USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Bitterroot National Forest | 1801 North First Street Hamilton, MT 59840

File Code: 1950
Date: February 2, 2017

Dear Interested Party,

The *Draft* Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact (Draft DN/FONSI) for the Meadow Vapor Project are now available. The project area is located east of Sula, MT and surrounds the communities of Springer Memorial and Bonanza. The project area includes approximately 11,090 acres and is administered by the Darby/Sula Ranger District, Bitterroot National Forest in Ravalli County. This project does not analyze any activities on private lands. The Responsible Official for the project is Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor, Julie King.

The selected alternative includes commercial timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, slash piling, and prescribed burning on approximately 3,200 acres. Under the selected alternative, 1,961 acres of commercial thinning and 1,158 acres of non-commercial thinning would be implemented. Of the 1,961 commercial thinning acres there are 39 units covering 1,262 acres that would be harvested using a ground-based, whole-tree yarding system. An additional 32 units covering 684 would be commercially thinned using a skyline yarding system. Prescribed fire would occur on approximately 3,134 acres after the commercial harvest and non-commercial thinning treatments are completed. The proposed treatments would reduce the potential of crown fire behavior in low and mixed severity fire regimes within the Wildland Urban Interface, reduce current and future fuel loadings, and improve forest resilience to natural disturbances.

The selected alternative would also improve watershed condition through management of the transportation system, including BMP upgrades and road decommissioning and storage. The selected alternative would decommission approximately 18.5 miles of roads. Approximately 1.5 miles of road will require physical treatment. Another 9 miles of system roads would be stored. Of these 9 miles, about 3.4 miles are not currently part of the Forest transportation system and will be added with the selected alternative. Less than 1 mile of the roads proposed for storage require treatments to hydrologic stabilize them.

The selected alternative would also implement motorized recreation opportunities through the construction of OHV trails. About 1.1 miles of trail are proposed for construction, creating loops routes in the project area.

The selected alternative would also approve a site-specific Forest Plan amendment to plan standards for coarse woody debris and thermal cover and allowing portions of third-order drainages within the project area to be managed at Elk Habitat Effectiveness values less than the plan standards.

The EA and *Draft* DN/FONSI are available on-line at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=42988. These documents are also available for review at the Darby Ranger District and Forest Supervisor's Office. Additional information can be obtained from: Amy Fox, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, 1801 N. First St., Hamilton, MT 59840 or 406-363-7120.

The Meadow Vapor Project is subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218, subparts A and B.

How to file an Objection and Timeframe

Objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with §218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed via mail, express delivery, or messenger service to: Objection Reviewing Officer, USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, 26 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, MT 59804; FAX to (406) 329-3411; email to appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us; or by hand-delivery (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays at USDA Forest Service, 26 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, MT 59804).

Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Ravalli Republic. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

The objection must contain the minimum content requirements specified in §218.8(d) and incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in §218.8(b). It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to §218.9. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

At a minimum an objection must include the following (36 CFR 218.8(d)): 1) The objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available; 2) a signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for Email may be filed with the objection); 3) when multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector shall be provided upon request); 4) the name of the proposed project, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the name(s) of the National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented; and 5) a description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and 6) a statement that demonstrates connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection.

Sincerely,

Julie K. King

JULIE K. KING
Forest Supervisor