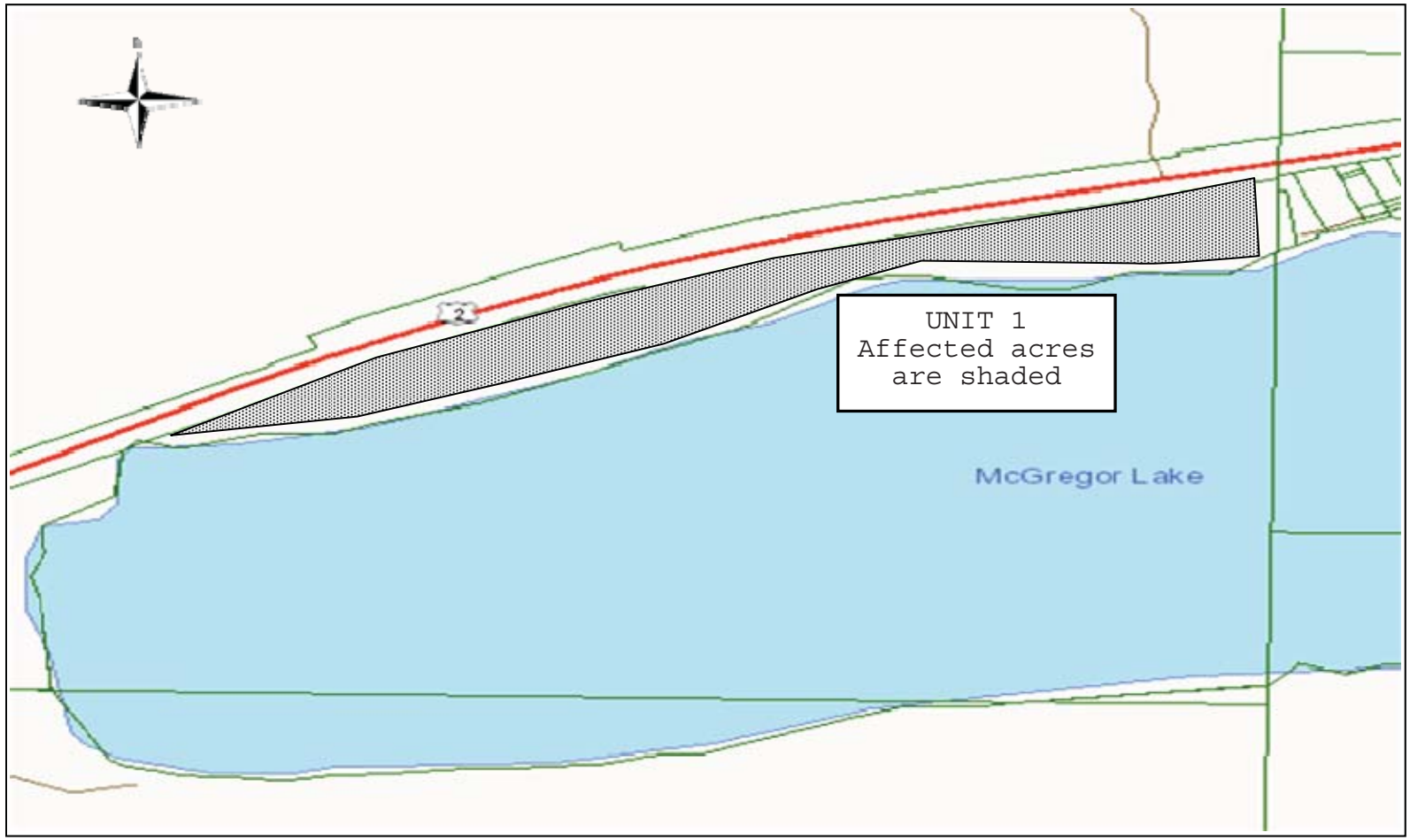
Short-Term Impact – An impact directly associated with a project that is of relatively short duration.

Significance – The process of determining whether the impacts of a proposed action are serious enough to warrant the preparation of an EIS. An impact may be adverse, beneficial or both. If none of the adverse impacts are significant, an EIS is not required.

