

## CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION FOR DNRC FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Project Name: Pistol Creek Timber Salvage

Proposed Implementation Date: December 2014

Proponent: Dennis Wheeler

Type and Purpose of Action: 1) To generate revenue for the common school trust (C.S.) by salvaging dead and dying timber before it loses economic value as directed in MCA 77-5-207.

Improve the overall health and vigor of the stand by removing disease infested trees

Location: S. 36, T18N, R20W

County: Lake

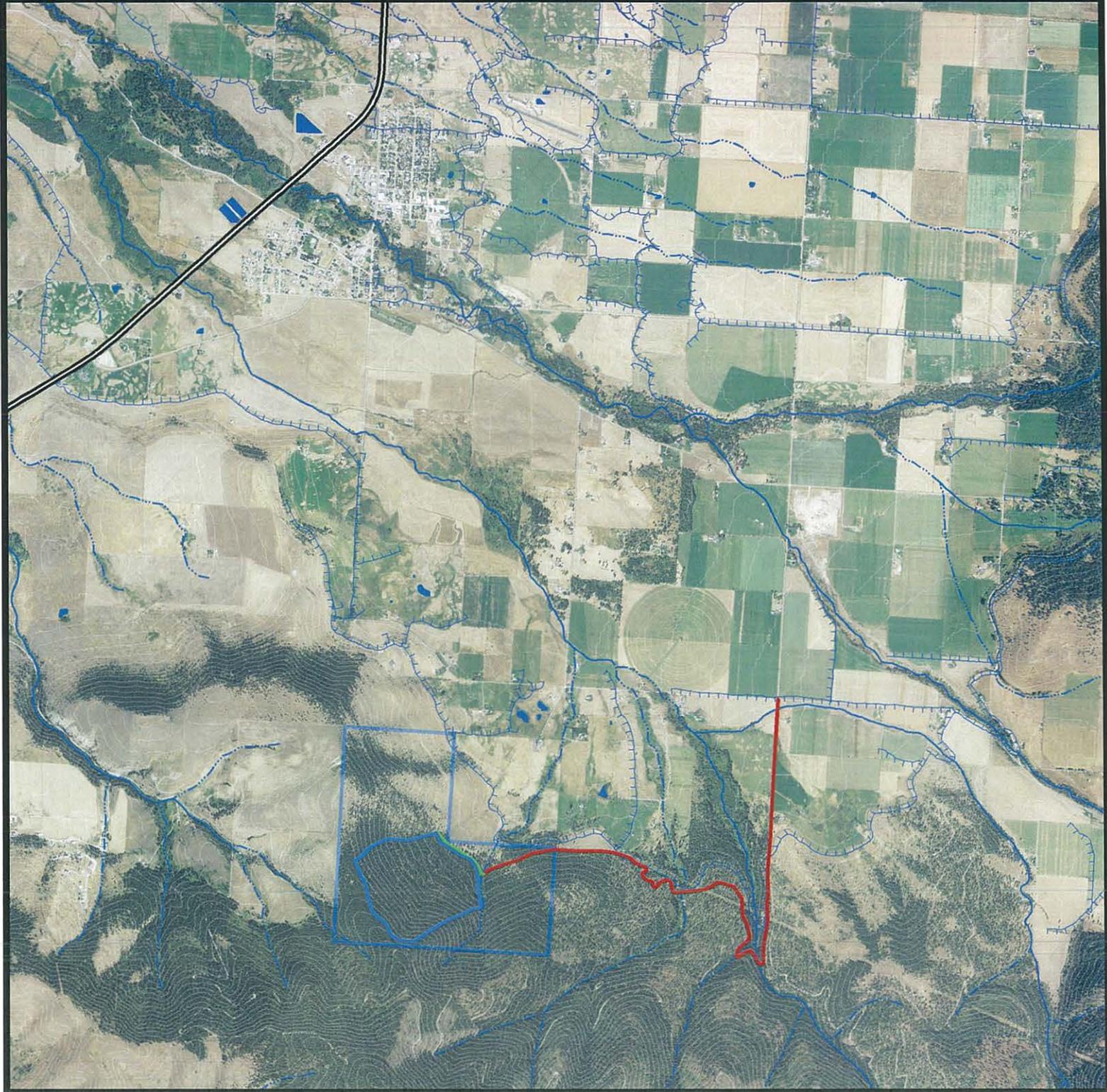
**Category (refer to ARM 36.11.447 (3)(a) through (w) for additional detail):**

- 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



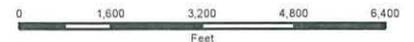
# Pistol Creek Salvage T18N R20W S36



## Legend

-  = Existing Road
-  = New Road (1576 Ft)
-  = Unit Boundary (126 Ac)

Montana DNRC  
Northwestern Land Office  
Timber



# Memorandum

**To:** Les Thomas; Pete Seigmund  
**Cc:** Dave Poukish; Marc Vessar  
**From:** Leah Smith, Wildlife Biologist  
**Date:** 11/11/2014  
**Re:** Pistol Creek Salvage

