

File Code: 1920/5100

Date: September 22, 2011

Subject: **Fire Management Amendment to the 1987 Forest Plan - Decision Notice
and Finding of No Significant Impact / Finding of Non-Significant Amendment**

Dear Interested Party:

After careful consideration of all public comments, the environmental analyses and alternatives developed for the proposed Fire Management Amendment to the 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan (Environmental Assessment, May 2011), I have decided to amend the Forest Plan management direction, standards and guidelines pertaining to unplanned wildland fire (Alternative 2). This action only applies to National Forest System lands under the management of the Gallatin National Forest in Gallatin, Park, Sweet Grass, Madison and Meagher counties in Montana.

As the Responsible Official for this decision, I am implementing the amendment (EA, Alternative 2) to meet several objectives. First, this action will better align the 1987 Forest Plan with current and future federal wildland fire management policies. Second, the amendment will allow fire managers the opportunity to consider and use a variety of fire management response strategies for unplanned ignitions that occur on the Gallatin National Forest, including managing fire to achieve resource management objectives as specified in the Forest Plan. And finally, this effort will better align the Gallatin National Forest's wildland fire management objectives with those of our neighboring Greater Yellowstone Area national forests and national parks, therefore providing more opportunities for coordination, collaboration and management of wildland fire events occurring along administrative boundaries.

My decision also incorporates the fire and fuel standards already provided in Forest Service manual 2324.2 and the two wilderness fire management guidebooks as the fire standard direction for Management Area 4 (wilderness and recommended wilderness areas). The sole reason for this action is to eliminate the need for two stand-alone wilderness fire management guidebooks; thus inserting that information formally in the Forest Plan through the fire management amendment effort.

By choosing Alternative 2, I am eliminating the outdated and obsolete information provided in the Forest Plan "Fire" Appendix E, and formally removing this appendix from Forest Plan direction.

There would be no changes to the individual management area goals and objectives with my decision to implement Alternative 2; only an update to the fire standards, which would be applied to all management areas. Fire management strategies and decisions would continue to be responsive to the goals and objectives described for each management area.

As disclosed in the Finding of No Significant Impact (DN, FONSI Appendix A), I believe the environmental effects of implementing Alternative 2 would not be significant. The amendment is a programmatic action that is not directly related to a specific project. It applies to unplanned, naturally-ignited (lightning-caused) wildland fire. Therefore, my decision to implement Alternative 2 would result in a non-significant amendment to the FP, pursuant to 36 CFR 219.10(f) and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12. My decision meets the requirements under the National Forest Management Act of 1976 and regulations found under 36 CFR 219.



Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217.3. A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 217.

A written appeal must be filed within 45 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice of this decision in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Montana. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner and meets the content requirements of 36 CFR 217.9. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source. Mary E. Erickson, Forest Supervisor, Gallatin National Forest, is the Responsible Official.

Paper appeals must be submitted to

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Reviewing Officer
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect or Rich Text Format (RTF) to appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received.

For additional information or questions concerning this Decision or the appeal process, please contact Julie Shea, Interdisciplinary Team Leader at 406/587-6706.

Sincerely,



MARY C. ERICKSON
Forest Supervisor