CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION FOR DNRC FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Project Name: Little Rocky Timber Permit

Proposed Implementation Date: October 2015

Proponent: TRM, Inc./MT FWP

Type and Purpose of Action: Commercial harvest of an estimated 95 MBF of Douglas-fir sawtimber from ~18 acres and the removal of juniper encroachment vegetation on ~16 additional acres.

The proposed harvest project would harvest overstocked, encroachment timber focusing on removing trees exhibiting poor form, crowns health and reducing overall stand density by ~60%. The harvest project would incorporate group selection, selection and seed tree harvest methods utilizing mechanical and conventional harvest systems. The project would utilize existing roads and construct ~1160 feet of temporary, minimum standard new road; and require skidding distances of up to 3000 feet with some constructed skid trails to access the harvest area. At project closure, the new road and skid trails would be physically closed.

The proposed juniper encroachment project would restore wildlife habitat on ~16 acres through the removal of juniper encroachment, keying on areas where juniper is crowding out more important species such as Bitterbrush and Sagebrush. Removal would be accomplished through mechanical and hand sawing and piling.

Both projects would be scheduled for late October 2015 through December 2015. Slash would be burned within two years of project completion.

Location: NW4 Section 16, Township 3 North, Range 5 East

County: Gallatin

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) X Removal of Small Trees
u) ☐ Removal of Hazardous Trees
v) ☐ Cone Collection
w) X 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	
☐	☒	a) Sites with high erosion risk.
☐	☒	b) Federally listed threatened and endangered species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered species as designated by the USFWS.
☐	☒	c) Municipal watersheds.
☐	☒	d) The SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes, except for modification or replacement of bridges, culverts and other crossing structures.
☐	☒	e) State natural area.
☐	☒	f) Native American religious and cultural sites.
☐	☒	g) Archaeological sites.
☐	☒	h) Historic properties and areas.
☐	☒	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.
☐	☒	j) Violations of any applicable state or federal laws or regulations.

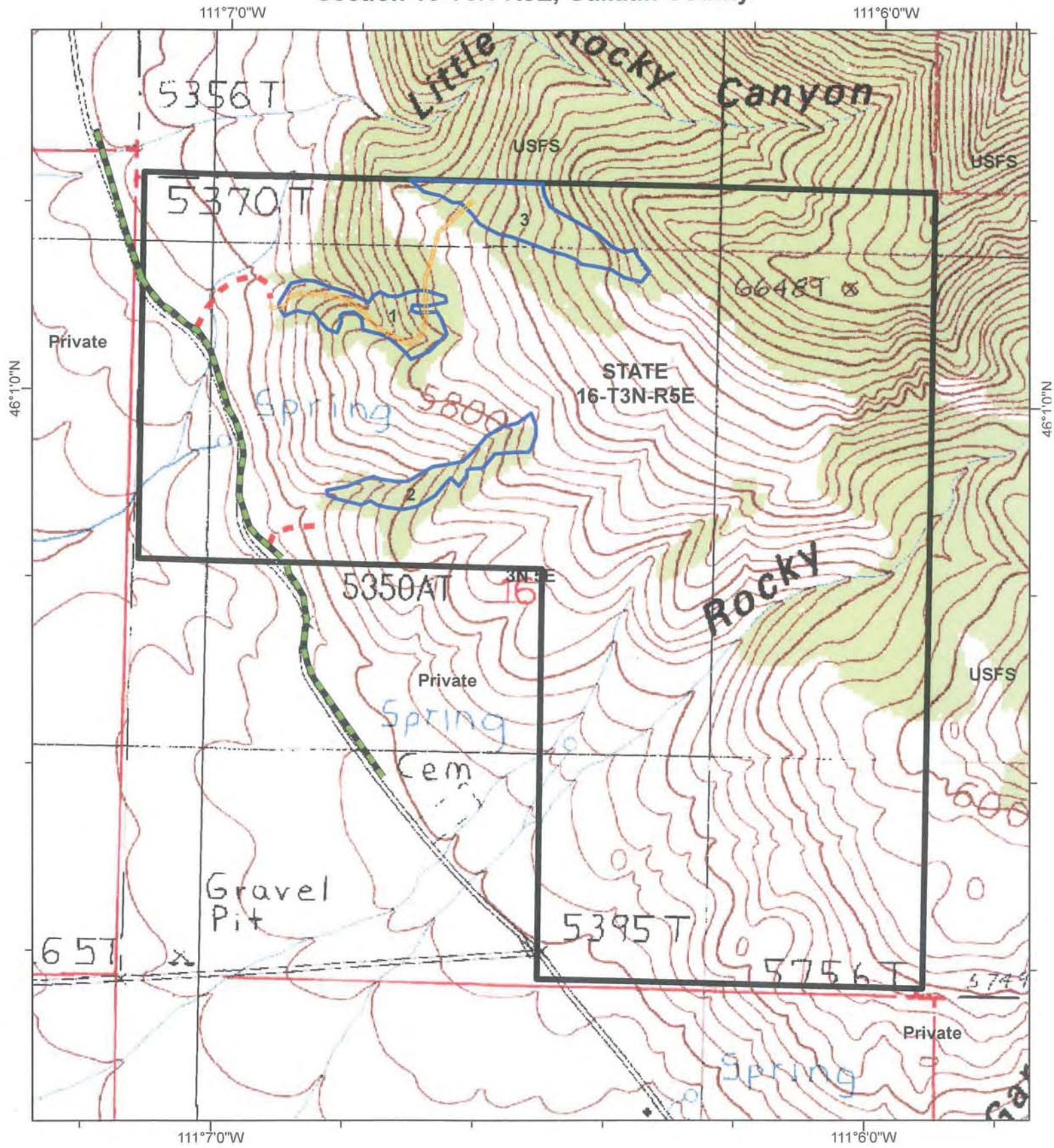
The project listed above meets the definition of the indicated categorical exclusion, including specified conditions and extraordinary circumstances, as provided in the Forest Management Rules (ARM 36.11.447).