I reviewed the Pistol Creek Salvage project which proposes to harvest approximately 50 MBF live trees and up to 300 MBF of dead trees affected by bark beetles. The harvest would occur in a 291-acre harvest unit in Section 36, T18N, R20W, 2.5 miles south of St. Ignatius. Operators would primarily target Douglas-fir trees affected by bark beetles, although other species may be harvested along the right-of-way. Removal of green canopy cover would be additive to the effect that bark beetles are having on mature canopy cover, although, considering that the majority of this volume would be cut along the new road, effects on live canopy cover would likely be minor. No old-growth occurs in the parcel. Approximately 0.85 miles of new road would be constructed in order to access the harvest unit. The salvage would occur for approximately 6 weeks during the winter, although the contract period would be from November 16 –March 31 and June 16-July 31.

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	No suitable 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 adjacent to non-recovery occupied habitat associated with the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) (Wittinger 2002) and grizzly bears may use the parcel. The majority of activities would occur during the winter, when bears are typically inactive, although some activity may occur through July 2015 with no logging occurring during the spring (April 1 – June 15). Approximately 0.85 miles of road would be constructed to access the harvest unit, but this road would be closed post-harvest. Visual screening would be largely unaffected by the activities since the salvage would focus on harvesting dead Douglas-fir trees with some harvest of live trees occurring in order to construct a new road. Thus, since, negligible disturbance and displacement would occur, minor changes to visual screening would occur, and no change in open road densities would occur, negligible adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effect to grizzly bears would be expected to occur.

SENSITIVE SPECIES

<p>Bald eagles (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)  Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water</p>	<p>A bald eagle territory associated with Mission Creek is in the vicinity of the project area. However, the nest is located more than 2.3 miles from the harvest units and the area is unlikely to be frequented by the eagles due to the lack of river and lake habitat in the area. Additionally, mitigations in the contract would ensure the retention of important eagle habitat attributes, such as large emergent trees and snags. Potential for disturbance would be minimal considering that the majority of activities would occur outside of the breeding season. Thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Black-backed woodpeckers (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>)  Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest</p>	<p>No recently (&lt;5 years) burned areas occur within the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Coeur d'Alene salamanders (<i>Plethodon idahoensis</i>)  Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (<i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i>)  Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture</p>	<p>No suitable grassland communities occur within the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Columbian sharp-tailed grouse would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Common loons (<i>Gavia immer</i>)  Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation</p>	<p>No suitable lake habitat occurs adjacent to the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to common loons would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Fishers (<i>Martes pennanti</i>)  Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian</p>	<p>No suitable fisher habitat occurs in the project area. Thus, no adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to fishers would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Flammulated owls (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>)  Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest</p>	<p>Approximately 291 acres of suitable flammulated owl habitat occurs in the project area. The salvage would focus on harvesting dead trees, which could provide potential nest trees. However, mitigations would ensure that at least 2 large snags (&lt;21 inches dbh) and 2 large snag recruits remain post-harvest. The new road would be closed effectively to reduce the possibility that firewood cutters may further reduce snag availability. Potential for disturbing the owls is low considering that flammulated owls typically migrate south in September in October and the majority of harvesting would occur over the winter. Thus, minor direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be anticipated.</p>

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 primarily outside of the breeding season and are not anticipated to have adverse effects of 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 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	Suitable cliffs/rock outcrops were not observed in the vicinity of the project area. Additionally, the proposed activities would occur primarily 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	Approximately 58 acres of suitable pileated woodpecker habitat would be affected by the salvage. The salvage would remove snags affected by bark beetles, reducing the availability of snags for foraging and nesting. However, mitigations would ensure that at least 2 large snags (<21 inches dbh) and 2 large snag recruits remain post-harvest and that all non-merchantable snags remain standing. Thus minor 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 primarily on north facing slopes below 4,200 feet. The salvage would focus on removing dead Douglas-fir trees although approximately 50 MBF of live trees would be removed as well, reducing thermal cover and visual screening. Approximately, 0.85 miles of road would be constructed and this road would be effectively closed post-harvest. Wintering game could be disturbed by the salvage considering that the activities would occur primarily in the winter. Thus, minor 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*). Report grizzly bear sightings to CSKT Wildlife Management or CSKT Tribal Wardens.
- Prohibit contractors and purchasers from carrying firearms while on duty. Ensure that all food, garbage, and other attractants (e.g., petroleum products) are cleaned up and stored in a bear-resistant manner.
- Ensure that the newly constructed road is closed effectively by using logging slash, kelly humps, or other methods post-harvest to ensure that motorized vehicles are not accessing the area. Close illegal firewood cutting roads with logging slash.
- Retain all ponderosa pine snags, grand fir snags, and unmerchantable snags in the unit. Ensure that at least 2 large snags and 2 large snag recruits ( $\geq 21$  in dbh) per acre are retained throughout the harvest units (i.e., at least 582 large snags would be present in the harvest unit post-harvest). The largest size-class of available snags must be retained (regardless of species), but ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch are preferred leave species. Broken-top snags are acceptable for retention, but must be at least 6 feet tall.
- Retain 5-10 tons per acre of coarse woody debris in the harvest units.
- Restrict operations to November 16-March 31 and June 16-July 31.

