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Sandpoint Ranger District
West Gold Project
Environmental Impact Statement

Record Of Decision



RECORD OF DECISION

For the

WEST GOLD PROJECT

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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

November 2002

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Table Of Contents

Introduction.....	ROD-1
Project Location.....	ROD-1
My Decision.....	ROD-1
Purpose and Need	ROD-3
The Selected Alternative.....	ROD-4
Specific Features of the Selected Alternative.....	ROD-8
Monitoring.....	ROD-8
Public Involvement.....	ROD-10
Scoping Activities.....	ROD-10
Issues Raised During Scoping	ROD-11
Public Review of the Draft EIS	ROD-11
Rationale For My Decision.....	ROD-12
How Well the Selected Alternative Fulfills the Purpose and Need, Protects Resources, and Responds to Public Comments	ROD-12
Other Alternatives Considered	ROD-15
Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Detail Study	ROD-17
Findings And Consistency With Laws, Regulations And Policy	ROD-19
Identification of the Environmentally Preferable Alternative	ROD-28
Documents And Project Files	ROD-28
Appeal Rights And Implementation	ROD-28

Attachments

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

West Gold Project Environmental Impact Statement Record Of Decision

Introduction

This Record of Decision documents my decision and rationale to select an alternative for the West Gold Project. My decision is based on review of the West Gold Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), review of public comments received to date, 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 West Gold Project is located about two miles southwest of Lakeview, Idaho (see figure A). The area can be reached by Forest Roads 2707, 278 and 332. The project area consists of National Forest land in the following legal location: all or portions of sections 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35 and 36 in Township 53 North, Range 2 West and sections 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 20, 21, and 29 in Township 53 North, Range 1 West.

My Decision

I have decided to select **Alternative C** as described within the West Gold Project FEIS (p. II-11) **but modified** to construct 850 feet of permanent road and a helicopter landing. I believe Alternative C Modified 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. The modification has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Team and has been found to be within the scope of effects analyzed in the FEIS.

Out of eleven alternatives considered, four were analyzed in detail: Alternative A – a No Action Alternative, Alternative B – the Proposed Action, Alternative C – an Alternative that did not propose any new road construction, and Alternative D – an Alternative that proposed mostly selective cutting as a vegetation treatment tool.

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 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 came down to the difference between B and C from an aquatic standpoint. Since both propose restorative actions that would result in positive benefits to the watershed in the long-term, my decision was based primarily on the level of short-term risk each alternative posed to the aquatic resources as a result of ground disturbing activities. Although I believe that the risk of harmful effects from either alternative to the watershed would be low, Alternative C would have the lowest risk (FEIS, Table 4, Chapter II). With the project occurring in a watershed that provides important spawning habitat to bull trout, a threatened species, I decided that choosing the alternative that did a good job of meeting our purpose and need, while having the lowest risk was the best decision.

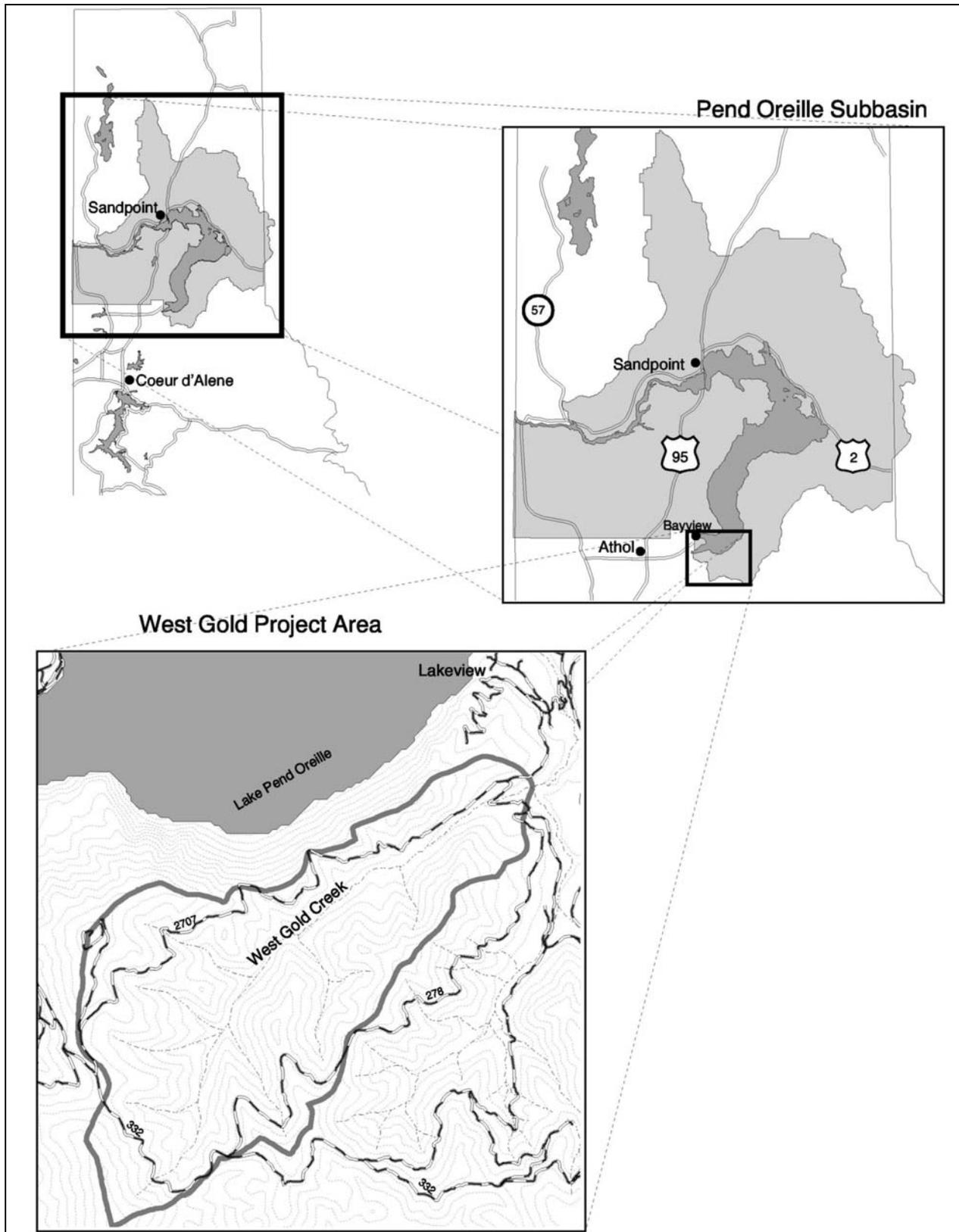


Figure A. Vicinity Map for the West Gold Project.

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 West Gold Project was derived from scientific information and assessments, and from field reviews and surveys of the resources in the West Gold drainage (FEIS pp. I-1 to I-2). Based on this information we developed a goal with five main objectives:

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

- ◆ *Restoring desired forest cover, structure, 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.*
- ◆ *Maintaining and improving West Gold Creek's aquatic habitat by reducing existing and potential sediment risks from roads.*
- ◆ *Managing current and additional motorized recreation opportunities while protecting resource values such as wildlife and water.*

The Gold Creek Ecosystem Assessment at the Watershed Scale (EAWS) evaluated the resource conditions of the Gold Creek Watershed (USDA 2002). Combined with the findings of broader scale assessments (Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Assessment, Northern Region Overview, and Pend Oreille Geographic Assessment) described in Chapter I (pp. I-3 to I-5), the findings of the Gold Creek EAWS provided the basis for our Purpose And Need (pp. I-5 to I-6). Specific findings and recommendations from this assessment which relate to the West Gold project area are:

Aquatic Ecosystems – Historically, large fires burned across the entire Gold Creek Watershed. Between 1850 and 1896, two stand-replacing fires consumed most of the forest vegetation within the watershed. As a result of these fires, Gold and West Gold Creeks were shaped by high water yields, increases in sediment and debris flows. Hydrologically, West Gold Creek is currently within its natural range of variability (sediment and water yield levels are within historic ranges and the creek is in good condition). However, the West Gold Creek subwatershed is in a rain-on-snow zone, which, combined with sediment risks from roads, can put fish spawning habitat at risk. West Gold Creek provides important spawning habitat for Bull Trout, a threatened species.

Reducing road densities and potential sediment risks from existing roads are recommended to maintain and improve the aquatic habitat in West Gold Creek.

Terrestrial Ecosystems – The introduction of blister rust and almost 70 years of fire suppression have changed the character of the forest vegetation. There has been a substantial reduction in the percentage of landscape composed of long-lived tree species such as western white pine, ponderosa pine, and larch. Conversely there has been an increase in Douglas-fir and grand fir, species that are more vulnerable to disturbances such as insects, diseases and fires. They are less adapted to disturbance such as fire and to natural climatic variability than the species they

replaced. As a result, there has been a significant increase in insect and disease activity, which has led to substantial amounts of trees dying throughout the watershed and higher fuel accumulations.

The longer-lived species that do exist in the subwatershed are not regenerating naturally because there is a reduced seed source and lack of areas where these seedlings can germinate and grow. These vegetation conditions have created a homogeneous forest that lacks structural and tree species diversity. Old growth and early succession patch sizes are smaller than are normally found on habitat types of this area. There is a direct correlation between this lack of vegetation diversity and a lack of wildlife habitat and species diversity. ***Treatment of stands to maintain or restore desired species, structures and patterns is recommended to increase terrestrial biodiversity and wildlife habitats.***

A lack of natural fires (from fire suppression) and an increase in dying trees has allowed forest fuels to increase beyond acceptable levels. Although large fires have been a natural part of ecosystem processes in this watershed, human developments within and just outside the subwatershed make the prospect of letting such a large fire burn today socially unacceptable. Suppressing such a fire is directed in the Forest Plan, and given the current fuel conditions would be very difficult. ***Treatment of fuels is recommended to improve our ability to suppress unwanted fire starts in the subwatershed, and use of prescribed fire is recommended to restore fire as a beneficial ecological process.***

Human Uses - There has been an increase in off-highway vehicle and snowmobile use due to restrictions in other areas of the Pend Oreille Subbasin. Many OHV users are coming north from the roads and trails in the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, which has implemented a new travel management program in the last two years. Some illegal use has been occurring in the West Gold Subwatershed. ***Providing more motorized recreation opportunities is recommended to accommodate the increased use.***

For more details, see the Affected Environment sections of Chapter III in the FEIS.

