CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Sieben Ranch SMZ Alternative Practice
Proposed Implementation Date:	November 2015
Proponent:	Doug Mote
Location:	Sections 4 and 5 Township 14N Range 7W
County:	Lewis and Clark

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Doug Mote has applied for a Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) Alternative Practice on approximately 8,000 feet of the Blackfoot River, east of Lincoln, Montana. The 8,000 feet for which the alternative practice is proposed is the total of five separate streamside reaches located on both sides of the river.

The purpose of the Alternative Practice is to salvage harvest dead trees or trees that are highly susceptible to blowdown. Trees proposed for harvest are primarily dead lodgepole pine and could pose a risk to recreationists. The application specifically requests to:

-Operate Equipment in the SMZ to within fifteen feet of the ordinary high water mark.

This Equipment operation would consist of a cut to length processor entering the SMZ, felling, limbing and placing trees on the ground. Then a forwarder would operate on that slash mat and remove the logs from the SMZ.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

This is private property and no public scoping is involved specialists within the DNRC were consulted.

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

N/A

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No Action Alternative: Timber harvest would likely occur and meet all SMZ rules. Trees harvested from within the SMZ would be handfelled and skidded from there tops or with a winchline.

Action Alternative: Under this alternative, an Alternative Practice to operate equipment within the SMZ would be granted. While the application requested equipment be allowed within 15 feet of the ordinary high water mark it was determined by the DNRC to not consider allowing equipment closer than within 20 feet of the ordinary high water mark. Additionally, GIS and air photo analysis was used to determine that while the total project area encompasses 8,000 lineal feet of SMZ, alternative practice operations would only take place on approximately 60 percent of this area.

Strict guidelines to ensure the integrity of the SMZ is not impaired would be followed. Please see part 5 of this Environmental Analysis for a thorough description of these mitigation measures.

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III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *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.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Logging is currently taking place, in accordance with the SMZ law. Under the proposed action alternative harvest would be limited to winter conditions. Therefore it is unlikely there would be impacts to geology, soil quality, stability and moisture under either alternative.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Is it possible that implementing this alternative practice would impact the integrity of the SMZ and these specific functions?

-Ability to act as an effective sediment filter.
-Ability to provide shade to regulate stream temperature.
-Protection of stream channel and banks.
-Ability to provide large woody debris for eventual recruitment into the stream to maintain riffles, pools, and other elements of channel stability.

Existing Condition

The Blackfoot River is a class 1 stream, although in certain years the upper reaches, where the Alternative Practice is proposed can go dry. In the project area the north side of the river is heavily forested. Vegetation on the south side of the river is primarily sagebrush and grasslands with trees encroaching into the grasslands immediately adjacent to the river and on wetter microsites. Please see Attachment A-1 for an aerial photograph of the area. Where trees are present they are primarily lodgepole pine or Douglas-fir with some ponderosa pine, cottonwood and aspen also being found.

Potential Environmental Effects

No Action Alternative:

-The SMZ law would be followed for this commercial timber harvest therefore it is unlikely there would be impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution or the integrity of the SMZ during this operation. Following completion of the commercial harvest non-commercial cutting, outside the jurisdiction of the SMZ law, could occur. Under the no action alternative mitigations for tree removal would not be enforceable.

Action Alternative:

-The ability of the SMZ to act as an effective sediment filter would not be impacted beyond baseline conditions because harvest would only occur under winter conditions, and the ground is on gentle slopes. Equipment trail locations would be located no less than 30 feet apart from each other and on average would be located at least 40 feet apart from each other. Generally equipment trails would be located at a 90 degree angle to the stream; deviation from this would only be allowed to provide greater streamside protection.

-The ability of the SMZ to provide shade would be maintained by adhering to salvage tree retention requirements in the SMZ law (MCA 36.11.305).

-Full protection of the stream channel and banks is maintained by keeping equipment at least 20 feet away from the stream at all times and ensuring equipment operation in the SMZ only takes place under winter conditions. The use of a cut to length processor and forwarder to travel into the SMZ, cut trees, and pack them out suspended from the ground is designed to limit impacts compared to hand falling trees and skidding them out by their tops.

-The ability to provide large woody debris for eventual recruitment would be maintained by adhering to salvage tree retention requirements in the SMZ law (MCA 36.11.305).

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Slash created from the project would need to be disposed of in accordance with all applicable laws. Impacts would be expected to be the same under either alternative.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

No Action: Harvest could occur without a SMZ alternative practice and salvage tree retention requirements of the SMZ law would be met.

Action Alternative: Harvest would occur with an SMZ alternative practice and salvage tree retention requirements of the SMZ law would be met.

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: The SMZ law would be followed and no impacts to fish, wildlife or birds would be expected.

Action Alternative: The ability to support diverse and productive aquatic, avian and terrestrial habitat would be maintained by following tree retention requirements of the SMZ law.

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 impacts to unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources would be impacted under either alternative.

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.

If the proposed action alternative is selected no impacts beyond those expected under the no action alternative would likely occur.

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.

N/A

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *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.

The proposed Alternative Practice would facilitate the removal of hazard trees in a high use recreation area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

None.

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.

None.

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 change in local and state tax base and tax revenues would be expected under either alternative.

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.

None.

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.

Currently, the private landowners allow public recreation within the proposed alternative practice area. The Streamside Management Zone is primarily used by anglers in the summer months. The landowner is concerned dead trees could pose a safety issue to recreationalists. The proposed action alternative would facilitate the removal of many of the potential hazard trees.