Prepared by: Chuck Barone (Name) 9/21/2015 (Date)

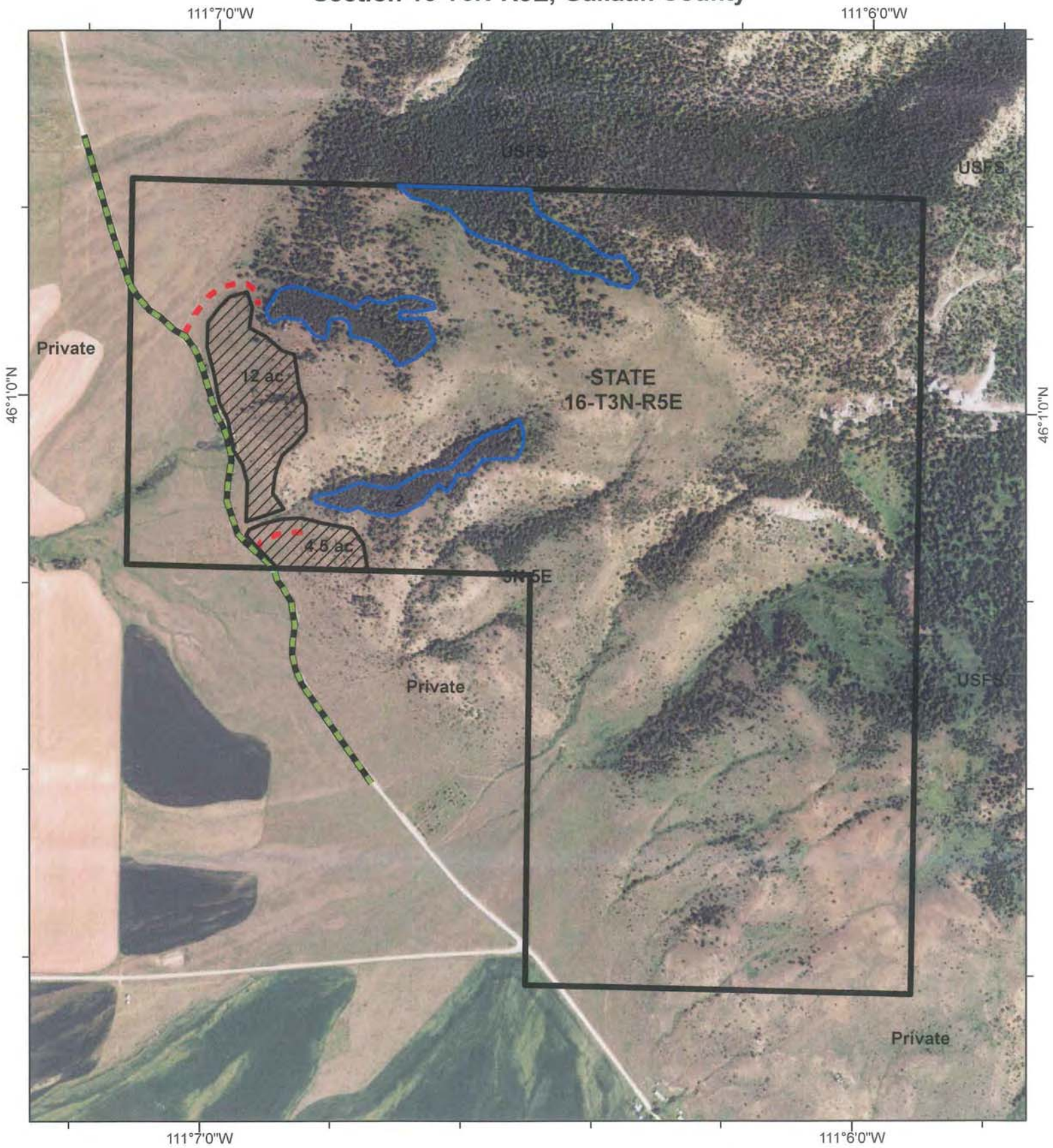
Decision by: Craig Campbell (Name) Bozeman Unit Manager (Title)

