

## **SCOPING NOTICE**

### **Georgetown Lake Vegetation Management Pintler Ranger District Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest**

#### **Background**

In 1997 the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest proposed the Double Sec Timber Sale and Vegetation Management project. A draft environmental impact statement (EIS) analyzing five alternatives was prepared and released in September 1999. Additional analysis after the release of the draft EIS was necessary due to an increase in timber harvesting on private lands within and adjacent to the project area. The cumulative effects of this new activity in combination with the preferred alternative identified in the draft EIS were unacceptable to the Forest Service.

After release of the draft EIS, the State of Montana, along with other western states, were struck with another severe fire season in the summer of 2000. The Georgetown Lake area and other communities throughout the western United States were threatened by wildfires for much of the summer. In the fall of 2000 the U.S. Congress and Clinton administration responded with the National Fire Plan that emphasizes treating hazardous fuels to reduce the threat of severe and damaging wildfires to forests and homes.

As a result of the cumulative effects impeding the proposed Double Sec Timber Sale and Vegetation Management project and the national emphasis on reducing hazardous fuels near homes, a decision was made to revise the purpose and need and develop a new proposed action. This new proposed action is the Georgetown Lake Vegetation Management project.

#### **Proposed Action**

The Forest Service will prepare a draft EIS to document the analysis and disclose the environmental impacts of proposed actions to reduce hazardous fuel levels, improve forest health and improve vegetative structure on forest and grasslands in the Flint Creek, North Fork Flint Creek, and upper Warm Springs drainages. The proposed project includes the Georgetown and Echo Lake recreation areas, located approximately 10 miles south of Philipsburg, Montana.

The Georgetown Lake Vegetation Management project proposes fuel reduction and forest health treatments in the form of thinning and shelterwood harvest on approximately 1,100 acres. Forest products harvested as a result of the treatments may include an estimated 1.061 million board feet of sawtimber and approximately 1.393 million board feet equivalent of roundwood (posts and poles). Treatment and timber harvest activities could occur at different times of the year, including winter. Slash residue from these thinning

activities would be disposed of using a mix of methods that could include piling and burning, chipping, lopping and scattering, and hauling the material away for disposal at another site. Approximately one and one-half miles of temporary road could be constructed.

In addition, mechanical and prescribed fire treatments to control conifer encroachment and reduce grassland fuels would occur on an approximately 1,150 acres. Small conifers in parks with low levels of encroachment would be cut and the slash piled by hand. The hand piles would then be burned. More heavily encroached parks would be slashed (small conifers cut) and then be treated with a combination of broadcast burning and underburning. Ground crews using hand-firing devices would conduct the prescribed burning. Helicopters with aerial ignition devices could be used for firing operations in some of the proposed units located away from the residential areas. Engines, hand crews, fuel breaks and constructed fire line would be used where needed to contain and control prescribed fires.

A table listing the units and brief description of the proposed activities are included with this document. The unit numbers correspond with those on the attached project map.

### **Purpose and Need**

The proposed action is designed to respond to the Goals and Objectives in the Forest Plan for the Deerlodge National Forest and Record of Decision approved September 1987. The Forest Plan and its accompanying EIS are available for review at the Pintler Ranger District Office. In addition to the Forest Plan, the National Fire Plan provides a strategy for a comprehensive approach to the management of wildland fire and hazardous fuels on Federal and adjacent State, tribal, and private forest and range lands in the United States. This strategy emphasizes reducing the risk to communities and the environment. As part of the National Fire Plan, a 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy has been prepared. One of the goals of this strategy is to reduce hazardous fuels. The purpose and need for this proposed action include the following:

#### **Reduce the potential of catastrophic damage to public and private property, developments and structures from wildland fire by decreasing the fuel loads in timbered stands**

The area surrounding Georgetown Lake and Echo Lake contains a considerable amount of private land intermixed with national forest. There are several hundred homes and other structures within the project area with subdivisions and new home construction continuing on private property. There are approximately 70 permitted recreation residences on Forest Service administered lands, several campgrounds and recreation facilities, and the Discovery Basin Ski Area. Based on the number of structures and developments in portions of the project area, the more densely populated areas are classed as urban interface while the areas of scattered homes are classed as intermix communities. The values at risk in these areas are rated as moderate to high. The

infrastructure in much of the area is such that firefighting capabilities are limited or hindered in many areas by narrow dead end roads and one-way in/out routes.