The Selected Alternative

Alternative C “modified” is identical to Alternative C in the FEIS with one exception—it will construct about 850 feet or 0.16 mile of road on the ridgetop above Road 278D to access and build a helicopter landing. See table A for a summary of activities and Attachment D for maps. Constructing this road and landing will allow for a shorter and less costly helicopter flight distance to access several logging units (see ID team Meetings Section A, of the project file).

Details of Alternative C Modified

Vegetation Treatments (see definitions in FEIS, p. II-8): **Selective cutting** will occur on approximately 411 acres to reduce competition and increase tree growth within stands. These are stands where significant numbers of healthy desired species such as white pine, larch and ponderosa pine are present and are in need of thinning to retain this health. The silvicultural prescriptions may include treatments such as thinning, improvement cutting and thinning with group selection.

Regeneration cutting and reforestation will occur on approximately 898 acres to remove undesirable trees, trees susceptible to or infested with root disease, or trees at risk of being killed by insects. Many of these are stands where there is significant tree mortality occurring or where there is *risk* of significant tree mortality within the next 10 to 20 years. Following cutting, these

stands will be burned to reduce fuels and prepare the site for planting with desired longer-lived species less susceptible to root disease. This type of cutting will result in 16 stands with openings* greater than 40 acres in size. The list of stands with openings over 40 acres can be found in the Forest Vegetation portion of the project file. 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). The silvicultural prescriptions will include irregular shelterwood, seedtree with reserves, and final removal with reserves. Rehabilitation and reforestation will be used in areas where there are already large openings created by root disease and insect attack (see Glossary, Appendix G in the FEIS for prescription definitions).

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 on about 1,077 acres to restore fire as an ecological process and to prepare the site for planting desired longer-lived species of ponderosa pine, larch and white pine. Non-fire fuel treatments, include about 223 acres of “limb and lop” (branches are cut from felled trees to a predetermined height then scattered to reduce fuel concentrations), about 10 acres of whole tree yarding and about 28 acres of grapple piling. About 29 acres of one old growth stand (unit 26) would be underburned (without any cutting) to provide ecological benefits of a low-intensity fire.

Within proposed units 16, 27, 31, 39, and 24, there may be areas where root disease patches and brush fields extend into the Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs). Slashing and burning fuel treatments would occur in these areas to expedite trending the riparian area toward long-lived tree species, improved canopy cover and woody debris recruitment to West Gold Creek in the long term. No merchantable material would be removed. This is consistent with INFS direction (USDA 1995; Appendix A, TM-1(b)).

Logging Systems and Road Construction: Approximately 68% of the area will be helicopter yarded, 31% will be skyline yarded and 1% will be tractor yarded. Approximately 0.16 mile of road will be constructed in order to construct a necessary helicopter landing site. **This road construction is the one feature in Alternative C that has been modified.** No more than 11 one-acre landing sites will be constructed, the final number will be determined during final project preparation.

Road Work to Improve Aquatic and Wildlife Habitat: To help reduce potential and existing sediment risks to the watershed, road maintenance activities would improve existing road drainage structures and surfaces on about 27.9 miles of road (see FEIS, tables 1 and 27). Existing roads would be improved to meet standards suitable for use by large trucks and equipment. Drainage structures in roads that pose sediment risks would be repaired, replaced, removed, or redesigned.

New Off-road Vehicle Route: To provide more off road vehicle opportunities while protecting resources, the gates on Roads 2707A and 2707AA would be modified to allow dry season use by motorized vehicles less than 50” except during soft roadbed conditions. All other roads currently gated would remain closed to all public motor vehicle access to maintain elk security and minimize erosion and maintenance needs. See table 27 in the FEIS for details.

*“Openings” in this case are not areas that are completely devoid of large trees. Regeneration cutting units can be considered openings according to policies related to the National Forest Management Act in that they have patches and clumps of trees across the landscape, but on average less than 30 percent of the trees remaining.

Table A. Activities that will occur under Alternative C Modified

Activities	Alternative C Modified
Proposed Vegetative Treatments (Acres)	
Selective cutting	411
Regeneration cutting	898
Underburn Only	29
Total Proposed Treatment Acres	1,338
Proposed Road Treatments (Miles)	
New Road Construction	0.16
New Road Storage	0.16
Existing Road Maintenance	27.9
Existing Classified Road Decommission	1.4
Existing Road Storage	1.7
Unclassified Road to Permanent Road	0.3
Existing Unclassified Road Decommission	0.7
Fuel Treatments (Acres)	
Underburn (includes acres of underburn shown above)	1,077
Limb and Lop	223
Grapple Pile	28
Whole Tree Yard	10
Burn Landing Debris	9
Total Fuels Treatment acres	1,347
Logging Systems (Acres)	
Helicopter	891
Skyline	405
Tractor	13
Total Logged Acres	1,309

To increase wildlife security and further reduce risks to the watershed, about 1.4 miles of existing gated roads would be decommissioned and about 1.7 miles of a currently gated road would be put into storage after use for the project (see table A above and 27 in the FEIS). In addition, 0.7 mile of an existing unclassified road would be decommissioned. If these roads are used by the contractor to accomplish vegetation restoration activities, decommissioning will be included in the contract or accomplished using revenue generated by the sale of timber. If any of the existing roads proposed for decommissioning are not used for the project, they will be decommissioned using appropriated or other funding sources.

Other Restoration Projects

The following projects are beyond the immediate restoration needs of this area but I have decided to approve them in the event that funding would become available to accomplish them. If sufficient revenues are generated from the sale of timber (i.e. K-V funds), those funds will be used. Other funding sources may be available and each project will be prioritized with other needs

across the IPNF and accomplished with appropriated funding. The following projects are listed in order of priority.

Noxious Weed Treatment and Monitoring - In addition to weed prevention measures described in “Features Designed to Prevent the Spread of Noxious Weeds”(FEIS p. II-24) the project area would be monitored, and weed treatment would be accomplished as necessary. An Integrated Pest Management approach (including biological, mechanical, cultural and chemical control) would be used. This would decrease the chance of existing infestations becoming established in new areas, and would reduce the risk of new invaders becoming established. Weed treatment related to the project would complement weed treatment efforts recently completed along Forest Roads 2707 and 278. All weed management activities would be conducted in accordance with the guidelines in the Sandpoint Noxious Weed Control Project FEIS (USDA 1998c).

Timber Stand Improvement - Thinning young, small diameter trees (formerly known as precommercial thinning) and other work would occur in 382 acres of previously cut areas (see Attachment D). These activities would redistribute growth and trend stand species composition to desired conditions. Thinning would favor healthy trees of desired species adapted to the various habitat types. Seral species such as ponderosa pine, western larch and white pine would be favored when present on the appropriate growing sites. Pruning white pine would improve the opportunity for this species to resist blister rust infection and reach maturity.

Thinning would leave roughly 400 trees per acre, in about 10x10 foot leave spacing. Thinning is necessary for density and species control and to prevent these stands from stagnating. Thinning is most effective if accomplished while the stands are still vigorously growing and while at least 30-40% of the crowns are still maintained in green healthy foliage. All slash from thinning would be removed from road ditch lines.

To control the density levels of the understory within most of the proposed cutting 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 cuts would require slashing. The selective cutting units would require some level of weed and release treatment. All slash would be removed from road ditch lines.

Native Seeding – Following prescribed burning of dry sites, recovery of native vegetation would be monitored. These areas would be seeded with native species appropriate to the site and fertilized if necessary to establish desired vegetation, enhance forage, and help prevent the spread of noxious weeds.

Future Salvage Opportunities

Future Salvage of Dead and Dying Trees – The effects analysis for the environmental impact statement includes potential salvage of up to one million board feet of dead and dying trees from cutting units for approximately six years after the timber sale contract is completed. Examples of situations in which salvage will be considered include (but are not limited to) groups of trees damaged by weather, fire, or insects. Salvage opportunities could take place within the cutting units subject to the following criteria:

- The Interdisciplinary Team must ensure the salvage activities are within the scope of effects analyzed in this EIS.
- 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 meet snag and coarse woody debris guidelines as outlined in Design Features (see Attachment C). Salvage would avoid actions that would undermine or take away from wildlife habitat management objectives (e.g. removal of large diameter snags or trees that provide important nesting habitat for flammulated owls).
- Salvage would meet assigned Visual Quality Objectives.
- 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 take place only when existing skid trails would be used.
- 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 activities would not cause detrimentally disturbed soils that exceed Forest Plan and Regional Soil Quality standards.
- Salvage would not take place if the activity would have an adverse effect to a flood plain or wetland.

The Interdisciplinary Team will review any proposed changes to the above criteria. If there are changes, a Supplemental Information Report will be written to determine if additional analysis is needed and if a Supplemental Decision will be necessary.

Specific Features of the Selected Alternative

After reviewing public comments and analyzing the potential effects of proposed activities, specific design features were identified by the Interdisciplinary Team to reduce and mitigate potential impacts to natural resources of concern (FEIS pp. II-12 to II-26). These features will be incorporated into the project design, timber sale contract, and other contracts and project plans. See Attachment C for the specific protection measures.

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. C Modified
Road construction/road work	2004
Timber harvest	2004-2008
Prescribed burning	2005-2010
Tree planting	2006-2011
Other Restoration Projects	2004-2010+

Monitoring

Forest Plan Monitoring

For activities in the West Gold project area, the Selected Alternative will comply with specific monitoring requirements identified by the Forest Plan (USDA 1987, 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-26).

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-27). 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. I believe that this steady informal communication will allow for necessary 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 described in Features Designed to Prevent the Spread of Noxious Weeds (Attachment C) would be documented on sale inspection reports. The effectiveness of seeding disturbed areas will be evaluated upon completion of the activity. Treated areas will be surveyed and monitored according to treatment priorities established in the Sandpoint Noxious Weed Control Project FEIS.

