



## Flathead National Forest

## Media Release

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# Public Comment Sought for Western Larch Cone Collection Project

KALISPELL, MT - The Flathead National Forest is proposing to collect western larch (*Larix occidentalis*) cones in order to acquire seeds that are vital to meeting the anticipated reforestation needs on the Flathead National Forest. Because of the inherent safety concerns of climbing larch trees (larch trees have brittle stems/ branches and hard bark that easily flakes off in large slabs) collection trees would be felled for safe cone collection.

Shooting cone-bearing branches off trees to collect the cones is another method used for cone collection. This method is time consuming and is not deemed to be an efficient way of collecting larch cones within the short harvest period (2-3 weeks). In addition, larch cones are very small (size of a walnut to a large grape) and significant loss would occur when the cone-bearing branch falls to the ground.

After cones are collected, the felled trees would remain on site. About 270 trees would need to be felled over a 10-year span to meet current anticipated needs. Seed requirements may be met with fewer trees depending on crop abundance. For example, if trees are producing 1/3 bushel of cones, 270 trees would need to be felled but if trees are producing 1 bushel of cones, 90 trees would need to be felled.

To maximize cone production and minimize the amount of tree mortality, larger diameter trees are preferred. Trees selected for cone collection would generally be between 22 and 28 inches diameter at breast height (DBH). Trees chosen for seed collection would be dominant and co-dominant trees that display vigorous growth with healthy crowns and are relatively insect and disease free. Trees selected for cone collection would not be older than 200 years. As larch trees age, their seed viability declines.

An individual seed lot collection in western larch should have a minimum of 20 trees separated by 200 feet in distance. This means approximately 1 tree per acre within a given area could be selected. It is anticipated that each cone-bearing tree will produce between one-third of a bushel and one and one-half bushels of western larch cones. The location of seed collection areas is not determined until a cone survey is done in the summer to determine if there is a sufficient cone crop. Seed trees chosen would be within one mile from a road. Seed collection typically occurs for a period of two to three weeks beginning in early September.

Where possible, cone collection will be focused in existing timber sale areas. However, cone collection could occur in other areas on the Flathead National Forest where adequate crops are identified. Melissa Jenkins, Forest Silviculturist for the Flathead Forest said "the amount of seed currently on hand is well below levels necessary to meet our planting needs. Because western larch cone crops do not occur on a regular basis in western Montana, we need to capture larch seed when a sufficient cone crop does occur. It is likely that cone harvest wouldn't occur in some years due to the sporadic seed cycles of larch."

Your comments and concerns regarding this project are important to us. Please address any comments or questions by April 16, 2012 to the project team leader, Marsha Moore, at 758-5325, [memoore@fs.fed.us](mailto:memoore@fs.fed.us), or to Flathead National Forest, 650 Wolfpack Way, Kalispell, MT 59901.

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