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Sandpoint Ranger District  
**Little Blacktail Ecosystem Restoration Project  
Environmental Impact Statement**

**Record Of Decision**



# **RECORD OF DECISION**

**For the**

## **LITTLE BLACKTAIL ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT**

### **FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Sandpoint Ranger District  
Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
Bonner County, Idaho**

**January 2002**

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- A-Stand Information
- B-Harvest Openings Greater Than 40 Acres
- C-Design Features of the Selected Alternative
- D-Maps Related to the Selected Alternative

# Little Blacktail Ecosystem Restoration Project

## Environmental Impact Statement

### Record Of Decision

## Introduction

This Record of Decision documents my decision and rationale to select an alternative for the Little Blacktail Ecosystem Restoration Project. My decision is based on review of the Little Blacktail Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), review of public comments received on the project, and how well the selected alternative meets the stated purpose and need for the project, protects resources, addresses public concerns, and is consistent with applicable laws, plans and policies.

## Project Location

The Little Blacktail Project is located within the headwaters of the Upper Cocolalla Creek subwatershed. The upper subwatershed, which drains from the headwaters to Cocolalla Lake, is approximately 27,320 acres in size. The Little Blacktail project area encompasses 2,139 acres or 8% of the entire watershed.

The project area is located within Bonner County, Idaho, approximately 12 air miles south of Sandpoint, Idaho and three air miles east of Cocolalla Lake (figure A). The area can be reached by Forest Roads 315 and 630. The project area consists of National Forest land in the following legal location: all or portions of Sections 14, 15, 21-23, 26 and 27 in Township 55 North, Range 2 West.

## My Decision

I have decided to select **Alternative B**, *described as the Proposed Action* within the Little Blacktail FEIS (p. II-5). I believe Alternative B provides comprehensive treatment of the resource problems identified in the FEIS, meets the purpose and need for this project, responds to public concerns and is consistent with applicable laws, plans and policies.

Out of nine alternatives considered, three were analyzed in detail: Alternative A – a No Action Alternative, Alternative B – the Proposed Action, and Alternative C – an Alternative that did not propose any new road construction.

The detailed rationale for my decision, stated further in this document explains how, ultimately, my decision came down to choosing between Alternatives B and C. After evaluating public comments and the FEIS, I found that both alternatives are very similar--both have minimal risks to the environment, both do a very good job of meeting the purpose and need and responding to public issues, and both are consistent with relevant laws, plans and policies. Given that all these factors are equal, my decision was based on the financial differences between the two alternatives and the feasibility of accomplishing our fuels treatments.

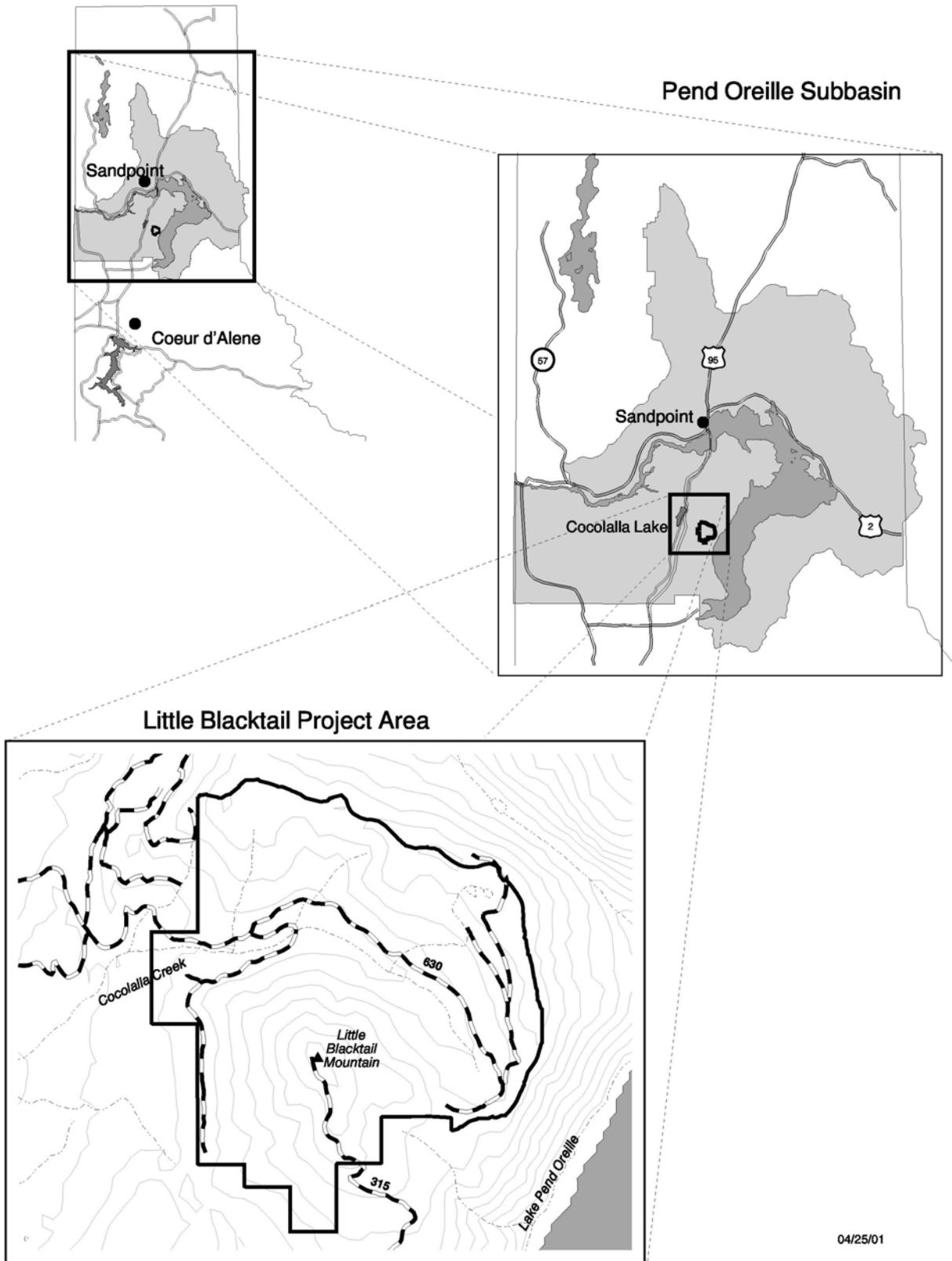


Figure A. Vicinity Map for the Little Blacktail Project

# Document Organization

The following sections provide more specific information on the purpose and need for the project, the activities that will be accomplished with the selected alternative, the public involvement that has taken place, other alternatives that were considered, and the rationale for my decision. Also documented are findings required by laws and policies, identification of the environmentally preferable alternative, when the decision will be implemented, and appeal information.

## Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for the Little Blacktail project was derived from scientific information and assessments, and from field reviews and surveys of the resources in the Cocolalla Creek drainage (FEIS pp. I-1 to I-2). Based on this information we have developed a goal with five main objectives:

To improve the health and productivity of terrestrial and aquatic habitats by:

- *Restoring desired forest cover, structure and pattern, and species composition across the landscape where they are outside natural or accepted ranges.*
- *Providing for wildlife habitat diversity.*
- *Restoring fire as an ecological process.*
- *Reducing the risk of destructive wildfire around the microwave sites at the top of Little Blacktail Mountain and the powerline corridor that serves the electronic equipment.*
- *Maintaining or improving Cocolalla Creek's aquatic habitat by reducing existing and potential sediment risks.*

Additional explanation of the need for each of these objectives follows.

- **Restoring desired forest cover, structure and pattern, and species composition across the landscape where they are outside natural or accepted ranges.**
- **Providing for wildlife habitat diversity.**

For over 90 years, wildfires have been suppressed in the forests in the project area. Over time, this exclusion of fire and the introduction of white pine blister rust have profoundly changed the structure, composition, and function of these forests. In order to maintain healthy, sustainable ecosystems, it is imperative to have species and forest structures that are adapted to disturbances such as insect and disease, fire and climatic variability.

Ecological disturbances, resulting from either natural processes or human-caused events, are responsible for changing landscape patterns and influencing wildlife populations. By maintaining a complex pattern of forest types and age classes across the landscape we can enhance biodiversity and strive to replicate historic patterns.

Root disease and mistletoe, which have always been present in these forests at natural levels, now flourish beyond historical levels due to the increased presence of grand fir and Douglas-fir, trees that are susceptible to these diseases. These forest health problems will continue to spread as long as grand fir and Douglas-fir remain the dominant tree species. As a result, the stands in the project area are not expected to advance successional to the desired forest structure, cover and species composition.

Today, the once dominant, mature ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees are surrounded by a forest of younger 70 to 80 year old Douglas-fir and grand fir trees. As these younger trees fill in open spaces in the forest, they compete with the mature trees for limited nutrients and water, and shade

out grasses, shrubs and other trees that need a lot of sunlight to establish. These large, sun-loving mature trees are decreasing as the lower branches of their crown die from the shade of the encroaching younger trees. Only isolated patches of the older mature trees can be found.

- **Restoring fire as an ecological process.**
- **Reducing the risk of destructive wildfire around the microwave sites at the top of Little Blacktail Mountain and the powerline corridor that serves the electronic equipment.**

Prior to European settlement, wildfires were an influential disturbance process that shaped the forest ecosystem across large landscapes. These fires occurred at a variety of intensity levels, depending on the forest types and moisture conditions. At the turn of the century, settlement surrounding the project area led to logging for homesteads and railroad development, and eventually the establishment of fire suppression policies. Since then, the natural role of fire has ceased to be a dominant ecological force. This has allowed fire-sensitive, shade-tolerant tree species to increase in abundance, and biomass and debris to accumulate.

As insect and disease infested trees die in increasing numbers, they leave behind dead branches and other debris that could fuel a lethal, stand-replacing fire—one that could kill most of the trees. The greater probability of a stand-replacing fire today poses a risk to the human developments on Little Blacktail Mountain and the lower slopes next to National Forest lands, as well as to the natural resources that exist throughout the area.

- **Maintaining or improving Cocolalla Creek’s aquatic habitat by reducing existing and potential sediment risks.**

Cocolalla Creek is a listed 303(d) water quality limited segment from the mouth of Cocolalla Lake to its headwaters (IDEQ 2000). The creek has been significantly modified by human activities for the lower two-thirds of its length in the private land areas below the Little Blacktail project area. The current status of this stream is that it has an approved Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for sediment delivery but no developed implementation plan. Under this status, there cannot be a net increase in sediment within the watershed from any activities (FEIS p. III-66).

Some existing roads within the Cocolalla subwatershed have caused increased sediment delivery to stream channels. Observable effects within the project area and subwatershed include erosion from road surfaces and ditches and sediment delivery to Cocolalla Creek

## The Selected Alternative

Alternative B (also referred to as the Proposed Action in the FEIS) was developed specifically to fulfill the purpose and need. See table A for a summary of activities and Attachment D for maps.

## Details of Alternative B<sup>1</sup>

Vegetation Treatments: Approximately 722 acres will be harvested using selective harvest treatment. Silvicultural prescriptions may include: thinning, shelterwood preparatory cuttings, improvement cutting and sanitation salvage cutting. Trees removed will generally be smaller or less dominant trees in the stand, species not desired for future stand composition, or diseased or dead trees that are not needed to meet future stand or wildlife habitat objectives.

Approximately 509 acres will be harvested using regeneration harvest treatment. Silvicultural prescriptions may include: irregular shelterwood with reserves, seed tree with reserves, and group selection. The size of open areas will range from approximately two acres to several hundred acres. Most of the trees will be removed with this type of cutting for the purpose of providing growing space for planted or natural seedlings. Both live and dead trees will be retained in an irregular spacing to provide wildlife habitat, maintain visual quality, and provide shelter for planted seedlings and a seed source for natural regeneration. The Regional Forester granted approval to exceed the 40-acre opening limit that is specified in CFR 219.27(d)(2)(i) and Forest Service Manual 2470.1 (see Attachment B).

An additional opportunity of Alternative B is to initiate visual rehabilitation of an existing clearcut on the northwest side of Little Blacktail Mountain. This clearcut does not meet Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs). Initiating visual rehabilitation will help move the VQO toward Forest Plan objectives.

See Attachment A for a list of stands to be treated in the project area and their existing conditions.