TES Plants: Monitoring of sensitive plant populations where the activities are modified by buffering to avoid adverse effects will be conducted by a botanist to validate the effectiveness of mitigation measures during and following the activity.

Vegetation: All regeneration-cutting units will be monitored for regeneration success the first, third and fifth year following planting if necessary. This is required by the National Forest Management Act.

Best Management Practices: Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be incorporated into many different phases of the project. The Zone Hydrologist will review the planned design of all temporary roads and all road maintenance 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.

A sale administrator will visit each active cutting unit at a frequency necessary to assure compliance with the BMPs and the timber sale contract. Minor contract changes or contract modifications will be agreed upon and enacted, when necessary, to meet objectives and standards on the ground.

Air Quality: During the burning of timber cutting residues (slash), smoke management guidelines would 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 and spring burning seasons and yearlong by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Visuals: The project will be reviewed before, during and after cutting operations are complete to assess whether visual quality objectives (VQOs) are met.

Decommissioned Roads: Decommissioned roads would be checked periodically during the first year (and periodically thereafter if no problems are noted) to monitor effectiveness of erosion control, noxious weed control, and wildlife security.

Permanent Stream Channel Cross-Sections: Cross-sectional profiles and dominant substrate have been measured in West Gold and Gold Creeks (see the Watershed section of the project file). Measurements will continue to occur on an annual basis following post treatment activities to determine if any changes in stream channel morphology from water yield increases occur.

OHV Use: Roads 2707A and AA will be checked periodically by road management crews to monitor whether OHV use is causing any damage to the roadbed or off the designated route. If improper use is occurring, law enforcement monitoring will be increased.

Public Involvement

The following information is also in the FEIS on pp. II-1 and II-2.

Scoping Activities

In June of 1997, a proposal for the West Gold project was mailed out to 96 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 that month and has continued to be on the schedule ever since. We received comments from 11 people, organizations, and agencies. In October of 1997 we held two field trips, one for an individual with questions about the project, and one for the Idaho Fish and Game.

In September of 1998 we sent out an update letter on the project to 29 people who had previously indicated interest in receiving mailings. That same month we held a field trip to the project area with representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In October of 1998 we held a field trip for another individual interested in the project. The project was then put on hold for a year while district specialists worked on a different Forest-wide project.

In October of 1999, the West Gold interdisciplinary team decided to conduct an ecosystem assessment of the Gold Creek Watershed prior to resuming the West Gold project. In 2000, the team decided to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the West Gold project instead of an EA because of the complexity of the issues. On July 14, 2000, a new proposal was sent out to 81* individuals, organizations, agencies, tribes, and local media on the Sandpoint District mailing list. A Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on July 17, 2000. We received comments from 16 people, organizations, and agencies. On October 18, 2000 we held a field trip with a new representative of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. On November 15, 2000 we met with representatives of Idaho Fish and Game to discuss the proposal. On March 31, 2000 we met with the archaeologist from the Kalispel Tribe and he did not have any concerns about the project. On April 4, 2001 we sent a letter to residents of Lakeview who requested

*Changed number on mailing list is due to a decrease in the number of people requesting to be informed of Sandpoint District projects and the West Gold project specifically.

information on the Gold Creek Ecosystem Assessment and informed them of the West Gold EIS. On February 13, 2002, we sent out a letter to our mailing list of interested agencies, organizations and individuals notifying them that the Draft EIS was about to be released and to indicate in what format they would like to receive it (compact disc, paper summary or paper summary and Draft EIS). On March 27, 2002 we sent a letter to all property owners in the Gold Creek Watershed also notifying them of the upcoming release of the Draft EIS and to let us know if they wanted to receive it and in which format.

Issues Raised During Scoping

Numerous issues were raised during our initial public scoping (FEIS II-2 to II-7). Three key issues led to the development of alternatives to the proposed action. These issues are:

Issue: The effects of regeneration cutting and resulting canopy openings on water yield increases, sediment delivery to streams, and aquatic habitat in West Gold Creek and Gold Creek.

Issue: The effects of road construction, decommissioning, and maintenance activities on sediment delivery to streams and aquatic habitat in West Gold Creek and Gold Creek.

Issue: Risk of project activities on the spread of existing weed infestations and introduction of new weed invaders.

Other issues that were raised were not key in developing alternatives but were important for their value to design specific protective measures and to measure the effects of the alternatives on different forest resources. These issues included effects of project activities on: forest vegetation, sensitive and rare plants, wildlife habitat and security, restoring fire as an ecological process and our ability to suppress unwanted fires, air quality, soils, visual quality, revenues generated from the sale of timber, and public road access.

Public Review of the Draft EIS

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) presented specific information on the proposal, the alternatives to the proposal, and the results of analysis of the information gathered. The DEIS was mailed on May 2, 2002 to 58 individuals, agencies and groups that requested it for review (FEIS p. II-2). Three individuals requested and received notification when the DEIS was available to view on the Internet. On May 7 a news release was sent to the Spokesman Review and other local media. A legal ad was published in the Spokesman Review on May 9, 2002. The Federal Register Notice of Availability of the DEIS was published on May 10, 2002. A 45-day comment period occurred until June 24, 2002.

Several meetings and field trips occurred between the Draft and Final EISs. In the spring of 2002, we met with various representatives of OHV groups regarding OHV opportunities in the Sandpoint Ranger District, including the West Gold project. On June 19, road manager Larry Elliot met with members of the Backcountry ATV Association to look at Roads 2707A and AA. On July 25, we met with members of Idaho Fish and Game and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality at the project area. On September 25, we held a field trip in the project area for members of the Idaho Native Plant society.

During the public comment period a total of 120 comment letters were received, 4 from environmental groups, 4 from Federal and State agencies and 112 from OHV users. Of the 112 letters, 108 were identical form letters. Details of all public involvement planning and activities

are located in the project file. The responses to public input can be found in Appendix I of the FEIS. Letters from State and Federal agencies are included in their entirety in Appendix I as required. Responses to comments from these letters are included with the other comments.

Only one new issue was raised after public review of the DEIS: the effect of road construction and existing road management on public road access. As a result, we analyzed this issue in a new section of Chapter III entitled Roads and Access Management. Other comments received were used to adjust and refine the analysis of the proposed action and alternatives, clarify and correct text, and prepare the Final EIS (see Changes Between the Draft and Final EIS in the FEIS Preface, p. b).

Rationale 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, Protects Resources, and Responds to Public Comments

Below are our Purpose and Need statements, followed by my rationale for selecting Alternative C Modified.

- ***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.***

Based on our analysis, 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 and declining from insect activity and disease, to more diverse stands with desired, longer-lived species (FEIS pp. III-1 to III-21). This will also trend early successional patch sizes and patterns toward historic ranges. The structure of vegetation within cutting units will be similar to those created by natural fire and successional processes. Individual trees and snags, clumps of trees, and uncut 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 pileated woodpeckers (FEIS pp. III-82 to III-91).

There were concerns that new road construction and the use of existing roads currently closed to motorized use would increase public motorized access into unmotorized areas, which could affect wildlife habitat security. There was also a concern that converting two existing gated road segments to allow OHV use could also affect wildlife habitat security.

With my modifications, Alternative C will construct only 0.16 mile of permanent road, which will be put into storage¹ after use for the project. To determine how this modified alternative fit into

¹ A method of retaining a permanent road for future use but removing features to eliminate hydrologic risks. Also includes some kind of road closure method and revegetation

the scope of the alternatives analyzed in the FEIS, I looked at the wildlife security analyses of Alternatives B and C (FEIS pp. III-91 to III-95). Alternative B (which proposed road construction) showed that use of existing gated roads and constructing 3 miles of temporary road and 0.3 mile of permanent road would result in a “worst-case scenario” prediction of elk habitat effectiveness (EHE) dropping from its current level of 55% to 47% in the short term and rising to 53% in the long term. Alternative C (which did not propose road construction) predicts EHE declining to 49% in the short term and rising to 53% in the long term. Idaho Fish and Game recommends a minimum EHE of 50%. Since, these estimates are “worst-case scenario” predictions and, in the long term EHE will remain above 50% with both alternatives, I am confident that Alternative C Modified will be similar in its effects as Alternative C and not have a significant effect on elk habitat effectiveness.

In addition, mitigation measures have been established to prevent public use from occurring during the life of the project (FEIS pp. II-15 to II-16).

- ***Restoring fire as an ecological process.***

The analysis shows that prescribed burning will help restore fire to fire-dependent habitat types (FEIS pp. III-46 to III-47). More than 1,300 acres, or about 30% of the project area will be treated for fuels reduction. As described in Chapter III of the FEIS, treatments involve a combination of timber cutting and fuels treatments that will greatly reduce the risk of destructive wildfire and improve the ability to suppress unwanted fires in treated areas (FEIS pp. III-46 to III-50).

Based on our analysis, I feel confident that Alternative C Modified provides the best possible combination of fuel treatments. 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 (FEIS pp. III-46 to III-49). 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 the powerline corridor.

- ***Maintaining and improving West Gold Creek’s aquatic habitat by reducing existing and potential sediment risks from roads.***

Currently, the primary risk to aquatic habitat is sediment from existing roads. It is important that we reduce these sediment risks because West Gold Creek is a water quality segment of concern (FEIS p. III-97) and important bull trout habitat (FEIS pp. III-100 to III-103).

Activities planned in Alternative C Modified to reduce existing and potential sediment risks from roads include the decommissioning of 2.1 miles of road, road maintenance activities, and the removal and replacement of culverts at risk of failing should a landslide or flood occur.

