



Flathead National Forest

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Kalispell, MT 59901

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News Release

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Flathead National Forest Releases Proposed Action for the Revision of the Forest Plan and Amendments for Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy

KALISPELL, MONTANA – March 5, 2015

The Flathead National Forest is releasing for public comment the proposed action for the revision of the land and resource management plan (forest plan) as directed by the National Forest Management Act. The proposed action for the revised forest plan includes management direction to support a variety of proposed and possible actions that may occur on the plan area over the next ~15 years, or life of the plan. Acting Forest Supervisor Sharon LaBrecque commented that “the proposed action reflects the overall theme of the 2012 planning rule by its integration of ecological, social, and economic sustainability as equally important components for management of NFS lands.”

The proposed action describes the Flathead National Forest’s distinctive roles and contributions within the broader landscape and details forest-wide, management area, and geographic area desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines. The management direction in the proposed action focuses on maintaining and restoring ecosystem and species diversity, and managing for forests that are resilient to disturbances and stressors, including climate change. The purpose is to provide for long-term sustainability of ecosystem values and desired ecosystem services. The proposed action identifies suitable uses of National Forest System lands and estimates of the planned timber sale quantity and long-term sustained yield for the Forest. The proposed action identifies priority watersheds for restoration, and includes the evaluation of wilderness inventory areas and eligible wild and scenic rivers.

The Flathead National Forest is concurrently releasing an amendment to integrate the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy (“strategy”) into the forest plans for the Helena, Kootenai, Lewis and Clark, and Lolo National Forests. The Flathead National Forest is incorporating the relevant portions of the strategy as part of its plan revision process. The proposed amendment provides grizzly bear habitat-related management direction within the portions of each forest that lie within the NCDE. This is a prerequisite for eventual

delisting of the NCDE grizzly bear population under the Endangered Species Act. The Forest Service will prepare a single environmental impact statement (EIS) for its revised forest plan and the amendments.

The following community meetings are planned to provide additional information and address questions related to the revision and amendment proposed action:

- March 17, 2015, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Flathead National Forest Supervisors Office, 650 Wolfpack Way, Kalispell MT 59901
- March 19, 2015, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Riverstone Family Lodge, 6370 US Hwy 93N, Eureka, MT 59917
- April 7, 2015, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Seeley Lake Community Center, Seeley Lake, MT 59868
- April 8*, 2015, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Northern Rockies Mtn. Heritage Center (Ft. Missoula), 3255 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, MT 59804
- April 9*, 2015, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Superior Ranger Station Conference Room, Superior, MT 59872
- April 14*, 2015, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Lincoln Community Hall, 404 Main St., Lincoln, MT 59639
- April 15*, 2015, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Stage Stop Inn, 1005 Main Ave. North, Choteau, MT 59422

*Meetings in Missoula, Superior, Lincoln and Choteau will primarily address the amendment proposed action.

The Flathead National Forest plan revision website provides the full proposed action text for the revision, describing preliminary desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and other plan content; the 2014 Assessment; summaries of the public meetings and public meeting materials, and public comments. The revision component of the proposed action is located at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/flathead/fpr. The amendment component of the proposed action can be found at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/flathead/gbamend. Links to the 2012 planning rule and the draft NCDE Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy can be found on these websites as well.

Project leader Joe Krueger noted, “The release of the proposed action initiates the scoping process. We are seeking public input to guide the development of the environmental impact statement and to further develop and refine the Flathead NF revised plan and grizzly bear habitat management for the four amendment forests.” For further information about the project, contact Joe Krueger, Forest Planner, Flathead National Forest, 650 Wolfpack Way, Kalispell, Montana 59901, (406) 758-5243, or at flatheadplanrevision@fs.fed.us.

