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Montana Tri-Forest Federal Sustained-Yield Unit Management Plan

March 2, 2026

Purpose and Goals of Sustained-Yield Unit

The Montana Tri-Forest Federal Sustained-Yield Unit (Unit) is being established in accordance with the Act of March 29, 1944 (Sustained Yield Forest Management Act or Sustained Yield Act), 16 U.S.C. §§ 583-583i. The purpose of the Unit is to maintain a predictable volume commitment and a continuous supply of forest products. Thereby, promoting stabilization of the existing forest products industry and manufacturing facilities in the Unit who are economically dependent on that supply of the effected communities of three National Forests in the State of Montana, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Custer Gallatin, and Helena-Lewis and Clark. Maintenance of community stability will occur through the sale of National Forest System timber and forest products that is expected to maintain existing local processing infrastructure, encourage investments in new processing infrastructure, and support the continued presence of processing infrastructure over time. The Unit will operate as long as the purposes of the Sustained Yield Act are being met.

Over the initial 10-year period, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Custer Gallatin, and Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forests expect to offer 350 million board feet of commercial timber (approximately 35 million board feet annually)¹ within the declared Montana Tri-Forest Federal Sustained-Yield Unit Act. This management plan describes how the expected volume will be sold consistent with the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Custer Gallatin, and Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Land Management Plans (forest plans). This management plan is based on the overarching goals of these three forest plans. In addition to maintaining stability of the effected communities, this management plan is expected to provide more sustainable and predictable timber supply that increases economic opportunities for local communities, as well as improve forest and watershed health and reduce wildfire risk. The sale of National Forest System timber within the Unit will be achieved through an array of available authorities and tools, including stewardship contracts and agreements, Good Neighbor Authority sales, and conventional timber sale contracts. This management plan will be updated periodically to determine whether the volume of commercial timber offered satisfies the purposes of the Unit, and to review and adjust the details of the plan as necessary.

A. Introduction

A1. Statutory Requirements

The Montana Tri-Forest Federal Sustained-Yield Unit is authorized by Section 3 of the Sustained Yield Act (16 U.S.C. § 583b). The Sustained Yield Act, authorized the establishment of sustained-yield units to, among other things, promote the stability of forest communities through continuous supplies of timber and forest products. This Unit will be managed in accordance with the Sustained Yield Act, the National Forest Management Act of 1976, the respective forest plans as described throughout this management plan, and other applicable laws and regulations.

A2. Purpose of Sustained-Yield Unit

The Unit will maintain community stability, provide continuous supply of timber, and improve forest health through the sale and delivery of timber to manufacturing facilities located within the Unit (see the

¹ This volume will be achieved 10 full fiscal years after this sustained-yield management plan goes into effect.

Geographic Area section below for more details). Appendix 2 provides a list of the existing manufacturing facilities within the Unit. Sun Mountain Lumber mills in Deerlodge and Livingston are the largest primary sawlog manufacturing facilities within the Unit.

The records of decision for each forest plan describe the projected timber harvest for each forest. The timber supply associated with this Unit is a portion of the overall timber available on the three national forests. The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Land and Resource Management Plan (2009), prepared under the 1982 Planning Rule, identifies an allowable sale quantity of 14 million board feet of timber per year (140 million board feet in any 10-year period). The Custer Gallatin Land Management Plan (2022), prepared under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) 219) has an estimated 10 million board feet per year in the record of decision. And the Helena-Lewis and Clark Land Management Plan (2021), prepared under the 2012 planning rule, has an estimate of timber production of about 27 million board feet per year. For all the forests, the constrained estimates are outputs that represent what can be generated given the ecological conditions, regulatory framework, and budget scenarios on each National Forest.

B. Geographic Area

B1. Sustained-Yield Unit Description

The Unit includes National Forest System lands:

- (1) on all Ranger Districts within the administrative boundary of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge;
- (2) within the administrative boundary of the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forests on the Townsend, Lincoln, Helena, Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs, and Judith-Musselshell Ranger Districts; and,
- (3) within the administrative boundary of the Custer Gallatin National Forest on the Hebgen Lake, Bozeman, Yellowstone, Gardiner, and Beartooth Ranger Districts.

