



**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** January 16, 2013

**RE: Opportunity to Comment Millie Fire Roadside Hazard Tree Removal**

Greetings. We thought you might be interested in this proposal since you live nearby or have indicated an interest in this type of project in recent months. The Bozeman Ranger District is asking for comments related to a proposal to remove fire affected trees that pose a falling hazard along approximately 15 miles of road within the Millie Fire perimeter. A vicinity map is enclosed. Trees within two tree lengths, up to 200 feet from a road that pose a hazard would be removed. The purpose of hazard tree removal is for safety of road users and maintenance of the roads.

The hazard to the roadways was created when the Millie Fire burned through the area killing most trees in its' path. Dead and dying trees are expected to fall into the roadway especially when combined with steep slopes. This situation will create conditions likely to result in sliding and rolling trees landing in the roadway creating snag hazards and roadway blockages. These trees present an immediate hazard so timely removal is important.

Hazard trees have been identified along the following Forest System Roads: Storm Castle Road (FSR #132), French Creek Road (FSR #2506), Lower Smith Creek Road (FSR #3126), Orchid Gulch Road (FSR #6985) and FSR #6970. Mechanized equipment would be required to stay on the established road prisms during removal of material from within roadside treatment areas. Activity related slash would be scattered on the ground. Approximately 730 acres will be evaluated for salvage of roadside hazard trees with an expectation that much of the roadway either does not have hazard trees and some of the roadway was not burned. These areas would not be treated. Early estimates indicate fewer than 300 acres would need roadside maintenance.

Riparian areas would be avoided. Forest land would be regenerated through natural regeneration or planting. Disturbed areas such as landings would be re-vegetated and stabilized if needed. Species to be removed include Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fire, and lodgepole pine. Implementation would begin in early summer 2013.

A preliminary assessment indicates that this proposal falls within the category of action listed in the Forest Service NEPA handbook (FSH 1909.15 ch. 30) that is excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of these category 36 CFR 220.6 (d)(4). Category 4, identifies the Repair and Maintenance of Roads, Trails and Landline boundaries. Preliminary analysis indicates that the degree of potential effect from the proposed action to the following resources is expected to be no effect or minimal effect resulting in no extraordinary circumstances.

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Preliminary conclusion</i>
Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species	The proposal to remove dead and dying hazard trees along existing roads would likely have some disturbance impacts to <u>wildlife species</u> due to noise from equipment and human presence. Effects to species of concern resulting from disturbance impact would be offset by the fact that salvage would occur along roads that are open to either the public and/or administrative use.  Habitat alternation would be negligible for all species of management



<i>Resource</i>	<i>Preliminary conclusion</i>
	<p>concern (threatened, sensitive or management indicator) except for the Black backed woodpecker and other migratory birds species that are associated with recently burned forest habitat. However impacts to this habitat component would be minor considering the small proportion of the burn area affected (est. 300 acres of tree removal) relative to the size of the burn (10,000 acres).</p> <p>For grizzly bear and Canada lynx the project would not likely adversely affect the species or critical habitat because habitat impacts would be minor and disturbance impacts would be temporary and partly offset by proximity to an open road.</p> <p>For sensitive species (black backed wood pecker, peregrine falcon, gray wolf, wolverine) the proposal may impact individuals or habitat due to slight habitat alteration and minor disturbance impacts. For northern goshawk there is a slight potential for disturbance but no nesting habitat alteration. For elk there is slight potential for disturbance and habitat alteration.</p>
Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.	Riparian areas would be avoided.
Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas	Not present in treatment area.
Inventoried roadless areas. Research Natural Areas.	Not present in treatment area.
American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.	No effect. Sites would be avoided.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. The comment period will end no sooner than February 19, 2013.

Written comments must be submitted to: Lisa Stoeffler, District Ranger, Attn: Millie Roadside, Bozeman Ranger District, 3710 Fallon St., Ste. C, Bozeman, MT 59718 or fax to 406/522-2528. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone 406/522-2520 or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to fs-comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to

appeal must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6. Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from: Teri Seth, NEPA Team Leader or Keith Konen, Silviculturist at the Bozeman Ranger District or on the Gallatin Forest webpage:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/gallatin/landmanagement/projects> under *Millie Fire Roadside hazard Tree Removal*.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217 (if applicable). Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within seven days.

Sincerely,

**/s/ Lisa Stoeffler**

LISA STOEFFLER

District Ranger

Attachment: Two maps