Some people expressed concern about the effects of new road construction, decommissioning, and maintenance activities on sediment delivery to streams and aquatic habitat in West Gold and Gold Creeks (FEIS p. II-3). Our analysis shows that removing two “at-risk” culverts would reduce the risk of sediment by at least 1,752 tons. If you combined this amount with that which potentially could occur at the culverts scheduled to be replaced, potential risk would be reduced by 2,572 tons (FEIS p. III-126). Although there would be a short-term increase in sediment generated from project activities, the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs), onsite direction and timing restrictions, along with the removal and replacement of culverts would result in a net decrease in sediment delivery (FEIS pp. III-114 to III-129 and Appendix K). The use of BMPs and other

protection measures, and the fact that all ground disturbing activities would occur outside of Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas, means the risk of any sediment being transported into the lowest reaches of West Gold and Gold Creeks is very low (FEIS pp. III-119 to III-120).

Alternative C Modified will construct only 0.16 mile of permanent road that will be put in storage after use for the project. Since this road location is high on a ridge and nowhere near any live stream crossings, we don't anticipate any predicted sediment delivery over what was estimated for Alternative C in the FEIS (pp. III-115 to III-119).

Another concern related to the effects of regeneration cutting and resulting canopy openings on water yield increases, sediment delivery to streams and aquatic habitat in West Gold and Gold Creeks (FEIS p. II-2). Our analysis shows that with the Selected Alternative, timber cutting would have little effect on peak flows, sediment delivery to streams, and aquatic habitat (FEIS pp. III-117 to III-121).

As discussed on pages III-104 to III-109, the West Gold channel is very resilient, as it has formed over time with the influences of increased water yield and debris flows from large-scale fires and rain-on-snow events. The analysis in the Watershed and Fisheries Environmental Consequences section shows that predicted water yield generated from creating openings in Alternative C would only increase by 4% (FEIS p. III-120). Since the vegetation prescriptions in Alternative C Modified are no different than Alternative C, the value for water yield increase would be the same.

Our analysis shows that there would be no cumulative effects to Gold Creek from increased water yield generated from Alternative C modified. Although there would be some sediment generated from our activities, overall there would be an estimated net reduction of sediment (1,752 tons in West Gold Creek and 1,894 tons in the Gold Creek Watershed) as culvert and road work is done and the Kick Bush Slide is repaired (FEIS, Table 24, p. III-127). Other reasonably foreseeable actions that are proposed in the Gold Creek Watershed include cleanup of mine tailings and waste rock. These activities would contribute to further sediment decreases in the watershed in the future (FEIS pp. III-121 to III-129).

For these reasons, I feel confident that Alternative C Modified meets the Purpose and Need and addresses public concerns by minimizing risks to water quality and fish habitat. I also believe that aquatic ecosystems will be maintained and improved throughout project implementation and through significant improvements that will also be achieved in both the West Gold and Gold Creek watersheds.

- ***Managing current and additional motorized recreation opportunities while protecting resource values such as wildlife and water.***

The area surrounding the West Gold drainage is receiving increasing OHV and snowmobile use each year (FEIS pp. III-139 to III-140). Many OHV users are coming over from roads and trails in the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District. Currently, Roads 2707A and AA serve as an alternate snowmobile route when Road 332 is plowed for forest management activities. Allowing OHV use on these roads will provide an area away from mixed traffic where OHV users can avoid larger vehicles and allow young, unlicensed riders to drive*.

*Idaho state law prohibits unlicensed drivers to operate OHVs on mixed-use forest roads, but they can drive them on OHV designated trails.

In the DEIS, we proposed only allowing OHV use between July 1 and 3 days prior to the start of elk archery season to avoid use during soft roadbed conditions and hunting season. Public comments we received from OHV users requested that we not place date restrictions on use. Many agreed that the route should be closed during soft roadbed conditions to avoid damage, but that they should be able to use the road any time it is dry. They also requested we allow use during hunting season since that is a busy time for mixed traffic on Road 332.

Based on these comments, the project Team decided to remove the date restrictions on OHV use (see section A of the project file), but to specify that the route will be closed with a closure order during soft roadbed conditions. This measure will keep the risk of erosion and potential effects to the watershed low (FEIS p. III-117).

The date restrictions related to hunting season were originally designed to maintain protection for elk security. The Wildlife Biologist conducted further analysis in the FEIS and found that since the OHV route is located on the edge of the project area, directly below a heavily traveled road, and since there would not be any other changes in existing road use in the rest of the watershed, the changes in road management will result in an imperceptible change to Elk Habitat Effectiveness (FEIS pp. III-93 to III-94).

There was also a concern that because there is known illegal OHV use in the project area, that establishing an OHV route would lead to the illegal pioneering of trails. The existing illegal use is occurring in two places: at the gates where people have been able to drive around, and down an old logging road in a plantation above Road 2707A. There is no evidence that any pioneering is occurring, most likely because of the surrounding steep terrain and lack of desirable areas to connect to (FEIS p. III-140). The portion of logging road that is allowing the illegal access across the plantation to Road 2707A is planned for decommissioning. With the legal designation of 2707A as an OHV route and the planned decommissioning of the old logging road, we anticipate that OHV use across the plantation will cease (FEIS p. III-142).

Based on this information, I believe this new OHV route meets the purpose and need to manage current and additional motorized recreation opportunities while protecting resources.

Other Alternatives Considered

The Interdisciplinary (ID) Team considered a reasonable range of alternatives as required in 40 CFR 1502.12(a). A total of eleven alternatives were considered, and four of those were considered in detail (FEIS pp. II-7 to II-14 and II-28 to II-30). 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-7).

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 developments such as the powerline

corridor and private lands outside the project area (FEIS pp. III-15 to III-17, III-43 to III-45, III-84, III-87, III-89, III-91 to III-92, III-95). In addition, risks of sediment delivery from existing culverts would continue (FEIS p. III-115).

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 cause the further deterioration of forest vegetation and wildlife habitat, do nothing to restore the ecological benefits of fire, would continue to add to the existing fuels problem, posing unacceptable risks of wildfires to private developments. I strongly believe that it is important to accomplish our purpose and need in the West Gold drainage. 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-1 to I-6). The No Action Alternative would not initiate such active restoration or a trend to bring this landscape toward desired conditions in the long-term.

Alternative B – The Proposed Action

Alternative B was our proposed action. It was proposed to accomplish the Purpose and Need using conventional logging systems where possible in order to make the project more economically efficient. The proposed temporary road construction would have made the project more economical to accomplish because it would have provided better access for skyline logging (instead of the more expensive helicopter method), fuels treatment, and planting (FEIS pp. III-137 to III-138). Alternative B was identical to C in almost every way because the vegetation and fuel treatments, road maintenance and culvert work, and our proposal to create an OHV route were the same in each alternative. The differences between Alternatives B and C were that C did not propose any road construction and it would require more helicopter logging (see table A above).

I did not select this Alternative primarily because of public and other agencies concerns over the potential effects of road construction and sediment delivery on the aquatic habitats of West Gold and Gold Creek. Our analysis estimated that differences in sediment yields produced by Alternatives B and C would be primarily attributed to temporary road construction and to a lesser extent, from changes in logging systems (FEIS p. III-119 to III-121). The sediment levels were estimated to increase by 11% for Alternative B and 9% for Alternative C; a difference of only about 2%. A more notable difference was in the amount of time our modeling showed for the sediment to recover back to baseline--10 years for Alternative B, and 6 years for Alternative C (FEIS p. III-116, figure 21).

Although I believe that our sediment predictions for Alternatives B and C would not pose a significant threat to the aquatic habitat, especially since there would be a net sediment risk reduction in West Gold and Gold Creeks, Alternative C is predicted to have the lowest risk of the two alternatives. I felt that given the level of importance Gold Creek Watershed is to bull trout spawning habitat, choosing the lowest risk was the prudent decision to make.

Alternative D – Selective Cutting Alternative

Alternative D was developed after receiving public comments requesting we try to accomplish our Purpose and Need using selective cutting methods only, instead of regeneration cutting methods. The ID Team considered whether this could be done, but determined that selective cutting methods could not be used in units where root disease is extensive, without exacerbating the root disease problem. This effort is described in the FEIS (FEIS p. II-30) and in the section below as an alternative considered but eliminated. However, the team went ahead and developed an

alternative that focused on where selective cutting could occur, dropping out all but one small regeneration cutting unit (FEIS pp. II-11 to II-12).

If Alternative D were implemented there would be substantially less acres of activity, canopy openings and a lot less road miles constructed than in Alternatives B and C. Consequently, effects from proposed activities to most resources would be substantially less. However, Alternative D would not do as good a job of achieving our Purpose and Need as B or C (see the FEIS, Chapter III Environmental Consequences of Alternative D for each resource analyzed).

This alternative would weakly achieve the first three objectives of our Purpose and Need in the areas that are treated. It would not treat the areas where our worst insect and disease infestations are, where fuels are the heaviest, and where Douglas-fir and grand fir are perpetuating these conditions. The health and productivity of forest vegetation and habitats would only be improved in a small portion of the watershed. Efforts to reduce sediment risks from roads and adding the new OHV route would still occur as in Alternatives B and C, so the fourth and fifth objectives of the Purpose and Need would be achieved at the same level.

For these reasons, I did not select Alternative D.

Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Detail Study

Seven 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-28 to II-30) and below.

Original Proposed Action

The Current Proposed Action has evolved over several years and several different ID Team Members. Since the first ID team, we have added and dropped different areas proposed for treatment. The very first proposal looked at all “high-risk stands” (stands that were not trending toward desired species compositions and structures, or stands at high risk of mortality--see project file for map). Various stands were dropped for the following reasons: difficult access, need to maintain corridors and secure areas for wildlife, high social value (areas around Bernard Peak), and potential effects on water yield. Other stands were added or dropped or their prescriptions changed as ground verification revealed new information making them higher or lower priority than we originally thought. Also, additional temporary roads were proposed for construction but were dropped when proposed locations were determined to be too risky or unfeasible. For these reasons, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

Use Of Even-Aged Cutting 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. 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 subwatershed level.
- Many stands proposed for regeneration cutting 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, including those that are not proposed for treatment.

For these reasons the alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

Treat The Ecosystem Without Logging

We received comments requesting that we consider alternatives that strive to achieve our ecosystem restoration objectives without using timber cutting. The alternatives were suggested several different ways:

Prescribed Burning Only – This alternative was considered after we received suggestions that we use prescribed fire to reduce stand density and not cut trees. Using prescribed burning as the primary tool would not be 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 could kill most of the trees.

