

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION FOR DNRC FOREST MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

Project Name: Ferry Basin Fire Salvage

Proposed Implementation Date: November, 2015

Proponent: Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Northwest Land

Office, Plains Unit

Type and Purpose of Action: The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) proposes to sell approximately 3,500 tons (500 MBF) of salvage timber in the Flathead River drainage, Section 16, Township 19 North, Range 22 West, approximately 23 air miles southeast of Plains, Montana. This action would produce estimated revenue of \$ 100,000.00 for the Common Schools (C. S.) Trust Grant. Under the proposed action, DNRC would salvage timber affected by the Melton 1 Fire, reduce excessive fuel loading and the related risk of wildfire, reduce insect infestations and promote timber types historically found in the area, maintain and improve forest health, and increase forest productivity beneficial to future trust actions (See Attachment 1, Vicinity and Project Maps).

In addition to timber harvesting, 1.0 miles of road would be reconstructed and approximately 10 miles of road would be maintained or have minor drainage improvements installed as necessary.

Location: Section 16 T19N R22W.

County: Sanders

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 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 | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a) Sites with high erosion risk. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | b) Federally listed threatened and endangered species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered species as designated by the USFWS. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | c) Municipal watersheds. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d) The SMZ of fish bearing streams or lakes, except for modification or replacement of bridges, culverts and other crossing structures. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | e) State natural area. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | f) Native American religious and cultural sites. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | g) Archaeological sites. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | h) Historic properties and areas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 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: Dale Peters _____ 10/19/15
(Name) (Date)

Decision by: David Olsen _____ Program Manager
(Name) (Title)

/s/ David M. Olsen _____ October 22, 2015
(Signature) (Date)

MEMORANDUM

To: Dale Peters, Forest Management Supervisor, Plains Unit

From: David Olsen, Plains Unit Resource Program Manager

Date: August 20, 2015

RE: Ferry Basin Salvage Timber Sale

Primary Objective

The primary objective of fire salvage operations following the Melton 1 Fire is to effectively recover value of timber killed, damaged, or otherwise injured during the fire event of August/September 2015. Loss to the associated trusts is to be minimized. Administrative rules as applicable to salvage operations shall be applied to this project.

Secondary Objective:

The secondary objective for this project is to promote timber regeneration and vegetative recovery on Trust lands burned in the fire event. Measures to promote natural regeneration as well as tree planting will be addressed in prescriptions for this project.