These National Forest System lands were selected because they are within the same manufacturing area as shown on the map of the Unit (see Appendix 1).

The Unit includes the entirety of the following counties: Beaverhead, Madison, Gallatin, Park, Sweetgrass, Stillwater, Golden Valley, Wheatland, Judith Basin, Cascade, Meagher, Broadwater, Jefferson, Deerlodge, and Silver Bow counties. Additionally, the Unit includes portions of the following counties: Carbon County west of Highways 212 and 310; Musselshell County west of Highway 87; Yellowstone County west of Highway 87 and north of Interstate 90; Fergus County south of Highway 81 to junction Highway 191 then south to Lewistown, Montana then south of Highway 200 to the junction with Highway 87; Lewis and Clark County south of Scapegoat Wilderness; Powell County south of Highway 200; and Granite County east of the Lolo National Forest.

B2. Timber Emphasis Lands

Each forest plan identifies lands suitable for timber production. Suitable lands will be emphasized for timber treatment and removal through sales of timber and forest products. Timber production is the purposeful growing, tending, harvesting, and regeneration of trees to be cut into logs, bolts, or other round sections for industrial or consumer use (36 CFR 219.19). The lands suitable for timber production under each forest plan considers regulation and policy that influence the management (see Table 1). For details on how suitable timber lands were identified, please refer to Chapter 3 of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (2009),

Appendix H of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land Management Plan, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (2021), and Appendix B of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land Management Plan, Custer Gallatin National Forest (2021).

Table 1. Acres and percent of suitable timber lands on each National Forest

National Forest Unit	Total NFS Acres	Suitable Timber Lands	Percent
Custer Gallatin ¹	2,445,371	327,914	13.41%
Helena-Lewis & Clark	2,883,227	368,563	12.78%
Beaverhead-Deerlodge	3,380,000	284,000	8.40%
Total	8,310,035	980,477	11.80%

1. Excludes the Ashland and Sioux Ranger Districts

Lands prohibited from timber harvest were not considered part of the suitable timber lands for the Unit. This includes designated wilderness areas, recommended wilderness areas, wilderness study areas and research natural areas on all three National Forests. Each forest has additional areas where timber harvest is prohibited in their forest plans that are not included as part of the Unit. Examples include Thompson Park on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and some backcountry areas on the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

Suitable timber lands, with additional refinements, were used as the starting point for delineation of timber emphasis lands within the Unit. The refinements are based on additional forest plan guidance from each plan. Timber harvest may be generated within the Unit from lands permitting harvest outside suitable lands, however, the majority of the timber volume is expected to come from these timber emphasis lands. Timber removal from the lands described below will be considered through the project-level planning process.

- Lands identified as “may be suitable for timber production” in individual forest plans were not included on the map because additional considerations need to be applied during the project level planning processes.
- Inventoried roadless areas were not included on the map because any timber removal must maintain the roadless characteristics and meet the exceptions within the 2001 Roadless Rule. These areas may be analyzed in site-specific planning processes.
- Approximately 0.5 miles on either side of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, Nez-Perce National Historic Trail, Pioneer Scenic Byway and East Rosebud Wild and Scenic River were not included on the map because these areas require additional considerations based on forest plan direction.
- The Pyror Mountains Geographic Area on the Custer Gallatin National Forest was not included on the map because it is not within the same manufacturing area as the other portions of the Beartooth Ranger District.

The result is that the Unit contains 925,024 acres of timber emphasis lands (see Appendix 1). Prior to implementation, vegetation management activities (including timber harvest) must be consistent with the applicable forest plan and all other applicable laws and regulations, including the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), Endangered Species Act (1973), National Historic Preservation Act (1966), Clean Water Act (1972), and Healthy Forest Restoration Act (2003). Application of the forest plan direction may result in some acres not being treated, even on the timber emphasis lands. Examples include application of streamside management zones and riparian management zones. Additional lands may be added or

removed through the site-specific planning processes subject to the National Environmental Policy Act, its implementing regulations, and other applicable laws and regulations.