Fuel Treatments: Prescribed burning (underburning) will be the primary tool used to reduce fuel accumulations and the risk of destructive wildfire, and to reinvigorate wildlife habitat. Non-fire fuel treatments, include “limb and lop” (branches are cut from felled trees to a predetermined height then scattered to reduce fuel concentrations), grapple piling, and top-attached yarding (trees are yarded out of the woods with the top attached to the top log; the top limbs are severed from the merchantable bole at the log landing and placed in piles for burning).

Logging Systems: Approximately 40% of the area will be skyline yarded, the remainder will be helicopter yarded (30%) and tractor yarded (30%). Approximately 5.4 miles of temporary roads will be designed and constructed. These roads are needed in order to harvest trees using skyline yarding.

Road Work To Improve Aquatic Habitat: Road work will occur on approximately 13.5 miles of existing roads. Road work activities designed to reduce sediment will include spot surfacing at stream crossings, installing relief culverts, cleaning and improvement of ditches, cleaning inlet and outlets of culverts, and installing rolling dips and outlet ditches. These activities will help improve drainage and decrease sediment delivery to stream channels. Drainage structures that pose sediment risks will be repaired, replaced, removed or redesigned and additional drainage structures will be installed. This will improve the water quality and fish habitat by reducing sediment production.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that these numbers, although often displayed to the nearest tenth of a percent (usually derived from databases and models), are our best estimates given the information we have and are primarily used for comparative purposes. Upon implementation, we strive to stay within the bounds of these numbers and the scope of our analysis (see the Preface of the FEIS for more information).

**Table A. Activities that will occur under the Alternative B**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Alternative B (Proposed Action)</b>
<b>Proposed Vegetative Treatments (Acres)</b>	
Selective harvest	722
Regeneration harvest	509
Total Proposed Treatment Acres	1,231
<b>Proposed Road Treatments (Miles)</b>	
Temporary Road Construction	5.4
Temporary Road Decommissioned	-5.4
Existing Road Work <sup>2</sup>	13.5
Existing Road Decommission	-0.7
Existing Road Storage	0.8
<b>Fuel Treatments (Acres)</b>	
Underburn	772
Limb and Lop	194
Grapple Pile	256
Yard Tops	9
Total Fuels Treatment acres	1,231
<b>Logging Systems (Acres)</b>	
Helicopter	386
Skyline	473
Tractor	372
Total Harvested Acres	1,231

Additional road work to improve durability for project and public use and to reduce existing and potential sediment risks includes one or more of the following activities: brushing, blading, rolling the road grade for increased drainage, armoring of culvert catch basins and outlets, adding gravel surfacing, replacing stream crossings, stabilizing cut and fill slopes and removing encroaching road fills.

Approximately 0.7 mile of unclassified existing roads will be decommissioned to remove the roads from the landscape and reduce sediment risks over time. Of this total approximately 0.4 mile are currently drivable (two roads each 0.2 mile in length) and approximately 0.3 mile (one road segment) are not drivable. Approximately 0.8 mile of two existing road segments will be put into long-term storage. These segments are classified roads that are currently not drivable.

Following project activities all temporary roads will be decommissioned to avoid sediment risks. Decommissioning includes removal of all stream crossings and full recontour of the entire road prism, introduction of woody debris, and revegetation as needed.

### *Other Restoration Projects*

The following projects are beyond the immediate restoration needs of this area but have been analyzed in the event that funding would become available to accomplish them (FEIS p. II-20). If

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<sup>2</sup> Road work consists of former definitions for “reconstruction” and “maintenance”. See FEIS p.II-7 for definitions.

sufficient revenues were generated from the sale of timber, those funds would be used. Other funding sources may be available and each project would be prioritized with other needs across the IPNF and accomplished with appropriated funding. The following projects are listed in order of priority. Figure 6 (Appendix M) identifies the location of all projects except noxious weed treatment and monitoring, and landing slash disposal.

### **Riparian Road Obliteration and Landing Slash Disposal**

A non-system road located almost entirely within the riparian area of Cocolalla Creek is diverting water down the road surface in wheel ruts. This situation affects overland flows on much of the length of this road. Approximately 3,000 feet of this road would be deep ripped, seeded, and fertilized. Waterbars would be placed every 50-100 feet. Recontouring of the roadbed would occur on approximately 1,500 feet. The recontoured section would be revegetated with grass and seedlings. Two stream crossings would be removed and reshaped, and one culvert would be removed. Excess debris from landing slash along main travel routes would be buried after landings have been burned.

### **Wildlife Habitat Burning on High Ridge Ecosystems**

A high ridge ecosystem maintenance project proposes to slash and mechanically remove sub-merchantable conifers within stands 658-01-29 and 658-01-76 (93 acres) to help restore ridge system habitats and reduce encroachment of vegetation. Prescribed burning would follow this. Burning would encourage regeneration of early successional vegetation and increase the vigor and palatability of existing browse species.

### **Inventory and Treatment of New Noxious Weed Invaders**

All areas of soil disturbance would be inventoried after harvest activities for new noxious weed infestations. New weed populations would be treated according to guidelines established in the Sandpoint Noxious Weed Control Project FEIS (USDA 1998). Treatment of pre-existing weed infestations other than those treatments described under Features Common to All Action Alternatives (see FEIS, Chapter II) would occur only if appropriated funding were available.

### **Timber Stand Improvement**

Thinning young, small diameter trees (formerly known as precommercial thinning) and other work would redistribute growth and trend stand species composition to desired conditions. Thinning would leave roughly 400 trees per acre, in about 10x10 foot leave spacing. All slash from thinning would be removed from road ditch lines.

To control the density levels of the understory within most of the harvested units, either a weed and release or slashing treatment would be accomplished. In general, the regeneration cuts (irregular seed tree and irregular shelterwood cuts) and the group selection harvests would require slashing. The selective cut units (sanitation, salvage, improvement cut, shelterwood preparatory cut, and commercial thin prescriptions) would require some level of weed and release treatment. All slash would be removed from road ditch lines.

### ***Future Salvage Opportunities***

The effects analysis of the FEIS includes potential salvage of up to one million board feet of dead and dying trees from proposed harvest units for approximately six years after the timber sale contract is completed (FEIS p. II-22). Salvage opportunities could take place within the harvest units as long as it meets the following criteria:

- Salvage activities must meet INFS guidelines.
- Salvage activities must protect all Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites or historic properties or areas, and other improvements from disturbances.
- Salvage would take place when only existing skid trails would be used.
- Salvage would meet snag and coarse woody debris guidelines
- Salvage would not take place if the activity would have an adverse effect on threatened, endangered and sensitive plant, animal or fish species or their habitat.
- Salvage would not include any new road construction.
- Salvage would not occur on soils having a “high risk” rating in any category listed in the IPNF Erosion, Sediment Delivery and Mass Failure Hazard Ratings if the activity would have an adverse effect on the soil or water resources.
- Salvage would not take place if the activity would have an adverse effect to a flood plain, wetland or municipal watershed.
- Salvage activities would meet Assigned Visual Quality Objectives.

The Interdisciplinary Team would review any changes to the above criteria. A Supplemental Information Report would be written to determine if additional analysis is needed and a Supplemental Decision is necessary.

## Modification of the Selected Alternative Between the Draft and Final EIS

After reviewing public comments and gathering additional information on proposed road construction in the project area, Alternative B was modified in two main ways:

1. Management of new roads that were proposed in the Draft EIS to be constructed and put into storage for future use changed so that all roads constructed would be decommissioned after their use for project activities.
2. All existing unclassified roads not currently part of the transportation system will be decommissioned.

These changes were made based on concerns about adding roads to the transportation system and concerns about potential sediment risks into Cocolalla Creek which is a water quality limited segment.

## Specific Features of the Selected Alternative

After reviewing public comments and analyzing the potential effects of proposed activities, specific design features were identified to reduce and mitigate potential impacts to natural resources of concern (FEIS pp. II-8 to II –20). These features will be incorporated into the project design, timber sale contract, and other contracts and project plans. A list of resources to be protected follows. See Attachment C for the specific protection measures.

- Features Related to Vegetation Management
- Features Designed to Protect Water and Fish Habitat
- Features Designed to Protect Air Quality
- Features Designed to Protect Soil and Site Productivity
- Features Designed to Protect Heritage Resources
- Features Designed to Protect Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive and Rare Plants
- Features Designed to Prevent the Spread of Noxious Weeds
- Features Designed to Protect Scenery and Visual Quality
- Features Designed to Protect Trails

- Features Related to Roads and Access Management
- Features Related County Roads
- Features Related to Temporary Roads

### *Schedule of Activities*

The following table shows the anticipated implementation schedule for activities under the Selected Alternative.

**Table 2. Approximate schedule of activities.**

Activity	Alt. B
Road construction/road work	2001-2002
Timber harvest	2002-2006
Prescribed burning	2003-2009
Tree planting	2004-2011
Other Restoration Projects	2006-2011

## Monitoring

### Forest Plan Monitoring

For activities in the Little Blacktail project area, the Selected Alternative will comply with specific monitoring requirements identified by the Forest Plan (Forest Plan, Chapter IV). The length of time that monitoring is needed will be determined by the results and evaluation of what is being monitored. When it is certain that regulations and standards are being met, monitoring of a particular element will cease. If monitoring evaluations show that regulations or standards are not being achieved at the desired level, management intervention will occur (FEIS p. II-22).

### Monitoring Specific to This Project

Project implementation generally involves the efforts of a variety of individuals with both specialized and general skills and training (FEIS p. II-23). Employees are accustomed to working together to achieve the desired project objectives. For example, it is common for a sale preparation forester or sale administrator to discuss specific ground or project conditions with the wildlife biologist or hydrologist to apply the best practices on the ground. Joint field reviews are taken as needed. This steady informal communication allows for incremental adjustments throughout project layout and implementation to achieve the desired results. In addition to these less formal monitoring procedures, the following monitoring items will be conducted:

Noxious Weeds: Pretreatment of roads and equipment as proposed will be documented on sale inspection reports. The effectiveness of seeding disturbed areas will be evaluated upon completion of the activity. Treated acres for weeds will be monitored according to treatment priorities established in the Sandpoint Noxious Weed Control Project FEIS. Decommissioned roads will be monitored for effectiveness of seeding and fertilizing and new weed invaders for a period of approximately three years.

TES Plants: Monitoring of sensitive plant populations where the proposed activity area was modified to avoid adverse effects will be conducted to validate the effectiveness of mitigation measures during and following the activity.

Vegetation: All regeneration units will be monitored for regeneration success (National Forest Management Act requirements). This is required by NFMA and will occur regardless of funding.

Each active harvest unit will be visited at a frequency necessary to assure compliance with the timber sale contract. Minor contract changes or contract modifications will be enacted, when necessary, to meet objectives and standards on the ground.

Best Management Practices: Best management practices will be incorporated into the design of all temporary road construction and road work. The Zone Hydrologist will review the planned design of all temporary roads to assure compliance with BMPs. The engineering representative and the Zone Hydrologist will monitor all temporary and reconditioned roads to ensure that they were built or restored to specifications.

Air Quality: During the burning of timber harvest residues (slash), smoke management guidelines will be followed as prescribed in the Idaho Smoke Management Memorandum of Agreement (1990), and the North Idaho Cooperative Smoke Management Plan (1990). Each airshed has a coordinator responsible for reporting all planned activity to a monitoring unit. The monitoring unit regulates the prescribed burning activities of all participants in the program. The Idaho Division of Environmental Quality recognizes this process as Best Available Control Technology for prescribed burning.

Air Quality is monitored by the North Idaho and Montana Airshed Groups during the fall burning season and yearlong by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Visuals: The project will be reviewed during and after harvest operations are complete to assess whether or not visual quality objectives (VQOs) were met.

## Public Involvement

In October of 1998, a proposal for the Little Blacktail project was mailed out to approximately 130 individuals, organizations, agencies, tribes and local media on the Sandpoint District mailing list to gather comments to be used in an Environmental Assessment (EA). The project was also listed on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Activities in March of 1997 and has continued to be on the schedule ever since. From these efforts we received 27 comments from individuals, organizations and agencies.

Meetings were held with key members of the interdisciplinary team and various members of the public between November of 1998 and July of 2000. These meetings were held at the request of the public. The intent of these meetings was to clarify concerns, answer questions, or review site-specific areas of concern. Due to some of these meetings changes were made to the proposed action. To highlight some of the changes: an area was eliminated from timber harvest due to its proximity to an individual's private water source, another area was eliminated from timber harvest due to its proximity to a seasonal wet depression. I feel these meetings with the public helped the interdisciplinary team formulate a proposed action that was more responsive to the site-specific needs on the ground.