The overall historic fire regime for the project area is described as mixed severity. A significant portion of the project proposes to treat forested lands comprised of vegetation condition classes 2 and 3 within and adjacent to areas defined as wildland urban interface and intermix communities. These conditions classes are characteristic of forests susceptible to stand replacement or severe wildfires that are associated with a mixed severity regime. When these types of fires occur in areas such as those described for the Georgetown and Echo Lake area, there is potential for catastrophic damage. Maintaining open grasslands, thinning forests, and removing hazardous fuel would reduce the potential for severe and damaging wildfires.

### **Reduce the risk to firefighters and public safety from wildland fire**

Suppressing intense burning wildfires is often a difficult and dangerous job. The degree of difficulty increases significantly when populated areas are threatened. Not only are firefighters at risk, but forest users and the citizens of the threatened community are also in danger. Reducing fuel loads through thinning, prescribed fire and other mechanical treatments would decrease the intensity of a wildfire and the potential for a catastrophic wildfire. The treatments would help create defensible spaces near private and Forest Service developments with the end result being a safer environment for firefighters and the public.

### **Maintain or improve forest and grassland health by increasing the diversity and productivity of forested stands and natural meadows**

Mature and over mature lodgepole pine stands occur in much of the project area. Many of these stands are heavily infected with dwarf mistletoe, a parasitic plant. Height growth has ceased and diameter growth in these stands is minimal. Some of these stands are adjacent to healthy sapling/pole stands, and mistletoe is being spread to these stands. The proposed action would thin some of these stands and remove older mistletoe infected trees that are spreading the parasite into adjacent young stands. Sapling/pole stands would be thinned with the healthiest trees remaining. Some stands affected by insects or other diseases could also be thinned.

Stands of immature, dense lodgepole pine occur throughout the project area. These trees have low live crown ratios, poor wind firmness, and bole strength. The dense stands are capable of sustaining a crown fire. The proposed action would thin these stands to increase growth rates, improve health, and reduce existing fuel levels.

Historically, some of the forested areas in the vicinity of Georgetown Lake were dominated by stands of Douglas-fir. Historic fire periodicity was less than 35 years, which encouraged a more park-like stand structure. The proposal would encourage the development of open, park-like, Douglas-fir stands with associated wildlife communities. This action would maintain portions of the Douglas-fir zone in a condition more resistant

to stand replacement fire, promote vegetative components that evolved with disturbance, and increase understory diversity.

The purpose and need for tree slashing and burning in grassland parks and timber grasslands is to: 1) reduce conifer colonization in grassland parks and maintain open areas in the understory of timber-grasslands; 2) maintain or improve wildlife habitats; 3) improve forage values for big game and domestic livestock. Many of the grassland parks are at "potential natural condition," containing late seral grass species. In the absence of natural fire, these parks have begun to fill in with coniferous trees, reducing their forage values for wildlife and domestic livestock. A combination of tree slashing and prescribed burning will be used to maintain the productivity of these lands. Prescribed fire will be used in higher elevation timber-grasslands to provide growing space for understory shrubs, forbs, and grasses. Due to the lack of periodic fire, these areas moved toward late seral species, with lodgepole pine increasing in area and density.

### **Provide opportunities to utilize wood products from thinning and fuel reduction treatments**

The treatments used to meet hazardous fuel reduction and forest health objectives would result in wood products being available for harvesting. There is a demand for National Forest sawtimber, posts, and poles in southwestern Montana and the supply of forest products is important to the local economy. The wood products industry is also recognized as an important part of the local economy. A goal of the plan is to provide for a long-term sustained yield of forest products. Providing the opportunity to harvest wood products would benefit the economy and meet forest plan goals.

The Georgetown Lake proposed project includes portions of Management Areas A7 – Developed Recreation, C2 – Big Game Winter Range, D2 – Forage Production Areas, and E1 – Productive Forest Land.

### **Decision to be Made**

The decision to be made is to determine if thinning, prescribed fire and other mechanical treatments to reduce hazardous fuels and maintain forest and grasslands would occur as proposed, and if an action is to occur, how much area will need to be treated to meet the purpose and need.

The selection of the proposed action or other action alternative may result in the need for forest plan amendments regarding visual quality objectives and use of prescribed fire.

### **Scoping**

A news release soliciting public input regarding the proposal will be sent to local media. Interested parties on the District NEPA mailing list will be sent a scoping notice. Residents and property owners that may be affected by the proposed project are also being sent a copy of the scoping notice.