C. Socioeconomic Summary

The manufacturing area includes 15 full counties and 7 partial counties, all within Montana and described in the Section B. Geographic Area above. The social and economic fabric of each of the counties benefits from and primarily relies on timber harvested from the Forests, either directly or indirectly. Several of the counties also include primary timber processing facilities that purchase federal timber from the Unit.

Nearly 28 percent of the land in the 22-county geographic area is National Forest System lands, compared to about 8 percent National Forest System lands throughout the country². Therefore, Forest Service decisions and actions in the area have a proportionally higher ability to affect the lives and well-being of residents.

As of 2024, the combined area had just 2.8 percent unemployment, compared to 4 percent nationally. However, at \$65,000 annually, the average earnings per job in the area were about 16 percent lower than the national average. Commodity sectors are a vital part of the economy in this predominantly rural area. Residents are employed in agricultural jobs roughly twice the national average. The percentage of employment in timber harvesting and processing in the 22-County area is near the national average; however, timber employment is especially important in Powell, Granite, and Carbon counties—each of these counties have timber-related employment at roughly six times the national rate. This makes it especially critical for these counties to maintain their existing timber infrastructure and related skilled labor, as the economic contributions extend throughout the manufacturing area and to other sectors of the economy. Powell County is an especially vital center for community stability within the Unit due to its relatively large timber processing infrastructure. Furthermore, the expected sustained flow of timber from the Unit will maintain stability of existing infrastructure and encourage additional investments, creating more jobs and economic stability for the affected communities.

When federal timber is sold and harvested, a series of economic effects is triggered, and jobs and income are supported directly and indirectly through the “ripple effects” that begin when timber enters the economy.

Foresters, loggers, truck drivers, and wood product manufacturers are some of the workers that are directly supported by harvesting and processing federal timber. Additionally, firms and individuals in those occupations purchase goods and services from other firms, supporting indirect jobs. Finally, the earnings that the directly and indirectly supported workers spend at establishments throughout the local economy support additional “induced” jobs and income, contributing to economic stability in those communities.

On average, every million cubic feet of timber harvested in Montana directly supports 26 jobs in harvesting and processing timber (Sorenson et al. 2016). For this manufacturing area, that translates to about 5.5 direct jobs per million board feet harvested. With a projected annual harvest of 35 million board feet, this management plan would directly support an average of 192 jobs per year over the next decade.

² Economic and geographic data in this section come from various federal datasets and were accessed via the Economic Profile System maintained by Headwaters Economics: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/economic-profile-system/about-eps/>.

An estimated 225 indirect and induced jobs would also be contributed via the economic ripple effects mentioned above, for a total annual economic contribution of 417 jobs³.

D. Limit of Manufacturing Area

Over the initial ten year period of Unit establishment, approximately 350 MMBF of timber sold from National Forest System lands within the Unit will be delivered and processed at manufacturing facilities located within the Unit boundary. Specifications meeting this requirement are defined in each timber sale contract. This timber includes both sawtimber⁴ and non-sawtimber⁵.

Sawtimber in the Unit is Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) trees greater than 6.0 inches at diameter breast height to a 4.6-inch top diameter inside bark or for all other coniferous tree species greater than 7.0 inches at diameter breast height to a 5.6-inch top diameter inside bark containing a minimum log length of 8.0 feet. Logs must contain at least 33.33 sound net scale in percent of gross scale material that is suitable for lumber manufacturing. Trees not meeting these specifications are considered non-sawtimber. Additional specifications can be found in the contracts or agreements implementing site-specific projects.

Exceptions to the limit of manufacturing area may be approved by the Timber Contracting Officer for non-sawtimber upon written request from timber sale purchasers. In addition, with concurrence by the respective Forest Supervisor, the Timber Contracting Officer may consider and approve exceptions in the following cases:

- (1) inability to find a market or receive a fair price for national forest timber purchased in the Unit; and,
- (2) requirements associated with the Small Business Set Aside program (15 USC 644(j)(1)) if there is a change in manufacturing size class as defined by Small Business Set Aside program within the Unit;
- (3) failure to receive payments from manufacturers within the Unit for timber within 30 days of delivery or billing, whichever is shorter.

