

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION FOR DNRC FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Project Name: Blacktail Fire Salvage

Proposed Implementation Date: 10/11/2013

Proponent: MT DNRC

Type and Purpose of Action: Salvage approximately 3 log truck loads for logs and 20 cords of firewood from the Blacktail fire area.

Location: S16 T19N R26W

County: Sanders

Category (refer to ARM 36.11.447 (3)(a) through (w) for additional detail):

- a) Temporary Uses of Land with Negligible Effects
- b) Plans and Policies
- c) Leases and Licenses
- d) Acquisition of Land or Interest in Land
- e) Road Maintenance and Repair
- f) Bridges and Culverts
- g) Crossing Class 3 Streams
- h) Temporary Road Use Permits
- i) Road Closure
- j) Material Stockpiles
- k) Backfilling
- l) Gathering Forest Products for Personal Use
- m) Regeneration
- n) Nursery Operations
- o) Water Wells
- p) Herbicides and Pesticides
- q) Other Hazardous Materials
- r) Fences
- s) Waterlines
- t) Removal of Small Trees
- u) Removal of Hazardous Trees
- v) Cone Collection
- w) Timber Harvest (<100 MBF green or 500 MBF salvage)

By process of the adoption of the Forest Management Rules on February 27, 2003, pursuant to ARM 36.2.523(5)(a), the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Trust Land Management Division, has adopted the above categorical exclusions for activities conducted on state forested trust lands. "Categorical Exclusion" refers to a type of action that does not individually, collectively, or cumulatively require an EA or EIS unless extraordinary circumstances occur (ARM 36.2.522(5)).

Extraordinary Circumstances:

Will the proposed action affect one or more of the following resources, species or situations in the project area? If the resource, species, or situation is present, but project design avoids potential adverse effects on the resource, the answer is "No". One "Yes" answer indicates that Categorical Exclusion is not appropriate for the project, and an EA or EIS must be conducted.

YES NO

- YES NO a) Sites with high erosion risk.
- YES NO b) Federally listed threatened and endangered species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered species as designated by the USFWS.
- YES NO c) Municipal watersheds.
- YES NO d) The SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes, except for modification or replacement of bridges, culverts and other crossing structures.
- YES NO e) State natural area.
- YES NO f) Native American religious and cultural sites.
- YES NO g) Archaeological sites.
- YES NO h) Historic properties and areas.
- YES NO i) Several related projects that individually may be subject to categorical exclusion but that may occur at the same time or in the same geographic area. Such related actions may be subject to environmental review even if they are not individually subject to review.
- YES NO j) Violations of any applicable state or federal laws or regulations.

The project listed above meets the definition of the indicated categorical exclusion, including specified conditions and extraordinary circumstances, as provided in the Forest Management Rules (ARM 36.11.447).

Prepared by: Kyle Johnson
(Name)

10/10/2013
(Date)

Decision by: DAVID OLSEN
(Name)

FOREST MANAGEMENT SUPERVISOR
(Title)

[Signature]
(Signature)

10-10-2013
(Date)

To: Kyle Johnson, Project Leader
CC: Leah Breidinger, Wildlife Biologist
From: Marc Vessar
Date: October 8, 2013

Subject Blacktail Fire Salvage CatEx

The permit would be for approximately truck 3 log loads of dead pine and fir logs, and approximately 20 cords of dead fir and lodgepole firewood. The proposed salvage would involve individual tree selection across approximately 79 acres, hand felling and tractor skidding only. On slopes that exceed 45% the applicant would winch-line skid. All work would be completed under dry soil conditions (<20% soil moisture).

According to ARM 36.11.447 (w), the project meets the criteria necessary to be nominated as a Categorically Excluded project. To ensure the soil, water and fisheries resources present in the project area do not preclude the CatEx designation; this document will assess the risk to existing resources including addressing the extraordinary circumstances listed in ARM 36.11.447 (a) (b) (c) (d) and (i).

Issue	Assessment	Meet Criteria for CatEx?
High erosion risk soils? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(a)	Soils in the proposed unit were reviewed as part of the Miller Creek Timber Sale Environmental Assessment (October 2002). No high erosion risk soils were identified.	Yes
Federally listed threatened and endangered <i>aquatic</i> species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered <i>aquatic</i> species as designated by the USFWS? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(b)	The nearest stream (Miller Creek) is approximately 1,000 feet from the project area. The risk of affecting aquatic species would be extremely low.	Yes
Within a municipal watershed? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(c)	No.	Yes
SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes...? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(d)	No harvest would occur in the SMZ of fish-bearing streams because no streams of this character were found in the project area	Yes
Cumulative effects? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(i)	Due to the small scale of this project in relation to the watershed size, the risk of additional cumulative impacts would be very low and likely immeasurable. Therefore, cumulative impacts would remain acceptable for this watershed.	Yes

Conclusion:

This project meets watershed, soils and fisheries criteria for a categorical exclusion because the potential for impacts to these resources would be very low.