Please submit any written comments to Bob Gilman, District Ranger, Pintler Ranger District, 88-10A-Business Loop, Philipsburg, MT 59858, telephone (406) 859-3211 by February 5, 2003. We are looking for feedback related to the purpose and need, proposed action, and alternatives to the proposed action that should be developed for detailed analysis. **If you wish to remain on the mailing list and receive a copy of the environmental impact statement prepared for this project, please indicate if you would like a printed copy or compact disc. If we do not hear back from you we, we will assume you want your name removed from this project's mailing list.**

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

/s/ Bob Gilman  
BOB GILMAN  
District Ranger

December 19, 2002  
DATE

## Georgetown Lake Vegetation Management Proposed Action

Unit #	Treatment	Wood Products	Acres
20	CT, BP	PP	23
23	T, HP, BP	PP	26
31	SW, HP, BP	ST	37
32	CT, BP	ST	17
33	SW, UB	ST	9
34	CT, BP	PP	8
38	CT, HP, BP	PP	21
40	CT, HP, BP	PP	38
41	CT, HP, BP	PP	4
43	CT, HP, BP	PP	11
44	CT, HP, BP	PP	19
45	CT, HP, BP	PP	4
46	CT, HP, BP	PP	11
47	CT, HP, BP	PP	11
48	CT, HP, BP	PP	2
49	CT, HP, BP	PP	2
50	CT, HP, BP	PP	0.2
51	CT, HP, BP	PP	0.2
52	CT, HP, BP	PP	0.2
53	CT, HP, BP	PP	0.1
54	CT, HP, BP	PP	0.2
55	CT, HP, BP	PP	1
56	CT, HP, BP	PP	26
59	CT, HP, BP	PP, ST	8
60	CT, HP, BP	PP	34
66	SW, UB	ST	51

Unit #	Treatment	Wood Products	Acres
76	T, C	PP, ST	93
77	T, C	PP, ST	180
78	T, HP, BP	ST	91
79	T, HP, BP	PP, ST	42
80	T, C, HP, BP	PP	48
81	T, C, HP, BP	ST, PP	188
82	T, HP, BP	PP	18
83	T, HP, BP	ST, PP	2
84	T, HP, BP	PP, ST	48
85	T, HP, BP		2
86	SL, BB		29
87	SL, BB		14
88	BB, SR		249
89	UB, SR		131
90	SL, HP, BP		7
91	SL, HP, BP		7
92	SL, HP, BP		32
93	SL, HP, BP		37
94	SL, HP, BP		54
95	SL, UB, BB		65
96	SL, UB, BB		62
97	SL, BB		95
98	SL, SC		40
99	SL, HP, BP		6
100	SL, HP, BP		22
101	SL, BB		165
102	SL, UB, BB		116

**Treatments**

CT – commercial thin  
 SW – shelterwood  
 T - thinning  
 SL – slashing  
 HP – hand pile slash  
 SC – scatter slash

C – chip residue & remove  
 BP – burn piles  
 UB – underburn  
 SR – stand replacement burn  
 BB – broadcast burn