E. Forest Products Included in Manufacturing and Processing

Sawtimber will be processed at primary manufacturing facilities into products, such as lumber, veneer, construction timbers, or similar products. See Appendix 2: Existing Manufacturing Facilities for a list of facilities.

Non-sawtimber may be processed at other manufacturing facilities. These facilities produce products such as chips, posts, poles, rails, and firewood. See Appendix 2: Existing Manufacturing Facilities for a list of facilities.

F. Forest Products Excluded from Manufacturing or Processing

All forest products from timber settlement sales⁶ are excluded.

³ Based on IMPLAN 2024 Model Year analysis conducted January 23, 2026. For more information on the IMPLAN modeling process, visit [IMPLAN.com](https://www.implan.com).

⁴ Sawtimber is defined as timber suitable for sawing into lumber. It refers to wood cut from trees that is suitable for processing as sawlogs.

⁵ Products not meeting sawtimber specifications are generally referred to as non-sawtimber. This could post and poles, fuelwood, pulp, and chips.

⁶ Settlement sales are when permission is “granted to cut, damage, or destroy trees, portions of trees, or other forest

G. Sale of the Timber

Timber will be offered and/or disposed of from National Forest System lands within the Unit boundary in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, including the National Forest Management Act.

Any timber offered under available disposal authorities (conventional timber sales, stewardship sales and agreements⁷, and Good Neighbor Authority⁸ sales) may contribute towards the requirements set forth in this Unit. Forest Supervisors will decide for each individual sale if it will contribute to the Unit. The National Forest will track the volume offered within the Unit as described in the Sustained-Yield Unit Review and Monitoring section below to ensure that we are meeting the overall goals of the Unit. In addition to the normal requirements for purchasers of National Forest timber, specific provisions will be developed and added to contracts and agreements to ensure compliance with the manufacturing and processing requirements in the management plan. These provisions will include, volume reporting by the purchaser and delivery verification to an acceptable manufacturing facility.

National Forest timber will continue to be available in sufficient amounts to satisfy the needs of bona fide settlers, miners, residents, farmers, and prospectors for personal and domestic use, in accordance with existing laws and regulations.

Any National Forest timber sale offered within the Unit which is not sold may be re-offered with no limitations on timber delivery outside the Unit.

H. Harvesting Scheduling

The rate of offering will be based on each applicable Forest Plan and will contribute to the projected timber sale quantity (PTSQ) and/or allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for each administrative unit. For more details on the annual projected timber harvest, see the Purpose of Sustained-Yield Unit section above. Timber volume will be counted towards the Unit when timber is offered based on this management plan.

Timber offered and sold under this management plan may be impacted by litigation, wind, flood, earthquake, landslide, fire, forest pest epidemic, or other natural phenomenon that are outside the control of the Forest Service. The Forest Service will not be required to replace volume not offered or lost due to such events. While not required, the Forest Service will work to re-offer timber impacted by these events whenever the Forest Service determines it is practicable.

I. Public Engagement and Notification

A public hearing on the Unit is anticipated to take place in Spring 2026, preceded by public notice. Public notifications will be made about each timber sale in the Unit following standard procedures for the three forests. Notification will also be made through the periodic sale announcement process every 6 months. All sales advertised under this authority are subject to planning processes under the National Environmental Policy Act and will include the required public engagement for each project.

products on National Forest System lands without advertisement when necessary for the occupancy of a right-of-way or other authorized use of National Forest System land” (36 CFR 223.12).

⁷ Authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.

⁸ Authorized under the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill).

J. Sustained-Yield Unit Review and Monitoring

J1. Term

This Unit and the related management plan can be terminated by the Chief of the Forest Service at any time, if no longer serving the purpose and goals listed in this management plan. A revised management plan may change any elements of this plan as described in Section J2.