In areas where the objective is to regenerate the stand, 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 (see fire effects discussion in FEIS “How Easily An Unwanted Fire Could Be Suppressed” pp. III-48 to III-49).

Therefore, because of the risk to resources and adjacent private property, the only stand that would be treated under this alternative would be Unit 26, where fuels are relatively light and prescribed underburning is already planned as the only method of treatment.

Although the other objectives of our Purpose and Need (reducing sediment risks, managing motorized recreation) could still be accomplished without treating the forest vegetation, little would be achieved to begin restoring terrestrial habitats. This alternative would also not meet Forest Plan standards for reforestation, reduction of susceptibility to insect and disease damage, site preparation and reduction of fire intensity and spread (see FEIS, Chapter I). For these reasons, this alternative was dropped from further consideration and was eliminated from further study.

No Timber Cutting, Restoration Only - This alternative would be similar to the Prescribed Burning Only Alternative and for the same reasons described above, was eliminated from further consideration.

Accomplish Purpose and Need Without Using Commercial Logging – This alternative suggested accomplishing all the elements of the proposed action, including cutting trees, without selling the trees in a commercial logging operation. To carry out this alternative would mean that either the cut trees would be left on site, or the Forest Service would have to pay someone to

remove the trees. To leave the trees on site would add a large amount of fuel and increase breeding areas for insect infestations. It would make planting difficult and create areas inaccessible to some wildlife where logs were left. Prescribed burning would not be possible because of the large amount of fuels left on site. If a wildfire were to start in one of these areas, suppression would be extremely difficult as well. In addition, leaving merchantable trees on site would waste usable wood fiber that could just as easily be utilized as products. A timber sale provides us with a means of accomplishing our objectives at a reduced cost, to treat fuels more effectively, and results in a benefit of timber as a by-product.

This alternative would not meet Forest Plan standards for reforestation, reduction of susceptibility to insect and disease damage, site preparation, utilization of forest products, and reduction of fire intensity and spread (see Chapter I). For these reasons, this alternative was dropped from further consideration and was eliminated from further study.

Use of Horse Logging

We received a suggestion that we use horse logging to remove trees in the project area. Horse logging requires more roads for yarding logs than conventional logging systems because horses cannot skid logs as far. Also, the vast majority of the project area is too steep for horse logging. For these reasons, an alternative using horse logging was eliminated from further consideration.

Use of Selective Cutting For All Vegetation Treatment

We received two suggestions that we use selective cutting for all treatment areas including those that propose regeneration cutting. The project team reviewed every proposed regeneration unit to see if selective cutting was a feasible tool. After evaluating all the stands, the team concluded that selective cutting would not be effective to achieve the restoration objectives in most of the areas. This is because where regeneration cutting is proposed, not enough trees of desired species are available to maintain a stocked stand while removing undesirable and unhealthy trees.

The team considered whether we could strictly salvage log in the regeneration units and concluded that it would still not meet our vegetation restoration objectives. For these reasons, this alternative, which proposed using selective cutting for all proposed treatment areas, was eliminated from further consideration.

The team found one unit (08) that could be changed from an irregular shelterwood to an improvement cut, which would result in only portions of that unit meeting desired objectives. As a result of considering this alternative, the team decided to fully analyze Alternative D, which uses mostly selective cutting as the primary treatment method. In Alternative D, all but one of the regeneration units in the proposed action were dropped since they could not be treated effectively with selective cutting, and one other (unit 08) was converted to selective cutting. See Alternative D for more details.

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 West Gold 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 four alternatives were considered in detail, including a no-action alternative as required by NEPA (FEIS pp. II-7 to II-12). An additional seven alternatives were briefly considered but eliminated from further study as described in Chapter II of the FEIS (pp. II-28 to II-30). 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).

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

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

- Implementation of Alternative C Modified 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 white sturgeon because there is no habitat within the effects area. This project *may effect, but is not likely to adversely affect* bull trout. Bull trout currently inhabit the Gold Creek Watershed. Road related activities, including maintenance, obliteration, and culvert upgrades could produce a short-term increase in sediment delivery to streams in the watershed. However, these activities will reduce sediment delivery in the long term. Removal and upgrades of culverts will also immediately decrease the risk of sediment from crossing failures. Therefore, the long-term effects from the project are a net reduction in sediment and are a benefit to bull trout habitat.
- This project will have *no effect* on any threatened or endangered wildlife species or their habitat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has reviewed the Biological Assessments for this project and has given their concurrence (see section P for a signed concurrence letter). 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-50 to III-56), 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.

Under authority of the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency and the States must develop plans and objectives that will eventually restore identified stream segments of concern. Gold Creek is currently a listed 303(d) water quality limited segment from the headwaters to Pend Oreille Lake (IDEQ 2000). The pollutants of concern are sediment and heavy metals. The current status is that there is an approved Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), and its implementation plan is pending. Under this status, there should not be a net increase in sediment through management activities to Gold Creek.

The Forest Service will develop an implementation plan for its portion of the TMDL in Gold Creek in cooperation with IDEQ, IDL, and interested local parties. In the interim, any activities we undertake or permit on NFS lands will be designed to substantially reduce pollutants of concern, where feasible. The timeframe for completion of the implementation plan has not yet been determined. Information and recommendations from the Gold Creek Watershed Analysis will be carried forward into the TMDL implementation plan. Based on the Watershed and Fisheries analyses in Chapter III of the FEIS (pp. III-97 to III-130), the design of Alternative C, and mitigation and monitoring requirements (Chapter II), I believe Alternative C Modified will ensure compliance with state and Federal water quality regulations by ultimately reducing sediment within the watershed and thereby improving water quality.

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 (Heritage project file). We have also consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office and they reviewed and concur with our determination of effects. 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 C Modified complies with the Natural Historic Preservation Act (FEIS p II-23 and section M of 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 (FEIS p. III-146 and Section P of the project file).

Natural Resource Agenda

On March 2, 1998, former 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 1) Watershed Health and Restoration, 2) Sustainable Forest Ecosystem Management, 3) Forest Roads, and 4) 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 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 West Gold 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 West Gold 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.

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-4). 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 West Gold project area (FEIS pp. I-4 to I-5).

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 planned for treatment. 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.

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, 9, and 19. 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-10 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.

Final Rule – Administration of the Forest Development Transportation System

In January 2001, the Forest Service Manual, which governs regulations concerning the management, use and maintenance of the National Forest Transportation (Road) System, (Chapter 7700) was revised with a “Final Rule.” The Final Rule set forth that if a forest level roads analysis has not been completed, the Responsible Official (in this case, the Sandpoint District Ranger) determines whether a roads analysis is needed at the project scale, and if so, what level of analysis is necessary to support a project-level decision. On February 5, 2002 the Sandpoint District Ranger established direction for a roads analysis for the West Gold project (project file). I find this analysis provided good information and sound reasoning for all road construction and management planned for this project. See the FEIS, Chapter III, Roads and Access Management for more information.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

The 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 West Gold Project 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. **Conserve soil and water resources and not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land:** Alternative C Modified 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-12 to II-13, II-17 to II-19, and III-115 to III-121). Additionally, watershed conditions are improved both in the short and long term through reduction of chronic sediment sources and reducing the risk of culvert failures (FEIS pp. III-126 to III-127). Soil resources are protected by minimizing erosion, compaction and displacement with mitigation measures (FEIS pp. II-22 to II-23), by reducing tractor yarding through the use of less impactful systems such as skyline yarding and helicopter yarding, and by maintaining coarse woody debris (FEIS pp. III-62 to III-63 and III-64 to III-69).
2. **[M]inimize serious or long-lasting hazards from flood, wind, wildfire, erosion, or other natural physical forces...:** Activities will not affect most potentially serious natural hazards. The vegetation and fuels treatment will reduce the risk of wildfire severity and increase control effectiveness on treated areas (FEIS p. III-46 to III-49). Hazards from erosion will not be increased by fuel reduction, and will be decreased by planting. The WATSED water yield model 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 little measurable effect in the duration and intensity of peak flows (FEIS pp. III-120 to III-121). The small degree of

change in sediment yield shows minimal overall impacts to the watershed (FEIS p. III-119 to III-120).

3. **[P]revent or reduce serious, long lasting hazards and damage from pest organisms, utilizing principles of integrated pest management:** 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-21). Existing noxious weeds will be treated and there will be prevention measures to minimize the risk of new invaders into the ecosystem (FEIS pp. II-24 to II-25 and III-33 to III-34)
4. **Protect streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water...:** Water bodies and their values are appropriately protected or improved (FEIS pp. II-17 to II-19 and III-114 to III-130).
5. **Provide for and maintain diversity of plant and animal communities to meet overall multiple-use objectives...:P** 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 vegetation diversity by reforesting 898 acres with white pine, larch, and ponderosa pine seedlings and reducing competition (through selective cutting) on 411 acres of stands containing desired species. Diversity will also be improved by reintroducing fire to 1,077 acres of the forest using prescribed fire (FEIS, pp. III-14 to III-21; pp. III-24 to III-29, and pp. III-82 to III-97).
6. **Provide for adequate fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native vertebrate species...:** 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 p. III-96 and Fisheries pp. III-129 to III-130).
7. **Be assessed prior to project implementation for potential physical, biological, aesthetic, cultural, engineering and economic impacts and for consistency with multiple uses planned for the general area:** 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. **Include measures for preventing the destruction of adverse modification of critical habitat for threatened and endangered species:** Implementation of the Selected Alternative will have no effect or have beneficial effects on critical habitat for Threatened and Endangered species (see Appendix K). Compliance with the Endangered Species Act is discussed in a previous section.
9. **Provide that...significant rights-of-way that are capable and likely to be needed to accommodate the facility or use from an additional compatible right-of-way be designated as a right-of-way corridor:** There are no right-of-way grants being issued as part of the activities.
10. **Ensure that any roads constructed...are designed according to standards appropriate to the planned uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and effects upon lands and resources:** All road related work was assessed with a formal Roads Analysis (see Roads

section of project file). Only 0.16 mile of a permanent road will be constructed. The road will be designed appropriately for large trucks and equipment, and placed in storage following use for project activities. FEIS Chapter III, Alternative B addresses effects from proposed roads in relation to each resource and provides the scope of analysis under which Alternative C Modified falls.

