

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION

Project Name: Sandbar Willow Harvest Proposed Implementation Date: January 2015
Proponent: Billmayer & Hafferman, Inc.
Type and Purpose of Action: Harvest of 1500 Sandbar Willow stalks for transplant.
Location: SE ¼ SW ¼ SW ¼ Section 34, T32N, R23W County: Flathead

Category:

- 1) Temporary Uses of Land with Negligible Effects
- 2) Plans and Policies
- 3) Leases and Licenses
- 4) Acquisition of Land or Interest in Land
- 5) Road Maintenance and Repair
- 6) Bridges and Culverts
- 7) Crossing Class 3 Streams
- 8) Temporary Road Use Permits
- 9) Road Closure
- 10) Material Stockpiles
- 11) Backfilling
- 12) Gathering Forest Products for Personal Use
- 13) Regeneration
- 14) Nursery Operations
- 15) Water Wells
- 16) Herbicides and Pesticides
- 17) Other Hazardous Materials
- 18) Fences
- 19) Waterlines
- 20) Removal of Small Trees
- 21) Removal of Hazardous Trees
- 22) Cone Collection
- 23) Timber Harvest

By process of the adoption of the State Forest Land 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 forest 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 activities affect the following in the project area? A "yes" answer will require a narrative explaining specific mitigation measures taken to eliminate the potential for impact. If the potential for impacts cannot be mitigated, then a MEPA analysis must be conducted.

YES	NO	
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	1) Sites with high erosion risk.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	2) Federally listed threatened and endangered species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered species as designated by the USFWS.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	3) Municipal watersheds.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	4) The SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes, except for modification or replacement of bridges, culverts and other crossing structures.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	5) DNRC listed sensitive species.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	6) State natural area.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	7) Native American religious and cultural sites.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	8) Archaeological sites.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	9) Historic properties and areas.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	10) 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.
<u> </u>	<u> X </u>	11) 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 State Forest Land Management Rules (ARM 36.11.437).

Prepared by: Nicole Stickney
(Name)

12/10/14
(Date)

Decision by: Brian Manning
(Name)

Unit Manager
(Title)

Brian Manning
(Signature)

12/11/14
(Date)

To: Brian Manning, Unit Manager

CC: Leah Breidinger

From: Marc Vessar

Date: December 10, 2014

Subject: Billmayer and Hafferman Willow Shoot Collection-Stillwater State Forest

The proposed collection of willow shoots from approximately 0.1 acres along the Stillwater River would occur in section 34 of T32N, R23W. Approximately 1500 willow shoots would be clipped by hand, bundled and carried to the nearby road. No ground disturbing activities are associated with this proposal. In addition, the removal of shoots from a single willow plant would be limited to approximately 50 percent of the viable stems. No mortality of willow plants would be expected from this activity.

According to ARM 36.11.447 (a), the project meets the criteria necessary to be nominated as a Categorical Exclusion 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)	The inventoried landtype in the project area is primarily Landtype 10-3 of the <i>Soil Survey of Flathead National Forest Area, Montana</i> authored by Martinson and Basko (1998, USDA Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with the Montana Agricultural Experiment Station. These soils have a low-moderate erosion rate and all work would be completed during frozen or snow-covered soil conditions.	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)	This portion of the Stillwater River is <i>not</i> considered as critical habitat for bull trout.	Yes
Within a municipal watershed? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(c)	The Stillwater River is not a municipal water supply.	Yes
SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes...? ARM 36.11.447 (2)(d)	While the activity would occur adjacent to a fish-bearing stream, no soil disturbing activity is proposed. In addition, the removal would not result in mortality of the willow plant and thus would not be expected to measurably affect the function of the SMZ.	Yes
Cumulative effects? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(i)	Because the work would all be completed by hand with frozen or snow-covered soil conditions and the removal would retain healthy willow plants, the risk of additional cumulative impacts to soils, water quality or fisheries 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: Brian Manning
 Cc: Marc Vessar
 From: Leah Smith, Wildlife Biologist
 Date: 12/9/2014
 Re: Martin Camp Willows

