DECISION NOTICE:
Blackfoot River Fishing Access Sites Forest Management Projects

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula MT 59804
Phone 406-542-5500

September 16, 2019

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to conduct forest management treatments on approximately 96 acres of forest on the K. Ross Toole, Johnsrud Park, Corrick's River Bend, and River Junction Fishing Access Sites (FAS) along the Blackfoot River in FWP Region 2, east of Missoula in Missoula and Powell Counties. If approved by the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission, the work would begin as early as November 2019.

The objectives of the proposed forest habitat restoration treatments are:

1. Removing hazard trees that pose a threat to public safety, property, and improvements;
2. reducing the potential for hazard trees to develop by maintaining or enhancing individual tree and stand-level resilience and resistance to stressors and damaging agents (such as drought, insects and disease, wildfire);
3. reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface;
4. improving and maintaining FAS aesthetics; and
5. selling any resulting merchantable tree byproducts to offset treatment costs and potentially generate revenue for the FWP Forest Management Account.

The treatments would involve approximately 96 acres of tree removal (both of trees with merchantable and nonmerchantable value). Tree planting may also be implemented in small openings created by tree removal. The operating period for the proposed treatments would be from November 1 through April 15 in order to minimize impacts to FAS users. Ground based logging equipment would be restricted to December 1 through March 15 and required to operate under relatively dry, frozen, or snow-covered conditions in order to minimize impacts to soil and vegetation. Other clean-up and rehabilitation activities, such as slash treatment, grass seeding, and tree planting would be short duration (1 to 2 days) and could potentially occur throughout the operating period. Roads and harvest would comply with Best Management Practices (BMPs). Control of noxious weeds would be included as part of the treatments.

Following this action, FWP anticipates that public safety and forest resilience will be improved. By addressing the underlying forest health issues that lead to the development of hazard trees, FWP may realize reduced operations and maintenance costs. Treatments would also reduce the risk of crown fire

that could pose a risk to neighboring landowners and negatively affect the quality of the recreational experience of these sites.

Costs to FWP for these forest management treatments are expected to be covered by FAS maintenance funds, grants, and the sale of merchantable timber byproduct. Any revenue in excess of project costs would be deposited into the legislatively established FWP Forest Management Account to implement further forest management projects pursuant to the provisions of 87-1-201(9)(a)(iv), Montana Code Annotated (MCA).

Alternatives

Alternative A: No Action. If FWP decides not to proceed with the proposed action, the four FASs would not receive forest management treatments at this time. Forest succession and competition amongst trees for limited resources would continue, leading to decreased stand vigor and potential for trees and stands to be less resilient to stressors and damaging agents. Dead and downed fuels may increase, negatively affecting the aesthetics of the FASs and make hiking in these areas more difficult. No timber would be sold to potentially generate revenue for the FWP forest management account. FWP would continue mitigating hazard trees and maintaining improvements in these FASs.

Alternative B: Proposed Action. Conduct forested habitat treatments on approximately 96 acres of the 4 FASs. Following this action, FWP anticipates that hazard trees would be mitigated, tree vigor and resilience to insects and diseases would be improved, hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface would be reduced, aesthetics would be improved, and the sale of timber may generate revenue for the FWP forest management account.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and to make a decision based on this information.

- FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal (Blackfoot River FASs Forest Management Project) on August 9, 2019 and accepted public comment for 32 days until September 9, 2019.

- Legal notice of the availability of the Draft EA was published once each in the *Independent Record* (Helena, Aug 13), *Missoulian* (Aug 8), Seeley Swan Pathfinder (Seeley Lake, Aug 15), and *Silver State Post* (Deer lodge, Aug 14) newspapers.

- FWP mailed 34 copies of the EA (and approximately 57 email notifications of the EA's availability) to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov, "Public Notices") from August 9 through September 9, 2019.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

DECISION

Based upon the EA and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

No concerns were raised during the public review and comment period that would bring the environmental analysis into question. In consideration of these facts, I adopt the Draft EA as final.

Based on the analysis in the draft EA and having received no public comments, I have selected the "Proposed Action" (Alternative B). I will recommend to the Fish & Wildlife Commission that it approve FWP's proposed Blackfoot River Fishing Access Site Forest Management Projects, as described in the EA. This is expected to occur at the Commission's next regularly scheduled meeting, currently scheduled for October 17, 2019 in Helena. (The Commission's agenda for this meeting can be accessed on FWP's website http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/insideFwp/commission/meetings/ just prior to the meeting.)

Randy Arnold
Region 2 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

9/16/2019
Date