Management Directives

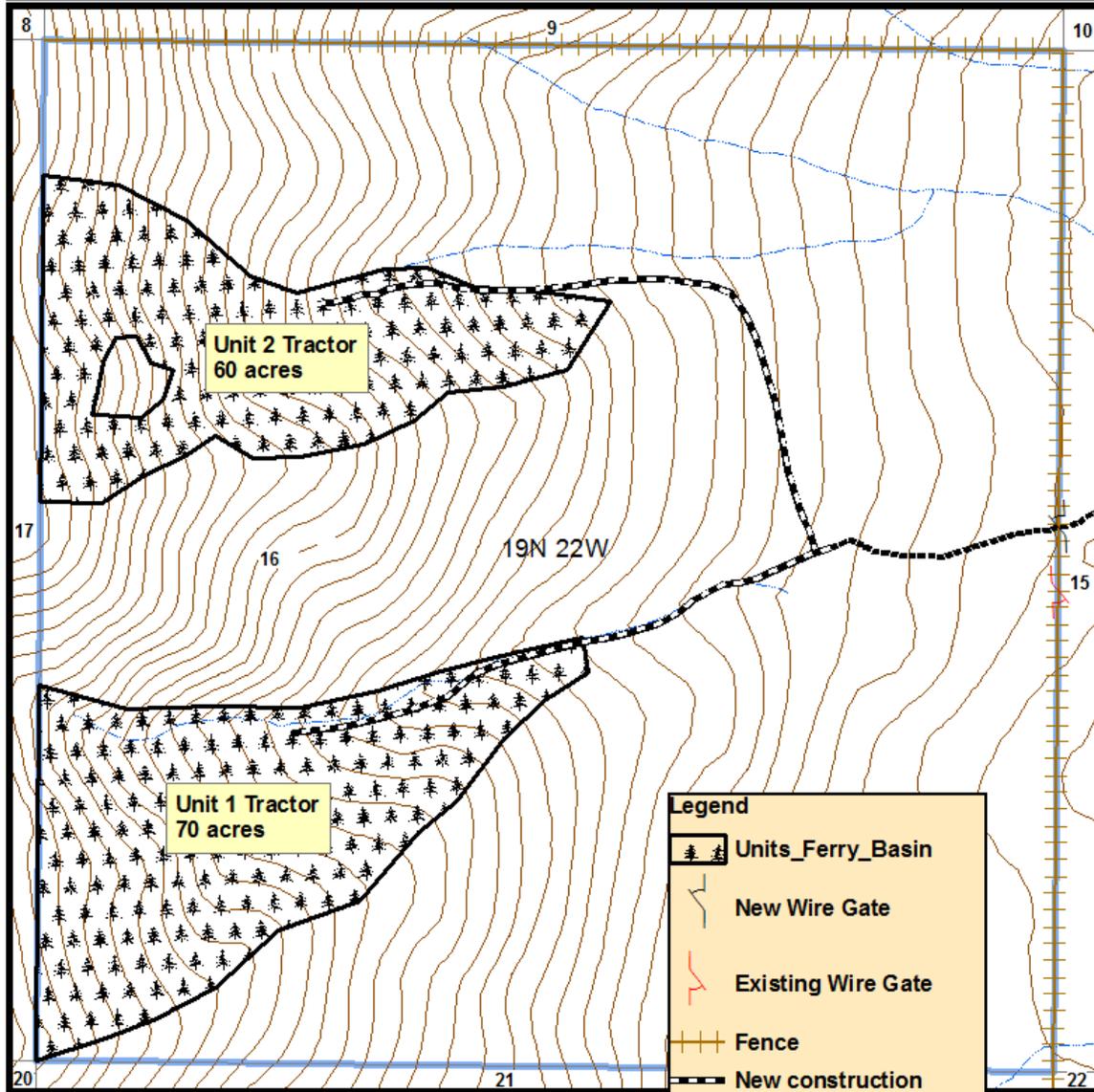
In planning and preparing this project, apply the management direction of the State of Montana Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), Montana State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP) and associated Administrative Rules. All applicable Tribal Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) rules and regulations will be met.