I reviewed the request from Billmeyer and Hafferman, Inc. to cut sandbar willows adjacent to the Stillwater River in Section 34, T32N, R23W. The proponents propose to harvest 1,500 willows. Approximately half of the stems from individual willow plants would be harvested, and the contractors estimate that they would harvest from approximately 50-75 willow plants. No power tools would be used and the site would be accessed via the Martin Camp Road, which is open to the public. Activities would occur for approximately 3 days between December 15-January 15.

The attached table summarizes the anticipated effects of the proposed activities on each Threatened or Endangered species, sensitive species, or big game species.

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	The project area does not contain suitable lynx habitat. 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 harvest unit is considered Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) non-recovery occupied habitat (NROH; <i>Wittinger 2002</i>). Activities would occur <300 feet from the Martin Camp Road, which is open to the public and would occur during the denning season; thus disturbance to grizzly bears would be minimal. Additionally, the harvest would occur for a brief approximately 3-day time period. Road construction would not occur and no power tools would be used to harvest the willows. Minor amounts of visual screening would be affected along the riparian corridor, but the affected willow plants are anticipated to regenerate following harvest. Thus, since, negligible disturbance and displacement would occur, negligible changes in hiding cover would occur, and open roads would be used to access the project area, negligible adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effect to grizzly bears would be expected to occur.
SENSITIVE SPECIES	
Bald eagles (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	Bald eagle territories occur in the vicinity of the project area; however, the project area is located outside of the home range of nesting eagles. Additionally, considering that the activities would occur for a brief 3-day time period outside of the breeding season, and that important bald eagle habitat attributes (e.g., snags) would not be affected, negligible adverse direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.

Black-backed woodpeckers (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	No recently (<5 years) burned areas occur within the project area. Thus, no 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 adjacent to 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	Suitable fisher habitat does not occur in the project area. Thus, no adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to fishers would be anticipated.
Flammulated owls (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	Suitable flammulated owl habitat does not occur in the project area. 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	The project area is located in the vicinity of wolf pack home ranges (DFWP 2013) and wolf use of the project area is possible. However, the proposed activities would occur outside of the breeding season and are not anticipated to have adverse effects on wolf prey. Thus, negligible adverse 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 in the vicinity of the harvest units. 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	Suitable cliffs/rock outcrops may occur in the vicinity of the project area. However, the proposed activities would occur outside of the breeding season. Thus, negligible adverse 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	Suitable pileated woodpecker habitat does not occur in the project area. Thus no adverse 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.

Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo</i>) Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal and coniferous forests that maintain deep persistent snow into late spring	No high-elevation habitat with persistent spring snow pack occurs in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to wolverines would be anticipated.
BIG GAME SPECES	
Elk (<i>Cervus canadensis</i>)	The proposed activities would occur in white-tailed deer winter range as identified by DFWP (2008). The proposed activities would remove portions of willow plants from a small area (~1 acre), reducing willow browse availability for a short time period. Disturbance to wintering animals would be minimal considering that the activities would occur for approximately 3 days, that power tools would not be used, and that open roads would be used to access the site. Visual screening along open roads would be minimally affected and thermal cover would not be affected by the proposed activities. Overall, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game would be anticipated.
Mule Deer (<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>)	
White-tailed Deer (<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>)	

Conclusion:

The potential for adverse effects to threatened and endangered wildlife species is low. None of the extraordinary circumstances listed under ARM 31.11.447(2) affecting wildlife resources would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion for this project.

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).
- Prohibit contractors and purchasers from carrying firearms while on duty.
- Ensure that all attractants such as food, garbage, and petroleum products are stored in a bear-resistant manner.
- Activities must occur between December 15 – January 15.

Literature Cited

DFWP 2013. 2013 Montana wolf pack locations. Individual GIS data layer. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Helena, MT.

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