Pre-NEPA Project Assessment

Discussion Information – Project overview
Forest/Grassland: Black Hills NF
District: Forest wide
Project Name: Spruce EA
Total Project Area: up to 25,000 acres of treatment
County: Custer, Pennington, Meade, Lawrence, Crook

Potential Treatment Types and Anticipated Outputs: (Check all that apply. If other, please describe)
- Commercial Harvest/Thinning: 25,000 acres, [_____] MMBF
- Pre-commercial Treatment: [_____] acres
- Fuels Treatment: [_____] acres
- Other: [_____] acres

Is this project currently identified on the Unit’s 3- to 5-year Program-of-Work? YES ☑ NO □
If yes, what is the current anticipated decision date? 15 July 2022
What is the planned implementation date for the project? FY22/4th qtr
Will this project be implemented under the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)? YES ☑ NO □

Unit Level – pre-NEPA project development and considerations
1. Please describe the preliminary purpose and need for the project. What Forest Plan Goals and Objectives is this project moving the project area towards?

RESPONSE: 1. Sustain local/rural economies by providing wood fiber/jobs. 2. Sustain forest health in the white spruce communities – encourage diversity in structure stages/age class distribution. 3. Reduce susceptibility to wildland fire by implementing large gaps in the landscape. 4. Return pine type with spruce intrusion back to pine stand trajectory (pine restoration).

2. What NEPA authority are you anticipating this project will utilize?
References and examples can be found: in FSH 1909.15 Chapt 30 for CE, EMC SharePoint for Healthy Forest Restoration Act (which includes authority for Wildfire Resiliency CE), and FSH 1909.15 Chapt 10 for Environmental Analyses. Other resources available: R1 EAP SharePoint or EMC SharePoint Sites
- ☐ Farm Bill Insect and Disease CE
- ☐ Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) Wildfire Resiliency CE
- ☒ Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) EA
- ☒ Conventional EA
- ☐ Other CE authority: Please list applicable category(ies):

[Enter applicable CE category as included in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30]

Commented [LF1]: In my opinion... this is absolutely Forest Restoration and not Insects/disease or wildfire resiliency (they will be secondary benefits but not the primary PN). This is also supposed to be a Comment on Item #3.
Commented [LF2]: I would change the order of priority to: 2, 4, 3 and 1.
3. Please explain the rational used to determine that the selection above is appropriate for the purpose and needs of the proposed project.

RESPONSE: believe a strong argument can be made under HFRA - but not sure it would be best.

4. What other resource or restoration benefits may result from implementing this project? Please list restoration projects that will occur in conjunction with the treatments and any other relevant related or connected activities or outcomes. (e.g., habitat improvement, weed treatments, watershed rehabilitation, revegetation, fuels reduction).

RESPONSE: WUI protection/fuels reduction, pine and aspen stand restoration, restoring uneven aged distribution of white spruce age classes.

5. Describe the existing or anticipated public and/or collaborative support that exists for this project.

RESPONSE: timber program is highly polarized - timber industry support - environmental group scepticism

6. Are there partnerships in place that could contribute resources or capacity to the project (e.g., funding, time (paid or volunteer), meeting facilitation, etc.)?

RESPONSE: none

7. Do you anticipate any impacts to public access for travel or recreation use that may require mitigation? These might include impacts to public access via currently open roads, trails, or proximity to recreation areas.

RESPONSE: perhaps some motorized trail closures during implementation for a few months at a time.

8. Are there any known controversial concerns/issues associated with this project?


9. Please describe the Unit’s capacity to support project development and analysis needs. Please list any resource areas the Unit or Pod can provide.

RESPONSE: silviculture support, heritage IDIQ task order writing, wildlife biologist surveys/usfw consultation

10. Please describe the distance from the District office to the project area and the current road conditions to access the project area.

RESPONSE: 1 hour travel times will be common, pavement and FS gravel roads

11. Please describe the accommodations available to support field work during the field season.
RESPONSE: limited bunkhouse space, hotels or long term rentals.

12. Is there any additional information you would like to share about the project?

RESPONSE: We have invested in Pine Aspen restoration previously which provides a baseline of work to build from.

13. Has the Unit completed a coarse filter process to assess the preliminary proposed action for compliance with the Forest Plan and applicable laws and regulations (check box if yes)? Please provide the unit point of contact for further information. This should also be the Strike Team’s POC for coordinating as the project moves forward. For example, which resource areas have reviewed the preliminary proposals to identify potential conflicts with FP Standards/Guidelines, requirements included in currently USFS consultation/programmatic biological opinions, resource sensitivities, etc?

- [ ] Silviculture
- [ ] GIS
- [ ] Wildlife (TES)
- [ ] Watershed/Aquatics and municipal watersheds
- [ ] Botany (TES)
- [ ] Weeds
- [ ] Range
- [ ] Heritage/Tribal (Cultural Resources)
- [ ] Soils
- [ ] Old Growth
- [ ] Special Management Areas/Designations
- [ ] IRAs/Wilderness/Special Management Areas
- [ ] Recreation
- [ ] Access/Transportation
- [ ] Others: [Resource area and POC Name]

If the coarse filter process was completed in GIS, please list the layers available in the T: drive?

