Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION NOTICE

For the Proposed Restoration of Forested Wildlife Habitat on the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area: The *BCWMA Ovando Mountain Forest Habitat Restoration Project*

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula MT 59804
406-542-5500
September 2010

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposed to conduct forested habitat restoration treatments on 354 acres of the Ovando Mountain Unit of the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (WMA), north of Ovando in Powell County. Treatments will remove conifers encroaching on aspen galleries, thin shade-tolerant understories of historically open and fire-adapted stands, remove diseased dead and dying late-seral lodgepole pine to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and encourage grass and woody browse recruitment on important ungulate winter range.

These treatments will begin to implement a larger forest restoration strategy for the Ovando Mountain Unit identified in the *Forest Habitat Improvement Plan for the Ovando Mountain Unit of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area* (2009). A combination of federal grants and the residual value of thinned trees is expected to cover treatment cost; FWP does not expect to expend or receive significant funds to accomplish this restoration project's objectives.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal (BCWMA Ovando Mountain Forest Habitat Restoration Project) on August 20, 2010 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on September 2, 2010.

Legal notice of the Ovando Mountain Forest Habitat Restoration Project EA was published in the *Missoulian* (August 21) and *Seeley Swan Pathfinder* (August 26) newspapers.

FWP mailed approximately 12 copies of the EA (and approximately 11 email notifications of the EA's availability) to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was

available for public review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/, "Recent Public Notices") from August 20 through September 2, 2010.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

One formal public comment was received during the open comment period:

> *Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Inc. strongly supports the Proposed Action outlined in the Draft BCWMA Ovando Mountain Forest Habitat Restoration Project EA dated August 20, 2010. We have a long history of supporting goods for services approaches to achieving landowners Stewardship and Restoration objectives. The proposed prescriptions and treatments are consistent with the purpose described of improving wildlife habitat on this portion of the BCWMA. Implementation will not only achieve these objectives, but also result in a variety of other benefits for adjacent landowners, local communities and local contracting professionals doing the work. We are very familiar with the area and the overall objectives of FWP and support their efforts. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact me at your convenience. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.*
>
> *G. Sanders of Pyramid Mountain Lumber*

DECISION

Based upon the EA and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, we have determined that the proposed action will not have negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, we conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

Neighboring landowners, agencies, and interested publics were involved throughout the development and planning of this restoration project. The Project benefited from the involvement and guidance of trained foresters at the University of Montana during its development, competed for and was awarded a significant federal support grant (administered by DNRC), and was presented to the BCCA Council and Forestry Committee on several occasions.

The proposal is consistent with statute that requires FWP to implement programs that address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife habitat enhancement on forested lands it owns. This project meets all those objectives.

In consideration of these facts, we approve the BCWMA Ovando Mountain Forest Habitat Restoration Project as described in the EA. With this Decision Notice, we adopt the Draft EA as final.

Mack Long
Region 2 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

9/10/10
Date