

SOCIAL

ANALYSIS AREA

The Basin Creek project area is adjacent to the community of Butte and comprises approximately 14,320 acres. Landownership in the project area is National Forest, but there are tracts of private land inholdings. The largest tract of private land is located in the Roosevelt Drive area and consists of approximately 80 private homes. The project is bordered on the south and west by the Continental Divide and on the north by private ownership. The primary features within the project are in addition to private lands are the Basin Creek Inventoried Roadless Area, Municipal Watershed, and Research Natural Area. The project area has a natural appearance to residents and visitors from several locations around Butte and the Highland Road (FS road #84). The Beaverhead-Deerlodge completed a Social Analysis in 2003 that includes information pertinent to this project.

History

Almost every aspect of life in the Butte area has been shaped by Butte's mining history. The gold rush of the 1860s brought prospectors to Butte. A silver boom followed the gold rush in the 1870s. By the 1880s, Butte was the world's biggest copper producer. The completion of the Utah Northern Railway in the early 1880s connected Butte to markets outside of Montana, which helped to accelerate Butte's commercial and industrial development (Social Assessment of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, 2003 – page 7-1). Most areas within the project area were harvested, then slashed and burned, during the mid to late 1800s to support Butte's mining activities. Eventually, open-pit mining replaced deep shaft mining, and the harvest of mass areas of trees stopped. Trees were allowed to mature to what is now an even aged stand of Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine as the dominant vegetation type in the project area.

Lifestyles

Many of the residents are third and fourth generation, and are part of a strong web of affiliation based on many factors including outdoor recreation (Social Assessment of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, 2003 – pages 7-30). Recreation is an important lifestyle component in Butte. Many of the recreation opportunities are located minutes from Butte on the National Forest, including the project area, also known as Butte's Backyard. Recreation opportunities in the project area include firewood gathering, driving for pleasure, OHV riding, hunting, and to a lesser extent hiking, horseback and mountain bike riding.

While Butte may be an urban area in terms of population density and governmental structure, interviews suggest that many of its residents share the values, interaction patterns, and attachments to place found in rural southwest Montana towns (Social Assessment of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, 2003 – page 7-31).

There is a growing population of residents moving to more rural areas such as Roosevelt Drive, Basin Creek and Blacktail Creek. Residents in the area are sensitive to forest issues and how it affects the aesthetics of the landscape and the potential for fire. Since the 2000 fire season and

outbreak of mountain pine beetle many people living in wildland urban interface have taken measures to protect their homes from potential fire starts by removing dead and dying trees.

User Conflicts

Within the project area there are user conflicts, but to a much lesser degree than other areas of the National Forest. Conflicts specific to the project area include access issues associated with private land and motorized and non-motorized use. Much of the project area is closed to public use, as it is part of the municipal watershed that supplies a large portion of Butte's water supply. The topography provides protection from conflicts between recreationists and the watershed due to the lack of access and rough terrain. There is little documentation of conflicts between users in this area.

Attitudes/Issues

Access to and use of public lands is important among residents of Butte. One of the topics addressed in the document was Major Uses or Land Cover Type. "Butte-Silver Bow County is experiencing one problem that is related in part to land use. Pine beetles have infected trees in Thompson Park and the Basin Creek watershed, which according to interview data is the source of about one third of the city's water. The county would like to remove the large heavily infected trees to help curb the disease, gain some economic benefit from the trees, and prevent a forest fire in Thompson Park..."(Social Analysis of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, 2003 – page 7-3). Since the mountain pine beetle outbreak in and around Butte there has been a central message from the public to address this issue to avoid the potential for fires in the urban area (public comments from recent timber proposals adjacent to the project area). Conclusions drawn from residents who have commented on the beetle infestation do not consider dead trees as part of the natural appearance of the landscape. They are also concerned about what the landscape would look like should a wildfire breakout in the project area as well as other areas overlooking Butte.

The Basin Creek Roadless Area is located on the west side of the project area and is part of the municipal watershed. Preserving roadless characteristics and non-motorized opportunities is important to residents, however, the proximity of this roadless area to many private homes, increases the concern to protect those homes.

Direct/Indirect Effects

The primary effects to the community and the social issues focus on the visual aesthetics to the area based on the No Action or Action Alternatives. The public has indicated their concern that dead trees and wildfires are not part of what many consider to be a natural appearing landscape. Under the No Action Alternative should a wildland fire start in the area; it would change the views from Butte and areas adjacent to the project area. Of equal concern is the overall aesthetics of the landscape if no harvest occurs and the landscape continues to change from dead and dying trees.

The proposed Action Alternatives would have temporary effects on the views from the Roosevelt Drive and Highland Road (FS road #84) following treatment. Alternative 4 would be the greatest due to the proposed harvest in the Inventoried Roadless Area. Over time the effects of the action alternatives would diminish. A complete description of effects to visuals can be found on pages 3.252-3.265. The action alternatives would have a positive effect on the community since they

have indicated their desire, in recent comments to other projects in the area, to see the diseased trees removed from the landscape to protect the forest from further spread of the disease and fire.

Cumulative Effects

Based on their comments, the public has supported past actions related to the removal of timber. Reasonable foreseeable actions appear to be consistent with the public's desire to address the mountain pine beetle outbreak and subsequent issues associated with the potential for fires and to control the continued spread of the disease.