## Literature Cited

- DFWP 2013. 2013 Montana wolf pack locations. Individual GIS data layer. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Helena, MT.
- Wittinger, W.T. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum on file at U.S. Forest Service, Region 1, Missoula, Montana.

**To:** Pete Seigmund, Les Thomas

**CC:** Leah Breidinger; file

**From:** Marc Vessar

**Date:** November 6, 2014

**Subject:** Pistol Creek 612--Wheeler

---

The proposed salvage harvest of insect-infected mostly green, standing Douglas-fir trees (and potentially other species) would occur in the Pistol Creek area (section 36, T18N, R20W. during spring/summer 2014. Up to 300mbf of scattered insect/disease infected sawlog material would be removed. An additional 50 mbf of healthy sawlog material would be harvested, mainly for road construction clearing. Up to 4500 feet (0.85 miles) of new road construction would be included. Work would be completed under standard soil moisture conditions, which are operating during periods of dry, frozen and/or snow covered ground.

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)	The inventoried soil types in the project area are primarily 11, 119, 122, 113, 176, 53, 59, 60 and 61 as listed in Soil Survey of Lake County Area, Montana (USDA, 1990). These soil types are not considered as a highly erosive soil. Slopes in the harvest area are generally less than 35% although a few pitches of up to 60% can be found.	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 project area is located well away from any fish-bearing surface water body. Because the salvage harvest units are located well away from any fish-bearing surface water a <i>very</i> low risk to aquatic species would exist.	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 fish-bearing streams have been identified on the state parcel. However, a Class 3 SMZ is in the middle of the proposed harvest area.	Yes
Cumulative effects? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(i)	Due to the no previous timber harvesting on this parcel, a consideration of the four issues above, and other existing conditions, the potential for additional impacts would be low. During and immediately after road construction, the risk of erosion would increase until vegetation is established. Because forestry BMPs would be applied to the project, erosion potential would be minimized. 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 low. Stips and specs to ensure acceptable impact levels to soil and water resources are attached.

**References:**

USDA, 1990. *Soil Survey of Lake County Area, Montana. Parts I and II.* 1990. Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Montana Agricultural Research Station.

- 1) Limit equipment operations to periods when soils are relatively dry, (less than 20 percent oven-dry weight harvest units), frozen, or snow-covered to in order to minimize soil compaction and rutting, and maintain drainage features. **Check soil moisture conditions prior to equipment start-up.** In order to prevent soil resource impacts, logging activities would be restricted to periods when one or more of the following conditions occurs, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Forest Officer.
  - a. Soil-moisture content at 4-inch depth is less than 20% of oven-dry weight
  - b. Minimum frost depth of 3 inches
  - c. Minimum of 16 inches loose snow or 8 inches packed snow adequate to avoid soil displacement
- 2) On ground-based units, the logger and sale administrator would agree to a skidding plan prior to equipment operations. Skid-trail planning would identify which main trails to use and how many additional trails are needed. Trails that do not comply with BMPs (i.e. trails in draw bottoms) would not be used unless impacts can be adequately mitigated. Regardless of use, these trails may be closed with additional drainage installed, where needed, or grass-seeded to stabilize the site and control erosion. Additional requirements include:
  - a. Skid trails would be located **at least 60 feet** apart unless on snow.
  - b. Skid trails would have erosion control installed where needed as directed by the forest officer.
- 3) Tractor skidding should be limited to slopes of less than 40 percent. Based on site review, short, steep slopes may require a combination of mitigation measures, such as adverse skidding to a ridge or winchline, and skidding from more moderate slopes of less than 40 percent. Ground-based logging systems (tractor, skidders, and mechanical harvesters) would be limited to slopes less than 40%.
- 4) Keep skid trails to 20 percent or less of the harvest unit acreage. **Provide for drainage in skid trails and roads concurrently with operations.** Keep skid trails at least 60 feet apart unless on snow.
- 5) Within the harvest units operations should retain **5 to 10 tons per acre** of downed woody material larger than 3 inches diameter to be left scattered throughout the harvested area.
- 6) Install and maintain adequate road drainage to control erosion and comply with forestry Best Management Practices and maintain concurrent with hauling operations. To maintain drainage features and avoid rutting, the department would limit the season of road use to dry, frozen or adequately snow covered conditions.
- 7) The proponent (Wheeler) will be required to apply for and obtain an 87A ALCO (Aquatic Lands Conservation Ordinance) permit to cross McCollum Creek. The crossing structure (CMP, bridge, ford) and size must be approved by the Forest Officer prior to application submittal. A copy of the application and response from CSKT must be presented to the Forest Officer prior to any work beginning at the crossing site.

- 8) Due to noxious weeds (hounds tongue) observed in the harvest area, all disturbed soil associated with road construction must be seeded with a Forest Officer provided grass seed mix before hauling can proceed.