A Notice of Intent to prepare the EIS was published in the Federal Register on December 7, 1999. We received comments from two agencies.

In February of 2000 we sent an update letter on the project to 27 people who had previously indicated interest in receiving mailings. The intent of the update letter was to inform those people interested in the project that the project had been put on hold due to the Douglas-fir Beetle Project

and we would now, for procedural purposes, be preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Little Blacktail project instead of an EA. A total of four responses were received (FEIS p. II-1 to II-2)

## Public Review of the Draft EIS

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was mailed on July 23 and 24, 2001 to 41 individuals, agencies and groups for review (FEIS p. II-2). The Draft EIS presented specific information on the proposal, the alternatives to the proposal, and the results of analysis of the information gathered. The Federal Register Notice of Availability of the DEIS was published on August 3, 2001. During the public comment period a total of 7 comment letters were received, two from local landowners, three from environmental groups, and two from other agencies. The responses to public input can be found in Appendix I of the FEIS. Letters from other agencies are included in their entirety as required in Appendix I of the FEIS. Responses to comments from the EPA are included with the other comments.

Comments received after public review of the Draft EIS were used to further analyze the proposed action and alternatives, develop new mitigation measures and issues, and prepare the Final EIS. Key changes due to public comments resulted in the addition of Finances as an analysis issue, the addition of an appendix featuring the soils analysis (Appendix F), and new design measures for temporary roads to reduce potential sediment risks (which includes decommissioning of all temporary roads instead of putting some into storage).

## Reasons For My Decision

The purpose and need statements explain why we have proposed this project. When considering alternatives, it is important to me that the Selected Alternative is one that best fulfills our purpose and need. At the same time, I must weigh other important considerations such as what level of effects the alternative will have on the environment, how well it addresses public concerns, and whether it is consistent with applicable laws and policies.

## How Well the Selected Alternative Fulfills the Purpose and Need

Below are our purpose and need statements, followed by my rationale for selecting Alternative B based on the purpose and need.

- ***Restoring desired forest cover, structure and pattern, and species composition across the landscape where they are outside natural or accepted ranges.***
- ***Providing for wildlife habitat diversity.***

I believe the Selected Alternative will begin to change successional stages and result in improved forest health and wildlife habitat. Our analysis shows that proposed vegetation treatments will convert homogeneous stands that have a high component of Douglas-fir and grand fir currently showing signs of stress from insect activity, and disease to more diverse stands with desired, longer-lived species (FEIS pp. III-14 to III-18). This will also trend early successional patch sizes and patterns toward historic ranges. The structure of vegetation within harvest units will be similar to natural fire and successional processes. Individual trees and snags, clumps of trees, and unharvested riparian areas will create a mosaic of residual vegetation across the landscape. These trends in the coniferous vegetation will, in turn, improve wildlife habitat by creating long-term habitat stability for species such as flammulated owls and goshawks (FEIS pp. III-57 to III-65).

There were concerns about the potential of new road construction and the improvement of existing undrivable roads to create increased motorized access into unroaded areas affecting wildlife habitat security. Mitigation and design features that address these concerns include decommissioning all temporary roads at the end of the project, and restoring currently non-drivable classified roads to the same non-drivable state. In addition, measures have been established to prevent public use from occurring during the life of the project (FEIS pp.II-20 to II-21). The Selected Alternative was specifically designed to minimize the amount of time temporary roads will remain on the landscape.

- ***Restoring fire as an ecological process.***
- ***Reducing the risk of destructive wildfire around the microwave sites at the top of Little Blacktail Mountain and the powerline corridor that serves the electronic equipment.***

The analysis shows that prescribed burning will help restore fire to fire-dependent habitat types (FEIS pp. III-34 to III-41). More than 1,200 acres, or over half of the project area will be treated for fuels reduction. As described in Chapter II of the FEIS treatments involve a combination of timber harvest and fuels treatments that will greatly reduce the risk of destructive wildfire around the microwave towers and the powerline corridor that serves them.

Based on our analysis, I feel confident that Alternative B provides the best possible combination of fuel treatments, while providing better access for prescribed burning with the construction of temporary roads. These reductions in fuels will create a low potential for the development of a destructive crown fire within the project area while reintroducing fire into the ecosystem. Some people have questioned our policy of continued fire suppression in this area when we have stated that such actions have caused some of the vegetation and fuels problems we are dealing with. I recognize that severe stand-replacing fires are part of the fire history in this area; however, it would be irresponsible of me to consider not suppressing fires with the proximity of the project area to private lands and developments.

- ***Maintaining or improving Cocolalla Creek's aquatic habitat by reducing existing and potential sediment risks.***

Currently, the primary risk to aquatic habitat is sediment from existing roads. It is important that we reduce any sediment risks because Cocolalla Creek is a water quality segment of concern (FEIS ppIII-65 to III-72). With a timber sale we will be able to repair areas of roads that cause chronic sediment problems sooner than if we were fund the road work without a timber sale. An additional benefit of this project is that we can generate revenues from the sale of timber that will accomplish other necessary road work that will reduce sediment sources. Without the revenues from the timber sale, funding to accomplish this road work might not be available as soon because this watershed is not designated as a high priority watershed for restoration (FEIS p. III-69).

Some people expressed concern about the effects of timber harvest and created openings on peak flows and sediment delivery. Our analysis shows that with the Selected Alternative, timber harvest would have no effect on peak flows and sediment delivery to streams and riparian areas because of the protection afforded by mitigation measures that require vegetation buffers on all streams and wetlands and the design of vegetation prescriptions (FEIS p. III-75).

Based on our analysis, I believe that constructing temporary roads will help us achieve the purpose and need more economically than other alternatives and provide a greater opportunity to fund other projects (FEIS pp. III-85 to III-88). Concerns have been expressed about the effect of new road construction on aquatic habitats. I recognize that the construction of new roads, and their

presence on the landscape could pose risks to the environment, but I believe we have designed the Selected Alternative to have short-term minor effects. However, in the long-term, the decommissioning of temporary roads and unclassified roads will have positive benefits in terms of sediment reduction (FEIS pp. III-73 to III-78).

Our analysis shows that the primary effect of new road construction on aquatic habitat would be the potential to cause sediment delivery at stream crossings. There are four stream crossings over intermittent streams associated with temporary road construction. Our analysis predicts a negligible increase in sediment delivery to the intermittent channels, and a reduction of sediment delivered to Cocolalla Creek in the long run with the application of design requirements for new roads and site-specific mitigation measures along with other road work proposed on existing roads (FEIS pp. II-8 to II-14, pp. III-73 to III-78, and Appendix A). The analysis also demonstrates that all new road construction will be located on landtypes that have low potential for mass erosion and surface erosion, therefore the risk of increased sediment directed into Cocolalla Creek is very low (FEIS pp. III-75 to III-76). I consider the risk of road building to be acceptable, and I am confident that State and Federal water quality standards will be met.

For these reasons, I feel confident that Alternative B minimizes risks to water quality and fish habitat. I believe that aquatic ecosystems will be maintained throughout project implementation and through significant improvements that will also be achieved through the road work associated with the timber sale.

## Other Alternatives Considered

The Interdisciplinary (ID) Team considered a reasonable range of alternatives as required in 40 CFR 1502.12(a). A total of nine alternatives were considered, and three of those were considered in detail (FEIS pp. II-5 to II-10 and II-25 to II-28). This section discusses the alternatives considered in detail and my rationale for not selecting them and alternatives not considered in detail and their reason for elimination.

### Alternative A – No Action

Alternative A provides a baseline comparison of predicted environmental consequences associated with taking no action versus implementing any of the action alternatives. Under this alternative, no action would be taken to respond to the Purpose and Need. There would be no tree removal, no prescribed burning, no fuels reduction, and no road construction or decommissioning. Existing trends and uses, such as fire protection and recreation management, would continue (FEIS p. II-5).

If this alternative were selected, natural processes, except influences from wildfire suppression, would continue. Ecosystem health and wildlife habitat would continue to decline, mortality from insects and disease would increase, and fuels would accumulate. These conditions would increase the risk of large stand-replacing fires, which would threaten the microwave site, powerlines, and nearby private developments (FEIS pp. III-14 to III-65). In addition, sediment delivery to Cocolalla Creek would continue (FEIS p. III-75).

I did not select Alternative A because it would not meet the stated objectives in the purpose and need identified in Chapter I of the FEIS, it would not improve watershed conditions, and it would pose unacceptable risks from wildfires to private developments. I strongly believe that it is important to accomplish our purpose and need in the Little Blacktail area. I believe an active restoration approach for both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem conditions are most consistent with

governing direction and the best available science contained in the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project Scientific Assessment and other assessments (FEIS pp. I-4 to I-5). The No Action Alternative would not initiate such active restoration or a trend to bring this landscape toward desired conditions in the long-term.

The long-term consequences of this alternative would pose more risk to the aquatic resources and terrestrial habitats. For these reasons, I did not select Alternative A.

### Alternative C – No New Roads

Alternative C was developed in response to public comments during scoping that expressed objection to any new road construction because of potential effects on forest resources such as water quality and wildlife habitat (FEIS p. II-9). It provided a way for us to address these concerns by eliminating new road construction from the Alternative and analyzing how not constructing new roads might show different effects than the proposed action (now the Selected Alternative B). The only difference between Alternatives B and C is the action of road construction. The vegetation treatments remain the same. Whether roads are on the landscape does not influence the type of treatments, but it does alter the proposed logging systems and fuel treatments in some units (see table A above).

Alternative C addresses concerns about new road construction. It would also meet the purpose and need very well. However, I did not select this alternative for two key reasons. First, Alternative C would be more expensive to log (FEIS p. III-88). It would skyline yard less ground and helicopter yard more ground. This change in logging systems would not provide any better resource protection on the ground than Alternative B (FEIS table 4 p. II-29) and would equate to a much more costly timber sale. A more costly timber sale would also limit the amount of revenue generated by the sale to be used for other projects.

Second, without the temporary roads, access for equipment during prescribed burning would be much more difficult. Temporary roads would serve as fuel breaks in the areas where we will use prescribed fire (FEIS p. III-85). This reduces the cost of having to construct additional firelines while providing access for people and equipment.

For these reasons, I did not select Alternative C.

### Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Detail Study

Six additional alternatives were developed by the interdisciplinary team and considered during scoping and project development, but dismissed from further study as explained in the FEIS (pp.II-25 to II-28) and below.

#### Moist Site Stands South Of Cocolalla Creek

The Interdisciplinary Team considered including more moist sites for timber harvest located in T55N, R2W Section 22, adjacent to Cocolalla Creek. These stands were not high priority stands to enter for silvicultural reasons. Since this area was low priority for vegetation treatment, and it is an unroaded landscape providing a spectrum of wildlife habitat within the project area, the team decided to drop this area from the proposed action. In addition, after reviewing the IPNF Erosion, Sediment Delivery and Mass Failure Hazard Ratings it was recognized that this area has moderate mass failure potential, high sediment delivery potential and potential to affect slope hydrology.

## Use of Even-Aged Harvest Units Not Exceeding 40 Acres

An alternative was considered that would have limited new openings to 40 acres or less and would not make any existing openings greater than 40 acres. However, it was not carried into the detailed analysis for the following reasons:

- Smaller openings would not sufficiently address the current vegetation problems on a landscape level and adequately meet the Purpose and Need.
- Smaller openings spread across the landscape would fragment large blocks of interior forest habitat and would not help to promote historic patch sizes.
- Visual resource impacts of smaller openings over a more extensive area can be greater than large openings of similar structure.
- Smaller openings would not effectively reduce the fuel loading to a scale that could provide fuelbreaks at the landscape level.
- Many stands proposed for regeneration harvest are experiencing high mortality, and are expected to continue with this level of mortality in the future. From a hydrologic standpoint, many of the stands will be openings within the next 10 years.

For these reasons the alternative was eliminated from detail study.

## Extensive Roding

The interdisciplinary team considered an alternative that would have extensively roded the project area. This alternative was dropped from further consideration primarily due to the potential impacts to the visual resources of the project area as there would be difficulty in roding sidehills while still meeting visual quality objectives. Other considerations included impacts to aquatics. A map displaying the proposed roding under this alternative can be found in the project file.

## Rehabilitate the Ecosystem Without a Commercial Logging Operation

Comments were received requesting the team consider alternatives that would rehabilitate the ecosystem and implement restoration projects without commercial logging. The following are the suggested alternatives that were considered. Reasons for dismissal follow.