Contracts awarded under this management plan will remain valid until closure or termination of each contract, regardless of status of the management plan.

J2. Instances Warranting Revisions to the Management Plan

When a changed condition arises that fundamentally alters the current condition of the Unit and/or the communities it benefits, the management plan may be updated to reflect corresponding changes in management objectives, terms, and conditions of the Unit.

If an applicable Forest Supervisor determines a changed condition impacts the forest products available from the Unit, the management plan may be revised. Any public notification and engagement would occur with any such updates in accordance with the Sustained Yield Act. Changed conditions include, but are not limited to:

- loss or addition of manufacturing infrastructure within the Unit boundary;
- change of ownership of existing manufacturing infrastructure within the Unit boundary;
- a wildland fire, natural disaster (i.e., flooding, wind event), or other act of God that alters the ecosystem function of the impacted National Forest System lands;
- a change in landownership or interest in the National Forest System lands contained within the Unit;
- adding lands under other federal ownership to the Unit;
- a change in law or regulations that impacts this management plan, including the amount of timber emphasis lands, such as an amendment to the Sustained Yield Act or change in listed species under the Endangered Species Act; or,
- Forest Plan revision or amendments.

J3. Management Plan Monitoring

To determine whether management practices outlined in this management plan are resulting in desired outcomes, each National Forest will record annually the following:

- volume offered and awarded within the Unit; and,
- delivery of the forest products to facilities within the manufacturing area.

This will be recorded at the end of each fiscal year by the Timber Contracting Officer. All documents, including the monitoring data, will be kept in an official record maintained by the contracting officer(s).

K. Sustained-Yield Unit Evaluation

The Forest Supervisors responsible for National Forest System lands within the Unit will periodically evaluate, at not less than 10-year intervals, the existing Unit to determine if the purposes of the Sustained Yield Act and management plan objectives are being met and if the existing Unit warrants changes or updates. This evaluation of this Federal Sustained-Yield unit will be based on how well the Unit is meeting the objectives for which the Unit was established. The Forest Service will consider information from public hearings or other public feedback in the decision. If necessary, a revised management plan may be developed every tenth year the Unit is in operation.

L. References

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Appendix 1: Map of the Montana Tri-Forest Federal Sustained-Yield Unit