Craig Campbell (Signature) 9/22/15 (Date)

ATTACHMENT A
Little Rocky Timber Permit
Section 16-T6N-R3E, Gallatin County



ATTACHMENT A1
Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project
Section 16-T6N-R3E, Gallatin County



ATTACHMENT B

Vegetative Analysis/Stand Prescription
Little Rocky Timber Permit

The State parcel is located on the extreme southwest edge of the Bridger Mountain Range within the grassland interface. Slopes range from 20-60% with an elevation range of 5300-6350 feet. The State parcel has ~115 forested acres which are dominated by Douglas-fir. The cover type is Douglas-fir and the habitat type is Douglas-fir/Idaho Fescue (Psme/Feid). Area is supports good forage and is well used by mule deer. Private lands to the south and west are agricultural lands and grass/shrub lands, USFS lands to north and east are forested. A timber permit was sold in 1985 harvesting ~10 acres of the State parcel.

Forested stands are included in fire group five with Douglas-fir the climax species and vigorous seral species with limber pine as a minor seral species. Sites are dry with sparse undergrowth. The mean fire interval ranges from 35 to 40 years. Fuel loadings are typically 10 tons/acre. Historically, fire thinned sapling and pole stands with ground fire maintaining mature stands in a more open, park-like condition, mixed-severity events, which maintained mature stands in scattered patches and a more open condition.

The presence and absence of forest and grassland patches would have been dynamic, shifting through time. Periodically, sites where conifers presently occur would have appeared more as grassland than forest. Surviving individual trees and clumps of trees in cool areas and gentle ridge tops served as seed sources that would have promoted the periodic regeneration of trees that may or may not have survived subsequent fire events. Historic fire events likely contributed to a naturally fragmented, open-park type community of forest stands at the landscape scale.

Stands are composed of encroachment Douglas fir due to forest succession and lack of fire disturbance during the past century. Fire suppression efforts have led to an increase in forest cover over the past 100 years. The absence of fire, in combination with encroachment, has resulted in overstocked and suppressed stands. These conditions make the stands more susceptible to fire and attack from insects and disease.