### 1. Treat the Vegetation without Commercial Logging

**Prescribed Burning Only** – This alternative was considered after receiving comments saying that the DEIS rejected burning as a way to deal with the problems created by continued fire suppression. Using prescribed burning as the primary tool would not be very effective at achieving the objectives of the purpose and need for most of the project area. Safe and controlled prescribed fires are planned in spring and fall when weather and moisture conditions help fire managers keep fire intensities and severities low. In stands where thinning is the objective, shady conditions and lack of continuous natural fuels would make burning in spring or fall difficult. Trees would not be thinned effectively with fire alone to achieve desired composition, cover, structure, and pattern. In order to get a fire to achieve the objectives of thinning in the shady stands, hotter and drier conditions would be necessary, and this would likely result in a lethal crown fire which would likely kill most of the trees.

In the areas where the objective is to regenerate the stand to desired species, using fire to accomplish objectives in those stands would require igniting the stands in hot and dry conditions to produce a lethal fire that would kill enough of the trees and brush and create the openings

needed for regenerating desired species. Such conditions would cause too great a risk of consuming more than just the trees in the areas proposed for regeneration and risk loss of control so close to private lands (see fire effects discussion “How Easily An Unwanted Fire Could Be Suppressed”).

Therefore, because of the risk to resources and adjacent private property, none of the stands would be treated if prescribed fire were the only tool to be used. In addition, funding to reduce existing and potential sediment risks could be difficult to obtain because this watershed is not considered high priority for watershed restoration work (see Chapter III, Watershed and Fisheries section). For these reasons, this alternative was dropped from further consideration and was eliminated from further study.

**Use Of Stand-Replacing (Lethal) Fire To Achieve Objectives** – This alternative was considered as a result of receiving comments asking why lethal fire couldn’t be used to achieve the same objectives as regeneration harvest. Although a lethal fire would achieve some objectives for stands in which we wish to reestablish desired species, it would not be as effective an approach at meeting the objectives of the purpose and need for the following reasons:

- ⇒ Allowing a lethal fire to burn so close to private lands would be socially unacceptable to nearby landowners due to risk of escape.
- ⇒ The severity of the fire could potentially exacerbate sediment problems by removing vegetation in riparian areas, and removing duff and humus layers from the soil. It could also potentially contribute more sediment from existing roads. These conditions would likely violate INFS standards for fire/fuels management as stated in FM-1 (see Appendix B, p.4), and forest plan standards for meeting state and Federal water quality requirements (USDA 1987 p. II-33).
- ⇒ A lethal fire would not improve the species composition through natural reseeding due to a declining seed source from desired seral species. Planting would still be necessary to provide the mix of species desired. Without it, shade tolerant species such as Douglas-fir and grand fir would continue to dominate.
- ⇒ A lethal fire would likely kill most of the trees potentially including moist riparian stands. It would therefore not provide the structural diversity, mosaic patterns, and wildlife habitat diversity desired. It would also waste usable and highly demanded wood fiber that could be sold as a by-product of achieving our ecosystem objectives. The microwave sites and powerline corridor would also likely be damaged.
- ⇒ This alternative would not be consistent with Forest Plan goals 8, 18, 19, 22 and 23 (see FEIS Chapter I), nor would it meet Forest Plan standards for visual quality (FP, page II-25), soil productivity (FP, page II-32), water quality (FP, page II-33), air quality (FP, page II-34), or fire management (FP, page II-38).

For these reasons, this alternative was eliminated from further study.

**Treat the Vegetation With Non-commercial Thinning** -This alternative was considered as a result of receiving comments asking us if objectives could be achieved only by thinning. After reviewing the stands proposed for treatment it was determined that, thinning would not be very effective at achieving the objectives for the larger-diameter stands that are proposed for treatment (see Vegetation Treatment Definitions in Chapter II). Non-commercial thinning is typically used for small diameter trees, which do not have much value as wood products. If we were to use non-

commercial thinning as a method to treat the vegetation we would only treat two stands (stands 29 and 76), achieving only some of the objectives for wildlife habitat and vegetation. Thinning in larger diameter stands (selective harvest, in this case) is a technique used to promote the healthy growth and productivity of existing desired species by reducing competition from other trees for light, water and nutrients. Thinning stands with regeneration objectives would not be an appropriate treatment method because these stands are declining in growth and productivity due to age, disease and insect attack. Thinning these trees would only exacerbate the poor health and growth of these stands, would not achieve our objectives, and would not comply with Forest Plan Goal 24 (see Chapter I).

Although thinning could be done in dense stands with larger diameter trees, leaving the cut trees on the ground would create an unacceptably high fuel loading over the long-run that would increase the risk of a severe and intense lethal fire. This would not meet the project's purpose and need to reduce the risk of destructive wildfire around the microwave sites. It would also not comply with Forest Plan standards to "protect property from wildfire" (USDA 1987, p. II-38) and "reduce impacts from burning to air quality by encouraging the use of forest products to reduce biomass" (USDA 1987 p. II-34). A commercial timber sale would provide a tool to safely and effectively reduce the biomass on site prior to treatment with prescribed fire, reduce the extra fuel loading, sell the commercially valuable wood, and recover monies to accomplish sediment risk reduction activities.

For these reasons, this alternative was eliminated from further study.

## **2. Accomplish only Watershed Restoration or Road Obliteration Work**

This alternative was considered after receiving comments that we should consider accomplishing only the watershed restoration and road obliteration work. Such an alternative would only accomplish 1 out of the 5 objectives of our purpose and need (reducing existing and potential sediment risks to Cocolalla Creek). Without a timber sale it is uncertain whether we would receive funding for these activities based on budget projections, and because this watershed is not considered high priority for watershed restoration work (FEIS p. III-69). For these reasons, this alternative was eliminated from further study.

## **Findings And Consistency With Laws, Regulations And Policy**

Numerous laws, regulations and agency directives require that my decision be consistent with their provisions. The following discussion is not an all-inclusive listing, but is intended to provide information on the areas raised as issues or comments by the public or other agencies. Consistency with other applicable laws and regulations not listed here are addressed under various resource Environmental Consequences sections in the FEIS.

### *National Environmental Policy Act*

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires analysis of projects to ensure the anticipated effects upon all resources within the project area are considered prior to project implementation (40 CFR 1502.16). The analysis for the Little Blacktail project followed the guidelines of NEPA as provided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Alternatives were developed based on existing conditions, Forest Plan goals and objectives, and public concerns and recommendations. A total of three alternatives were considered in detail, including a no-action alternative as required by NEPA (FEIS p. II-5 to II-10). An additional six alternatives were briefly considered but eliminated from further study as described in Chapter II of the FEIS

(pp.II-25 to II-28). The range of alternatives is appropriate given the scope of the proposal, the public issues expressed, and the purpose and need for action as stated in Chapter I of the FEIS (FEIS p. I-1).

### *Natural Resource Agenda*

On March 2, 1998, Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck announced the Forest Service Natural Resource Agenda (FEIS p. I-9). The Agenda provides the Chief's focus for the Forest Service, and identifies specific areas where there will be added emphasis, including:

- Watershed Health and Restoration
- Sustainable Forest Ecosystem Management
- Forest Roads
- Recreation

The activities to be implemented under the Selected Alternative are consistent with the goals and tentative direction provided under the Natural Resources Agenda to date. Watershed health and restoration would be addressed through road work and maintenance. Sustainable forest ecosystem management will be addressed by converting stands to desired, long-lived species less susceptible to disease, by improving growth and productivity of those species where they exist, and by reducing potential fire severity and the continuing mortality of insect and disease infested stands. Forest roads will be addressed by constructing temporary roads to accomplish proposed activities, by reducing sediment risks posed by existing roads, and by decommissioning unneeded roads or putting into storage roads intended for potential future management. Recreation will be addressed by managing existing recreation opportunities in a way that protects the natural resources in the Little Blacktail project area.

### *Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project*

This analysis was guided by integrated ecological assessments and strategies that resulted in the combined Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service project known as the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). The ICBEMP project is discussed in more detail in the FEIS (p. I-4).

Although the scientific findings are not part of the Forest Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, they are expected to provide guidance for the revision of the Forest Plan. Because of the tentative nature of the direction in the ICBEMP Draft EIS, no decisions or guidelines for analysis will be made using this direction; however, the science behind the Draft EIS is used extensively in the analysis for the Little Blacktail project.

### *Northern Region Overview*

The Northern Region Overview is briefly described in the FEIS (p. I-4). The Overview findings conclude that there are multiple areas of concern in the Northwest Zone of the Region (which includes the Idaho Panhandle National Forests), but that "this subregion holds the greatest opportunity for vegetation treatments and restoration with timber sales...Aquatic restoration should be focused on specific needs based on the zone aquatic restoration strategy" (Northern Region Overview Summary, USDA October 1998, p. 9).

The Overview goes on to state, "The timber management (timber harvest) tool best fits with the forest types in northern Idaho and is essential, for example, to achieve the openings needed to restore white pine and larch, and maintain upland grass/shrub communities. It can enhance

terrestrial/watershed objectives where timber funds are used to close and improve roads. Aquatic restoration could tie with assessing road access needs and obliteration of nonessential [roads]" (Northern Region Overview Summary, USDA October 1998, p. 33).

The activities that will occur under the Selected Alternative are consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Northern Region Assessment.

### *Forest Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests*

All resource plans are to be consistent with the Forest Plan [16 U.S.C. 1604(i)]. The Forest Plan guides all natural resource management activities [36 CFR 219.1(b)]. All administrative activities affecting the National Forest must be based on the Forest Plan [36 CFR 219.10(e)].

Chapter II of the Forest Plan describes in detail Forest-wide management direction, goals, objectives, research needs, desired future condition and standards applicable to the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF). The land allocation decisions made in the Forest Plan allocated lands within the project analysis areas to Management Areas 1, 4, and 9. Chapter III of the Forest Plan describes the Management Area direction for each land allocation for the IPNF.

I have evaluated features of the Selected Alternative against Forest Plan goals, as well as the standards for consistency with the Forest Plan. These Forest Plan goals and standards are discussed in Chapter I of the FEIS (p. I-9 to I-11), with disclosures of Forest Plan consistency for each resource in Chapter III.

All management activities included in the Selected Alternative are in full compliance with Forest Plan goals, objectives and standards, including the Inland Native Fish Strategy amendment to the Forest Plan.

For additional discussion of consistency with the Forest Plan, please refer to the discussion under "National Forest Management Act," in this Record of Decision.

### *Pend Oreille Geographic Assessment*

The Geographic Assessment for the Pend Oreille Lake area, which includes the Pend Oreille Lake sub-basin, is discussed in the FEIS (p. I-5). The assessment (currently in progress) has identified ecosystem trends and changes over the last 100 to 200 years. Several Pend Oreille Geographic Assessment findings relate to the Little Blacktail project area:

- There is a shift in forest structure from early and late forest development to immature size class stands.
- There is a loss of long-lived tree species such as western larch, western white pine, and ponderosa pine, and an increase in Douglas-fir and grand fir.
- There is a lack of wildfire as a natural disturbance factor.
- There is an increased risk of severe stand-replacing fire on dry habitats due to fuel accumulations from the exclusion of fire.

The assessment provides a description of the historic and current ecological, social, and economic conditions of the subbasin. The condition descriptions were used to characterize the analysis areas infested by Douglas-fir beetles. Findings of the Geographic Assessment are very similar to more broad-scale conclusions found at the Columbia Basin and Northern Region scales. The Geographic Assessment suggests converting shade-tolerant/drought and fire-intolerant species to shade-intolerant/drought and fire-tolerant species (FEIS pp. III-1 to III-14). Findings of the Geographic Assessment also indicate that there is an increased risk of stand-replacement fire on

the drier habitat types due to fuel accumulations resulting from fire exclusion. The objectives of this project are consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Geographic Assessment.

### *Endangered Species Act (ESA)*

The Sandpoint District Wildlife Biologist, Fisheries Biologist, and Botanist have evaluated Alternative B in regard to Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive wildlife, fish and plant species. Findings are disclosed in the Biological Assessments and Biological Evaluations FEIS (Appendix H) and summarized here.