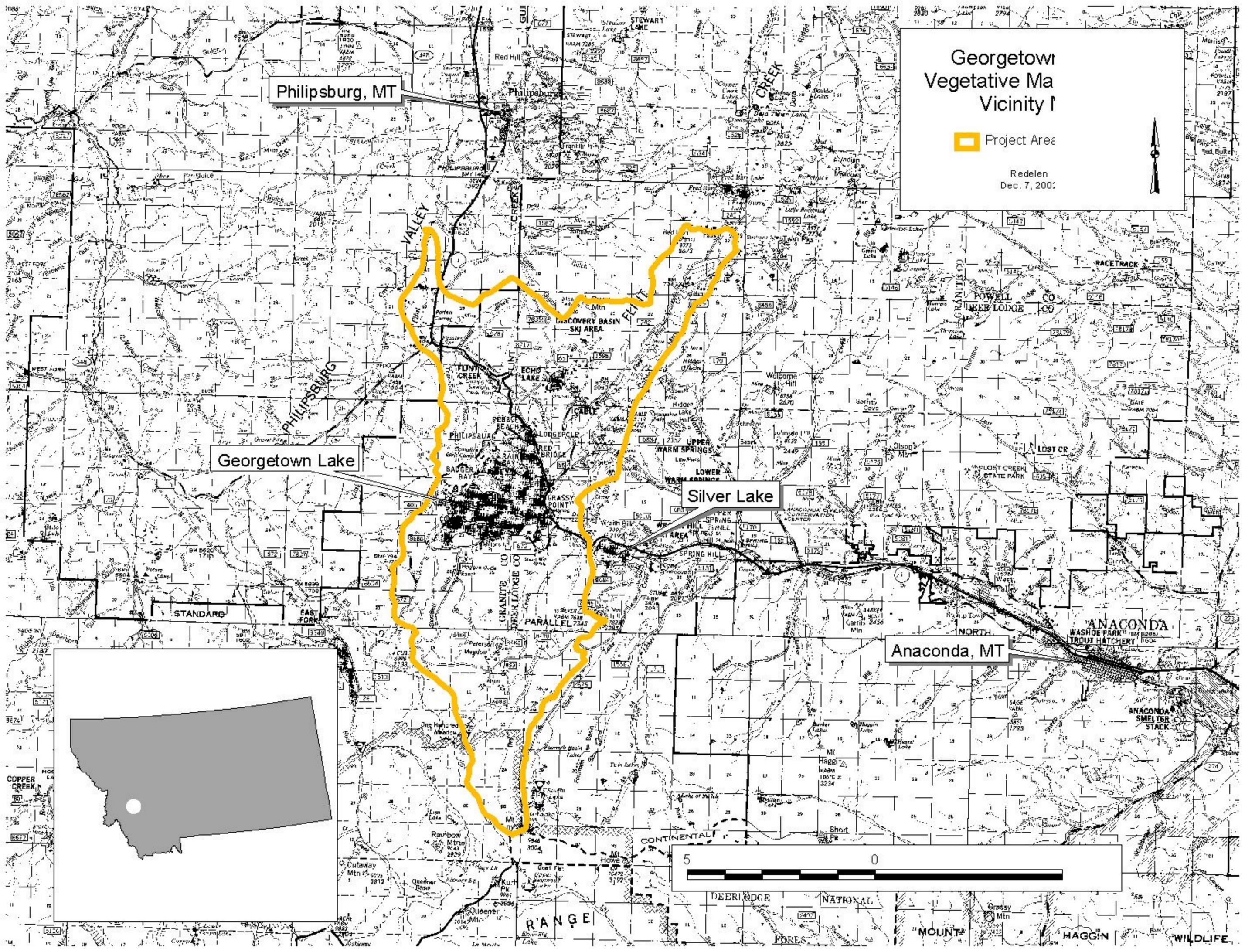
**Wood Products**

PP – post and poles  
 ST - sawtimber

# Georgetown Vegetative Ma Vicinity I

Project Area

Redelen  
Dec. 7, 2003

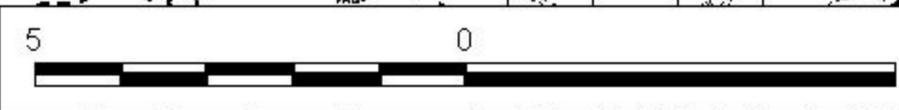
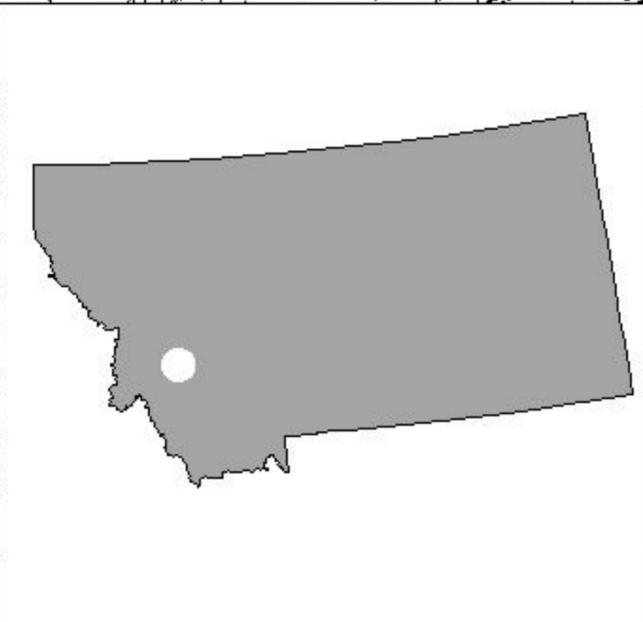