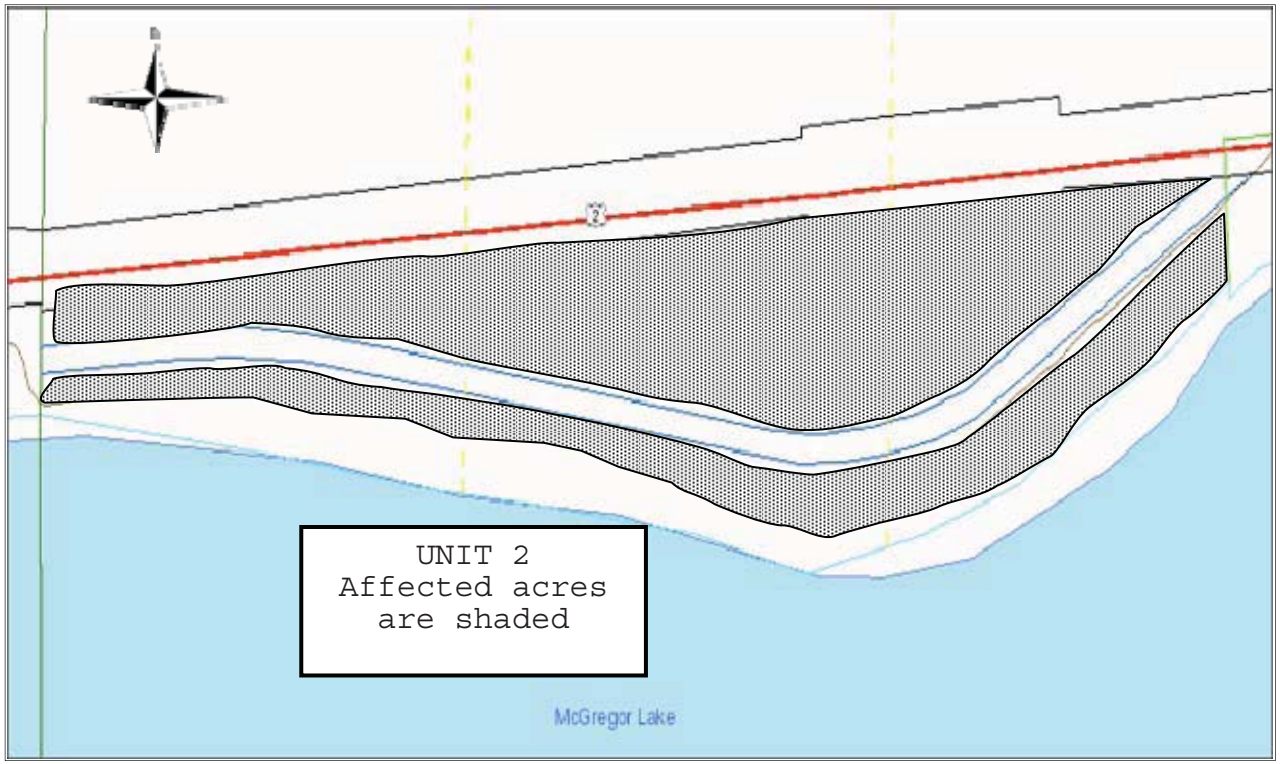
Supplemental Review – A modification of a previous environmental review document (EA or EIS) based on changes in the proposed action, the discovery of new information, or the need for additional evaluation.

Tiering – Preparing an environmental review by focusing specifically on narrow scope of issues because the broader scope of issues was adequately addressed in previous environmental review document(s) that may be incorporated by reference.