- Implementation of Alternative B will have *no effect* on water howellia, Ute ladies'-tresses or Spalding's catchfly or their habitats. All potentially suitable habitat for water howellia will be buffered from direct and indirect effects through implementation of INFS guidelines.
- This project will have *no effect* on bull trout. Bull trout do not currently inhabit the Cocolalla Creek Watershed and they will not be reintroduced into the system while the fish barrier on private land above the mouth is in place. Aspects of this project (road-related activities) in the short term *may affect individuals, but will not lead toward a trend to federal listing of westslope cutthroat trout*. Road construction produces a short-term increase in sediment delivery to streams in the watershed, but improved road drainage would reduce sediment delivery to stream channels in the long term. This reduction in sediment is expected to lead to improved rearing and spawning habitat. Aspects of this project (road-related activities) in the short term *may affect individuals, but will not lead toward a trend to federal listing of torrent sculpin*, if they are present in streams potentially affected by this project. Road construction produces a short-term increase in sediment delivery to streams in the watershed, but improved road drainage would reduce sediment delivery to stream channels in the long term. This reduction in sediment is expected to lead to improved rearing and spawning habitat.
- No Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive wildlife species or their habitat is found within the effects area for this project.

These determinations were based on analysis of Alternative B. I believe the Selected Alternative is consistent with the Endangered Species Act.

### *Clean Air Act*

The Forest-wide standard for air quality is to coordinate all Forest Service management activities to meet the requirements of the State Implementation Plans, Smoke Management Plan and Federal air quality standards. This will be done under the Selected Alternative, and burning will be conducted in a manner that will meet air quality requirements.

The monitoring of air pollutants during prescribed burning seasons is used to eliminate burning during times when such activities will result in violations of the State Standards, including unacceptable impacts to non-attainment areas. The North Idaho/Montana Airshed Group monitors smoke management for air quality; the Forest Service voluntarily ceases burning operations to avoid violation of State standards. The Idaho Panhandle National Forests coordinate and schedule burning activities to maintain air quality. Burning plans addressing smoke management are prepared by qualified personnel. The Sandpoint Ranger District is a member of this group and adheres to the group's restriction procedures. As monitoring units, the airshed groups may reduce burning, stop burning in specific areas, or cease burning entirely when meteorological or existing air quality conditions so warrant. Forest management burning is thereby regulated during the months of September through November (North Idaho Cooperative Smoke Management Plan).

Based on the above and my review of the air quality analysis (FEIS pp. III-43 to III-48), I have concluded that this project meets all criteria to protect air quality.

### *Clean Water Act and Idaho State Water Quality Laws*

The Clean Water Act (as amended, 33 U.S.C. 1323) directs the Forest Service to meet state, interstate and local substantive as well as procedural requirements with respect to control and abatement of pollution in the same manner and to the same extent as any nongovernmental entity. The Forest Service has the statutory authority to regulate, permit and enforce land-use activities on the National Forest System lands that affect water quality.

Upper Cocolalla Creek is a listed 303(d) water quality limited segment from the mouth of Cocolalla Lake to its headwaters (IDEQ 2000). The pollutants of concern are sediment and temperature modification. The current status of this stream is that it has an approved Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) but no implementation plan has been developed yet. Under this status, there cannot be a net increase in sediment within the watershed. Based on the Water Resources and Fisheries analyses in Chapter III (pp. III-73 to III-78), the design of Alternative B, and mitigation and monitoring requirements, I believe Alternative B will ensure compliance with state and Federal water quality regulations by not producing a net increase in sediment within the watershed.

### *National Historic Preservation Act*

Cultural resource surveys have been completed on all areas where ground-disturbing activities will occur. This action is not expected to affect any cultural resources. Recognizing that the potential exists for unidentified sites to be encountered and disturbed during project activity, contract provision C6.24# will be included in all contracts. This provision allows the Forest Service to unilaterally modify or cancel a contract to protect cultural resources regardless of when they are identified. This provision will be enforced if a site is discovered after an activity begins.

Heritage and Tribal interests are regulated by federal laws that direct and guide the Forest Service in identifying, evaluating and protecting heritage resources. We have consulted with the Kalispel Tribe and they had no concerns about the project. Based on the heritage resource reports in the project file and the design features that would be used if cultural resources were discovered during the project, I have concluded that Alternative B complies with the National Historic Preservation Act (FEIS p II-17 and project file).

### *Environmental Justice Act*

Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, ordered federal agencies to identify and address the issue of environmental justice; or the adverse human health and environmental effects that disproportionately impact minority and low-income populations. Based on the composition of the affected communities and the cultural and economic factors, the Selected Alternative will have no adverse effects to human health and safety or environmental effects to minority, low-income, or any other segments of the population (project file).

### *National Forest Management Act (NFMA)*

National Forest Management Act and accompanying regulations require that several other specific findings be documented at the project level.

**Forest Plan Consistency** - Management activities are to be consistent with the Forest Plan [16 USC 1604 (i)]. The Forest Plan guides management activities [36 CFR 219.1(b)]. Consistency with the Forest Plan is discussed in Chapter III of the FEIS, by resource issue.

Upon review of the information disclosed in the Little Blacktail FEIS, Chapter III effects analysis for each resource, I find that my decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS).

### **36 CFR 219.27(a) Resource Protection and 36 CFR 219.27(g) Diversity**

The following statements address resource protection requirements of the National Forest Management Act:

1. Alternative B conserves soils and water resources and will not result in significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land. Water quality is maintained through the use of Best Management Practices, streamside buffers, logging systems designed for minor impacts, and site-specific mitigation measures (FEIS pp. II-8 to II-21). Additionally, watershed conditions are improved both in the short and long term through reduction of chronic sediment sources and the decommissioning of all newly constructed temporary roads (FEIS p. III-75). Soil resources are protected and improved through minimizing erosion, compaction and displacement by reducing tractor yarding and replacing with less impactful systems such as skyline yarding (FEIS p. II-7 and II-13) and helicopter yarding and maintaining coarse woody debris (FEIS p. II-16 and Appendix F).
2. Activities will not affect most potentially serious natural hazards. The vegetative and fuels treatment will reduce the risk of wildlife severity and increase control effectiveness (FEIS p. III-34 to III-41). Hazards from erosion will not be increased by fuel reduction, and will be decreased by planting. The Equivalent Clearcut Area water yield model (ECA) that was used to estimate increases of water yield from proposed activities, predicted that any increase in water yield would be slight and there would be no measurable effect in the duration and intensity of peak flows (FEIS p. III-74). The small degree of change in sediment yield shows minimal overall impacts to the watershed (FEIS p. III-75 to III-76).
3. The timber resource will be managed consistent with the Forest Plan objectives of minimizing hazards due to insects and disease by maintaining stand vigor and diversity of plant communities and tree species (FEIS p. III-1 to III-19).
4. Water bodies and their values are appropriately protected or improved (FEIS pp. II-8 to II-21).
5. The activities will provide for and maintain a diversity of plant and animal communities as described in this decision document. The Selected Alternative will increase vegetative diversity by reforesting 509 acres with white pine, larch, and ponderosa pine seedlings. Diversity will also be improved by re-introducing fire to 772 acres of the forest using prescribed fire burns (FEIS, Forest Vegetation pp. III-1 to III-19; Wildlife pp. III-48 to III-65; and TES Plants, pp. III-22 to III-24).
6. Activities will either not affect or will maintain sufficient habitat for viable populations of existing native vertebrate species and management indicator species consistent with the multiple-use objectives established in the Forest Plan. (FEIS, Wildlife pp. III-48 to III-65).
7. The EIS assesses potential physical, biological, aesthetic, cultural, engineering, and economic impacts of the Selected Alternative and is consistent with multiple uses planned for the area.

Forest Plan consistency is located throughout the FEIS Chapter III sections and also previously mentioned in the section titled Forest Plan For the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

8. Implementation of the Selected Alternative will not affect critical habitat for Threatened and Endangered species. Compliance with the Endangered Species Act is discussed in a previous section.
9. There are no right-of-way grants being issued as part of the activities.
- 10/11. Only temporary road construction would occur. All temporary roads will be designed to standards as described in the FEIS on p. II-8 and II-9 and according to standards appropriate to the planned uses, considering safety, costs of transportation and effects upon lands and resources. FEIS Chapter III addresses effects from proposed roads in relation to each resource. None of the temporary roads are necessary for the permanent transportation system and will be decommissioned following use.
12. Applicable Federal, State, and local air quality standards will be met (FEIS p. III-48).

### **36 CFR 219.27(b) Vegetation Manipulation**

The selected alternative will:

1. **Be best suited to the goals stated in the Forest Plan.** These goals are stated in the FEIS within Chapter I and III. Based upon review of pertinent information from the FEIS, and interdisciplinary team field review, I have determined that Alternative B is well suited to initiate Forest Plan direction and meet the multiple-use goals established for the area.
2. **Assure that technology and knowledge exists to adequately restock lands within five years after final harvest.** Technology and knowledge does exist to comply with this requirement (IPNF Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report, 1998, page 7). Managed stands will be stocked within a timely manner (FEIS p. II-13). Soils Appendix F and the Vegetation project file contain information pertaining to past reforestation within the project area.
3. **Not be chosen primarily because they will give the greatest dollar return or greatest output of timber (although these factors shall be considered).** Economic factors were considered in my decision, however; they were not overriding. After reviewing the two action alternatives it was clear to me that they both provided a net decrease in sediment. The analysis showed the difference between the two alternatives, in terms of sediment delivery, to be negligible. The risk to the watershed with either alternative was low. There was also no difference in effects of each alternative on other resources since vegetation prescriptions remained equal. I used economic efficiency as a way to compare these two alternatives since effects to other resources were similar and low. The Selected Alternative uses less expensive logging systems (skyline vs. helicopter) and therefore is has a higher likelihood of selling as a timber sale. Please refer to page ROD-1 of this decision document and the Financial discussions in the FEIS (pp. III-85 to III-88). In addition, the Selected Alternative provides better access and control points for fuel treatments.
4. **Be chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.** The selection of Alternative B does consider the effects on residual trees and adjacent stands as disclosed in the FEIS Chapter III “Forest Health and Productivity” Section. In addition, design measures to protect residual stands are planned (FEIS p. II -13).

5. **Be selected to avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and to ensure conservation of soil and water resources.** For all alternatives, protection of soil resources and maintenance of long-term soil productivity will be accomplished in accordance with Best Management Practices (BMPs), avoidance of problem soil areas, regulation of yarding equipment used, and site preparation operations. In addition, the application of specific features of the Selected Alternative will assure that site productivity is maintained and soil and water resources are protected (FEIS p. II-13, II-16 and Appendix F Soils).
6. **Be selected to provide the desired effects on water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.** After review of the FEIS, I find that the Selected Alternative will provide the desired effects on vegetation resources within the project areas, and will have desired effects on water, wildlife, and soil resources within the project areas. Please refer to the discussions of effects to resources in Chapter III of the FEIS.
7. **Be practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total costs of preparation, logging and administration.** Data presented in the FEIS relative to transportation, economics and harvesting requirements indicate to me that the selected alternative is feasible and practical. Please refer to the Financial discussions in the FEIS, pages III-85 to III-88.

### **36 CFR 219.27(c) Silvicultural Practices**

The following management requirements apply to timber harvest and silvicultural treatments:

*1) No timber harvesting shall occur on lands classified as not suited for timber production pursuant to Sec 219.14 except for salvage sales or sales necessary to protect other multiple-use values or activities that meet other objectives on such lands if the forest plan establishes that such actions are appropriate. These lands shall continue to be treated for reforestation purposes if necessary to achieve the multiple-use objectives of the plan.*

Guidelines for determining suitability are found in the Forest Plan, and proposed harvest units are within productive habitat types as described in the Forest Plan. Tree harvest will occur within Management Areas 1 and 4 as described in the Forest Plan. These Management Areas are considered suitable for timber management.

### **36 CFR 219.27(d) Even-aged Management**

*1) When timber is to be harvested using an even-aged management system, a determination that the system is appropriate to meet the objectives and requirements of the Forest Plan must be made. Where clearcutting is to be used, it must be determined to be the optimum harvest method [16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(F)(i)].*

The Selected Alternative will employ the use of even-aged management systems (regeneration harvests) on approximately 509 acres. Silvicultural prescriptions may include: irregular shelterwood with reserves, seed tree with reserves, and group selection. The size of open areas will range from approximately two acres to several hundred acres. Most of the trees will be removed with this type of cutting for the purpose of providing growing space for planted or natural seedlings. Both live and dead trees will be retained in an irregular spacing to provide

wildlife habitat, maintain visual quality, and provide shelter for planted seedlings and a seed source for natural regeneration. Clearcutting is not planned.

