

**BEARTOOTH FRONT STORM DAMAGE CLEAN-UP AND FUELS REDUCTION  
HEALTHY FORESTS RESTORATION ACT – WEST FORK ROCK CREEK PROJECT  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT APPENDIX M**

**CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST**

**Forest Plan Amendment Determination of Non-Significance**

**and**

**Forest Plan Amendment**

**Number 43**

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) provides that forest plans may be amended in any manner, but if the management direction results in a significant change in the plan, additional procedures must be followed. 16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(4).

The Forest Plan Amendment included in the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Healthy Forests Restoration Act Project – West Fork Rock Creek project is being completed under the requirements of the 1982 planning regulations. Because the Custer Forest Plan was approved pursuant to the planning regulations in effect before November 9, 2000, per 36 CFR 219.14 b 2), a 3-year transition period for plan amendments began on April 21, 2008. During the transition period, plan amendments may continue using the provisions of the planning regulation in effect before November 9, 2000 – in this case, the 1982 planning regulations. In the case of this Forest Plan amendment, the responsible official has chosen to use the provisions of the prior planning regulations and, per 36 CFR 219.13(a)(1), has elected to use the 36 CFR 218 objection procedures.

The 1982 regulations at 219.10(f) require the agency to determine whether or not a proposed amendment would result in a significant change in the plan. If the change resulting from the proposed amendment is determined to be significant, the same procedure as that required for development and approval of a plan shall be followed. If the change resulting from the amendment is determined not to be significant for the purposes of the planning process, then the agency may implement the amendment following appropriate public notification and satisfactory completion of NEPA procedures.

Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1900, chapter 20, section 1926.51 (WO Amendment 1900-2006-2) identifies criteria to consider in determining whether an amendment is significant or non-significant for those plans using planning regulations in effect before November 9, 2000.

Changes to the land management plan that are not significant can result from:

1. Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.
2. Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis.
3. Minor changes in standards and guidelines.
4. Opportunities for additional projects or activities.

Examples of significant changes include:

1. Changes that would significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected.
2. Changes that may have an important effect on the entire land management plan or affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.

#### **Forest Plan Amendment Determination of Non-Significance**

I have evaluated Forest Plan Amendment Number 43 pursuant to Forest Service planning regulations and Forest Service Manual direction discussed above as well as information disclosed in the EA and administrative record. These considerations are documented as follows:

- **Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives** In the Forest Plan, Forest-wide Management Plan Goals and Objectives are found on pages 3 through 7. Specifically, I reviewed the Forest Plan goals and objectives for timberland management, recreation management, and visual resource management. I find that Forest Plan Amendment Number 43 does not change any of the overall Forest Plan multiple-use goals or objectives related to these or other resource values.

I reviewed Forest Plan Table II-1 Projected Outputs and Activities by Time Period (p. 6) and I do not find that it provides any outputs relative to visual resource management nor does it project outputs relative to acreage of fuel reduction or acreage of hazard tree reduction. I find that my decision does not alter the long-term relationships between the levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan for any resource. Long-term recovery of visual quality is anticipated within 10 years (EA appendix B). My decision was additionally guided by the results of a comprehensive analysis that considered the cumulative effects of activities on the natural resources, economics, and social patterns of the planning area. My decision accomplishes a balance of uses, and in so doing I find that the mix of multiple-use goals and objectives disclosed in the Forest Plan is not changed. Therefore the Forest Plan Amendment Number 43 is not significant. I find this amendment would not trigger any changes in outputs.

- **Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions** This amendment does not change any management area boundaries. The management emphasis of affected management areas is not changed since the amendment temporarily

adjusts Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) standards in specific portions of Management Areas F and R. Therefore, I find that Amendment Number 43 does not represent a significant change in the management area boundaries or management prescriptions pertaining to Forest Plan goals, objectives or standards.

- **Minor changes in standards and guidelines** As discussed above, Forest Plan Amendment Number 43 makes minor and temporary project-specific adjustments to Forest Plan VQO standards in portions of Management Areas F and R. Forest Plan Amendment Number 43 does not change the intent of the plan, as resource protections in the form of standards are already in place and will remain so. Rather, it makes clear what standards apply, in which management area they apply. These minor changes to the Management Area F and R VQO standards contained in Amendment Number 43 are applicable only to the project area addressed by the EA, which is the West Fork Rock Creek drainage of the Beartooth Ranger District, and only for hazard tree and fuel reduction activities. This is approximately 0.08 percent of the total National Forest System lands on the Custer National Forest covered by the Forest Plan.
- **Opportunities for additional projects or activities** This decision does not alter the opportunities for projects or activities since it still provides for the access to oil and gas resources.

Based on the above discussion and the evaluation of each of the changes disclosed in the discussion above, I find that this amendment does not alter the long-term relationships between goods and services projected by the Forest Plan. This decision only affects approximately 0.08% of the land covered by the Forest Plan. Therefore, this amendment is not significant as described pursuant to Forest Service Manual 1900, chapter 20, section 1926.51. The full text of Amendment Number 43 and rationale for site specific, project related changes follows below.

**CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST  
FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT  
NUMBER 43  
Billings, Montana**

The Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) for Management Area F on page 61 and for Management Area R on page 91 of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Custer National Forest and National Grasslands is hereby site-specifically amended as follows:

In areas that were burned by the 2008 Cascade fire and within 300 feet of West Fork Rock Creek Road #2071, the Visual Quality Objective (VQO) will be modification for approximately three years and partial retention VQO for an additional seven years after Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project activities are completed in the West Fork Rock Creek. Ten years after project activities are completed, the VQO will be retention and partial retention.

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**MARY ERICKSON**  
**Acting Forest Supervisor**

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**DATE**