APPENDIX B
FUEL REDUCTION UNIT 1 – 23 acres

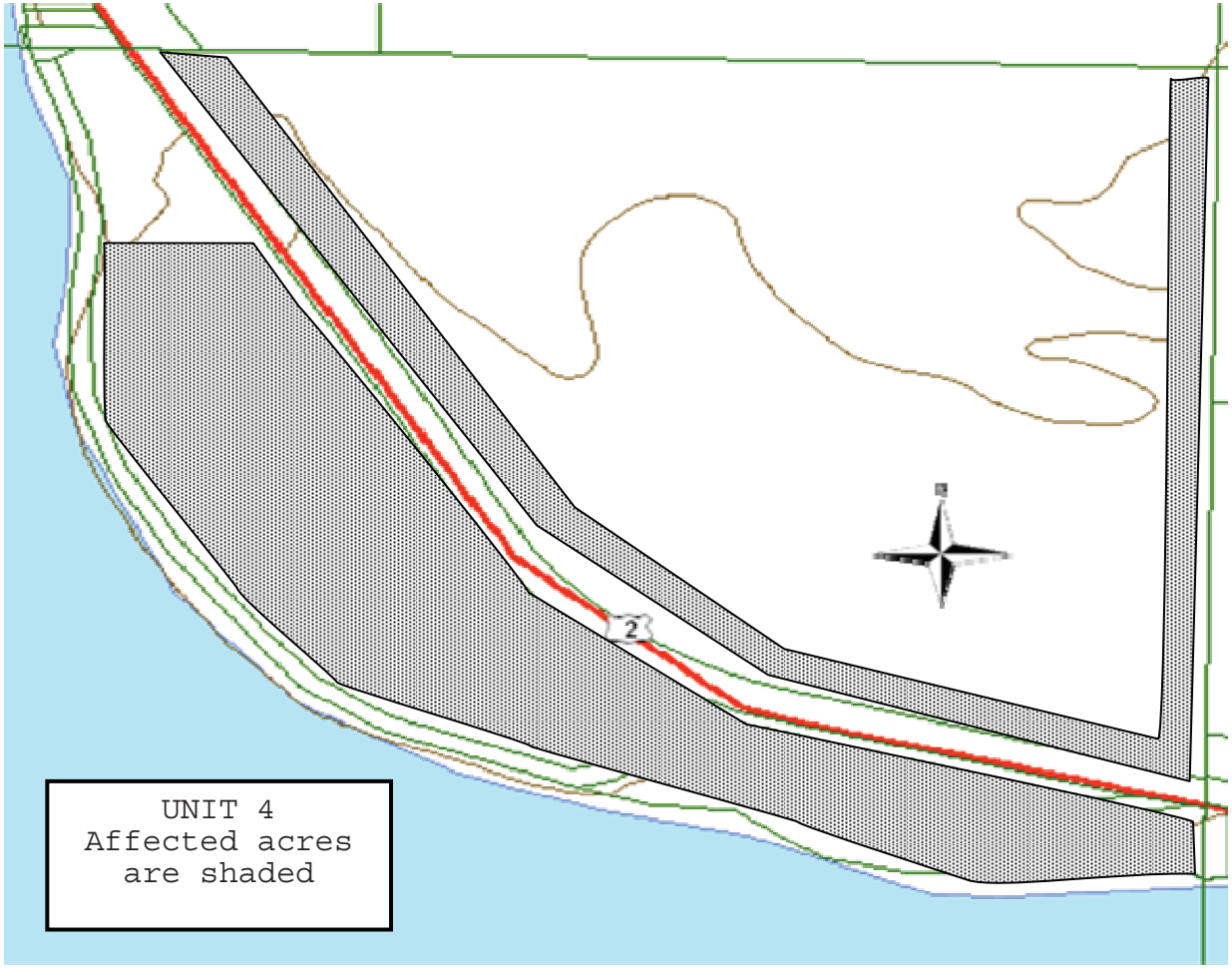


FUEL REDUCTION UNIT 2 MCGREGOR LAKE – 65 Acres



FUEL REDUCTION UNIT 3 LITTLE MCGREGOR LAKE – 80 Acres

FUEL REDUCTION UNIT 4 – 100 Acres



APPENDIX C – Sensitive Plants and Animals in McGregor Lake project areas

Species of Concern Terms and Definitions

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) element occurrence database (http://nris.mt.gov) indicates no known occurrences of federally listed threatened, endangered, or proposed threatened or endangered plant species in the proposed project areas. The search did indicate the project areas are within habitat for Common Loon, Trout, Gray Wolf, Fisher, Wolverine, Canada Lynx, and Westslope Cutthroat. Please see the next page for more information on these species.

Montana Species of Concern. The term **"Species of Concern"** includes taxa that are at-risk or potentially at-risk due to rarity, restricted distribution, habitat loss, and/or other factors. The term also encompasses species that have a special designation by organizations or land management agencies in Montana, including: Bureau of Land Management Special Status and Watch species; U.S. Forest Service Sensitive and Watch species; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Threatened, Endangered and Candidate species.

Status Ranks (Global and State)

The international network of Natural Heritage Programs employs a standardized ranking system to denote global (**G** -- range-wide)
and state status (**S**) (Nature Serve 2003). Species are assigned numeric ranks ranging from 1 (critically imperiled) to 5 (demonstrably secure), reflecting the relative degree to which they are "at-risk". Rank definitions are given below. A number of factors are considered
in assigning ranks -- the number, size and distribution of known "occurrences" or populations, population trends (if known), habitat sensitivity, and threat. Factors in a species' life history that make it especially vulnerable are also considered (e.g., dependence on
a specific pollinator).

Status Ranks	
Code	**Definition**
G1 S1	At high risk because of extremely limited and/or rapidly declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it highly vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G2 S2	At risk because of very limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G3 S3	Potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.
G4 S4	Uncommon but not rare (although it may be rare in parts of its range), and usually widespread. Apparently not vulnerable in most of its range, but possibly cause for long-terr concern.
G5 S5	Common, widespread, and abundant (although it may be rare in parts of its range). Not vulnerable in most of its range.

SENSITIVE ANIMALS IN THE VICINITY OF FAS ACCESS ALONG MCGREGOR LAKE

(No sensitive plants species occurring in project area)

1. Gavia immer (Common Loon)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3B**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

Sensitive
FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

Two Element Occurrences of the common loon. Most recent was reported on Little McGregor lake in July of 2004 and the other on McGregor lake in May of 2002.

2. Canis lupus (Gray Wolf)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **DM**
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

Sensitive
FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

One Element Occurrence data reported in 2006 of Gray Wolves in the proposed project area.

3. Martes pennanti (Fisher)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

Sensitive
FWP CFWCS Tier: 2

One Element Occurrence data reported in 2005 of fisher in proposed project area.

4. Gulo gulo (Wolverine)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

Sensitive
FWP CFWCS Tier: 2

One Element Occurrence data reported in 2004 for wolverine in proposed project area.

5. Lynx canadensis (Canada Lynx)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LT**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

One Element Occurrence data reported in 2003 for Canada lynx in proposed project area.

6. Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi (Westslope Cutthroat Trout)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4T3**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

One Element Occurrence data reported of westslope cutthroat trout in McGregor Creek.

NOTE: This appendix is information provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program from their database of the Natural Resources Information System.