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Subject: 2002 MONTANA FORESTRY BMP AUDIT RESULTS RELEASED (BMPs Proven To Be 97% Effective)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2002 MONTANA FORESTRY BMP AUDIT RESULTS RELEASED
(BMPs PROVEN TO BE 97% EFFECTIVE)

Missoula, Mont. - Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Director Bud Clinch today announced the completion and results of the 2002 Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP) Audit.

The Governor requested the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Forestry Division, evaluate statewide forest practices for BMP implementation and report the findings to the Montana Environmental Quality Council (EQC). The report summarizes the findings of Montana's 2002 forestry BMP audits, and complements similar study reports completed in 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000.

BMPs are practical, forest management techniques that protect water quality and soil within a timber harvest area. The BMP audit process is used to evaluate whether the practices are being applied and if they are effectively limiting non-point source pollution. Forestry BMPs, if properly applied, can limit water pollution-the kind of diffuse pollution that forestry operations often produce, such as sediment from a road or from the timber harvest operation. An example of a forestry BMP would be adequate rocks and material at the exit end of a culvert as needed to prevent run-off from removing sediment and material.

The audits process recognized four distinct ownership groups: State of Montana Trust Land (DNRC), U.S. Forest Service/Bureau of Land Management lands (Federal), private industrial lands (Industry) and non-industrial private forest lands (NIPF). DNRC used established site selection criteria, representing a sample of those logging operations conducted closest to streams and lakes, to choose 43 new timber harvest sites harvested since 1999. The criteria limited the sample to those sites most sensitive to practices that could adversely affect water quality. The audit teams evaluated a maximum of 50 practices at each site, rating BMP application and effectiveness of each practice on a 5-point scale.

Four interdisciplinary teams conducted the audits during the summer of 2002. Each team was composed of a fisheries biologist, a forester, a hydrologist, a representative of a conservation group, a road engineer, a soil scientist, and a non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowner or logging professional.

The BMP Audit process has five main objectives, which were:

- 1.) Evaluate if BMPs are being applied on timber harvest operations.
- 2.) Evaluate the general effectiveness of BMPs in protecting soil and water resources on the specific sites.

- 3.) Evaluate the need for information on the implementation of the Montana Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) law and rules as well as evaluation of the general effectiveness of SMZs in protecting water quality.
- 4.) Evaluate the need for information to focus future educational study or efforts by identifying subjects and geographic areas in need of further attention or investigation.
- 5.) Evaluate and provide information on the need to revise, clarify, or strengthen BMPs.

The audit teams evaluated the 43 sites for BMP application. BMP application refers to utilization of those practices set forth by the BMP guidelines. Audit results showed that across all ownerships, BMPs were properly applied 96 percent of the time. Although many harvest sites had at least one instance where a BMP was inadequately applied, these departures were mostly minor and did not cause erosion or deliver material to a stream.

The audit teams also evaluated BMP effectiveness. Audit results showed that across all ownerships, BMPs were effective in protecting soil and water resources 97 percent of the time.

According to Clinch, since the BMP audit process began in 1990, there has been a steady improvement in adherence to BMP practices. For instance, eight "high-risk" harvest practices are always evaluated. These are practices that, if not applied or applied correctly, are likely to allow sediment to enter a stream. In the 1990 audit, "high risk" BMPs were applied and effective approximately half the time. In the 2002 audit over 92 percent of time these "high-risk" BMPs were correctly and effectively applied.

"The 2002 audit results not only reflect the current level of compliance but when compared to past audit results from similar categories, trends can be revealed," explained DNRC Service Forestry Bureau Chief, Rob Ethridge. "This information will be compared with the results of past audits to determine if a shift in the trend of audit results is occurring." According to Ethridge, between now and the next audit, the participating agencies, landowner groups and industries will be looking closely at the 2002 audit results to make necessary adjustments and continue to fine tune the implementation of BMPs, "This does provide an excellent opportunity to really test one of the fundamental concepts of voluntary best management practices; identify problem areas and respond."

While the Montana Legislature has formally adopted BMPs, landowners, managers and logging professionals are not legally required to apply BMP practices. BMPs are voluntary. Why, then, is compliance so universal and BMP standards adhered to so closely? Clinch credits a well-established, cooperative education effort. Institutionalized information and education opportunities are offered through organizations like the Montana Logging Association, MSU Extension Forestry, Montana Wood Products Assoc., Montana Forest Owners Association and DNRC.

"This cooperative, voluntary approach has produced a decade of continued compliance results that exceed those of even statutorily regulated states. This is a reflection of the level of commitment toward stewardship of our natural resources by the logging industry in Montana," Clinch added.

For a copy of the 2002 Forestry BMP Audit Report, with detailed results, call the DNRC, Forestry Division office in Missoula at (406) 542-4300 or call your local DNRC forestry office. The offices are listed in your phone book under State Government, Natural Resources and Conservation. The report will be available in early December at DNRC offices statewide.

For specific information regarding the 2002 Forestry BMP audit, please contact DNRC Service Forestry Bureau Chief Rob Ethridge at (406) 542-4303.

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