

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Forest in Focus – West Stinkwater Forest Restoration Project - U of M Lubrecht Experimental Forest
Proposed Implementation Date:	2/20/15
Proponent:	Lubrecht Experimental Forest
Location:	Lubrecht Experimental Forest, Greenough, MT.
County:	Missoula

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Implement silvicultural practices on private non-industrial forest lands for the purpose of:

- Reducing forest stand density and improving residual tree growth rates.
- Reduce ground, ladder and crown fuels to reduce potential of catastrophic wildfire.
- Improve shrub component in the forest for wildlife habitat.
- Move forest from a stagnant, decadent state to a more vibrant, productive state.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

The Montana DNRC conducted public scoping for the Forests in Focus Grant Project as a whole by soliciting comments at four public meetings, (held in Forsythe, Billings, Missoula, and Kalispell), and by publishing requests for comments in the legal advertisement sections of the following newspapers. The Miles City Star, the Billings Gazette, the Missoula Missoulian, and the Kalispell Daily Interlake. No comments on the project as a whole were received either written or at the meetings.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

1. No Action
2. Action Alternative: Provide for the partial funding of fuels reduction treatments through pre-commercial and commercial thinning of understory vegetation on Lubrecht Experimental Forest (LEF) lands. The LEF would harvest an estimated 180 MBF of merchantable timber and 13,860 tons of pulp from approximately 462 acres. Timber would primarily be harvested using tractor logging with conventional, mechanical or cut-to-length operations and would be focused on the removal of understory and/or suppressed trees and those trees infected with or susceptible to insect and disease mortality. These activities are consistent with LEF long term goals and management plans.

Identified potential issues surrounding this proposed action have either been resolved or mitigated through project design. Recommendations to minimize direct, indirect and cumulative effects have been incorporated in the project (see Great Northern Land Services Request for Proposal)

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

No Action Alternative: No impacts, current use and activities of/by wildlife would continue.

Action Alternative: The area is used by deer, elk, bears and most other species commonly found at mid-elevations in western Montana. The proposed action would not detrimentally alter habitat or restrict use of the area by these species. Snags and large relictual trees would be maintained in the stand to ensure continued usage by all avian species currently utilizing the stand. The logging activities will be short-term and any potential displacement would be short lived. No cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats will occur.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

No Action Alternative: No impacts. Current usage patterns would continue.

Action Alternative: Bull Trout are federally listed as a threatened species and are present in the Blackfoot River Watershed, which is connected hydrologically to the site via Stinkwater Creek, which is a tributary of Elk Creek. Adherence to BMP's and permitted stream crossing protocols and mitigation requirements would mitigate potential sedimentation from the stream crossing entering Stinkwater Creek.

Although grizzly bears have been documented south of Highway 200, use of the area has been limited to bear movement through the area and not as residential habitat. The project area is outside of designated grizzly bear recovery zones.

Gray Wolves inhabit the area with the Union Peak pack being in the immediate vicinity. Proposed activities are anticipated to have no negative impacts on the resident wolf population.

Flamulated Owls may inhabit the area but none have been observed. Post-treatment forest conditions would remain suitable for the owl; LEF policy includes maintenance of cavity trees and creation of new potential cavity habitat.

Conclusion:

In general, with the identified mitigations, the potential for effects to threatened and endangered species is relatively low and overall minor to negligible effects to wildlife would be anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

None

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

No Action Alternative: No impacts.

Action Alternative: Portions of the project will be visible from the Garnet Range Road. The selective harvest prescriptions and distance from public roads would minimize any visual impacts. Prescriptions are designed to mimic historical stand conditions and would not have an adverse visual impact in the area.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

None

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

None.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.• Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.• Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No Action Alternative: No changes to existing situation.

Action Alternative: The intent of the project is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire fire within the project area by improving forest health through tree thinning and reduced fuel loading of understory vegetation. There will be a temporary increase in log truck traffic during haul operations. Signs will be posted to alert travelers.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No Action Alternative: No change to current activities.

Action Alternative: This project would add to the commercial timber harvesting activities currently operating in the area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

No Action Alternative: No additional employment opportunities.

Action Alternative: The project would employ 3-5 timber harvest professionals and 4-5 truck drivers for 12-16 weeks. Products removed and delivered to area mills will contribute to maintaining employment at these mills.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No Action Alternative: No additional revenue or taxes would be generated.

Action Alternative: The project will generate revenue for the LEF and taxable revenue from local contractors and mills.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

None

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Action Alternative is in concordance with the goals and objectives of the Lubrecht Experimental Forest Management Plan and the College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

No Action Alternative: No changes.

Action Alternative: The project area is presently open to non-motorized recreation by the general public and would remain open following completion of the project. Temporary closures to the actual project areas would be required during active road construction and harvesting operations. Hunters use the area as part of the LEF's Block Management Access Program. The proposed action would not impact these hunter opportunities. No cumulative impacts to access and the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

None

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

No affect

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

None

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Roger Ziesak	Date: 2/18/15
	Title: Forest Practices Program Manager/FIF Grant Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The Action Alternative and the granting of funds from the Forests in Focus Project.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Not Significant.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Paula Short
	Title: Forestry Assistance Bureau Chief
Signature: 	Date: 4.13.15