I have reviewed the vegetation information in the FEIS and Project Files and the site-specific management objectives within the Forest Plan and have determined that even-aged management practices are appropriate (with reserve trees as described in the FEIS p. II-6) as the appropriate method to achieve the multiple resource objectives on the sites selected for harvest. I have received Regional Forester approval for openings over 40 acres in size as required by FSM 2470.1.

## Identification of the Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality defines the environmentally preferable alternative as “ *the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment, it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.*” This definition could be generalized to mean the alternative that best balances negative impacts with benefits.

Identification of the environmentally preferable alternative requires consideration of conditions that are present or foreseeable in both the short- and long-terms. In the short-term, Alternative C – No New Roads, would best meet the definition because it would reduce sediment (from 7.9 tons/year to 3.1 tons/year) coming from existing roads while not building any new roads and provide a low risk to aquatic ecosystems.

However, over the long-term Alternative B – Selected Alternative is also considered a low risk to aquatic ecosystems since all new temporary roads would be engineered using the design features discussed in Chapter II of the FEIS and they are located on landtypes that have low potential for mass erosion and surface erosion. The risk of these temporary roads failing is low. There will be a short-term increase in sediment delivery during the decommissioning of these roads; however, over the long-term, slope stability will be restored, surface erosion will be eliminated and all crossings and associated fill will be removed from the channel. The site should need no future maintenance after this restoration. It is expected that complete restoration of these sites will be reached within three to five years following decommissioning activities and sediment delivery would reach the level of Alternative C (3.1 tons/year) over the long-term (Hickenbottom 2001 and Redente et al 1994).

In conclusion, over the long-term, the difference between the effects of the two alternatives on the environment is the same (FEIS pp. III-65 to III-78).

## Documents And Project Files

This Record of Decision summarizes some of the analyses that have led to this point in the process. More reports and analyses have been referenced or developed during the course of this project and are part of the Project Files. All project files for the Little Blacktail FEIS project are available for review by the public. Please contact Nancy Kertis or Judy York at the Sandpoint Ranger District (208) 263-5111, to review the files.

# Appeal Rights And Implementation

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. A written Notice of Appeal must be submitted within 45 days after the date of notice of this decision is published in the Spokesman-Review newspaper. The Notice of Appeal must be sent to the Appeal Deciding Officer (Regional Forester):

**USDA Forest Service, Region 1**  
**Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer (RFO)**  
**P.O. Box 7669**  
**Missoula, MT 59807**

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient written evidence and rationale to show why my decision should be remanded or reversed. An appeal submitted to the Appeal Deciding Officer becomes a part of the appeal record. An appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

As a minimum, the Notice of Appeal must include:

- ✓ a statement that your document is an appeal filed according to 36 CFR part 215
- ✓ your name, address and, if possible, telephone number
- ✓ the decision being appealed by title and subject, date of decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official
- ✓ the specific changes you want to see in the decision or the portion of the decision to which you object
- ✓ a statement of how my decision fails to consider comments previously provided either before or during the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215.6 and, if applicable, how you believe the decision violates law, regulation, or policy

Your appeal will be dismissed if the preceding information is not included in the Notice of Appeal.

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur five business days from the close of the 45-day appeal-filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

For more information regarding the project, please contact Nancy Kertis, Interdisciplinary Team Leader at the Sandpoint Ranger District, (208) 265-6616.

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RANOTTA K. MCNAIR  
Forest Supervisor

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Date

## ATTACHMENT A - Stand Information

UNIT ACRES	STAND ID	PREF Rx	STAND ACRES	SIZE CLASS	COVER TYPE	ALT. B LOGGING SYSTEM	ALT B. FUELS	REFO	ALT. B STRUCTURE	ALT. B COVER TYPE
5.7	65801003	SW prep	28	MHRS	GF	S	LL/6		Mat/Lrg	GF
32	65801006	CT FR	32	IMSA	DF	S/T	UB/17 GP/15		Imm/Med	DF
41.2	65801007	Irreg SW or Irreg ST	68	IMSA	DF	S	UB/41	WL WP PP	Seed/Sap	WP
46	65801010	SW prep/GS	47	IMSA	DF	T/S	GP/15 UB/31	plant GS	Imm/Med	DF
25	65801012	SW prep/GS	25	IMSA	DF	T/S	GP/22 YT/3		Imm/Med	DF
6.7	65801013	Irreg STor Irreg SW	48	IMSA	DF	T	UB/7	WL PP WP	Seed/Sap	WP
42	65801013	CT/GS	48	IMSA	DF	T/S	UB/32 GP/10		Imm/Med	DF
51	65801014	CT w/ GS	67	IMSA	DF	H/T/S	LL/32 UB/6 GP/13		Imm/Med	DF
4.2	65801014	SW prep/GS	67	IMSA	DF	H	UB/4		Imm/Med	DF
12	65801014	Irreg SW or ST	67	IMSA	DF	T	GP/12	WL WP PP	Seed/Sap	WP
15	65801015	SW prep/GS	19	IMSA	DF	S/T	GP/15		Imm/Med	DF
32.8	65801016	SW prep/GS	33	IMSA	DF	S/T	GP/5 UB/28		Imm/Med	DF
18.7	65801017	Irreg ST or Irreg SW	76	IMSA	DF	S	UB/19	WL PP WP	Seed/Sap	WP
49	65801018	CT	50	IMSA	DF	T	LL/49		Imm/Med	DF
37.3	65801019	CT	37	IMSA	DF	T	LL/37		Imm/Med	DF
214	65801020	Irreg SW & CT	214	IMSA	DF	H/S/T	UB/204 GP/10	PP WL	Seed/Sap	PP
19	65801021	Irreg SW	29	MLRS	DF	H/S/T	UB/14 GP/5	WL WP PP	Seed/Sap	WP
20.7	65801022	Irreg SW	21	MLRS	DF	S/T	GP/7 UB/14	WL WP PP	Seed/Sap	WP
43.9	65801023	Irreg SW or Irreg ST	44	IMSA	DF	S	UB/44	WL WP PP	Seed/Sap	WP
62.4	65801025	CT/GS	62	IMSA	DF	S/T	UB/62		Imm/Med	PP
26.7	65801026	CT/GS	28	IMSA	DF	T/S	UB/17 GP/10		Imm/Med	DF
31.9	65801028	Irreg SW or Irreg ST	32	MLRS	WL	T/S	UB/20 GP/12	WL WP	Seed/Sap	WL
29.1	65801030	CT/GS	29	IMSA	DF	T	GP/29		Imm/Med	DF
50	65801033	Irreg SW or Irreg ST	50	IMSA	DF	S/T	UB/46 GP/5	PP WL	Seed/Sap	PP
17	65801034	ST	17	IMSA	DF	T	UB/17	PP WL WP	Seed/Sap	WP
5	65801035	San Salv	5	IMSA	DF	T	LL/5		Imm/Med	DF
8	65801036	CT	26	IMSA	DF	T/S	GP/8		Imm/Med	DF
13	65801036	Irreg SW or ST	26	IMSA	DF	S/T	UB/13	WL WP PP	Seed/Sap	WL
5	65801036	San/Salv	26	IMSA	DF	T	LL/5		Imm/Med	DF
3	65801037	ST	27	IMSA	DF	T	GP/3	Plant WP/WL	Seed/Sap	WP
4	65801037	CT w/ GS	27	IMSA	DF	T	GP/4		Imm/Med	DF
5	65801039	San/Salv	10	IMSA	C	S	LL/5		Imm/Med	C
8	65801043	Irreg SW or ST	19	IMSA	DF	H	UB/8	Plant WL	Seed/Sap	WL
11	65801043	CT w/ GS	19	IMSA	DF	T/H	LL/11		Imm/Med	DF
1.7	65801044	SW prep/GS	2	IMSA	DF	S	UB/2		Imm/Med	DF



## ATTACHMENT B

### HARVEST OPENINGS GREATER THAN 40 ACRES

#### Introduction

The following table identifies those stands that will exceed 40 acres, either due to the size of the proposed unit, or the size of the unit in conjunction with adjacent openings.

For the purpose of this analysis, past regeneration harvests were no longer considered created openings when both vegetation and watershed conditions met management objectives.

**Table C-1. Acres of proposed and existing openings by stand number and cumulative totals.**

Openings	Stand Number	Silvicultural Prescription**	Estimated Opening Acres	Estimated Cumulative Opening Acres
Proposed	65801033	ISW/ST	50	50
	65801007	ISW/ST	41	
	65801017	ISW/ST	19	
	65801020	ISW/CT	214	
	65801021	ISW	19	
	65801022	ISW	21	
	65801023	ISW/ST	44	
	65801028	ISW/ST	32	
	65801043	ISW/ST	8	
	65801051	ISW/ST	7	
	66001004	ISW/ST	69	
Existing*	65801060	None	18	
	65801065	None	18	
	65801066	None	20	
	65801073	None	16	
	65801074	None	19	565

\*Existing openings include natural and human-caused openings

\*\*ISW = Irregular Shelterwood, ST = Seedtree, CT = Commercial Thin

## ATTACHMENT C - Design Features of the Selected Alternative

### Features Related to Vegetation Restoration

**Protection of Residual Stand** – To protect the residual stand in selective cutting units, the size of logging equipment will be limited to meet the treatment objective. Skid trail width in these cutting units will not exceed 10 feet, unless otherwise agreed to by the sale administrator. Requirements to accomplish this objective may include one or more of the following: (1) limiting the size of logging equipment, (2) using rub trees, or (3) restricting the timing of logging. The use of skyline yarding where feasible protects residual trees as well.

**Retention of Hardwood Trees** - To maintain forest species diversity and wildlife habitat, aspen and birch trees will not be harvested for pulp. If for safety reasons these species need to be cut they will remain on site for long-term site productivity. Selected merchantable conifers in and around aspen patches will be removed to reduce competition for water, nutrients and sunlight.

**Post-harvest Treatments** - In regeneration units, site preparation, fuels treatment, and planting activities will occur within five years following timber harvest or the start of rehabilitation. Site preparation and/or fuels treatment may include a combination of prescribed burning, underburning, grapple piling and hand piling, depending on post-harvest conditions.

**Over 40 acre openings** - Harvest unit size in 11 stands will be over 40 acres in size. The District requested and received Regional Forester approval to exceed the 40-acre size limit. The scoping letter dated October 27, 1998 and the Draft EIS detailed this request. See project file for specific information related to this request.

**Regeneration Harvest** – Regeneration harvest will not be proposed in areas that are unsuitable for reforestation in a timely manner as described in Forest Service Policy (NFMA).

### Features Designed to Protect Water and Fish Habitat

**Best Management Practices** - All activities will be designed to protect water quality and fisheries habitat. Best Management Practices (BMPs) are the primary mechanism to enable the achievement of water quality standards. The Forest Service Handbook 2509.22 (Soil and Water Conservation Handbook) outlines BMPs that meet the intent of the water quality protection elements of the Idaho Forest Practices Act. Site-specific best management practices that have been specifically designed for these alternatives and are part of the design criteria are described more fully in Appendix A.

**Inland Native Fish Strategy** - No-activity zones of protection for fish habitat will be established along stream channels using the guidelines established by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS) unless, as the INFS directs, site-specific conditions warrant changing them (INFS Decision Notice 1995, p. A-5). These no-activity zones include 150-foot (slope distance) protection zones in streams with no fish, 300-foot protection zones in streams that have fish, and 60-foot protection zones in streams that do not have water in them year-round. Ephemeral draws will have a 50-foot protection zone if they either are directly tied to an intermittent channel, or lack large woody debris and vegetation that prevent scouring or head cutting.

In lieu of on-site delineation, standard widths defining Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) will be used without modification. Streamside protection zones (RHCAs) were determined categorically for streams in the project area and are based on the INFS. The buffer widths used will be as described in the INFS.

**Protection of Wetlands, Seeps, and Springs** - Wetlands and aquatic habitat in the northeastern portion of the project area will be buffered from all harvest activities by a minimum of 300 feet.

**Reduction of sediment delivery to channels** - Cross drains and relief culverts will be installed to disperse water and reduce water concentrating below culverts on Roads 630, 630A, and 630C. Road work (e.g. replacement of culverts, installation of rolling dips, armoring of culverts) and road decommissioning within any live crossing will take place after July 15th to reduce risk of effects from sediment during spring runoff and to avoid effects to westslope cutthroat trout redds.

