



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Idaho Panhandle
National Forest

Coeur d'Alene River
Ranger District

P. O. Box 14
Silverton, ID 83867

2502 East Sherman Avenue
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

File Code: 1950

Date: March 4, 2003

Hello –

I would like to share with you some information concerning a proposal to harvest trees and gather blown down trees in the Flat Creek area of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District. The project area is located adjacent to Road 1518 (please refer to the vicinity map). This proposal has been identified as the Wood Fish Project.

The purpose and need for this project is derived from the Yellow Dog Downey Environmental Assessment, completed in 1994. Under the Yellow Dog Downey Decision Notice, approximately 5,000 pieces of large woody debris were to be used in stream channel and hill slope restoration work following completion of activities in the Yellow Dog Downey Timber Sale Area. The large woody debris gathering activities were planned to occur in stands on the former Wallace Ranger District (the east side of the current Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District), but outside the planning area of the Yellow Dog Downey analysis area. Timber harvest was completed in 2001.

Recent field surveys confirm the estimated amount of wood needed for the restoration work. Based on the situation just described, the following criteria were developed for identifying potential stands on the east side of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District from which wood could be gathered under this Wood Fish Project:

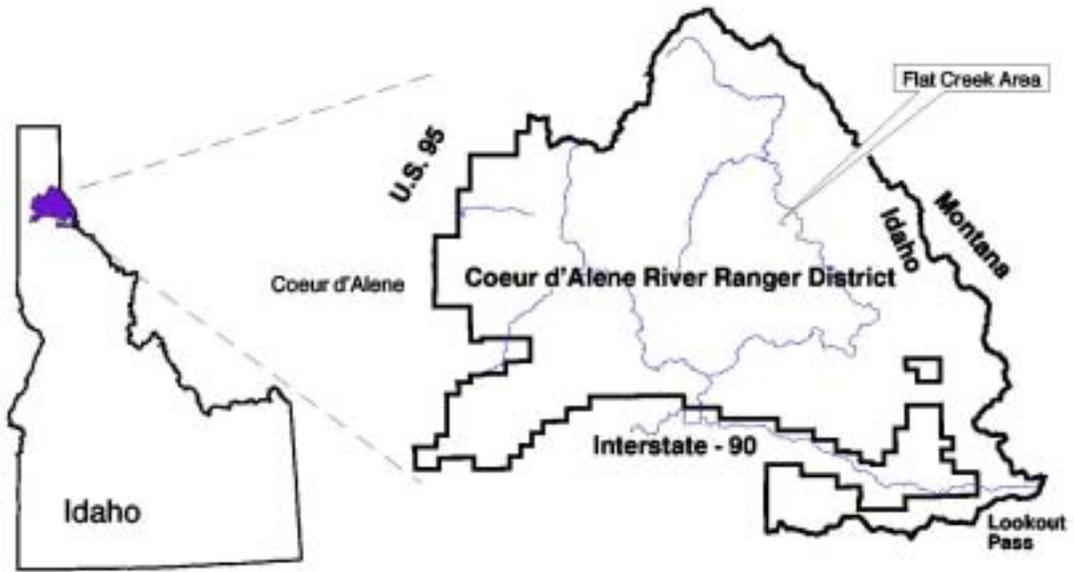
- *A total of approximately 5,000 pieces of large woody debris will be gathered.*
- *We will use wind thrown trees wherever possible.*
- *We will limit our wood gathering to a stand outside of allocated old growth and allocated recruitment old growth.*
- *We will limit our wood gathering to a stand outside of lynx analysis units (LAU's).*
- *We will utilize the existing transportation system, with no additional road building.*
- *Activities will follow the direction of the Inland Native Fish Strategy (such as buffer widths in riparian areas).*
- *The proposal to collect needed materials will be economically feasible.*

Applying these criteria, we identified five potential stands from which we could gather the needed wood: four were in the Suburban Peak Area and the remaining stand is in the Flat Creek area. All of the stands were in the Devils Elbow travel corridor for lynx. A review of the stands in the Suburban Peak area, which were adjacent to one another, revealed a relatively broad, flat ridge top that provides travel security for lynx. To maintain this travel corridor, the four stands in the Suburban Peak area were dropped from further analysis.

