Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA) Project
Project Update—Fall 2023

Fall Public Monitoring Field Trip Summary

The Medicine Bow National Forest hosted its second annual monitoring field trip on September 13, 2023. The trip was attended by five members of the public, four representatives from partner groups, and four US Forest Service staff.

We visited three treatment units that were part of the 2022 Site Preparation / 2023 Planting Project in the Badger Focus Area, which is located on the southern end of the Snowy Range, about 35 miles southwest of Laramie, in Albany County, Wyoming. For this project, the Forest completed about 300 acres of tree planting in the 2018 Badger Creek fire area. Before planting, the Forest completed about 200 acres of site preparation (crushing, mastication, and similar activities) to address accumulations of dead and down trees and prepare the area for planting.

Treatment Unit, Site Preparation by Dozer, Badger Focus Area
Photo Credit: MS, USFS

Treatment Unit, Site Preparation by Mastication, Badger Focus Area. Photo Credit: MS, USFS

Monitoring and reporting are the final phase of the LaVA implementation process. The primary intent of this phase is to answer the questions:

* Did we do what we said we were going to do?

* Did we get the expected outcomes?

* Do we need to adjust future treatments?

Overall, the project appears successful. Initial monitoring and discussions on the field trip indicate that implementation went according to plan, that all design features were correctly applied, and that project objectives were met.

Over the coming winter, we will develop the 2023 monitoring report for the LaVA project. Monitoring will continue for certain items in future years, with updates posted in subsequent reports.

(continued on next page)

Fall Public Monitoring Field Trip Summary (*continued*)

In this project area, we are working with Colorado State University and the Rocky Mountain Research Station on long-term monitoring in addition to LAVA monitoring to compare different site preparation methods with each other and with no site preparation. We also conduct our own monitoring for contract specifications (during planting) and silvicultural objectives (survival). We expect to continue planting about 300 to 500 acres a year. This could increase substantially in the future considering the Mullen Fire, but right now seed is limited as are funding and personnel. We are looking at ways to increase seed collection and address other challenges.

What Have We Been Doing?

Since the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed in August of 2020, we have been working closely with our partners and interested members of the public to plan and implement projects across the LaVA landscape following the five-phase process described in Appendix A of the ROD, the Adaptive Implementation and Monitoring Framework. The table below summarizes the status of LaVA projects in relation to the Appendix A process. Some highlights from the implementation process in the last few months include:

- Continued exploring conservation finance as a tool to increase the pace and scale of implementation.

- Hosted the Fall Public Monitoring field trip (summarized on page 1).

- Held several field trips to look at preliminary treatment areas.

- Continued project identification in five focus areas started in previous years.

- Completed field validation for nine projects in seven focus areas. Completed some, but not all, field validation for two additional projects.

LaVA Project Status – Fall 2023		
Appendix A Phase	**# Projects**	**Acres**
1: Focus Areas	5	n/a
2: Preliminary Design	5	n/a
3: Refine and Validate	27	49,057
4: Review and Implement	15	4,797
5: Monitor and Report	2	375

- Completed implementation checklists for two projects in two focus areas.