**Protection of private water source** - There is a water source on private land adjacent to the northwest corner of stand 658-01-006. No timber harvest or fuel treatment activities will occur within a 2 to 4 acre area around this source.

## Features Designed to Protect Wildlife Habitat

**Wildlife Tree Retention** – The following minimum amounts of standing trees will be retained within harvest areas:

- Dry Forest: 4 snags and 6 live tree replacements/acre from the largest trees.
- Moist Forest: 6 snags and 9 live tree replacements/acre from the largest trees.

Selection of snags and live tree replacements will emphasize practices that assure the highest probability for long-term retention (Bull et al. 1997). Practices will focus on retaining ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir and western red cedar trees, especially veteran or relic ponderosa pine and larch trees. Trees killed by root disease will not be used to meet retention objectives because of their short lifespan as snags. High hazard snags and snags in the advanced stages of decay will not be used to meet retention objectives (Intermountain Forest and Industry Association et al. 1995).

Large diameter snags (greater than 15 inches diameter) that are felled for safety reasons will remain on site to provide wildlife habitat and long-term site productivity.

To ensure adequate distribution of snags, snags should be represented on every 25 acres of treatment, in clusters or clumps where feasible. (For example if a treatment area is 100 acres in size, this measure will avoid a possible scenario of providing all the snags for the 100 acres within a 5 acre patch and no snags on the remaining 95 acres).

Where necessary, an unharvested perimeter will be left around large, relic, fire-burned trees and snags, and slash will be pulled back to protect these trees from timber harvesting and prescribed burning operations.

**Dry Forest Ecosystems** - Due to the high incidence of insect and disease, some stands proposed for treatment are not able to maintain sufficient forest structure necessary for flammulated owls

and other wildlife associated with dry forest ecosystems. However, some stands proposed for treatment will retain enough structure to promote or achieve suitable habitat conditions. For these stands, harvest designs that will help maintain habitat persistence on the landscape will include:

- Retaining a stand average of at least 40 percent overstory canopy closure.
- Designing for non-uniform spacing of trees (moderate within stand variability) within residual stands.
- Managing for mature ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir communities.

**Vegetation Screen** – In order to provide security screening for wildlife and minimize motorized access into cutting units next to open roads, vegetation buffers will be provided along open main roads and next to treatment areas where feasible. Buffers will transition from a no-harvest zone into the treatment prescription.

**Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife Species Management** - The Forest Service will conduct goshawk nest searches during project layout and design. Any suspected nest or other evidence of nesting (i.e. agitated birds defending territory) will be reported to a Forest Service Biologist for validation. If any active nest site were discovered, the legal and biological requirements for their conservation will be met.

If any threatened, endangered, or sensitive species were located during project implementation, management activities will be altered, if necessary, so that proper protection measures are taken. Timber sale contract clause C6.251, Protection of Threatened, Endangered And Sensitive Species, will be included in any timber sale contract.

## Features Designed to Protect Air Quality

**Smoke Management** – All prescribed burning will be conducted following the Memorandum of Understanding established between the States of Idaho and Montana to comply with State and Federal air quality guidelines. Burning will only occur when weather and air conditions are favorable for smoke dispersal. No burning will be initiated during times when air quality restrictions are in place.

Landing slash and excavator piles will be burned in late fall when the risk of escape into adjoining stands and damage to residual timber are lessened.

## Features Designed to Protect Soil and Site Productivity

The following practices are designed to minimize the detrimental impacts of soil compaction, displacement, severe burning, and nutrient and organic matter depletion on long-term soil productivity. The use of these practices will insure that the soil quality standards listed in the Forest Plan and Regional Soil Quality Standards will be met.

**Protection During Tractor Yarding** - The following tractor skid trail spacing will be used:

- Where feasible, existing skid trails will be used.
- All new skid trails will be designated.

- Where terrain is conducive, trails will be spaced at least 100 feet or more apart, except where converging.
- Skid trail spacing closer than listed above may be planned when winter logging could occur on at least two feet of packed snow or frozen ground, or where adequate slash matting exists.

**Protection Using Skyline Yarding** - Where feasible, skyline yarding will be the preferred logging system over tractor yarding. The intent is to reduce the potential detrimental soil impacts of displacement and compaction.

**Protection During Prescribed Burning Activities** – Prescribed burning will take place only when the surface inch of mineral soil has a soil moisture content of 25 percent by weight or 100 percent or greater duff moisture.

**Nutrient Protection on machine or hand piled areas** - Fine residue (foliage and branches) will be allowed to overwinter on site to allow potassium to leach out of these materials.

**Protection of Large Woody Debris** - Management of coarse woody debris and organic matter in cutting units will follow the research guidelines contained in Graham et al., 1994.

**Protection during grapple piling activities** – The grapple pile machine will travel on a slash mat during piling activities.

## Features Designed to Protect Heritage Resources

In the event that cultural resources are encountered during program activities, the Forest Service has the authority to modify or stop timber sale activities. The standard heritage resources protection provision C(T)6.24# - Protection of Cultural Resources (1/93), will be used in the sale and road construction contracts. The provision specifically requires the contractor to notify the Forest Service of discoveries of historic resources.

Mitigation of impacts to cultural resources can include, but is not limited to:

- Establishment of buffer zones
- Directional falling
- Alteration of harvest unit boundaries
- Changes in road locations
- Designation of skid trails away from historic properties
- Limiting the harvest methods in certain areas
- Seasonal operating limitations
- Limiting slash disposal and tree planting activities

## Features Designed to Protect Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive (TES) and Rare Plants

TES plant surveys will be conducted as needed prior to weed treatment activities. The biological control agent *Aplocera plagiata*, which attacks goatweed (*Hypericum perforatum*), will not be

released in the analysis area due to the proximity of a population of the sensitive plant species large Canadian St. Johnswort (*Hypericum majus*) near Maiden Creek. *Aplocera plagiata* has been shown to attack large Canadian St. Johnswort in host specificity tests (Bergman 1996). Site-specific TES plant surveys will be conducted as needed prior to in-stream watershed work in highly suitable riparian habitat.

If an action alternative is selected, any changes that may occur during layout, will be reviewed, and TES plant surveys conducted as necessary prior to project implementation. Newly documented occurrences will be evaluated, with specific protection measures implemented to protect population viability. Such measures could include the following:

- Dropping units from harvest activity
- Modifying unit boundaries to provide a minimum 100-foot slope distance around documented occurrences
- Modifying harvest methods, fuels treatment or logging systems to protect TES plants and their habitat
- Implementing, if necessary, Timber Sale Contract provisions C(T)6.251, Protection of Endangered Species, and C(T)9.52, Settlement for Environmental Cancellation.

## Features Designed to Prevent the Spread of Noxious Weeds

Noxious weed treatment will be conducted according to guidelines and priorities established in the Sandpoint Weed Control Project FEIS (April 1998). Methods of control may include biological, chemical, mechanical and cultural controls. The biological control agent *Aplocera plagiata*, which attacks goatweed (*Hypericum perforatum*), will not be released in the analysis area due to the proximity of a population of the sensitive plant species large Canadian St. Johnswort (*Hypericum majus*) near Maiden Creek. Herbicide treatment will not exceed the maximum treatable acres established under the Sandpoint Weed Control Project FEIS adaptive strategy. A table displaying maximum treatable acres in the Cocolalla drainage is included in the project file.

Weed treatment of all existing roads to be used for hauling, service landings and helicopter landings will occur prior to ground disturbing activities, when feasible. If the weed treatment does not occur prior to ground disturbing activities then treatment will occur the following weed season.

All timber sale contracts will require cleaning of off-road equipment prior to entry onto National Forest lands.

All skid trails, landings and other areas of substantial soil disturbance will be seeded with a weed-free native and desired non-native seed mix and fertilized. All newly constructed roads will require hydro-mulching as described under Features Specific to Alternative B, Features Related to Temporary Roads.

All straw or hay used for mulching or watershed restoration activities will be certified weed-free. Road segments identified for obliteration will be treated prior to obliteration.

Gravel or borrow pits to be used during road construction or reconstruction will be inventoried and treated (as needed) prior to use to insure they are free of new weed invader species (see project file for a list of these species).

Any priority weed species (see project file for a list of these species) identified during road maintenance will be reported to the District Weed Specialist.

## Features Designed to Protect Scenery and Visual Quality

As needed to meet Visual Quality Objectives, the following specific mitigation measures will be used:

- Mitigate negative impacts in the middle ground by shaping units to imitate natural openings and landform configurations, including islands of untouched vegetation. Locate and construct roads and landings to minimize cuts and fills. Maintain hardwoods for diversity of color and texture.
- Mitigate negative impacts in the background by emulating natural forms. Created openings should be irregular in shape. Maintain hardwoods for diversity of color. Blend vegetation from treated to untreated areas.

## Features Designed to Protect Trails

Trail #232 will be designated on the timber sale area map as a protected resource.

Where possible, the trail tread on Trail #232 will be protected from logging activities. Disturbed tread will be restored to pre-harvest condition under the timber sale contract.

In the interest of public safety, Trail #232 and Forest Road 630E will be closed to public access during active harvest operations within the following stands: 658-01-017, -021, -022, -023, -028, and -047. Public trail access to this area will be reopened from October 1 through November 15. No timber sale operations will occur during this time period. This scheduled closure and reopening of Trail #232 and Forest Road 630E will only be in effect during harvest operations within this specified area. In addition, the trail may be closed during the post-sale activity of prescribed burning.

During trail closure periods, signing of the closure will be posted at either end of the trail.

Currently there is no parking facility for the #232 trailhead. If a helicopter landing is constructed where the current trailhead exists on road 315 it will be converted to a parking area for the trailhead at the end of the project. If a landing is not created, the first 100 feet of road 315D will not be obliterated and will be maintained as trailhead parking after the timber sale contract is completed.

## Features Related to Roads and Access Management

Log hauling will occur along Roads 630 and 315. No hauling will occur on weekends or holidays to reduce safety hazards during times of increased visitor use.

Dust abatement will be used as needed on National Forest roads to control dust and maintain driver safety.

Previously bermed and impassable classified roads will be managed with long-term intent for non-motorized use (winter snow machine use will still be accepted). See table 2 for a list of roads being used for the project and how they will be managed after all project activities are completed.

To prevent the establishment of motorized public use patterns on temporary roads (Alternative B) or on existing, undrivable roads that are opened for project activities:

- When roads are first constructed or reopened prior to use for the project they will be closed to public motorized vehicle use with an earthen barrier and/or gate.
- Once project activities start, the roads will remain closed with a gate to public use. Gates will be closed at the end of each day's use, during periods of inactivity, on weekends, and on holidays.
- After completion of sale activities, the roads will remain closed to public motorized use with a gate or barrier until the road could be decommissioned or put into storage.
- Decommissioning or storage activities will occur as soon as possible unless the roads are needed for post-sale activities such as planting or fuels treatment.

Road 630E will remain accessible to motorized vehicles less than 50 inches unless harvest activities are occurring in that area (see Features Designed to Protect Trails above).

All existing and created skid trails that might provide vehicle access from open roads will be closed with large mounds made up of a combination of slash and dirt. This will help reduce the attraction to use these trails.

## Features Related to County Roads

To reduce the impacts of log haul on county roads, the timber sale administrator will contact the Bonner County Roads Department to notify them when work (road work and log hauling) will begin on Little Blacktail and Cocolalla Creek roads. It will be the county's responsibility to dust abate their maintenance portions of these roads.

## Features Related to Temporary Roads

**Road Design** - To avoid potential resource damage from temporary roads that may remain on the landscape until post-sale activities are completed (possibly five to eight years), all temporary roads generally greater than 300 feet in length<sup>1</sup> will be designed by a Forest engineer and will be incorporated into a road package tied to the timber sale. There will be an engineering representative on site during all new temporary road construction to ensure design specifications are met.

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions to increasing this distance could occur if ground conditions are such that resource damage would be minimal.

The timber sale will be split into separate subdivisions. The intent of the subdivision is to focus activity within a specific area and limit the length of time a new road will remain on the landscape before all timber sale-related work (i.e. burning) is completed. At the end of all project activities, these roads will be decommissioned and removed from the forest transportation system.

**Sediment Reduction** - All new temporary road construction will require slash filter windrows within RHCA boundaries.

All new temporary road construction will require hydro-mulching on soil disturbance sites within critical areas such as stream crossings. Mulching will occur immediately after road construction is completed.