ATTACHMENT I

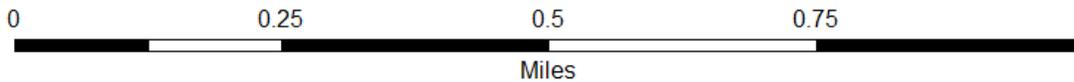
Harvest Units

Vicinity Map

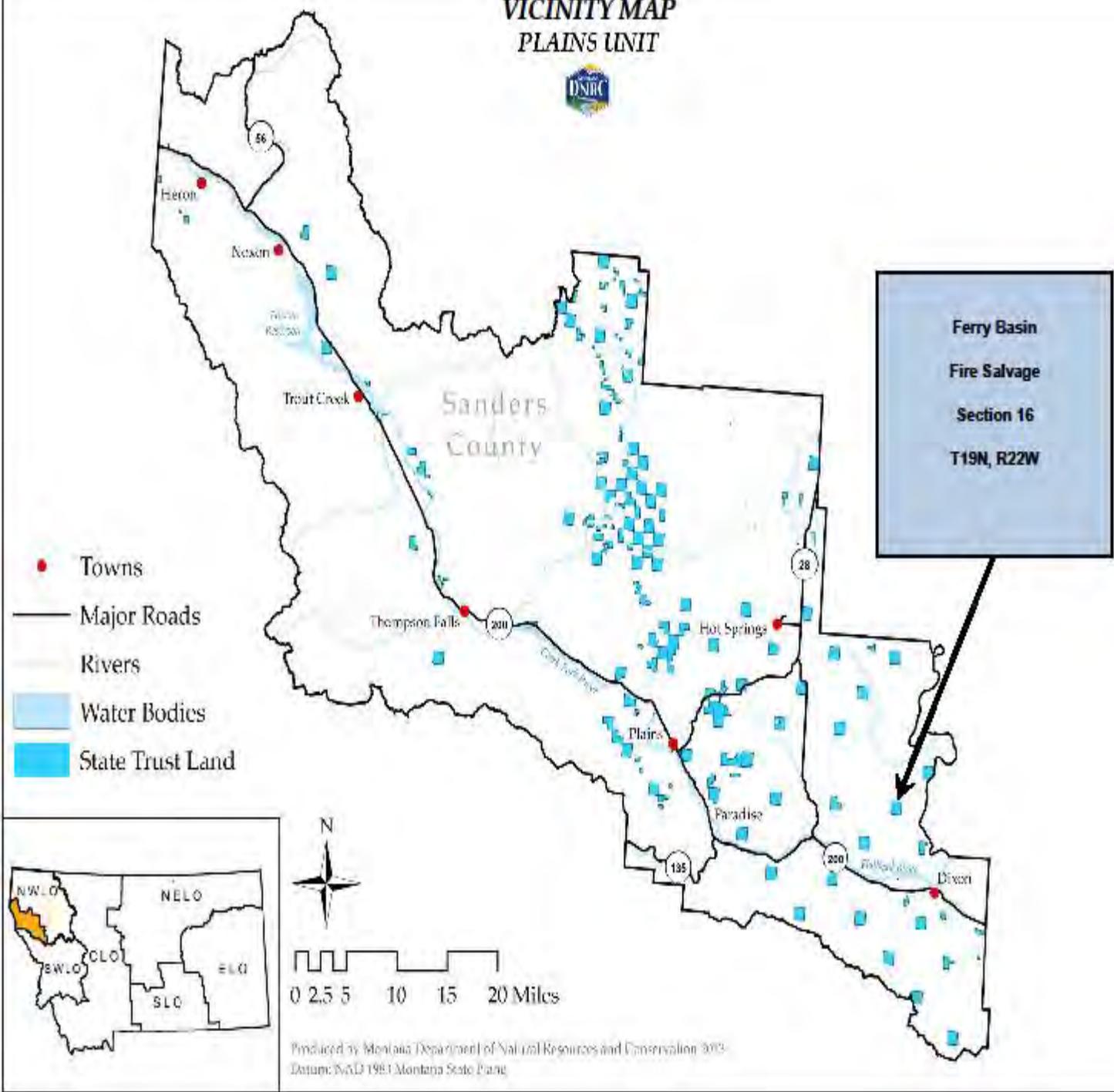
Ferry Basin Fire Salvage; Harvest Plan T19N R22W S16



Montana DNRC
Trust Land Management Division
Northwestern Land Office
Plains Unit
dmp 10/15



VICINITY MAP PLAINS UNIT



Produced by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation 2003
Datum: NAD 1983 Montana State Plane

ATTACHMENT II

RESOURCE ANALYSIS

SOILS ANALYSIS

WILDLIFE ANALYSIS

To: Dale Peters, Project Leader
 CC: Leah Breidinger, Wildlife Biologist
 From: Marc Vessar
 Date: October 21, 2015
 Subject: Ferry Basin Fire Salvage CatEx

SOILS ANALYSIS

The permit would be for up to 500mbf fire killed timber. The proposed salvage would utilize ground-based harvesting methods across approximately 130 acres. Some hand felling and winchline skidding may be required on slopes that exceed 40%. All work would be completed under dry, frozen or snow covered soil conditions.

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)	Soils in the proposed units have been inventoried in the <i>Soil Survey of Sanders and Parts of Lincoln and Flathead Counties, Montana</i> and viewed using the Web Soil Survey. The erosion factor (K_w) was reviewed for susceptibility to sheet and rill erosion. Values of the K_w rating can range from 0.02 to 0.69 with the higher number indicating a higher susceptibility to erosion. Soils in the project area have a range of 0.2 to 0.32. No high erosion risk soils were identified.	Yes
Federally listed threatened and endangered aquatic species or critical habitat for threatened and endangered aquatic species as designated by the USFWS? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(b)	No fish bearing streams are near the project area. Therefore there is no risk of affecting aquatic habitat.	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 harvest would occur in the SMZ of fish-bearing streams because no streams of this character were found in the project area	Yes
Cumulative effects? Adapted from ARM 36.11.447 (2)(i)	Due to the small scale of this project, the lack of hydrologic features and the substantial rock content of the soils the risk of additional cumulative impacts would be low. Therefore, cumulative impacts would remain acceptable for this project.	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.