- Continued implementing 10 projects in seven focus areas using a variety of agreements, Good Neighbor Authority, service contracts, and timber sale contracts.
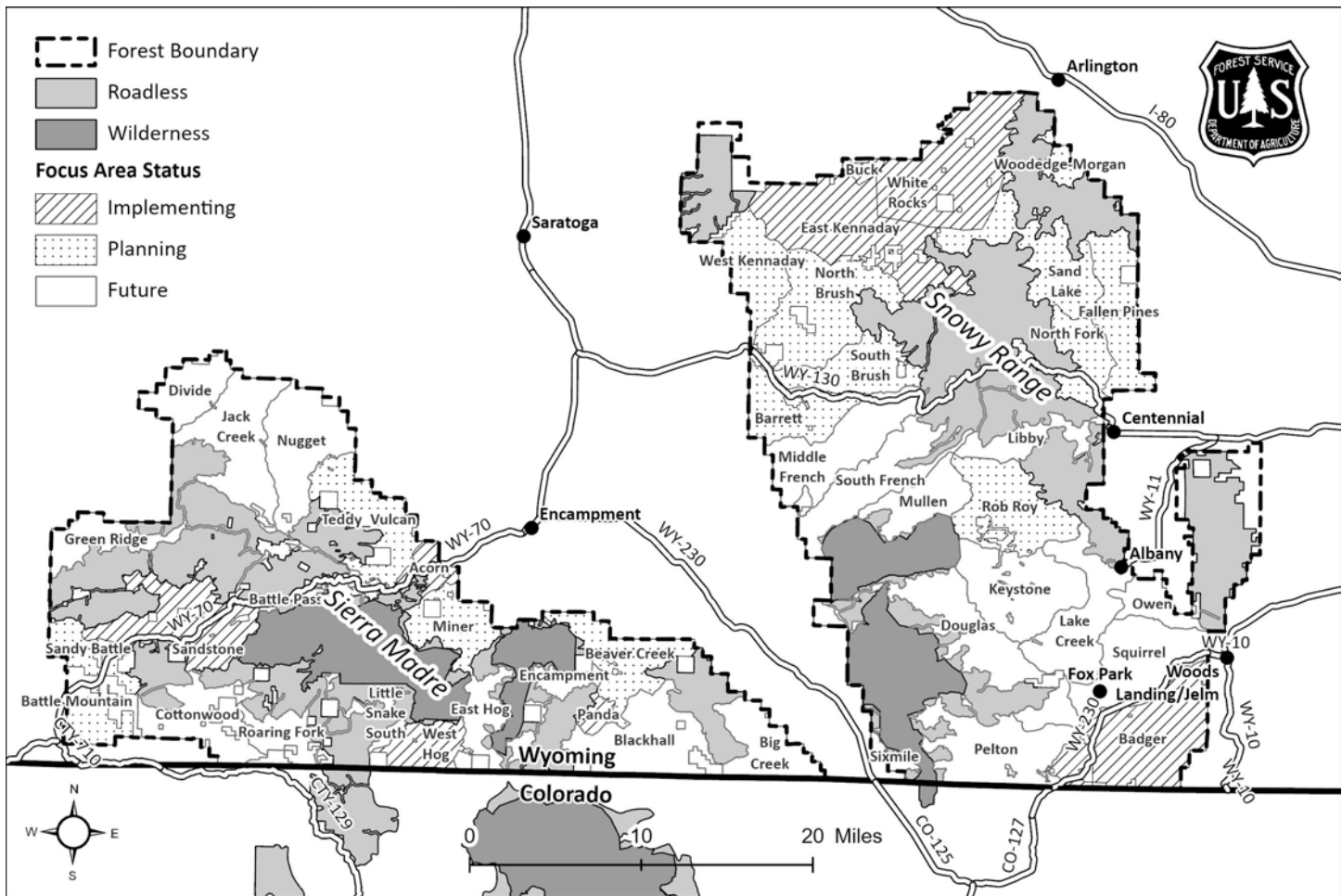
- Completed one project in one focus area.

What is the LaVA Project?

The Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis Project, or "LaVA" project, was developed to respond to unprecedented landscape-level tree mortality from bark beetles and other forest health issues that affected hundreds of thousands of acres across the Medicine Bow National Forest since the late 1990s. The LaVA decision authorized up to 288,000 acres of vegetation management on the Forest over 15 years. Objectives of the project include:

- Mitigating hazardous fuels

- Providing for recovery of forest products

- Enhancing forest and rangeland resilience to future insect and disease infestations

- Protecting infrastructure and municipal water supplies

- Restoring wildlife habitat

- Enhancing access for forest visitors and permittees

- Providing for human safety.

Implementation Plan

The implementation process outlined in Appendix A contains five phases, eighteen activities, and takes three or more years to complete. The Forest Service, working with our partners, developed a draft plan to provide our partners and the public with the schedule for providing meaningful input on focus areas and preliminary treatments, as well as allowing us to work together to prioritize workloads, secure funding, and meet objectives of the LaVA project across the landscape. As our collaborative work on each focus area proceeds, we will update the plan to reflect current conditions and priorities in the area. The map below displays the current status of focus areas across the LaVA landscape.

Additional Information and How to Get/Stay Involved

- The LaVA Implementation web page links to extensive information on the NEPA decision and supporting analysis, implementation process, LaVA StoryMap and feedback tool, pre-treatment and implementation checklists, treatment tracking, and monitoring. It is updated regularly as new information becomes available.

- The LaVA StoryMap is an interactive tool for spatially representing LaVA focus areas and treatments on the landscape. The StoryMap allows users to view future, ongoing, and completed treatments and to provide online feedback specific to focus areas and treatments.

- We encourage you to join the LaVA mailing list through GovDelivery, which is our primary means of directly contacting the public. To use the GovDelivery online application, enter your email address, then scroll down the list of available subscriptions to the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, which has a dropdown menu of current projects including the LaVA project.

- The Forest Service hosts a LaVA public workshop each spring and a monitoring field trip every fall. Workshops and field trips will be advertised through a press release, the LaVA mailing list (via GovDelivery), and on the implementation web page.

- For additional information on the LaVA project, please contact Matt Schweich, LaVA Implementation Coordinator at matthew.schweich@usda.gov (preferred) or (307) 745-2422 (limited voicemail monitoring).