11. **Provide that all roads are planned and designed to re-establish vegetative cover on the disturbed area within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed 10 years after the termination of the contract...unless the road is determined necessary as a permanent addition to the National Forest Transportation System:** The segment of road to be constructed would become part of the permanent transportation system but would be put into storage after use for the project. This would include reestablishing vegetation cover.
12. **Be consistent with maintaining air quality at a level that is adequate for the protection and use of National Forest System resource and that meets or exceeds applicable Federal, State, and/or local standards or regulations:** Applicable Federal, State, and local air quality standards will be met (FEIS p. III-56).

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 Chapters I and III. Based upon review of pertinent information from the FEIS, and interdisciplinary team field review, I have determined that Alternative C modified 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, Vegetation Treatment Definitions, p. II-8). The Vegetation section in Chapter III 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 three action alternatives it was clear to me that they all would result in a positive financial return (FEIS pp. III-137 to III-138). Although Alternative C Modified would provide less of a return than Alternative B, it would still provide a more favorable return than D, while at the same time accomplishing our Purpose and Need very well, and having negligible effects on the environment.
4. **Be chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.** The selection of Alternative C Modified does consider the effects on residual trees and adjacent stands as disclosed in the FEIS Chapter III "Forest Health and Productivity" Section.
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-17 to II-19 and Chapter III, Soils and Watershed sections).

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, recreation uses, aesthetic values, 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-136 to III-138.

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. Tree harvest will occur within Management Areas 1, 9, and 19 as described in the Forest Plan. There are two stands proposed for regeneration cutting in the project area (stands 632-01-024 and -025 in Unit 35) currently designated as unsuitable for timber production within Management Area 9. Based on recent field reconnaissance, these stands should be classified as suitable. Documentation of this recommended change in classification is located in the project file.

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 cutting) on approximately 898 acres. Silvicultural prescriptions may include: irregular shelterwood, seedtree with reserves, and final removal with reserves. The size of open areas will range from approximately five 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 (with reserve trees as described in the FEIS p. II-8) are 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 (project file, Vegetation section).

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. Although Alternative A would produce the least negative direct and indirect effects to most resources in the short term, it is not environmentally preferable because there would still be sediment risks from road drainage problems and it would provide the least amount of benefits to forest health and productivity. Alternative D would provide some benefits to forest health and productivity, and have the least negative effects of the action alternatives. Both Alternatives B and C, would provide the greatest benefits to forest health and productivity, but Alternative C (no new road construction) would be environmentally preferable because it would produce less sediment than Alternative B, have fewer ground-disturbing impacts, provide a low risk to aquatic ecosystems, and result in a greater overall net sediment reduction in the Gold Creek watershed.

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 West Gold Project FEIS are available for review by the public. Please contact Judy York at the Sandpoint Ranger District (208) 265-6665, to review the files.

Appeal Rights And Implementation

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.14. A written Appeal must be submitted within 45 days following publication of the notice of this decision in the (newspaper of record, City, State). Send Appeals to:

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer
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 which state:

- State that the document is an appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR part 215;
- List the name and address of the appellant and, if possible, a telephone number;
- Identify the decision document by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official;
- Identify the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks or portion of the decision to which the appellant objects;
- State how the Responsible Official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided, either before or during the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215.6 and, if applicable, how the appellant believes 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 Judy York, Interdisciplinary Team Leader at the Sandpoint Ranger District, (208) 265-6665.

RANOTTA K. MCNAIR
Forest Supervisor

Date

Attachment A – Stand Information

WEST GOLD ALTERNATIVE C STAND TREATMENTS								
Unit	Stand ID	Acres	Size Class	Forest Cover Type	Alternative C Prescription	Alt C Harvest system	Fuels Treatment	Reforestation
06	63201001	3.57	IMSA	DF	Thin	S	LL	NONE
06	63201043	7.07	IMSA	DF	Thin	S	LL	NONE
07	63302032	22.87	IMSA	L	Thin/Group Select	S	UB	NONE
08	63301034	38.23	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	PP/WL
09	63301025	23.86	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	WL/WP
10	63301013	8.81	IMSA	DF	Thin	S	LL	NONE
10	63302028	16.59	MHRS	PP	Thin/Group Select	S	LL	NONE
11	63302042	9.97	IMSA	DF	Thin/Group Select	S	LL	NONE
12	63302043	12.60	IMSA	GF/WH	Seedtree w/reserves	S	UB	WL/WP
13	63302004	10.87	IMSA	L	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	WP/WL
15	63302004	4.44	IMSA	L	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	WL/WP
16	63302046	19.43	IMSA	DF	Rehabilitation	H	UB	WL/WP
17	63302002	18.36	IMSA	GF/WH	Seedtree w/reserves	S	UB	WL/WP
17	63302004	34.19	IMSA	L	Seedtree w/reserves	H	UB	WL/WP
18	63302045	14.15	IMSA	LP	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	WL/PP/WP
19	63302045	13.48	IMSA	LP	Thin	T	GP	NONE
19	63302045	7.61	IMSA	LP	Thin	S	GP	NONE
20	63302021	35.87	IMSA	C	Thin/Group Select	S	LL	NONE
21	63302049	13.24	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	WL/WP
22	63302003	18.18	IMSA	DF	Thin/Group Select	S	LL	NONE
23	63302020	10.18	IMSA	C	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	WL/WP
23	63302020	3.90	IMSA	C	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	WL/WP
23	63302022	22.79	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	WL/WP

WEST GOLD ALTERNATIVE C STAND TREATMENTS								
Unit	Stand ID	Acres	Size Class	Forest Cover Type	Alternative C Prescription	Alt C Harvest system	Fuels Treatment	Reforestation
23	63302022	8.13	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	WL/WP
23	63302023	32.03	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	WL/WP
23	63302023	39.04	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	PP/WL/WP
24	63202008	12.29	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	PP
24	63202031	14.66	IMSA	L	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
24	63202032	19.29	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP
24	63202037	20.68	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
24	63202037	7.55	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	PP/WL
24	63202038	3.11	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP
24	63202038	7.13	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	S	UB	PP
24	63302013	15.95	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP
25	63202032	4.80	IMSA	DF	Thin/Group Select	H	WTY	NONE
25	63202038	5.24	IMSA	DF	Thin/Group Select	H	WTY	NONE
26	63202025	28.58	MHRS	PP	Underburn Only	None	UB	NONE
27	63202004	21.17	IMSA	DF	Rehabilitation	H	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202004	19.34	IMSA	DF	Rehabilitation	S	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202020	6.67	MHRS	GF/WH	Rehabilitation	H	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202027	9.92	IMSA	DF	Rehabilitation	H	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202027	17.22	IMSA	DF	Rehabilitation	S	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202028	11.75	SAWT	DF	Rehabilitation	H	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202028	22.00	SAWT	DF	Rehabilitation	S	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202041	3.13	MHRS	C	Rehabilitation	H	SL/UB	PP/WL/WP
27	63202048	4.55	MLRS	DF	Rehabilitation	S	SL/UB	PP
28	63302007	23.73	IMSA	GF/WH	Thin	H	LL	NONE
29	63202006	12.71	IMSA	DF	Rehabilitation	S	SL/UB	WL/WP

WEST GOLD ALTERNATIVE C STAND TREATMENTS								
Unit	Stand ID	Acres	Size Class	Forest Cover Type	Alternative C Prescription	Alt C Harvest system	Fuels Treatment	Reforestation
30	63202042	2.27	MULT	L	Final Removal w/Reserves	H	LL	NONE
31	63202002	45.35	IMSA	GF/WH	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
31	63202003	72.17	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
31	63202014	3.28	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
31	63202018	43.04	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
31	63202019	37.22	MLRS	GF/WH	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL/WP
31	63202022	14.33	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
31	63202023	2.88	IMSA	LP	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP/WL
31	63202024	13.44	MHRS	LP	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP
32	63202017	13.82	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
33	63202023	6.71	IMSA	LP	Thin	H	UB	NONE
34	63202026	4.09	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
35	63201024	40.25	MHRS	L	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	NONE
35	63201025	21.96	MHRS	L	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	NONE
36	63201043	31.41	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
37	63201010	7.67	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
37	63201011	4.82	MHRS	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
38	63201003	9.47	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
38	63201004	8.23	IMSA	PP	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
38	63201007	7.02	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
39	63201014	4.98	SAWT	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB/LL	NONE
39	63201032	14.88	MULT	PP	Thin & Group Select	H	UB/LL	NONE
40	63302007	11.37	MULT	GF/WH	Thin	H	LL	NONE
41	63202008	23.01	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP
41	63202009	9.20	IMSA	GF/WH	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP

WEST GOLD ALTERNATIVE C STAND TREATMENTS								
Unit	Stand ID	Acres	Size Class	Forest Cover Type	Alternative C Prescription	Alt C Harvest system	Fuels Treatment	Reforestation
41	63202038	7.19	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP
41	63202040	13.43	IPOL	LP	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	PP
42	63202026	10.09	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
42	63202036	7.83	IMSA	DF	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
42	63202042	5.43	MULT	L	Thin & Group Select	H	UB	NONE
43	63302003	8.12	IMSA	DF	Thin	H	LL	NONE
44	63302007	63.54	MULT	GF/WH	Thin	H	LL	NONE
45	63302021	7.34	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	GP	WL/WP
46	63302049	6.96	IMSA	DF	Irregular Shelterwood	H	UB	WP/WL
48	63302049	14.06	IMSA	DF	Thin/Group Select	H	LL	NONE
	TOTAL	1,337.79						

Size Class

IMSA – Immature sawtimber
 MHRS- Mature high risk
 MULT – Multistory
 SAWT – Sawtimber
 IPOL – Immature Pole

Forest Cover

DF – Douglas fir
 GF – grand fir
 WH – western hemlock
 LP – lodgepole pine
 PP – ponderosa pine
 L - larch
 C - cedar

Harvest System

T – tractor
 S – skyline
 H – helicopter

Fuels

UB – underburn
 LL – limb and lop
 GP – grapple pile
 WTY – whole tree yard

Reforestation

WL – western larch
 WP – white pine
 PP – ponderosa pine

Attachment B – Openings Greater Than 40 Acres

The following table identifies those stands that will exceed 40 acres in size, either due to the size of the proposed unit, or the size of the unit in conjunction with adjacent openings. For the purposes of this analysis, past regeneration cut areas were no longer considered created openings when both vegetation and watershed conditions met management objectives.