The nearest Wilderness is the Scapegoat Wilderness approximately 10 miles air miles northeast of the project area. Neither alternative would have any impacts to Wilderness access.

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.

The project has no direct implications for density and distribution of population and housing.

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?

None.

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.

N/A

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Neil Simpson	**Date:**	12-2-2015
	Title:	Forester		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Following a review of the document as well as the corresponding Department policies and rules, the Action Alternative has been selected because it meets the intent of the project objectives outlined in Section I – Type and Purpose of Action. This includes but is not limited to the need to salvage harvest dead trees or trees that are highly susceptible to blowdown which could pose a risk to recreationalists.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

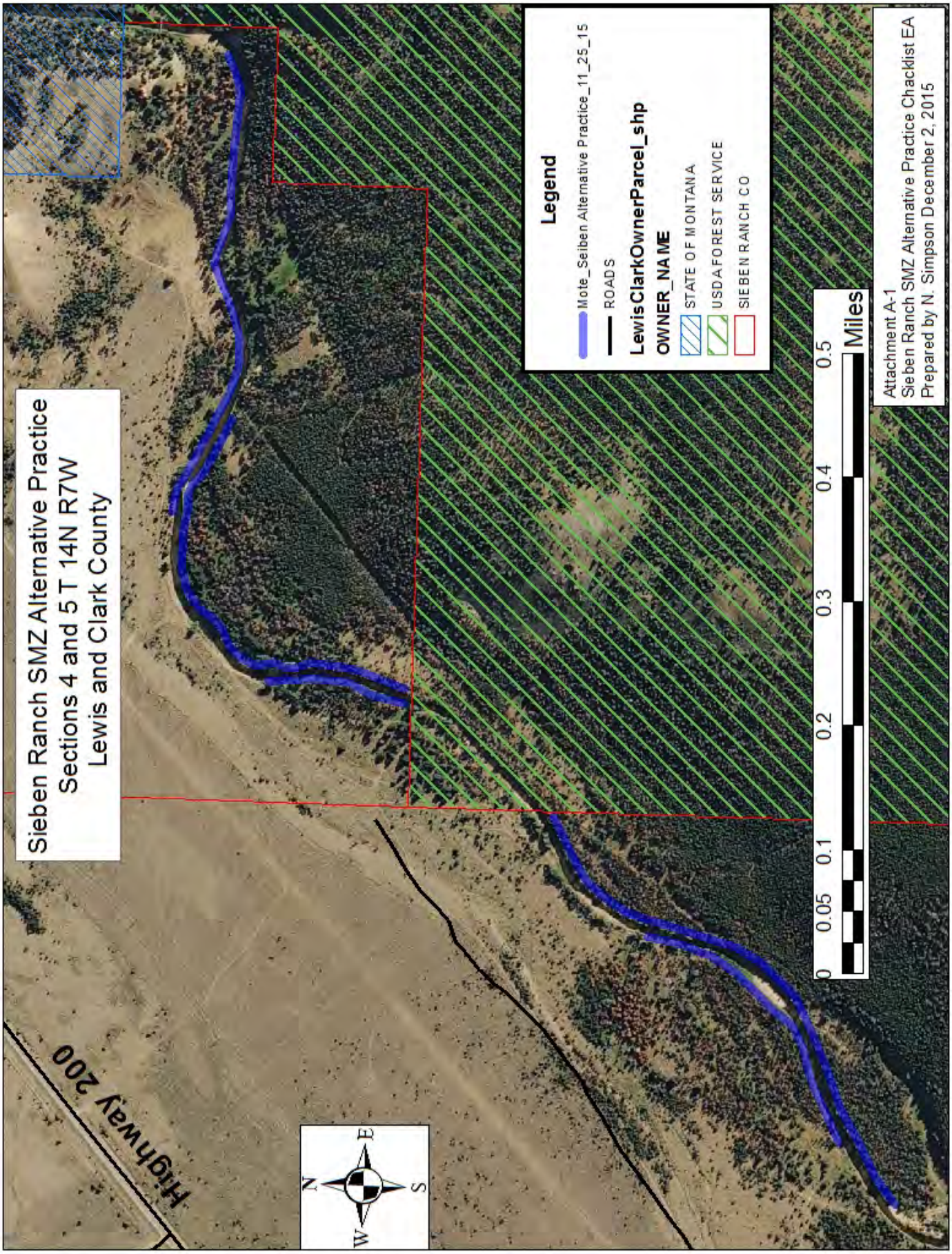
I find that the Action Alternative will not have significant impacts for the following reasons:

- The Action Alternative is in compliance with the existing laws, rules, policies, and standards applicable to this type of proposed action.
- Appropriate mitigations have been proposed to minimize potential impacts to resources such as terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats; soil; vegetation; and water quality, quantity, and distribution.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

	EIS		More Detailed EA	**X**	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name: Kristen S. Baker-Dickinson** **Title: Clearwater Unit Manager**		
Signature:	***/s/ K. Baker-Dickinson***	**Date**:	**12/4/2015**


Sieben Ranch SMZ Alternative Practice
Sections 4 and 5 T 14N R7W
Lewis and Clark County
Legend
Mote_Seiben Alternative Practice_11_25_15
ROADS
LewisClarkOwnerParcel_shp
OWNER_NAME
STATE OF MONTANA
USDA FOREST SERVICE
SIEBEN RANCH CO
0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5
Miles
Attachment A-1
Sieben Ranch SMZ Alternative Practice Chacklist EA
Prepared by N. Simpson December 2, 2015
Highway 200
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