Spot gravelling with approximately 6 inches of gravel will be required at all stream crossings, rolling dips, and in any wet areas.

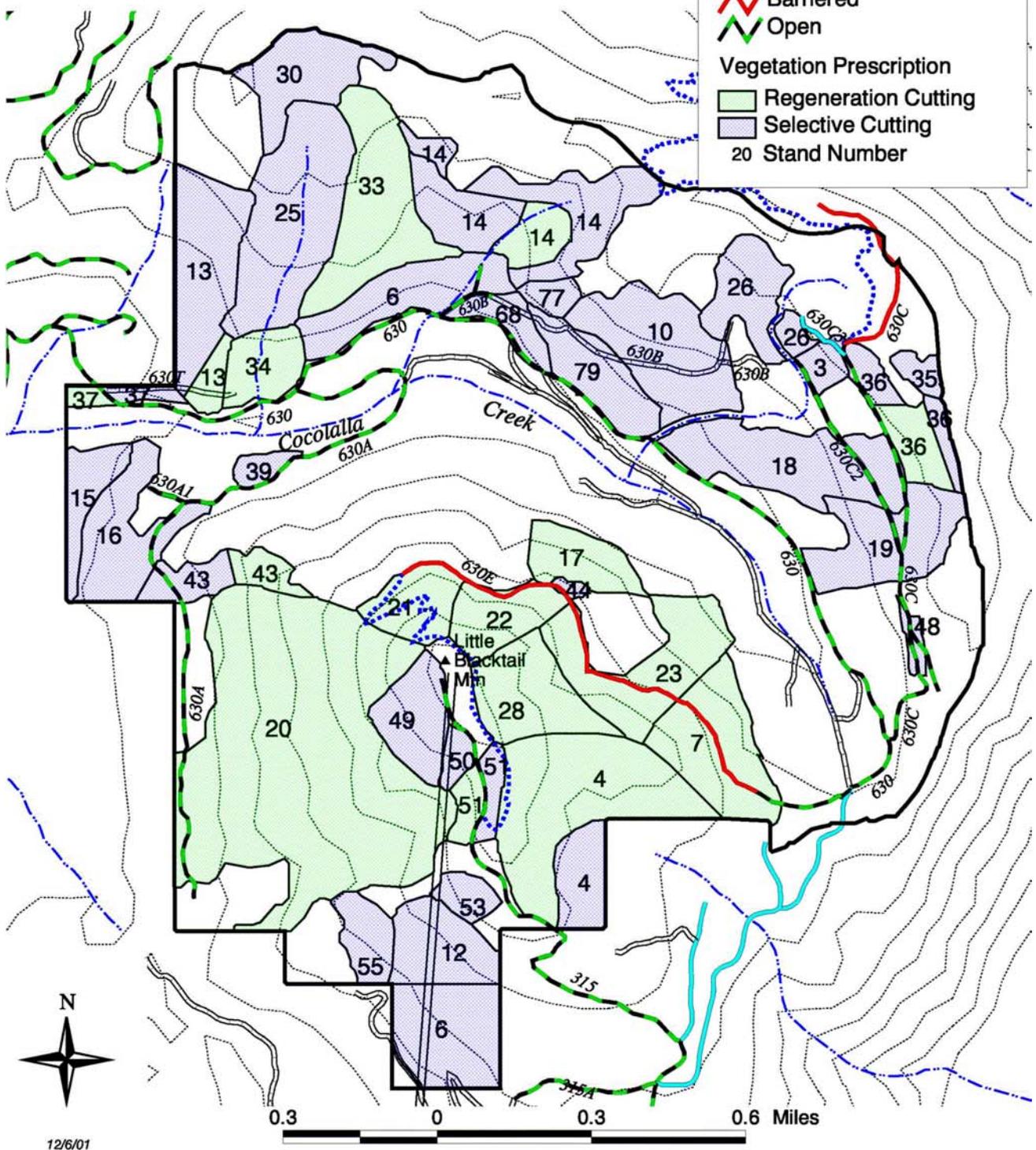
**ATTACHMENT D - Maps related to the Selected Alternative**

# LITTLE BLACKTAIL

## Alternatives B & C

### Proposed Vegetation Treatment

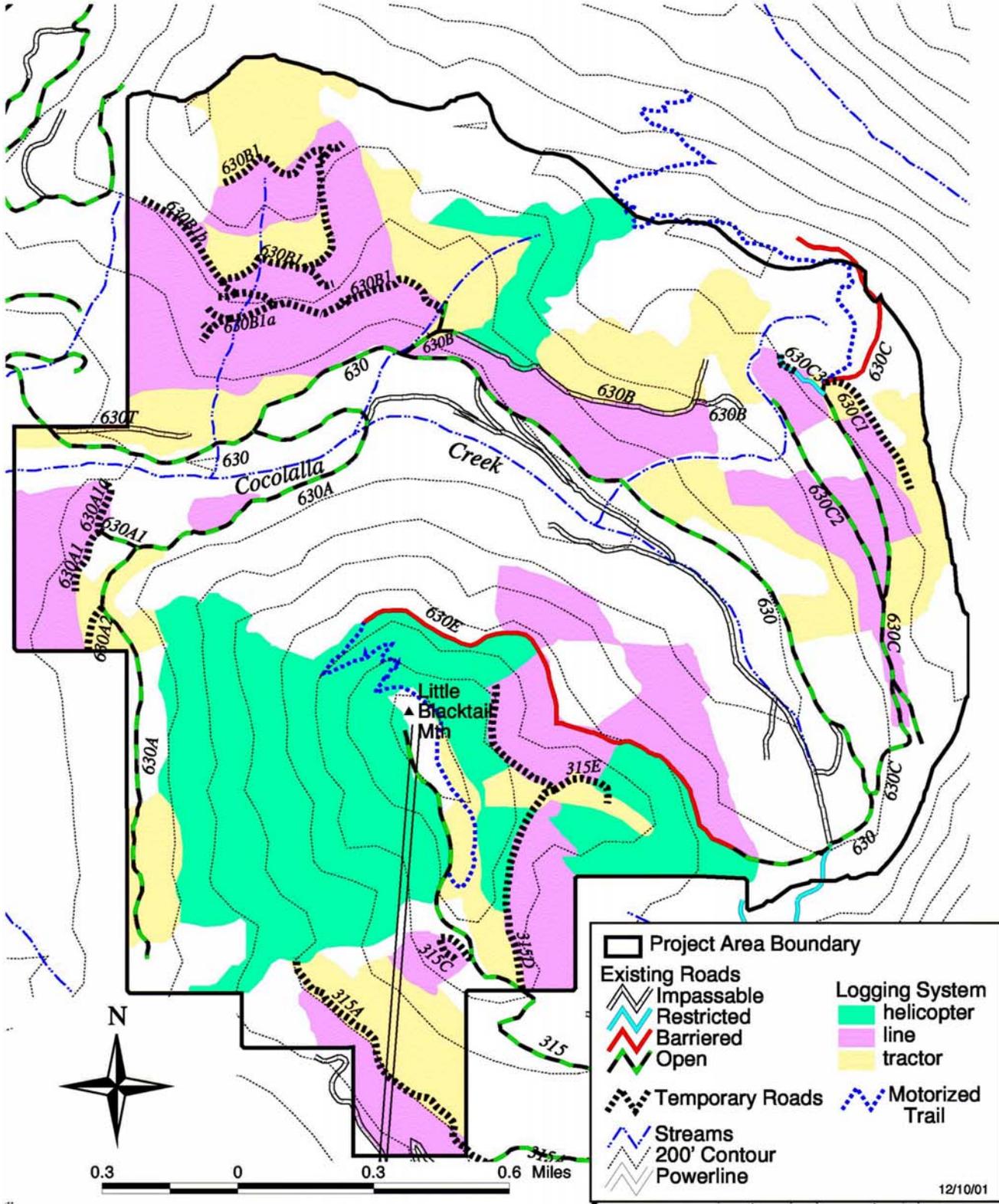
**Project Area Boundary**  
200' Contour  
Streams  
**Existing Roads**  
Impassable  
Restricted  
Barriered  
Open  
**Vegetation Prescription**  
Regeneration Cutting  
Selective Cutting  
20 Stand Number



# LITTLE BLACKTAIL

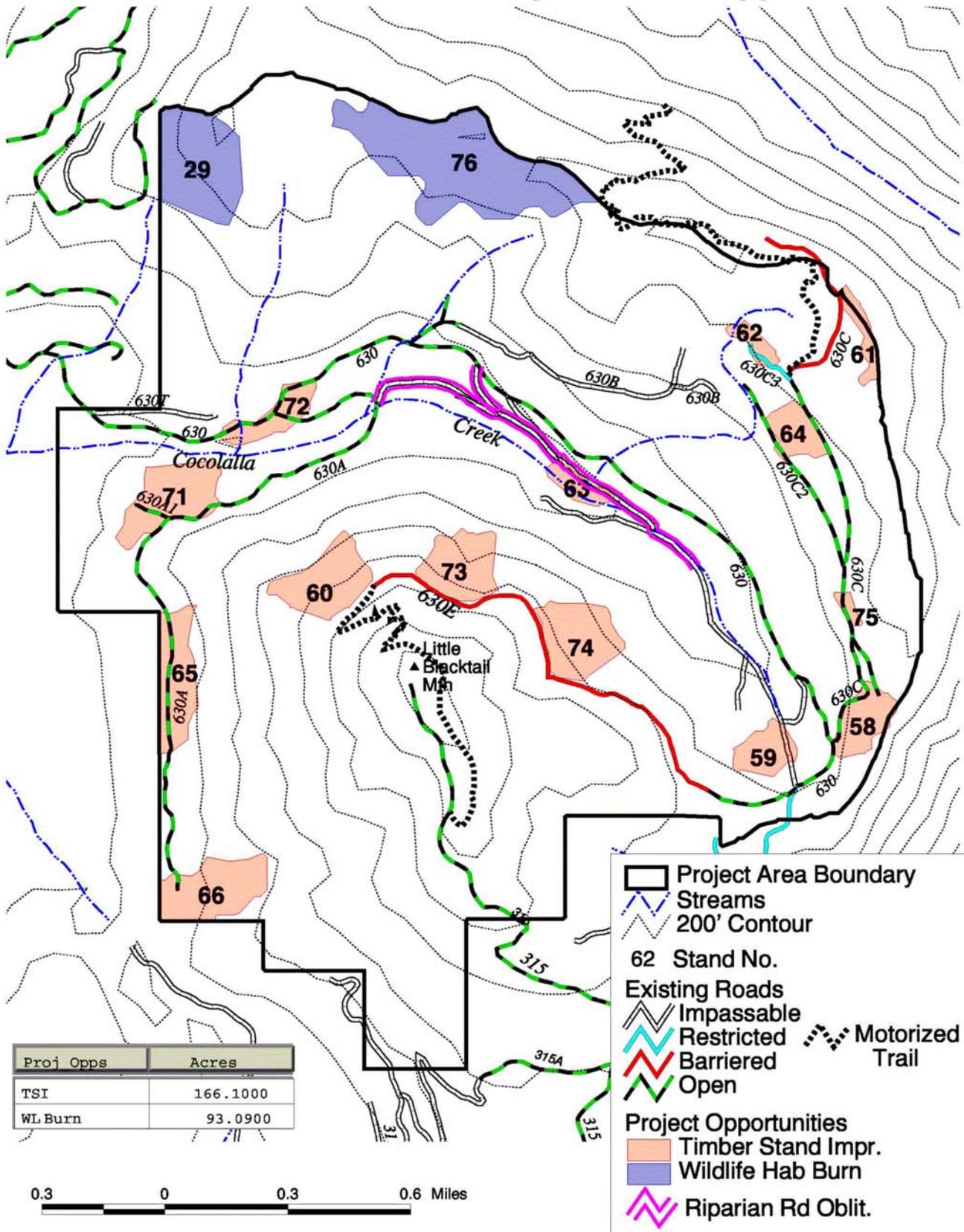
## Alternative B

### Logging Systems and Proposed Roads



# Little Blacktail

# Project-related Opportunities



Proj Opps	Acres
TSI	166.1000
WL Burn	93.0900

- Project Area Boundary
- Streams
- 200' Contour
- 62 Stand No.
- Existing Roads
  - Impassable
  - Restricted
  - Barred
  - Open
- Motorized Trail
- Project Opportunities
  - Timber Stand Impr.
  - Wildlife Hab Burn
  - Riparian Rd Oblit.