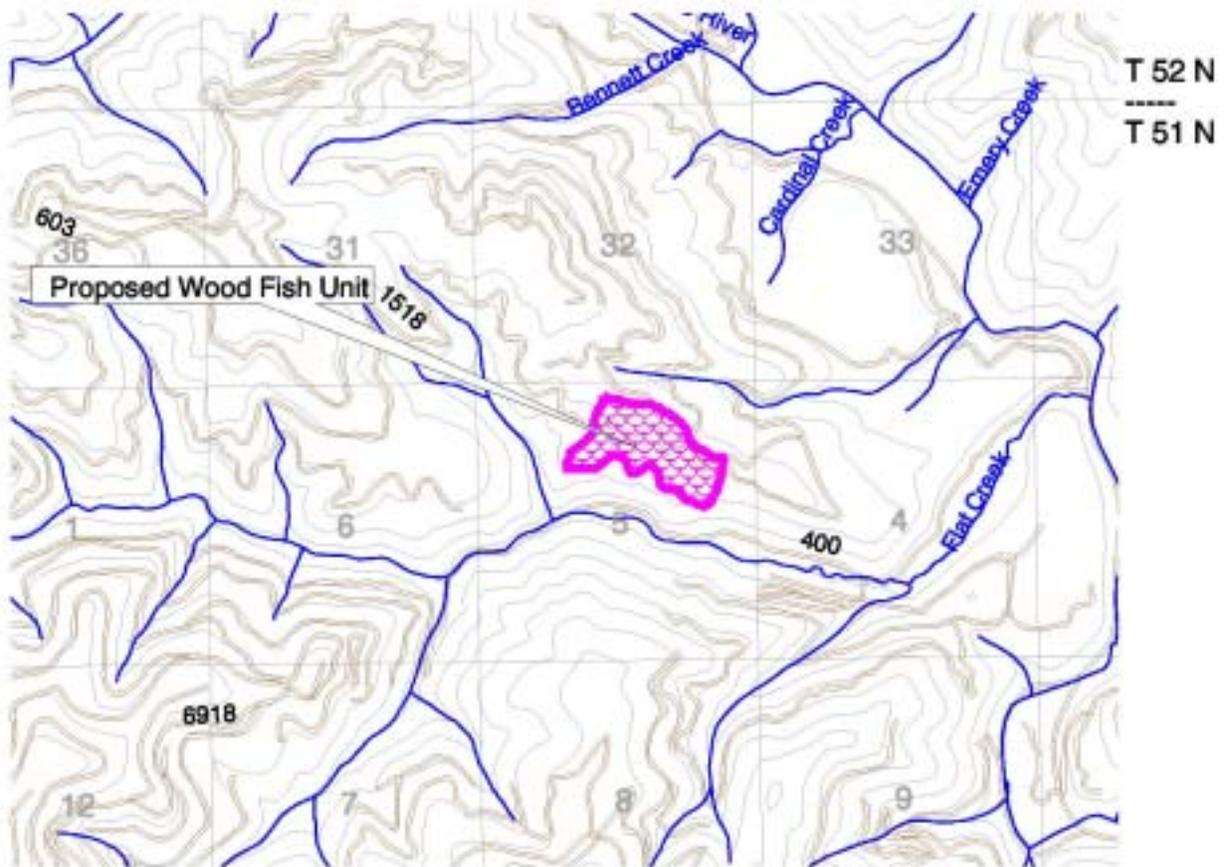
The remaining stand in the Flat Creek area (stand number 13802017) was found to provide a good opportunity for large woody debris collection in addition to accomplishing vegetative restoration and fuels reduction activities, and would not result in a disconnect of the lynx travel corridor. The following describes the stand, the proposed activities, and the expected benefits in more detail.



Wood Fish Area Map



R 2 E | R 3 E



Tree species associated with early seral communities have declined dramatically throughout the Coeur d'Alene River Basin. Recent and past stand examinations demonstrate the transition of this once white pine-dominated stand to a western hemlock-dominated stand (Figure 1). Very few white pine and western larch individuals remain.



FIGURE 1. These photos depict a forest of primarily western hemlock where there once was white pine. Note the high density of white pine snags and heavy fuel build up on the forest floor.



Under this proposal, we would harvest timber using a “regeneration” method, while maintaining the western larch, white pine, and lodge pole pine in the stand.

This method would trend the vegetative species composition of the stand back toward those more resistant to insects and disease, while obtaining the wood necessary to accomplish the stream channel and hillslope restoration commitments we made in the Yellow Dog Downey Timber Sale Area. Patches of trees (called “leave” patches) would be incorporated into the prescription to provide structure and maintain snag densities for wildlife habitat in the area. Wood removal would focus on western hemlock, wind thrown, and downed material of approximately 50% soundness or greater, taking care not to damage the roots, tops or boles of leave trees during harvest or removal.

Ground-based operations would occur on designated skid trails, with skyline operations in yarding corridors to reduce impact to the site. As provided by the Forest Plan, no more than 15% of the activity area would be detrimentally compacted, displaced or “puddled.” Upon completion of yarding and harvest activities, activities would occur on skid trails to further reduce compaction and speed recovery of the trails (Figure 2). For example, the tops and limbs of live trees would remain on site to provide nutrients to the soil as they break down over time. Large woody debris would be maintained at levels of 25 to 35 tons per acre of three inch or greater in diameter. No harvest would take place on sites unsuitable for the establishment of trees in the future, given current technology.



FIGURE 2. These photographs illustrate the recovery of treated skid trails after 3 years.



These activities are necessary to meet Forest Service commitments identified in the Yellow Dog Downey Environmental Assessment for aquatic habitat improvement. The proposal will provide large woody debris in order to address water resource and fisheries issues in the Yellow Dog and Downey Creek drainages, while reducing fuel loads, providing for vegetative restoration, and improve areas for big game to winter in the Flat Creek area. Actual placement of the large woody debris in stream channel and hill slope restoration will occur as planned and analyzed under the Yellow Dog Downey Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice.

Habitat improvement activities such as this proposal meet the requirements to be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. A Decision Memo and documentation of anticipated benefits and effects will be prepared, and I expect will be issued to interested members of the public in April 2003.

I would like to learn of your concerns related to this proposal. We can best use your written comments if we receive them by April 4, 2003. Please mail your comments to Wade Jerome, Project Team Leader, at the Fernan Office of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, 2502 East Sherman Avenue, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, 83814-5899. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Wade at (208) 664-2318.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph P. Stringer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JOSEPH P. STRINGER
District Ranger