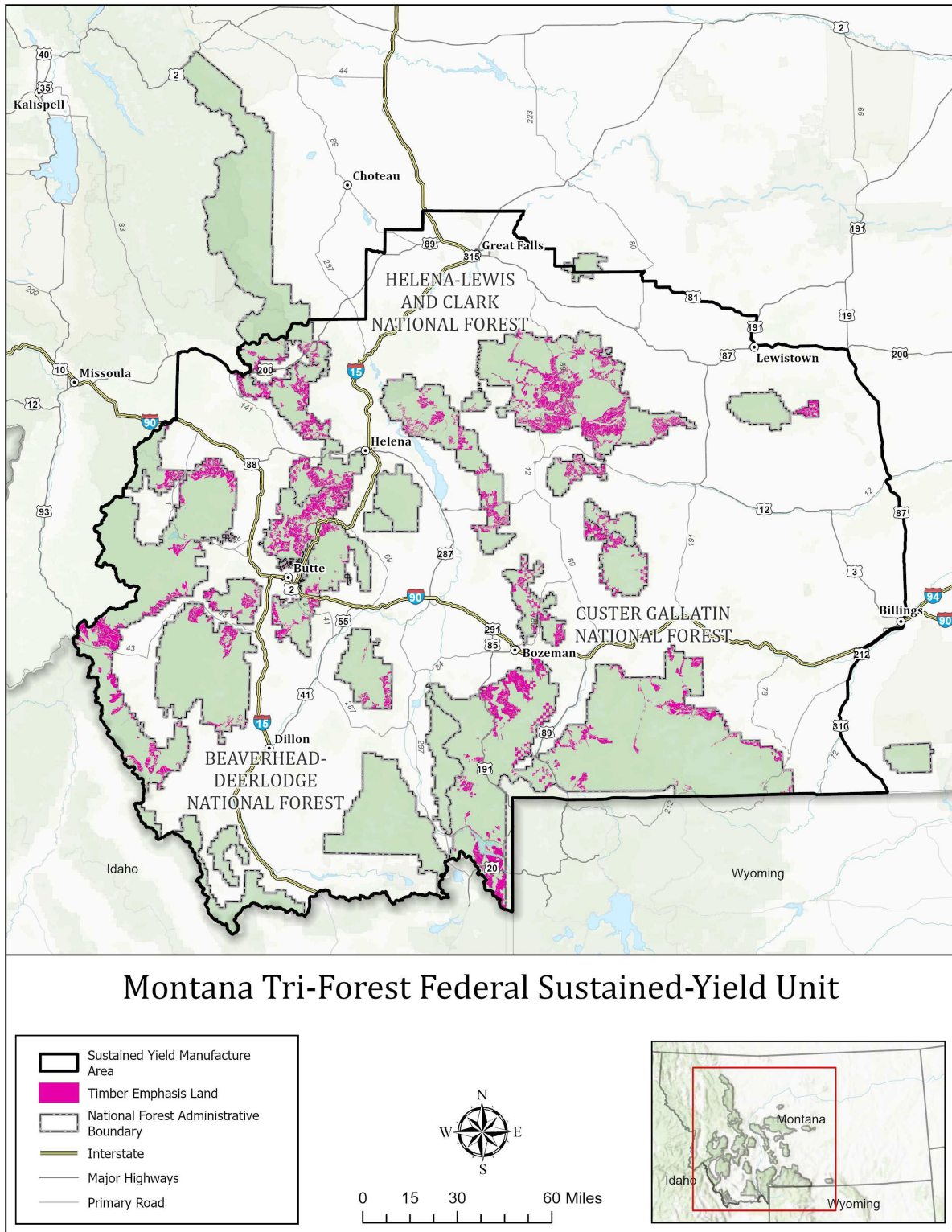


Figure 1. Map of Montana Tri-Forest Sustained-Yield Unit

Appendix 2: Existing Manufacturing Facilities

The following tables provide a list of sawmills and other facilities within the Unit. These lists are current as of January 16, 2026. This information comes Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation list of “Montana Forest Product Manufacturers” found is the following website:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b06281f35bf04d1d8381ad27bc747e47/>.

Table 2. List of Existing Sawmill Facilities Located Within the Montana Tri-Forest Federal Sustained-Yield Unit

Facility	Location
Sun Mountain Lumber	Deer Lodge, MT
L&L Custom Sawmill	Lincoln, MT
Big Sky Sawmill	Vaughn, MT
The Good Wood Guys	Great Falls, MT
Marks Lumber	Clancy, MT
Knapp Lumber	Dillon, MT
Summit Log Products	Dillon, MT
Quality Timberworks	Toston, MT
Big Timberworks	Gallatin Gateway, MT
Sun Mountain Lumber	Livingston, MT
B & J Sawmill	Reed Point, MT
Gebhardt Post & Lumber	Roundup, MT
Evergreen Wood Products LLC	Moore, MT

Table 3. List of Other Manufacturing Facilities Located Within the Montana Tri-Forest Federal Sustained-Yield Unit

Facility	Location
Boese's Wood Fence Supplies	Philipsburg, MT
Pfendler Post & Pole	Drummond, MT
Stosich Inc	Lima, MT
Whispering Pines	Deer Lodge, MT
Bouma Post Yard	Lincoln, MT
Cascade Log Homes	Cascade, MT
Marks-Miller Post & Pole Inc.	Clancy, MT
Montana Mobile Cabins by Shotgun Construction	Whitehall, MT
Ruby Valley Pressure Treating	Alder, MT
Bozeman Firewood Company	Manhattan, MT
Myrstol Post and Pole Company	Clyde Park, MT
Montana Custom Millwork	Billings, MT