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Comment Period Extended For Marshall Woods Project

Missoula, Montana (April 2, 2015) – The Missoula Ranger District has extended the public comment period for the Marshall Woods Restoration Project to April 30, 2015 to allow more opportunities for the public to learn about the details of the project and provide comment.

“The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area (RNRA) is such a high value recreation area for the local community that we wanted to provide additional time for people to be a part of this process,” said Jennifer Hensiek, Missoula District Ranger.

“By extending the comment period we have the opportunity talk in more detail about the needs we have identified in the project area, like enhancing forest resilience, emulating fire’s natural role in ecosystems, and providing education and recreation opportunities.

“We want to remind people that we have never had a “preferred alternative” and no decision has been made. A vital aspect of any project is always public comment. So, whatever alternative is selected – or if we decide to select actions from various alternatives – which has always been a critical piece of how we could approach this – the final decision will protect the recreation values of the RNRA.”

The Marshall Woods Restoration Project is a collaborative effort with the Lolo Restoration Committee that began in 2008. The Lolo NF along with the LRC have committed a lot of time and effort to engage the community through multiple open houses and field visits, trailhead postings and direct communication over the past 5 years. Part of this ongoing effort and the extended comment period will include additional opportunities for discussions and field visits with those interested in learning more about this project.

Following public scoping in 2010, the project’s planning team developed a range of alternatives to address the public comments. While discussions seem to be focused on the proposed treatments in the main Rattlesnake corridor, it is important to realize that the project’s proposals include more than this. The environmental assessment, which can viewed on-line at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mashallwoods, includes four alternatives: Alternative A is No Action but includes ongoing already approved actions and maintenance activities; Alternative B includes commercial tree harvest, log hauling, and improvements to roads and trails in the main Rattlesnake corridor, Woods Gulch and Marshall Canyon as well as small tree cutting and prescribed fire; Alternative C includes commercial tree harvest and log hauling and improvements to roads and trails in Marshall/Woods Gulch area only with small tree cutting and prescribed fire in the main corridor; and, Alternative D includes small tree cutting and prescribed fire only to treat forest fuels with no commercial tree harvest. Temporary roads constructed in Alternatives B and C would be “rolled up” and restored to a natural condition after they were used for project implementation.

All of the action alternatives include additional resource improvement activities such as road obliteration, conversion of old roads to trails, weed control, hand thinning and prescribed fire. Given the sensitivity of this area, an extensive collection of measures to reduce potential impacts was developed.

According to Hensiek, “We take our stewardship responsibility very seriously. The project was designed to maintain outstanding wildlife habitat, recreation, and historic and paramount watershed values; features of the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area that Congress specifically recognized when establishing the area. When developing the project, the collaborative identified how the project’s scientifically-based treatments could be used as basis for education and research. Due to its close proximity to Missoula and the University of Montana, what better place is there to demonstrate how various management activities can be used to restore the forest and maintain the values important to the public who recreate on the Lolo?”

“I’m encouraged by the passion people have for this unique place, which so many associate with recreation and its fundamental place in their lifestyle,” Hensiek said. “The next step for all of us is to continue to focus on the specifics of the project, remembering we have a lot of flexibility at this point, and be a part of a good decision that benefits the land and the public. I’m confident we can do that.”

Information about the project, as well as field trip details will be posted at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/marshallwoods.

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