Stand Prescription for Commercial Harvest:

Treatments for Douglas fir cover types would target dying, at-risk and overstocked trees for removal. Trees of all age and size classes exhibiting signs of insect/disease, poor health and/or poor tree form characteristics would be designated for harvest. Additionally, overall stand density would be reduced by up to 65% of the merchantable volume, targeting shade tolerant species and trees exhibiting overstocked/suppressed conditions, while favoring younger age classes for the residual stand, utilizing group selection/selection/seed tree harvests. Large live trees, live cull trees, snags, cull snags, and coarse woody debris and fine materials would be protected and retained in sufficient quantities where applicable. In general, submerchantable trees and shrubs would be protected and retained for visual screening. Juniper would not be protected for purposes of wildlife habitat improvement.

Stand cover type and severity of stand conditions would dictate harvest method used, emulating moderately to severe ground fire. Harvest prescription would recover value from resources before it is lost, reduce overstocking, fire hazard, and insect and disease while promoting forest health, vigor and productivity. Additionally, harvest would open the stands to encourage natural regeneration of shade intolerant species; retain a Douglas fir cover type while maintaining a semblance of historic stand conditions; and promote the growth of native grasses, forbs and shrubs for desirable browse for wildlife habitat improvement where applicable.

Juniper encroachment – Juniper encroachment within harvest areas would not be protected during harvest operations to further reduce encroachment. Areas of heavy juniper encroachment within harvest

areas may be further treated by felling, trampling and piling. Juniper encroachment outside of harvest areas may be treated by felling, trampling, lopping and piling. Treatment dependent on funding.

Excess slash would be consolidated at landings and burned. Natural regeneration would be expected. No rare plants or cover types have been noted by the Montana Natural Heritage Program or observed within the proposed project area.

Section 16-T3N-R5E:

Unit 1 (6.0 ac/30 MBF), Unit 2 (4.5 ac/20 MBF) and Unit 3 (7.5 ac/40 MBF): Units are dominated by Douglas fir with some scattered Limber pine. Sawtimber size ranges from 8-18" dbh, heights for dominants/co-dominants from 50-55' and an age range from 110-125 years. The stands are moderate to overstocked and moderately suppressed. Stands are composed of encroachment Douglas fir and a few old relic trees found scattered in stands and at the top of ridges.

Group selection, selection and seed tree harvests would be utilized to harvest Douglas fir targeting dying, at-risk, defective or damaged trees and for stand density reduction. Desirable dominate/co-dominate trees would be left for seed source as available. One large snag or snag recruit (≥21" dbh or next available size) per acre would be left where available.

A main skid trail ~3000 feet in length would be needed to access Unit 3 through Unit 1. To facilitate safe access into Unit 1, the beginning segment of the skid trail would need to be constructed.

Retain all fine litter and 5-10 tons/acre of large woody debris >3" diameter as feasible. Consolidate remaining slash at landings for burning. Conduct regeneration survey in 5-7 years and a thinning survey in 15 years after harvest.

There is currently more total forest cover in Gallatin County than in prior historical conditions. The proposed Action Alternative commercial harvest represents ~16% of the total forested acres within the State tract of the proposed timber permit. Harvesting a total estimated 90 MBF of timber would alter the forest cover on approximately 18 total acres. The proposed levels of harvest and subsequent reduction in forest canopy within Douglas fir cover types would be accelerated compared to what would be expected to occur under the present natural conditions, excluding stand replacement fire.

Due to the size, duration and harvest method of the proposed project, road closures and additional recommended mitigation measures, any impacts to vegetative communities and cover from commercial harvesting are expected to be minor and temporary.

MEASURES RECOMMENDED TO MITIGATE POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

1) Compliance with Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP's), Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) laws, the Montana Stream Protection Act (124 Permit) and applicable DNRC Forest Management Administrative Rules.
2) Limit equipment operations to periods when soils are dry (less than 20% soil moisture), frozen or snow covered (12 inches packed or 18 inches unconsolidated) to minimize soil compaction, rutting, vegetative disturbance and maintain drainage features. Control erosion by installing adequate drainage on roads and skid trails.
3) The Forest Officer shall approve a plan for felling, yarding and landing location in each harvest unit prior to the start of operations in the unit. The locations and spacing of skid trails and landings shall be designated and approved by the Forest Officer prior to operations and skid trails will not be spaced less than 60 feet. Minimize soil disturbance by general skid trail planning and

limit sustained tractor skidding to slopes ≤45% throughout the entire project. Limit scarification to 30-40% of the harvest area.