Table B-1. West Gold Project proposed new openings from vegetation treatments and connected openings from past cutting that would create openings greater than 40 acres.

DEIS Unit Number	DEIS Unit Stand Number(s)	Silvicultural Prescription*	Estimated New Opening Acres	Adjacent Existing Opening Acres**	Total Estimated Opening Acres
9	633-01-025	ISW	24	61	85
12	633-02-043	ST with reserves	13	143	156
13,15,16,17,18	633-02-002 633-02-004 633-02-045 633-02-046	ISW, R, ST with reserves	101	n/a	101
21, 46	633-02-049	ISW	20	56	76
23	633-02-020 633-02-022 633-02-023	ISW	116	17	133
24, 27, 29, 41	632-02-008 632-02-031 632-02-032 632-02-037 632-02-038 633-02-013 632-02-004 632-02-020 632-02-027 632-02-028 632-02-041 632-02-048 632-02-006 632-02-009 632-02-040	ISW, R	283	59	342
31	632-02-002 632-02-003 632-02-014 632-02-018 632-02-019 632-02-022 632-02-023 632-02-024	ISW	232	n/a	232
35	632-01-024 632-01-025	ISW	62	n/a	62

*ISW = Irregular Shelterwood, ST = Seed tree, R = Rehabilitation

**Existing openings include natural and human-caused openings

Attachment C – Design Features of the Selected Alternative

The following design features are listed in Chapter II of the FEIS where they include mitigation effectiveness ratings.

Features Designed to Reduce Sediment

Temporary and Classified Road Decommissioning to Improve Aquatic Habitat - All temporary and classified roads identified for decommissioning or storage would be obliterated with appropriate techniques. These may include full and partial recontouring; removing all culverts; stabilizing fill slopes and restoring stream channel crossings back to natural grade. Seeding, fertilizing, and placement of woody debris would follow to establish desired vegetation and prevent noxious weed spread.

Hydro-mulching - All road construction would require hydro-mulching on soil disturbance sites within critical areas such as wet areas. Mulching would occur immediately after road construction is completed.

Features Related to Vegetation Restoration

Post-cutting Treatments - In regeneration units, site preparation, fuels treatment, and planting activities would occur within five years following timber cutting 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-cutting conditions.

Openings Over 40 acres - Cutting in 16 units as proposed would result in contiguous openings of greater than 40 acres in size. The update letter dated September 11, 1998 provided a 60-day public comment period on this issue as required by Regional Forest Service Guidelines (see Project File, Public Involvement Section). A request for approval by the Regional Forester to exceed the 40-acre openings limit has been submitted to the Regional Office and will be determined upon review of this Draft EIS.

Retention of Large Old Trees in Stands Not Designated as Old Growth – Within some units there are portions of small stands (<25 acres) with groups of large old trees that are not defined as old growth. Marking guidelines would specify that these groups of trees would be retained.

Features Related to Roads and Access Management

Conversion of Unclassified Road Segment to Classified Road – Approximately 0.3 mile of a one-mile unclassified road 2707UF would be converted to a classified road to maintain a dispersed recreation site. The remaining 0.7 mile of road would be decommissioned to stop existing motorized use through a plantation.

Transportation, Maintenance and Safety on Roads - Log hauling and some yarding and decking of logs would occur along Roads 2707 and 278. Haul would occur out Road 332 (the Bunco) Road to the west. Haul routes would be posted with signs indicating heavy truck traffic. No hauling would occur on weekends and holidays to reduce safety hazards during high use times by visitors. Dust abatement would be used as needed on National Forest roads to control dust and maintain driver safety.

Management of Gated Roads During Project Activities - During logging activities and during bow and firearm hunting seasons, existing gated roads in the project area would remain closed to all motorized vehicles not associated with the logging operation. While using these roads, the

purchaser would not be allowed to use motorized vehicles to gather firewood, hunt or transport big game animals from behind the gates.

Management of Motorized Access on Gated Roads After Project is Completed - The following roads, which are currently gated and closed to all wheeled motorized vehicles would retain their current restricted access: Roads 2708A, 278A, 278B, and 278D. Restrictions on Roads 2707A and 2707AA, which are open to snowmobile use in the winter when Road 332 is plowed, would change to accommodate motorized vehicles less than 50” in width except during soft roadbed conditions. All other roads listed above would remain closed to all public wheeled motor vehicle access. See table 27 for details.

Features Related to Timing of Activities

Timing of Contracted Activities - The timber sale would be split into separate subdivisions. The intent of the subdivision is to limit the length of time most of the contracted activities take place within a specific area.

Timing of Road Decommissioning – Unless circumstances change during implementation that would extend the duration of time a road is needed, roads would be decommissioned within the following timeframes:

- ◆ Temporary roads or existing road segments proposed for decommissioning that are not needed for post-cutting activities (e.g. fuel treatment or planting) would be decommissioned the same season following cutting activities or no later than the following season.
- ◆ Other road segments proposed for decommissioning that are needed for post-cutting activities, such as prescribed burning or planting, would be decommissioned within two to five years of cutting activities.

Timing of Logging Operations – The purchaser would have the option of winter or summer logging with the following exceptions:

- ◆ No winter logging could occur in any units accessed by Roads 2707A or 2707AA when Road 332 is plowed or scheduled to be plowed. Roads 2707A and 2707AA are used as a snowmobile bypass when winter logging in other areas uses Road 332 for log haul.
- ◆ No winter logging could occur on Road 278 to allow snowmobile access for Lakeview residents unless other snowmobile or drivable road access were available.

(Also see Features Designed to Protect Wildlife Habitat regarding logging timing restrictions during Harlequin Duck breeding season.)

Features Designed to Keep Prescribed Burns Under Control

Prescribed burning treatments would be conducted according to established standards in FSM 5142 – Prescribed Fire Management. A site-specific burn plan would be prepared for each area to be burned. Burning would only occur when weather, fuel conditions, and available resources are at the levels specified in the prescribed burn plan.

Slash and Pile Burning - Landing slash and excavator piles would be burned in late fall after heavy rains and during cooler temperatures when the risk of escape into adjoining stands and damage to residual timber is lessened.

Fuelbreaks - If natural fuelbreaks are not present, fire lines and fuelbreaks would be constructed around the perimeters of all burn units. Where possible, fire lines and fuelbreaks would be

constructed on ridges, benches, and the toe of slopes, using the advantage of the terrain to best control the fire.

Use of Water and Engines - Fire hose would be installed along critical sections of fuelbreaks using water supplied from fire engines and/or pumped from nearby natural water sources (see Features Designed to Protect Water and Fish Habitat for “Protection of Fish When Using Streams For Prescribed Burning Control” below).

Features Designed to Protect Air Quality

Smoke Management – All prescribed burning would 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 would only occur when weather and air conditions are favorable for smoke dispersal. No burning would be initiated during times when air quality restrictions are in place.

Features Designed to Protect Soil, Water and Fish Habitat

Best Management Practices - All activities would 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.

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

Inland Native Fish Strategy – Commercial timber cutting would be prohibited in RHCAs for fish habitat protection using the guidelines established by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS). These no-cut zones include 300-foot (slope distance) protection zones for streams that have fish, 150-foot protection zones for perennial streams with no fish, and 100-foot for intermittent streams and sensitive landtypes, since Gold Creek is a priority watershed. Ephemeral draws would have a 50-foot (slope distance) protection zone if they are either directly tied to an intermittent channel, or lack large woody debris and vegetation that prevent scouring or head cutting.

Except for units likely to have burning and reforestation activities within the RHCA, standard widths defining Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) would be used without modification. INFS allows silviculture practices to be applied in RHCAs to acquire desired vegetation characteristics where needed to attain Riparian Management Objectives (see Appendix B, TM-1(b.)) and to design prescribed burn projects that contribute to the attainment of Riparian Management Objectives (see Appendix B, FM-4). No overstory canopy would be removed within the RHCAs. Some slashing² of shrubs and undesirable saplings and seedlings may occur in selected units to prepare sites for burning and reforestation activities. Planting within RHCAs would follow burning activities to promote long-lived species such as cedar, larch, and white pine. Streamside protection zones (RHCAs) were determined categorically for streams in the project area and are based on the INFS.

² Slashing is the use of chainsaws to treat sub-merchantable, undesirable tree species in order to prepare a site for burning and reforestation with desired species.

Eleven acres of thinning are proposed in unit 6, which is located within a landslide prone area. Skyline or helicopter logging would be necessary to minimize ground disturbance activities and harvesting can only occur during the summer months when the soils are not saturated.

Protection Of Wetlands, Seeps, Bogs, Wallows and Springs – All known or discovered wetlands, seeps, bogs, elk wallows and springs less than one acre in size would be protected with a "no activity" buffer approximately 100 feet in diameter. There are no such areas larger than one acre.

Road Surface and Drainage Crossing Maintenance to Improve Aquatic Habitat - The main source of erosion and sediment delivery from roads is usually from the road surface. Road maintenance activities that focus on reducing sediment delivery are blading along the road prism; spot surfacing at stream crossings; installing relief culverts where ditch lengths are too long; cleaning and improving ditches; cleaning the inlet and outlets of culverts; and installing rolling dips and outlet ditches. These activities would help improve road surface drainage and decrease sediment delivery to stream channels.

