

Lonesome Wood Vegetation Management 2 – Summary of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)

The FEIS is available for review. The FEIS was revised to address comments received on the Draft EIS and to update information related to the 2001 Roadless Rule. We received comments from eight individuals, groups or agencies on the Draft EIS, some supportive letters and some in opposition. Appendix C of the FEIS includes Response to Comments. The nature of the comments were varied but concentrated on climate change, fire science, old growth, snags and dependent species, roads, scenery, water quality, weeds, management indicator species, moose and big game, sensitive species, threatened and endangered species and habitat. A Record of Decision is expected soon.

The project area is located about 12 air miles west of West Yellowstone, MT along the westshore of Hebgen Lake and the Hebgen Lake Road (FSR #167). This project is designed to increase firefighter and public safety, reduce wildland fire risks to both private and Forest Service properties that have been identified in the WUI including the evacuation routes, and to reinvigorate aspen forest. The primary access road is 18 miles long; starting as a two-lane road off of Hwy 20 then tapers to a narrow dead end.

Three alternatives were analyzed in detail. Alternative 1 – The No Action Alternative, in which the project area would have no fuels reduction or aspen reinvigoration. The area would be subject to natural or ongoing changes only. Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action is designed to reduce the wildland fire risk to life and property in the wildland urban interface and evacuation routes for this WUI and to reinvigorate aspen forest. The proposed action meets the purpose and need most effectively and minimizes potential impact to all other resources. Alternative 2 was the preferred alternative identified in the Draft EIS. Alternative 3 – Mitigated Alternative is designed to address the same goals as Alternative 2 with the reconfiguration of units and reduction of acres designed to reduce impacts to moose winter habitat. The action alternatives respond to national, regional and Forest priorities to reduce risk to life and property in the WUI. The alternatives are consistent with the Gallatin Forest Plan and all applicable laws and direction. The action alternatives incorporate secondary activities, mitigation measures, restoration actions and monitoring requirements in order to achieve the full benefit of proposed treatments and to minimize potential impacts to various resources. The alternatives were also designed to address landowner and permittee concerns. As proposed, all project work would be completed within 6-9 years, once implementation begins after a decision. Nine additional alternatives were considered but not carried forward for detailed study.

The following issues were analyzed: *Fire/Fuels, Inventoried Roadless Areas, Moose Winter Habitat, Grizzly Bear, Air Quality, Economics, Fish and Amphibian, Invasive Weeds, Range, Recreation, Outfitting and Special Uses, Scenery, Sensitive Plants, Soils, Transportation, and more Wildlife issues – Canada Lynx, Management Indicator Species, Migratory Birds, Sensitive Species, and Other Species.*

Approximately 370 acres of the proposed treatments are in the Lionhead Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). About 150 acres of proposed treatments are in a part of the IRA that is substantially altered. The Roadless Rule (2001) allows harvest in these areas. The remaining 220 acres of treatment in the IRA, in unit 2, is designed to restore ecosystem composition and structure by removing generally small diameter trees. Thinning is focused on ladder fuels, which are generally less than six inches in diameter in this unit. No temporary or permanent roads are proposed in the inventoried roadless area. As proposed, the treatments adhere to current direction for IRAs.

Alternative 2 treatments would achieve 2375 acres of desired fire behavior in the WUI and evacuation route. Approximately 18 miles of evacuation route would be maintained or improved. Approximately 1605 acres containing aspen stands or remnants of aspen stands would be treated to enhance aspen health and vigor. In comparison, Alternative 3 would include about 305 fewer acres resulting in 1-1/2 to 2 miles of the evacuation route being untreated. The last 2 miles of the Hebgen Lake Road are the most isolated and, as a result, of great concern. The no action alternative leaves the entire area untreated. Alternative 2 is the preferred alternative. This alternative most effectively meets purpose and need for action and mitigation and project design effectively address environmental and social issues raised by the public and agency specialists both in the Forest Service and partner agencies. The primary difference between the alternatives is that the evacuation route beyond Cozy Corner (unit14) is not treated in Alternative 3. Further, the environmental effects that alternative 3 were designed to address, moose winter habitat, are minimal in both alternatives. Alternative 2 will reinvigorate more aspen forest.

For additional information concerning the FEIS, visit the Gallatin Forest Webpage at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/gallatin/landmanagement> then go to Projects /Lonesome Wood 2 or contact Teri Seth, Team Leader, Gallatin National Forest, Bozeman Ranger District, 3710 Fallon St Ste C, Bozeman, MT, 59718, (406) 522-2520.