MITIGATIONS:

ARM 36.11.422 (2) and (2)(a) state that appropriate BMPs shall be determined during project design and incorporated into implementation. To ensure that the incorporated BMPs are implemented, the specific

requirements would be incorporated into the DNRC Timber Sale Contract. As part of this alternative design, the following BMPs and recommendations are considered appropriate and, would be implemented during harvesting operations:

- 1) Limit equipment operations to periods when soils are relatively dry, (less than 20 percent oven-dry weight harvest units), frozen, or snow-covered 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 75 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% on ridges, convex slopes, and concave slopes when winter conditions exist; and less than 35% on concave slopes without winter conditions.
- 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.
- 5) 95% of all slash, long butts and cull material should be return skidded or left within the harvest unit. Slash should be returned at the landing to the unit and distributed evenly throughout the unit. Slash would be returned to the unit as it is created and worked onto the skid trails. Large amounts of slash shall not be allowed to accumulate at the landings before it is returned in the unit. Slash shall be scattered on skid trails as skidding progresses on each trail. Within the harvest units operations should retain at least ten tons per acre of downed woody material larger than 3 inches diameter to be left scattered throughout the sale units. Material will be aligned predominately perpendicular to the slope. While sub-merchantable trees may be retained, all sub-merchantable trees felled, must be left predominately perpendicular to the slope to reduce surface runoff and erosion.
- 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) Limit crossing of draws to a minimum spacing of 200 feet. Do NOT skid down draws.
- 8) At the close of the harvest, install water bars and non-merchantable material (slash, long butts, and cull material) on haul roads to provide long-term erosion control. Grass seed road surfaces with appropriate seed mix.

Memorandum

To: Dale Peters;
Cc: Marc Vessar
From: Leah Breidinger, Wildlife Biologist
Date: October 8, 2015
Re: Ferry Basin Salvage -wildlife comments

WILDLIFE ANALYSIS

I reviewed the Ferry Basin Salvage, which would occur in T19N, R22W, and Section 16, which burned in the 3,073-acre the Melton 1 Fire of 2015. The Section is primarily open grasslands with approximately 180 acres of dry forest types in the western portion of the Section. The burn severity of the fire was high and the majority of trees present in the Project Area are dead or dying Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine. The proposed salvage harvest would retain at least 4 trees ≥ 21 inches diameter per acre, any green trees, and all sub-merchantable trees to the extent possible. The timber sale contract would be for approximately 1 year, with motorized activities prohibited from April 15- July 1 to protect black-backed woodpeckers.

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 Canada lynx habitat occurs in the vicinity of the Project Area. No 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 outside of grizzly bear recovery zone and non-recovery occupied habitat (<i>USFWS 1993, Wittinger 2002</i>). Thus, no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be anticipated.
SENSITIVE SPECIES	
Bald eagles (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	No bald eagle nests occur in the vicinity of the Project Area and no lake habitats are located within 1 mile of the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated.

<p>Black-backed woodpeckers (<i>Picoides arcticus</i>) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest</p>	<p>The project area was burned in the Melton 1 Fire of 2015 and the proposed salvage would affect 131 acres of the 179 acres of burned forest available in the Project Area. However, the remaining 48 acres of burned stands on DNRC lands would remain unharvested. The acres identified for retention are located adjacent to burned timber located on tribal lands. Additionally, the proposed activities would occur outside of the breeding season for a brief period of time and all sub-merchantable materials that do not pose a risk to human safety would be retained. Thus, minor adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be anticipated under the Action Alternative. No effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be anticipated under the No Action Alternative.</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 within 500 feet of 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>The project area does not contain suitable fisher habitat. Thus, no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to fisher would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Flammulated owls (<i>Otus flammeolus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest</p>	<p>The project contains preferred flammulated owl cover types; however these stands were burned and are not currently providing suitable habitat structure for flammulated owls. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be anticipated.</p>
<p>Gray wolves (<i>Canis lupus</i>) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities</p>	<p>Gray wolves may use the Project Area. However, the proposed activities would not occur in areas likely to be used as denning or rendezvous sites 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.</p>
<p>Harlequin ducks (<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Northern bog lemmings (<i>Synaptomys borealis</i>) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Peregrine falcons (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands</p>	<p>Cliffs and rock outcrops occur near the project area; however, the closest peregrine nests to the Project Area are located >6 miles from the Project Area on the Flathead River (MTNHP October 2, 2015). Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated.</p>