Being responsive to the public collaborative processes that have been undertaken on the Flathead National Forest over the past few years was a key consideration in development of the proposed action. More specifically, the proposed action:

- Emphasizes front country recreation opportunities by identifying areas around Lakeside, Bigfork, and Whitefish for additional recreation opportunities.
- Recommends 188,000 acres for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System including the Jewel Basin and the Tuchuck-Whale areas as well as additions to Mission Mountain, Bob Marshall, and Great Bear Wilderness areas.
- Continues management standards for riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs), but with modifications that provide more flexibility to treat vegetation within RHCAs to achieve desired conditions.
- Identifies changes in areas suitable for over-snow vehicle use based on the public’s desire to open some areas and close others. The proposed action increases suitable acres open to over-snow vehicle use in the lower end of Big Creek from McGuinness Creek to the North Fork

Road, south to Canyon Creek while decreasing an equivalent amount of acres open to over-snow vehicle use in the upper end of Sullivan Creek, Slide Creek and Tin Creek. The proposed changes would need to undergo subsequent site-specific analysis in order to be implemented.

- Continues management standards for lynx habitat, but with some important clarification and consideration of long-term desired conditions at a landscape level.
- Identifies 22 rivers as eligible for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.
- Places an increased emphasis on social and economic sustainability, while maintaining ecological sustainability. Many of the changes in the plan, such as increases in suitable base acres (over the 2006 planning effort), more flexibility in where and how to conduct vegetation management, and additional motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, have the potential to provide additional jobs and income in the Flathead valley.
- Increases recognition of the importance of the suite of ecosystem services provided by the forests, beyond those typically thought of such as timber, grazing, and recreation, water quality and quantity, clean air, tribal and cultural uses, and huckleberries.
- Increases recognition of partnerships with federal and non-federal entities in helping to achieve desired conditions and improve overall resources management. Partnerships, such as the Whitefish Range partnership, and/or collaborative processes within the local communities fosters relationships that help accomplish projects in the communities' and Flathead NF's shared interest.
- The Flathead NF, in consultation with MTFWP and other experts, screened a lengthy list of species, and developed a list of 9 potential wildlife Species of Conservation Concern (SCCs), 2 potential aquatic SCCs, and 13 potential botanical SCCs. The Regional Forester will make a decision on which species are carried forward as final SCC.
- Provides for timber outputs that move vegetation toward desired conditions while considering multiple resource objectives. Initial modelling efforts indicate a Projected Timber Sale Quantity (PTSQ) of approximately 28 million board feet annually. The Projected Wood Sale Quantity (PWSQ) (all wood products) is estimated at approximately 30-34 million board feet annually.
- Ensures that habitat protections specific to the grizzly bear are consistent on key National Forest System lands within the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem (NCDE), by incorporating the relevant habitat management direction from the grizzly bear conservation strategy.