Road drainage crossings that pose a hazard and risk to aquatic species and their habitat from sediment delivery have been evaluated throughout the project area. Recommendations for each crossing may include replacing, redesigning or upgrading crossings as needed. Some specific road improvements to reduce sediment risks include:

Road 2707A and 278– Road drainage crossings along these two roads would be redesigned to avoid stream diversion potential and culvert failure. On the 2707A, proposed treatments would maintain access for snowmobiles and a groomer. Increasing the culvert's flow capacity and constructing a rolling dip would reduce sediment risks.

Road maintenance activities that repair or remove drainage structures in perennial streams would take place after July 15th and prior to September 15th. This is to reduce risk of effects from sediment during spring runoff and to avoid effects to westslope cutthroat trout redds and staging or spawning bull trout.

Classified Road Decommissioning to Improve Aquatic and Wildlife Habitat - All classified roads identified for decommissioning or storage would be decommissioned with appropriate techniques. These may include full and partial recontouring; removing all culverts; stabilizing fill slopes and restoring stream channel crossings back to natural grade. Seeding, fertilizing, and placement of woody debris would follow to establish vegetation and prevent noxious weed spread.

Protection of Fish When Using Streams For Prescribed Burning Control - To avoid adverse effects to fish and redds while using natural water sources, water removal may not exceed 90 gallons per minute and pumping sites would be located away from spawning gravels. The intake hose would be screened to prevent accidental intake of small fish. An emergency spill clean up kit would be on site in the unlikely event of a fuel spill outside the containment system. This is consistent with INFS direction (USDA 1995; Appendix A, RA-5).

Features Designed to Protect Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife Tree Retention – Design features for the project were developed to ensure the retention and selection of snags at a level and distribution that have been shown to support viable populations of species that use them.

Snags and live tree replacements would be retained where opportunities exist in treatment units at levels recommended by scientific literature based on recent studies (Bull et al. 1997). In high-risk

stands proposed for regeneration cutting, desired snag habitat is generally lacking due to past large-scale lethal fires and the preponderance of short-lived tree species and root disease. Consequently, snag retention objectives would not be met in these areas.

Snag retention objectives are consistent with recent published data that suggests that populations of cavity nesters were viable in stands of ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forests that contained about four snags per acre (Bull et al. 1997).

To compensate for the lack of snags in heavy root disease areas, the following minimum amounts of snags and live tree replacements are to be retained within applicable cutting areas:

- Dry forest habitats: 4 snags and 8 live tree replacements/acre from the largest trees.
- Moist forest habitats: 6 snags and 12 live tree replacements/acre from the largest trees.

Selection of snags and live tree replacements would emphasize practices that assure the highest probability for long-term retention (Bull, et al. 1997). The high hazard snags and snags in the advanced stages of decay would not be used to meet retention objectives (Intermountain Forest and Industry Association et al. 1995). Retention practices would focus on ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir and western red cedar trees, especially veteran or relic ponderosa pine and western larch trees. Trees killed by root disease should be avoided, where possible, to meet retention objectives because of their rapid deteriorate/fall-down rate.

Large diameter snags (greater than 15 inches diameter) that are felled for safety reasons would remain on site to provide for large woody debris and long-term site productivity.

To promote good distribution of snags, some snags would be represented on every 10 acres of treatment, in clusters or clumps where feasible.

Slash would be pulled back from veteran or relic ponderosa pine and western larch live trees and snags to protect them from the adverse effects of prescribed burning. Grapple piling would be considered to treat fuels on moderate slopes where residual snags would be at risk from broadcast burning.

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

Dry Forest Ecosystems - Due to the high incidence of insect and disease, some stands proposed for treatment are not able to sustain sufficient forest structure necessary for flammulated owls and other wildlife associated with dry forest ecosystems. However, some proposed stands retain enough structure to promote or achieve suitable habitat conditions for these species (see project file). For these stands, cutting treatments would be designed to maintain the persistence of habitat on the landscape by:

- Retaining a stand average of at least 40 percent overstory canopy closure.
- Designing for non-uniform spacing of trees (moderate within stand variability) or clumps.
- Managing for a mature ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir community.
- Designing fuel treatments to retain residual forest structure, including vertical structure that may occur in the patches or clumps of trees.

Vegetation Screen – Vegetation buffers would be left along open roads and next to treatment areas where there is a realistic chance of protecting buffers from logging and fuel treatments. This measure is designed to provide security screening for wildlife and minimize unscheduled access. Buffers would transition from a no-cut zone into the treatment prescription.

Harlequin Duck Habitat Protection - Along West Gold Creek (from the confluence with Gold Creek, upstream, through Section 17) manage riparian habitat according to INFS guidelines (see Features Designed to Protect Water and Fish Habitat above). Ground-based, mechanized activities would be avoided within at least 300 feet of the stream during harlequin duck breeding season (April 15 – September 5) in or near proposed units 06 and 39. Helicopter logging activities would also be withdrawn from this area during the same season. Activity restrictions could be removed if on-site breeding surveys determine that habitat is not occupied.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife Species Management - If any threatened, endangered, or sensitive species were located during project layout or implementation, management activities would be altered, if necessary, so that proper protection measures are taken. Timber sale contract clause B(T)6.25, Protection Of Threatened, Endangered And Sensitive Species, would be included in any timber sale contract.

Protection of Elk Wallows - See “Protection Of Wetlands, Seeps, Bogs, Wallows and Springs” above under Features Designed to Protect Water and Fish Habitat.

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 would be met.

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

- All new skid trails would be designated.
- Where terrain is conducive, trails would 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 During Prescribed Burning Activities – Prescribed underburning and pile burning would 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) would 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 would follow the research guidelines contained in Graham et al (1994). These guidelines specify leaving 7 to 14 tons/acre of coarse woody debris on Douglas-fir/grand fir sites and 17 to 33 tons/acre on hemlock /cedar sites.

Protection during grapple piling activities – The grapple piling machine would travel on a slash mat during piling activities.

Restoration of Landings – All non-dedicated helicopter landings would be restored by decompacting the site using a winged subsoiler, seeding and planting the site to reestablish vegetation and leaving coarse woody debris for nutrient retention.

Features Designed to Protect Heritage Resources

During timber sale layout, an archeologist would identify and mark as much of the historic trails located within proposed units 20, 24, 28, 40, 41 and 44 as possible to determine if protection measures are necessary. If the trail can be identified, blazed trees would be protected and the tread location cleared after logging activities.

In the event that heritage resources are encountered during program activities, the Forest has the authority to modify or stop timber sale activities. The standard heritage resources protection provision B(T)6.24 (Protection Of Cultural Resources), would be included in the timber sale contract. The provision specifically requires the contractor to notify the Forest of such discoveries. Mitigation of impacts for timber sales can include, but are not limited to:

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

Features Designed to Protect Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive and Rare Plants

TES plant surveys would be conducted as needed prior to weed treatment activities.

Should one of the action alternatives be selected for implementation, any change to unit boundaries or addition of new treatment areas that may occur during layout would be reviewed, and TES plant surveys would be conducted by a qualified botanist. Newly documented occurrences would be evaluated, with specific protection measures implemented to protect population viability. Such measures could include the following;

- Dropping units from cutting activity
- Modifying unit boundaries to provide a minimum 100-foot slope distance buffer around documented occurrences
- Modifying cutting methods, fuels treatment or logging systems to protect TES plants and their habitat
- Implementing, if necessary, Timber Sale Contract provisions B(T)6.25 (Protection of Endangered Species), and C(T)9.51 (Settlement for Endangered or Sensitive Species Termination).

Features Designed to Prevent the Spread of Noxious Weeds

Noxious weed treatment would be conducted according to guidelines and priorities established in the Sandpoint Weed Control Project FEIS (USDA 1998c). Methods of control may include biological, chemical, mechanical and cultural. Herbicide treatment would not exceed the maximum treatable acres established under the Sandpoint Weed Control Project FEIS adaptive strategy. A table displaying maximum treatable acres in the West Gold Creek drainage is included in the project file.

Gravel or borrow pits to be used during road construction or reconstruction would be free of new weed invader species (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist). A list of weed species considered to be potential new invaders is included in the project file. The Forest Service would inspect and treat gravel or borrow pits as needed prior to their use.

Any priority weed species (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist) identified during road maintenance would be reported to the District Weed Specialist. A list of priority weed species is included in the project file.

The purchaser would be responsible for weed treatment of existing haul routes. Treatment would occur prior to ground disturbing activities where feasible. If the timing of ground disturbing activities would not allow weed treatment to occur when it would be most effective, it would occur in the next treatment season following the disturbance. The Forest Service would be responsible for treating helicopter and service landings.

All timber sale contracts would require cleaning of off-road equipment by the purchaser prior to entry onto National Forest lands. If operations occur in areas infested with new invaders (as defined by the IPNF Weed Specialist), all equipment would be cleaned prior to leaving the site.

The purchaser would seed all newly constructed roads, skid trails, landings or other areas of disturbance (including maintenance on existing roads) with a weed-free native and desired non-native seed mix and fertilized as necessary.

All straw or hay used for mulching or watershed restoration activities would be certified weed-free.

Road segments identified for weed treatment and proposed for decommissioning would be treated prior to decommissioning.

Features Designed to Protect Scenery and Visual Quality

As needed to meet Visual Quality Objectives, the following specific design criteria would be used:

Tree cutting activities would be designed to rehabilitate views that include the existing clearcuts and power line corridor by shaping units to imitate natural openings and landform configurations, including islands of untouched vegetation, openings, clumps of trees and open stands of trees with irregular spacing. Where treatment areas lie next to past clearcuts or the powerline corridor, straight lines would be modified by leaving trees in an open mosaic pattern. This technique borrows color and texture from the existing landscape, including the old cutting units. In thinning units, the spacing of leave trees would vary and some clumps of denser canopy would be retained to create a natural appearance. Roads and landings would be located and constructed to minimize cuts and fills. Hardwoods would be maintained for diversity of color and texture.

In the background view areas, openings would be shaped to a size and form that appear as natural. Hardwoods would be maintained for diversity of color. Vegetation would be blended from treated to untreated areas.

Attachment D – Maps Related to The Selected Alternative