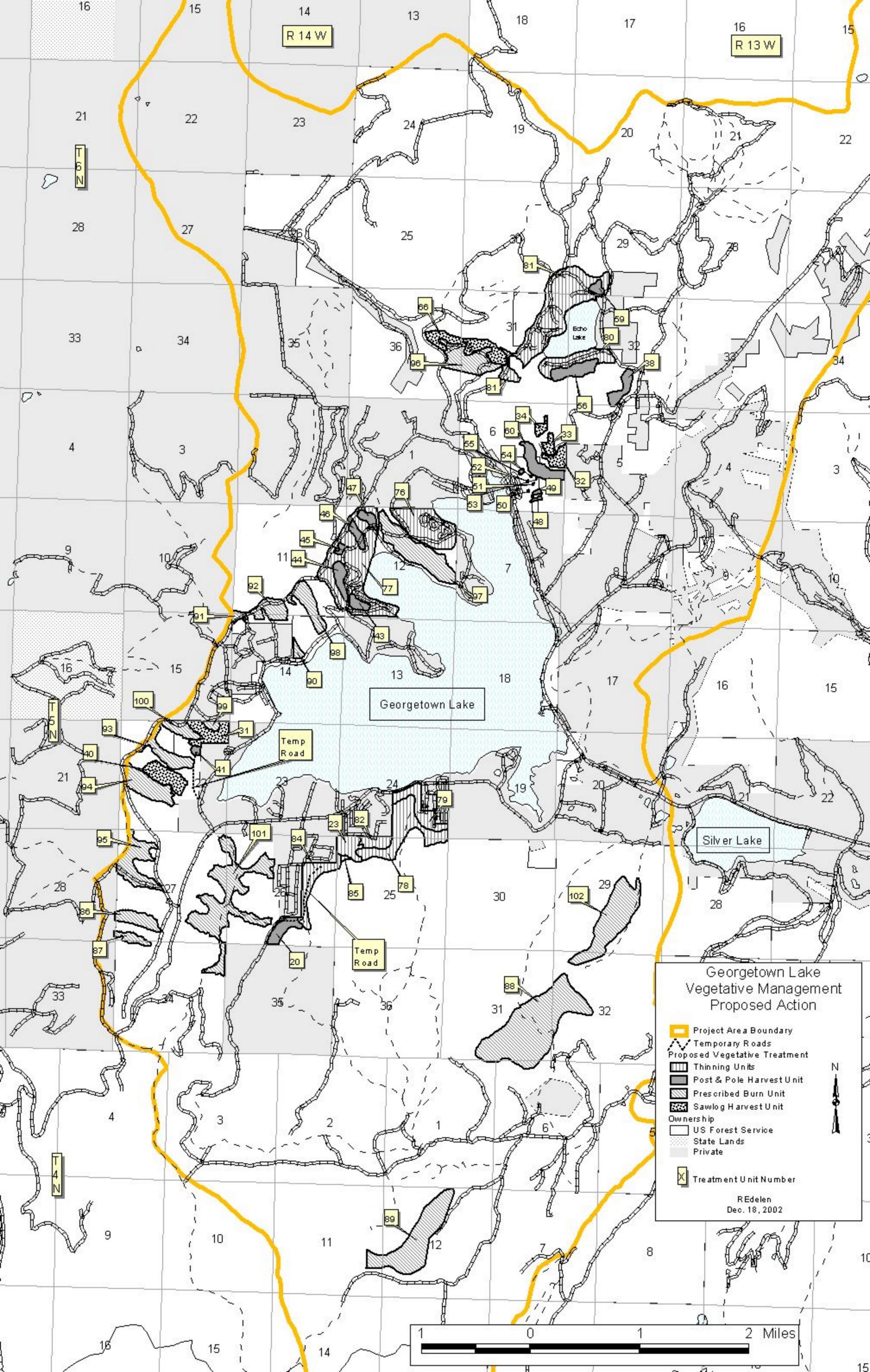
Philipsburg, MT

Georgetown Lake

Silver Lake

Anaconda, MT





R 14 W

R 13 W

T 6 N

T 5 N

T 4 N

Georgetown Lake

Echo Lake

Silver Lake

Temp Road

Temp Road

**Georgetown Lake Vegetative Management Proposed Action**

- Project Area Boundary
- Temporary Roads
- Proposed Vegetative Treatment**
- Thinning Units
- Post & Pole Harvest Unit
- Prescribed Burn Unit
- Sawlog Harvest Unit
- Ownership**
- US Forest Service
- State Lands
- Private
- Treatment Unit Number

REdelen  
Dec. 18, 2002

