



**File Code:** 1950/2630

**Date:** June 8, 2006

Dear Interested Party,

The Pintler Ranger District is initiating this scoping statement to provide a starting point for public input. The District proposes to evaluate the impacts and feasibility for implementing a variety of activities along a segment of the Middle Fork Rock Creek, located in T4N, R15W, section 18, designed to restore stream channel and riparian vegetation conditions (see attached map).

### **Purpose and Need**

The riparian shrub community has markedly declined in many areas of the Pintler Ranger District over the past 15 years. The decline of the riparian shrub community, exacerbated by livestock grazing, use of the area by big-game and over-topping by conifers is resulting in reduced stream channel stability along this segment of the Middle Fork Rock Creek. The Middle Fork is a major spawning and rearing watershed for bull trout in the Rock Creek core area (USFWS 2005).

The project area is located primarily within Management Area F1 of the 1987 Deerlodge National Forest Plan. The Goals described for this management area are; to maintain and enhance riparian values for wildlife, recreation, fishery and aquatic habitat and water quality, to improve fisheries and wildlife habitat through specifically prescribed vegetation manipulation and/or structural means and to improve water quality, minimize erosion, and strengthen or protect streambanks through the same mechanisms (pg IV-34). The project area also includes two additional management areas outside of the riparian zone. These are management area C3 and E3. The goals for these MAs are described on pages IV-18 and IV-26. They direct us to manage for big-game habitat throughout the year, emphasizing forage production and cover needs.

### **Proposed Action**

This project contains several activities. These include:

- the harvest and sale of overstory lodgepole pine on approximately 10 acres of streamside terraces to reduce shading of the riparian shrub community,
- placement of some of the harvested trees into, and along the margin of 0.5 miles of the stream channel
- construction of 4-strand barbed wire livestock fencing around the entire perimeter of the project ( $\approx$  250 acres)
- planting willow slips and sedge plugs along 0.75 miles of stream
- construction of big-game exclosure fences (7 1/2' tall mesh) around about 20 acres of existing, but severely stressed, willows located in two locations within the project area.



### **Decision to be Made**

As the Pintler District Ranger, I will decide the extent, if any, of the proposed action to be implemented; where and how these activities would be conducted; and mitigation measures and monitoring requirements. Based upon our current knowledge of this project, it is probable that the project will meet the criteria for categorical exclusion from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2, Category 6). Category 6 allows for wildlife habitat improvement activities, including thinning, shrub regeneration and use of trees to improve habitat conditions.

Pursuant to clarification issued on October 19, 2005 by the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California in the Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck case, projects in which the cutting of trees for thinning or wildlife purposes occurs over an area greater than 5 contiguous acres are subject to notice, comment and appeal under the 36 CFR 215 rules. This project meets that criterion.

### **How to Get Involved**

This is your first opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis for this project. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that the potential effects of Federal actions and alternatives to those actions be disclosed to the public. All interested parties have an opportunity and are encouraged to participate in the process. We ask that you submit your comments in writing to assist in issue and alternative development. Issues identified during scoping will be used to develop alternatives to the proposed action. Please provide specific rationale for your comments and opinions to assist us in the analysis for the project.

Comments regarding this project should be submitted to:

District Ranger  
Pintler Ranger District  
88 10-A Business Loop  
Philipsburg, MT 59858  
Telephone 406-859-3211 FAX 406-859-3689  
Email: sgerdes@fs.fed.us subject: Middle Fork Riparian Enhancement

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. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person can 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.

To ensure your comments will be included in this analysis, comments should be postmarked by **July5, 2005**. Persons not responding to this mailing will not receive further information regarding this project. If you wish to participate in this environmental analysis or be kept informed of the process but are unable to respond to this scoping document, please contact **Steve Gerdes, Project Lead**, at the address or phone number above.

Sincerely,

*/s/CFBuchaGentry*

CHARLENE F. BUCHA GENTRY  
District Ranger

Enclosure