Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA)

Project Update—Fall 2024

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?

Fall Public Monitoring Field Trip

The Medicine Bow National Forest hosted its third annual monitoring field trip on September 25, 2024. The trip was attended by two members of the public, one representative from local media, four representatives from partner groups, and fourteen US Forest Service staff.

Project introduction, Spool GNA monitoring field trip.
Photo credit: PO, USFS

We visited two sites that were part of the Spool project, which is located on the northern end of the Sierra Madre Range, about 20 miles southwest of Saratoga, Carbon County, Wyoming.

The Spool project was developed and implemented collaboratively between the US Forest Service and Wyoming State Forestry Division (WSFD) using the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). Treatments included 227 acres of clearcuts in primarily lodgepole pine stands, including 124 acres covered by the LaVA decision and 103 acres covered by the earlier North Savery Project Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision. An additional 104 acres of equivalent treatments were implemented on adjacent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and State of Wyoming lands. The project included an estimated 1.6 miles of road reconstruction and 1.7 miles of temporary roads.

Overall, the project appears successful and its objectives were met. Initial monitoring and discussions on the field trip indicated that treatments went according to plan. A lack of clarity on responsibility for road closures was identified as a challenge. Prior to the field trip, the US Forest Service and WSFD resolved this challenge collaboratively and all roads appeared adequately closed and rehabilitated.

Over the coming winter, we will develop the 2023 / 2024 monitoring report for the LaVA project. Monitoring will continue for certain items including road closures in future years, with updates posted in subsequent reports.

Discussing treatment prescription and slash disposal, Spool GNA monitoring field trip. Photo credit: PO, USFS

What Have We Been Doing?

Since the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed in August of 2020, we've worked 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:

Discussing temporary road closure and rehabilitation, Spool GNA monitoring field trip. Photo credit: PO, USFS

- Continued exploring conservation finance as a tool to increase the pace and scale of implementation, specifically in the municipal watershed for the Town of Encampment.

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

- Held a field trip to look at preliminary treatments in one focus area.

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

- Completed field validation for nine projects in eight focus areas.

- Completed some, but not all, field validation for five additional projects.

- Continued implementing 15 projects in nine focus areas using a variety of agreements, Good Neighbor Authority, service contracts, and timber sale contracts.

- Completed two projects in two focus areas.

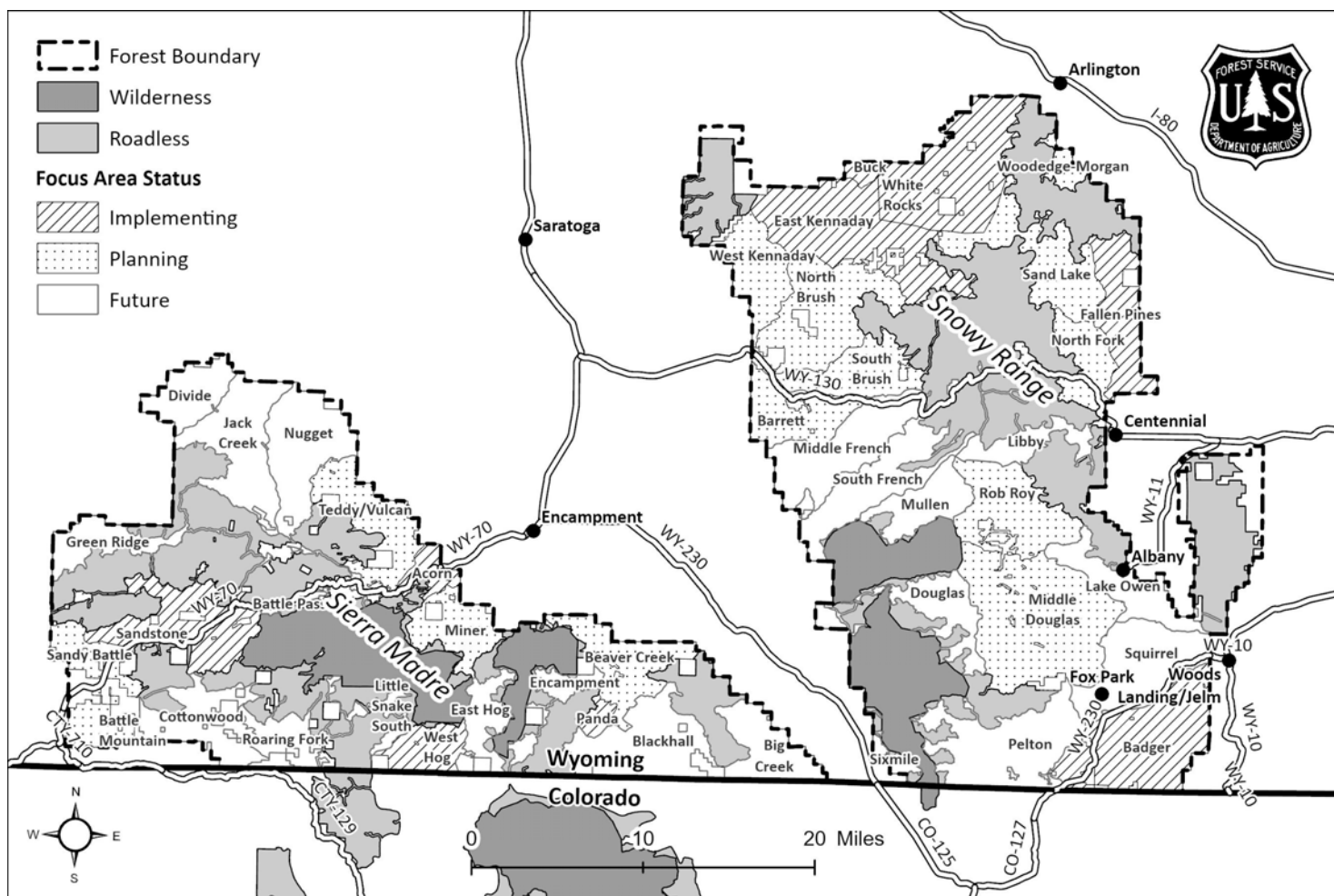| LaVA Project Status – Fall 2024		
Appendix A Phase	**# Projects**	**Acres**
1: Focus Areas	4	n/a
2: Preliminary Design	5	n/a
3: Refine and Validate—Low Priority	26	22,905
3: Refine and Validate—High Priority	11	6,266
4: Review and Implement	20	7,949
5: Monitor and Report	4	1,024

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 and schedule for providing meaningful input, 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 proceeds, we will update the plan to reflect current conditions and priorities. The map below displays the current status of focus areas

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, 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.

- 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 are 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).