Memorandum

To: Kyle Johnson
Cc: Marc Vessar
From: Leah Breidinger, Wildlife Biologist
Date: 10 October 2013
Re: Blacktail Salvage (2013) -wildlife comments

I reviewed the Blacktail Salvage project proposed for 79 acres in T19N R26W Section 16. The proposed salvage would be for approximately 3 truckloads of dead pine and fir logs, and approximately 20 cords of dead fir and lodgepole firewood. The proposed activities would be completed by the end of 2013. The attached table summarizes the anticipated effects of the proposed activities on each Threatened or Endangered species, sensitive species, or big game species.

STATUS	SPECIES/HABITAT	DETERMINATION – BASIS
Threatened and Endangered Species	Canada lynx (<i>Felis lynx</i>) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zones	No suitable Canada lynx habitat occurs in the project area. Thus, no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Canada lynx would be anticipated.
	Grizzly bear (<i>Ursus arctos</i>) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	The project area is located outside of grizzly bear recovery zone and non-recovery occupied habitat (USFWS 1993, Wittinger 2002). Thus, no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be anticipated.
Sensitive Species	Bald eagles (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	No bald eagle nests occur in the vicinity of the project area and no lake habitats are located within 1 mile of the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.
	Black-backed woodpeckers (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	The project area was burned in the Blacktail Ridge fire of 2012 and the proposed salvage would affect 79 acres of burned forests. However, the remaining 142 acres of burned stands on DNRC lands would remain unharvested. Additionally, the proposed activities would occur outside of the breeding season for a brief period of time and all sub-merchantable materials that do not pose a risk to human safety would be retained. Thus, minor direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be anticipated.
	Coeur d'Alene salamanders (<i>Plethodon idahoensis</i>) Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams	No moist talus or streamside talus habitat occurs within the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Coeur d'Alene salamanders would be anticipated.
	Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (<i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i>) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture	No suitable grassland communities occur within the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Columbian sharp-tailed grouse would be anticipated.

	Common loons (<i>Gavia immer</i>) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	No suitable lake habitat occurs within 500 feet of the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to common loons would be anticipated.
	Fishers (<i>Martes pennanti</i>) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	The project area does not contain suitable fisher habitat. Thus, no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisher would be anticipated.
	Flammulated owls (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	The project contains preferred flammulated owl cover types; however these stands were burned and are not currently providing suitable habitat structure for flammulated owls. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be anticipated.
	Gray wolves (<i>Canis lupus</i>) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities	No wolf packs are located within 5 miles of the project area (<i>MFWP wolf pack data, 2012</i>). Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to gray wolves would be anticipated.
	Harlequin ducks (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	No suitable high-gradient stream or river habitats occur within 0.5 miles of the project area. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to harlequin ducks would be anticipated.
	Northern bog lemmings (<i>Synaptomys borealis</i>) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats	No suitable sphagnum bogs or fens occur within the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to northern bog lemmings would be anticipated.
	Peregrine falcons (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	No suitable cliffs/rock outcrops for nest sites were observed during field tours of the area. Additionally, peregrine eyries have not been documented within 0.5 miles of the project area (<i>MNHP data, October 10, 2013</i>). Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated.
	Pileated woodpeckers (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	The project area does not contain suitable pileated woodpecker habitat due to the Blacktail Fire. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to pileated woodpeckers would be anticipated.
	Townsend's big-eared bats (<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	No suitable caves or mine tunnels are known to occur within the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Townsend's big-eared bats are anticipated.
Big Game Species	Elk (<i>Cervus canadensis</i>)	The project area The project area is considered white-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk winter range by DFWP (2008). However, the majority of the project area is not currently providing thermal cover that would ameliorate severe winter conditions due to the Blacktail Ridge Fire of 2012. The proposed harvest would remove dead trees that do not provide thermal cover for big game, thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game are anticipated.
	Mule Deer (<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>)	
	White-tailed Deer (<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>)	

List of Mitigations

- If a threatened or endangered species is encountered, consult a DNRC biologist and develop additional mitigations that are consistent with the administrative rules for managing threatened and endangered species (ARM 36.11.428 through 36.11.435).
- Minimize mechanized activity within 0.25 miles of burned forested stands in the project area from April 15-July 1st to reduce disturbance to black-backed woodpeckers.
- Close any road or skid trails opened with proposed activities to reduce the potential for unauthorized motor vehicle use.
- Manage for snags, snag recruits, and coarse woody debris, particularly favoring ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas-fir (ARM 36.11.411, ARM 26.11.414).
- Retain sub-merchantable burned trees where soil, slope stability, and human safety concerns allow.

Conclusion

In general, with the identified mitigations, the potential for effects to threatened and endangered species is low and overall negligible effects to wildlife would be anticipated. Thus, none of the extraordinary circumstances listed under ARM 36.11.447 (2) (b) and (i) affecting the wildlife resources would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion for this proposal.

Literature Cited

DFWP 2008. Maps of moose, elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer distribution in Montana. Individual GIS data layers. August 12, 2008. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Helena, MT.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionElk.jpg>.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionMoose.jpg>.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionMuleDeer.jpg>.

<http://fwp.mt.gov/gisData/imageFiles/distributionWhiteTailedDeer.jpg>

USFWS. 1993. Grizzly bear recovery plan. Missoula, Montana. 181 pp.

Wittinger, W.T. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum on file at USDA Forest Service, Region 1. Missoula, Montana. 2pp.