Pileated woodpeckers (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	The project area does not contain suitable pileated woodpecker habitat due to the Melton 1 Fire. Thus, no 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	The Project Area is located outside of areas that retain snowpack in the spring and is unlikely to be used by wolverines. 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 potential big game winter range habitat. However, the proposed harvest would remove dead trees that do not provide thermal cover for big game, thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game are 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 immediately. Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors or wolf dens are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area contact a DNRC biologist.
- Prohibit contractors and purchasers conducting contract operations from carrying firearms while on duty as per ARM 36.11.444(2) and GB-PR2 (USFWS and DNRC 2010).
- Minimize mechanized activity within 0.25 miles of burned forested stands in the project area from April 15-July 1st to reduce disturbance to black-backed woodpeckers.
- Close any road or skid trails opened with proposed activities to reduce the potential for unauthorized motor vehicle use.
- Retain at least 2 snags and 2 snag recruits per acre >21 inches dbh or the next available size class, particularly favoring ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir for retention. If snags are cut for safety concerns, they must be left in the harvest unit. Retain a minimum of 10-15 tons/acre of coarse-woody debris.
- Retain sub-merchantable burned trees where soil, slope stability, and human safety concerns allow.

Literature Cited

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

USFWS. 1993. Grizzly bear recovery plan. Missoula, Montana. 181 pp.

USFWS and DNRC. 2010. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volumes I and II. U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6, Denver, Colorado, and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Missoula, MT. September 2010.

ATTACHMENT III

PRESCRIPTIONS

Ferry Basin Fire Salvage Timber Sale

Silvicultural Prescription and Cutting Guidelines

Sale Name: Ferry Basin Fire Salvage **Unit Number(s):** 2 **Acres:** 130

Location: Section: 16 TWP: 19N RGE: 22W **Vol Est:** 500 MBF

Elevation: 3560 - 4480 feet **Slope:** 0-50% **Aspect:** mostly east to northeast

Habitat type: PSME/CARU (Douglas-fir/pinegrass)

Current Cover Type: PP **Appropriate Cover Type:** PP

Soils: Winkler gravelly loam, 15 to 60 percent slopes 42%
Finleypoint gravelly loam, 15 to 60 percent slopes 31%
Bigarm, cool-Hogsby-Rock outcrop complex 8 to 30 percent slopes 27%

Description of stand(s):

The current stand is 98% dead standing, black timber as a result of a wildfire. It was a multi-storied, three canopy level stand, comprising of a 50/50 mix of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. The saw timber component averaged 55-75 feet in height, 10-14 inches in diameter and was approximately 70 years of age. There is no surviving regeneration, and the ground cover was most likely dominated by pinegrass.

Treatment Objectives:

Salvage and capture the remaining value of the fire killed trees. Retain woody debris for soil stabilization. Retain all live timber for seed as well as sub-merchantable trees and cull trees.

Prescribed Treatment:

Leave Tree. As a result of the fire, this is a stand replacement event resulting in an even aged silvicultural system.

Harvest Method:

Ground based harvesting with conventional, mechanical, or cut-to-length operations on dry, frozen or snow covered ground are applicable. Retain the maximum amount of woody debris possible by 'in woods' processing of trees, lopping tops off prior to skidding, or return skidding slash from the landing.

Prescription/Cutting Guidelines:

Cut and leave trees are not marked. Cut dead trees only. Remove merchantable, fire killed trees. Retain at least 4 trees per acre (100' x 100' spacing) 21 inches DBH or greater. If 21 inch DBH trees are not present, leave the largest diameter trees available. Retain sub-merchantable trees to the greatest extent practical.

Site Preparation and Regeneration:

Site preparation is not needed, as the fire has prepared the seed bed. Leave live trees and adjacent live trees to provide for natural regeneration.

Anticipated Future Treatments:

Natural regeneration should be evaluated approximately five years from time of site preparation, and the need for supplemental planting determined. This stand should be evaluated for pre-commercial thinning and overstory removal treatments approximately 20 years from time of harvest. Stand conditions would be monitored for future salvage opportunities related to insect and disease outbreaks, severe weather events, fire or other unanticipated circumstances on a case-by-case basis.