Management areas in the proposed action

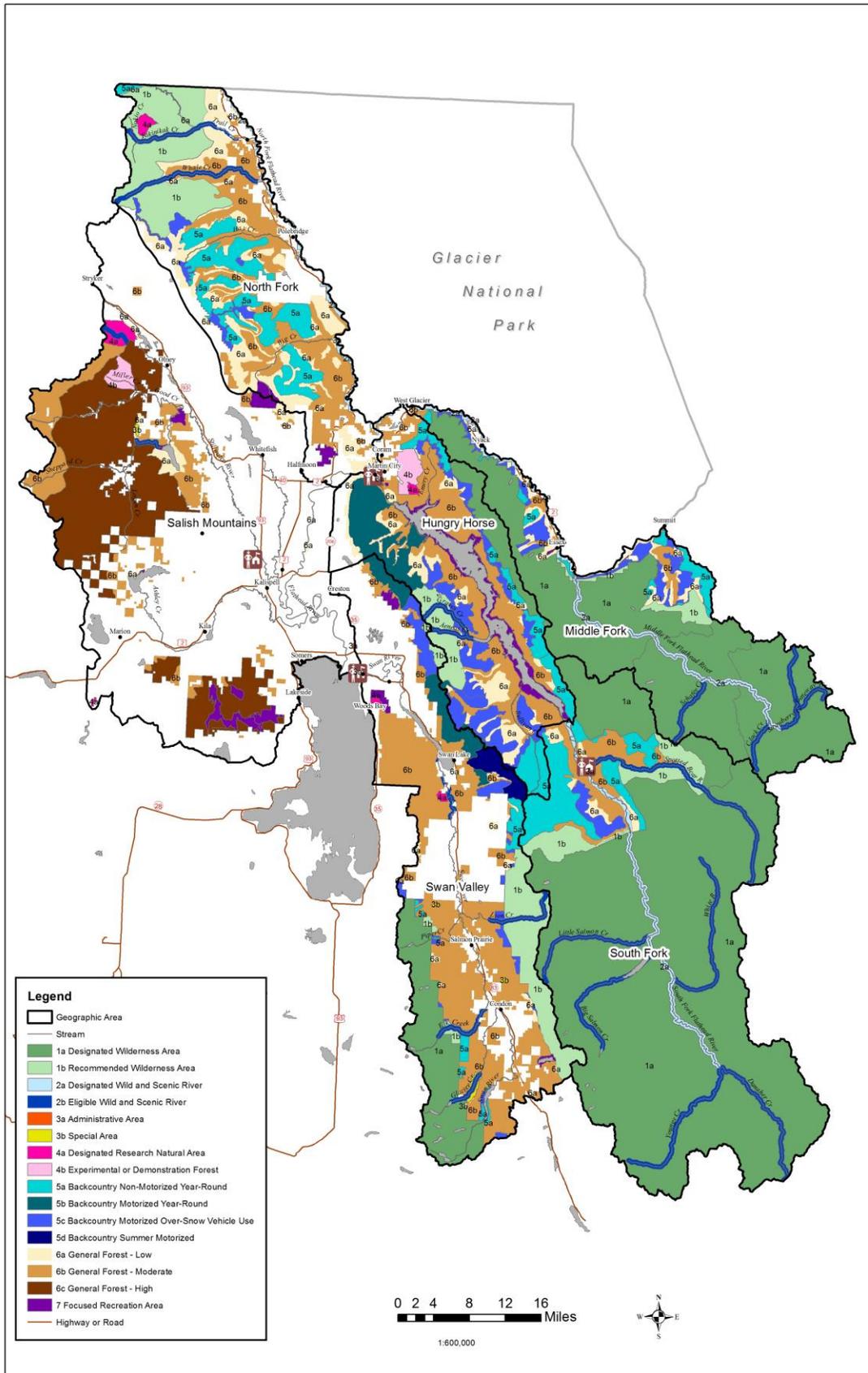
The National Forest System land within the Flathead National Forest boundary has been divided into seven management areas (MA), each with a different emphasis which is intended to direct management activities on that particular piece of land. MA allocations are specific to areas across the Forest with similar management needs and desired conditions. Table and map follow.

Acres and percent of Flathead National Forest management areas

MA	Name	Categories	Acres ^{a, b}	Percent ^b
1	Wilderness	1a Designated	1,072,219	44.8
		1b Recommended	188,206	7.9
2	Wild and Scenic Rivers	2a Designated	17,373	0.7
		2b Eligible	18,227	0.8
3	Special and Administrative Areas	3a Existing	425	<0.0
		3b Proposed	1,487	0.1
4	Research Natural Areas; Experimental and Demonstration Forests	4a Research Natural Areas	7,804	0.3
		4b Experimental and Demonstration Forests	11,708	0.5
5	Backcountry	5a Non-motorized Year-round	148,323	6.2
		5b Motorized Year-round, wheeled vehicle use only on designated routes/areas	50,160	2.1
		5c Motorized over-snow vehicle use	97,743	4.1
		5d Wheeled motorized vehicle use only on designated routes/areas	10,044	0.4
6	General Forest	6a Low	131,139	5.5
		6b Moderate	435,773	18.2
		6c High	169,068	7.1
7	Focused Recreation Areas		33,360	1.4
Total NFS Lands			2,393,058	100

a. Some MA acreages may overlap (e.g., MA1b – Recommended Wilderness may have an overlapping MA4 – RNA).

b. Acres and percentage from GIS dataset. The official acres for NFS lands and wilderness areas can be found in the land are report, <http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar-index.shtml> .



caption: Flathead National Forest management areas.