[Please enter all T: File Paths here]

14. Will field surveys be needed for the project area to finalize proposed action or support effects analysis? Complete table as necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey/Field Work Needs</th>
<th>Description of needs or if no further field work is needed, enter 'complete'</th>
<th>Days needed (8-hr)/GS-level</th>
<th>Total estimated cost to complete needed field work (GS daily)</th>
<th>Does the unit have capacity to complete needed field work or another strategy in place to do so?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Commented [LF4]: Will definitely need to add fuels and timber into the #14 survey/field work needs

Forest Service
Northern Region
15. For all projects, please include a map of the project area and a T: file path to an .mxd file or the project data location that includes the following most accurate/up-to-date layers:

- Data or .mxd location: [Please include T: File Path here]

Essential data sets (as possible) should include (Check boxes for data available)

- Project Data (can be preliminary)
  - Use project area boundary
  - Use any working data to support understanding current proposed activities (commercial and non-commercial vegetation treatment units, haul routes, temp road locations, fuels management activities, etc)

- State/County or Unit-level data
  - Planning Data: Forest Plan Management Areas, Geographic Areas, Special Designation Areas (RNA,
Wilderness, etc), Inventoried Roadless Areas

- Administrative Data: District, County, Townships/Ranges/Sections, Cadastral/Parcel ownership info
- Vegetation: Forest Vegetation Class, Stand Exam/Walk-through survey data (if available) – species composition, size class, old growth, stand density, snags, structure and structural stage, habitat type group or biophysical setting, FIA/CSE summary database for larger project areas, FACTS query on past management activities, Previous survey data for insect and disease/risk assessments, resilience to insect and disease
- Fire/Fuels: Historical/recent fire information, ignition points, structures, risk assessments, fire regime group, current CWPP WUIs, Airshed status/sensitivities/monitoring locations
  IMPORTANT: For projects that anticipate using the Farm Bill CE or HFRA EA, include the WUI boundary, as defined in the County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). If no CWPP exists, provide a layer that meets the definitions of WUI as described in HFRA, Section 101.
- Engineering/Roads: INFRA Roads/Transportation with jurisdiction/travel management status/maintenance level, Gates/barriers for any road closures and status information (if available), culvert locations or other road/stream crossing information, Infrastructure
- Recreation Resources and Lands: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, developed recreation areas, dispersed sites, motorized/non-motorized trail systems, national recreation areas/trails, use levels or INFRA development levels to support understanding of managed use rates (if available for trails or developed recreation sites), Special Uses (active permitted uses)
- Heritage/NRHP: known locations of evaluated/unevaluated cultural resource (or a summary of the status of surveys), assessment of areas for high/moderate/low probability of cultural resource occurrences for survey needs (**see note below)
- Range: Range Management Units, RMU investments/improvements
- Geology: Geology/Minerals data, Active/Non-active mines and adits
- Soils: Soils Landtype (LSI), Down woody material/snag surveys (potentially assessed by silv, fuels, or wildlife)
- MT Natural Heritage program data – botany, terrestrial and aquatic wildlife
- Hydrology/Aquatics: NHD Streams, NWI Wetlands, Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas/Riparian Conservation Areas, stream classifications, 303d or 305A listed status, Fish-bearing/non-fish-bearing status, HUCs and status (priority, etc), municipal watershed/public water sources, stream monitoring data, unique fish or amphibian known occurrences, Aquatic TES data (known occurrences, known habitat, critical habitat, potential habitat, tools used to rate habitat effectiveness/assess potential habitat)
- Terrestrial Wildlife: Lynx Analysis Units, BORZ (Bears outside recovery zone)/BMU (Bear Management Units), Elk Herd Units with any mapped seasonal ranges (forage, winter, summer, calving) and habitat effectiveness ratings, Known summer and winter range (wolverines, bear, migratory birds), Goshawk nest and nest stand locations, Critical Habitat for any federally-listed species, existing surveys/information (TESP species known occurrences), NRIS wildlife data (verified vs. draft/incomplete), Any tools used for potential habitat, habitat effectiveness, unique habitat features known (actively used wallows, leks, snags, etc), Hunting Districts
☐ Botany: any previous survey data of known occurrences of TESP plants, potential habitat, tools for potential habitat effectiveness.
☐ Non-native invasive plants: any previous survey data of known occurrences of priority species, as well as others, areas of past treatment efforts
☐ Availability of NAIP, Lidar (DTM, CHM).

Regional data sources: DEM (and slope analysis), ALPs with info on ‘Admin to Standard’ FS landlines,

**PLEASE NOTE: If any sensitive data is available, the unit’s standard operations for such data management will be followed.

Please provide contact information for the following:

** PRIMARY PROJECT CONTACT:  ** RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL/LINE OFFICER:

Name: [Name]  
Title: [Title]  
Phone: [Phone]  
Email: [Email]  

Name: [Name]  
Title: [Title]  
Phone: [Phone]  
Email: [Email]