4) Slash would be left in the harvest units where feasible, and distributed on skid trails upon completion of use, for nutrient cycling, to control erosion and to provide shade and protection for seedlings. Retain all fine litter in harvest units as feasible and 5-10 tons/acre of large woody debris >3" diameter.
5) For slope stability on the road construction segments, construct cutslopes at 1:1 (run/rise) in common material and 1/4:1 for rock. Install adequate road drainage to control erosion concurrent with harvest activities, road opening and new construction. Provide effective sediment filtration along drainage features near crossing sites. New construction and major skid trails on State lands would be closed with slash and debris and/or barriers, and adequate drainage provided.
6) All road and logging equipment would be power washed and inspected prior to being brought on site. Sale area would be monitored for weeds following harvest and a treatment plan would be developed should noxious weeds occur.
7) At sale closure, grass seed roads, skid trails (where needed) and landings with an appropriate weed free seed mixture.
8) One snag and one snag recruit per acre, of the largest diameter class, would be retained where applicable. Cull live trees and cull snags would be retained where applicable. Submerchantable trees and shrubs would be protected and retained for visual screening.
9) Contact DNRC wildlife biologist should any threatened or endangered species be encountered within the proposed project area.

ATTACHMENT E

LITTLE ROCKY TIMBER PERMIT
CHECKLIST FOR ENDANGERED, THREATENED AND SENSITIVE SPEICES
CENTRAL LAND OFFICE

Prepared by Chuck Barone September 17, 2015

Threatened and Endangered Species	**Potential for Impacts and Rationale** [Y/N] Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures N = Not Present or No Impact is Likely to Occur Y = Impacts May Occur (Explain Below)
Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) Habitat: dense spruce/fir forest supporting snowshoe hares.	[N] The proposed project area is not located within preferred lynx habitat. Although Lynx could occasionally use the project area, suitable lynx habitat is not present on the project area. Habitats high in coarse woody debris that is preferred for denning, and large acreages of dense conifer regeneration at high elevations that are preferred for foraging are not well represented in the project area. Lynx habitat is marginal due to naturally induced fragmentation, and the high level of interspersion of native grassland habitat and dry forest types. No suitable lynx habitat currently exists within the project area. The predominant Douglas Fir forest type within the project area does not contain high horizontal cover comprised of subalpine and spruce bows. Considering the limited presence of several habitat attributes within the project area that are known to be important for lynx and snowshoe hares (e.g. dense overstory canopy, dense shrubs and downed logs), habitat in this area is likely best suited as travel habitat or matrix habitat that would facilitate movement, linkage, and provide habitat for secondary prey

	species such as red squirrels. Preferred lynx habitat is marginal within the proposed project area due to the lack of highly desirable habitat conditions for lynx and their primary prey, snowshoe hares. Adverse direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to lynx as a result of this project are not expected.
Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*) Habitat: recovery areas, security from human activity	[Y] The proposed project area lies outside of any grizzly bear recovery area. The nearest recovery area is the GYE grizzly bear recovery zone situated ~30 miles south of the project area. Grizzly bear use of the extreme Bridger Mountains may occur, however, the project area is currently considered outside of the occupied habitat boundary defined by Wittinger (2002). Potential riparian habitat for grizzly bears is not present within the project area. Human access levels are presently moderate to high due to the public access. Approximately 1160 feet of temporary new road would be constructed to minimum standard to access the proposed harvest units. All new roads would be physically closed and made impassible at project completion, and patchy cover would be retained in harvest units following treatment. In associate with activities, food storage measures would also be required and firearms restrictions would be applied. Proposed project activities would not occur from March 15 - June 15. The potential for any measurable increases in bear-human conflicts following the project activities are expected to be negligible. Adverse direct, indirect and cumulative impacts to bears as a result of this project are expected to be minor.

Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) Habitat: High elevation cirque basins and zones with persistent snow in late spring	[N] The proposed project area falls within the range of wolverines. The DNRC is not aware of any specific observations of wolverines associated with the proposed project area, however, periodic or transient use of the proposed project area could occur. High elevation areas with persistent snow late into the spring do not occur in the project area. Due to the size, nature, duration and location of the proposed project, activities associated with this proposal are expected to have minimal effect on wolverines.

DNRC Sensitive Species	[Y/N] Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures N = Not Present or No Impact is Likely to Occur Y = Impacts May Occur (Explain Below)
Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) Habitat: late-successional forest <1 mile from open water	[N] No bald eagle nests, feeding areas, roosting areas or suitable nesting habitat occur within 1 mile of the project area (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated under the proposed action.
Black-Backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*) Habitat: mature to old burned forest	[N] No recent burns within the last 5 years occur on the project area or within 1 mile of the project area. Stands found within the proposed project area are presently experiencing minor insect activity and could attract birds (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). However, regionally insect activity is abundant at the landscape scale and not likely to be limiting for black-backed woodpeckers. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be anticipated under the

	proposed action.
Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludoviscianus*) Habitat: Prairie, shortgrass prairie, badlands	[N] Black-tailed prairie dogs have not been documented in the project area or surrounding (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). No grassland habitat suitable for use by black-tailed prairie dogs occurs in or near the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to prairie dogs would be anticipated under the proposed action.
Flammulated Owl (*Otus flammeolus*) Habitat: late-successional ponderosa pine and Doug.-fir forest	[N] Warm forest types suitable for use by flammulated owls do not occur in or near the project area (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be anticipated under the proposed action.
Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) Habitat: ample big game pops., security from human activity	[N] No known denning or rendezvous sites occur within 1 mile of the project area. However, wolves may occasionally use the project area and occasional sightings have been noted in the area. Minimal risk of direct, indirect or cumulative effects that would result in harm to wolves would be anticipated under either of the alternatives considered. If wolves or an active den site were detected in the immediate area, operations would cease, and a DNRC biologist would be consulted. Appropriate mitigations would be developed and applied prior to resuming activities.
Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Habitat: sagebrush semi-desert	[N] No occurrence records for greater sage grouse exist the project area (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). However, extensive stands of sagebrush community types do occur near the project area. No leks or core areas are known to have been identified within one mile of the project area. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to greater sage grouse would

	be anticipated under the proposed action.
Harlequin Duck (Histrionicus histrionicus) Habitat: white-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	[N] No known streams supporting harlequin ducks occur within or near the project area, and no recent observations (within the last 15 years) have been reported for the general area (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to harlequin ducks would be anticipated under the proposed action.
Mountain Plover (Charadrius montanus) Habitat: short-grass prairie, alkaline flats, prairie dog towns	[N] No grassland habitat suitable for use by mountain plovers occurs within or near the project area (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to mountain plovers would be anticipated under the proposed action.
Northern Bog Lemming (Synaptomys borealis) Habitat: sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats	[N] No sphagnum meadows, bogs or fens occur within or near the project area, and the project area occurs outside of the known distribution of northern bog lemmings in Montana (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to bog lemmings would be anticipated under the proposed action.

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) Habitat: cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	[N] Cliff features and suitable foraging areas do occur within 0.75 miles of the project area. No known nest sites occur within or near the project area. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated under the proposed action.
Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) Habitat: late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	[N] The project area occurs outside of the normal distribution of pileated woodpeckers in Montana (MNHP/FWP Montana Field Guide -- search 9/15, and MNHP 2015). Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to pileated woodpeckers would be anticipated under the proposed action.
Townsend's Big-Eared Bat (*Plecotus townsendii*) Habitat: caves, caverns, old mines	[N] No caves, caverns, or old mines suitable for use by bats occur within 1 mile of the project area. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Townsend's big-eared bats would be anticipated under the proposed action.

*Montana National Heritage Program/ FWP Montana Field Guide 2015.