



**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** August 02, 2004

Dear Planning Participant or Interested Citizen,

The intent of this letter is to inform you that the Forest Service, Custer National Forest, Sioux Ranger District has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the **Ekalaka Hazardous Fuel Project**. A completed EA document and project area maps are enclosed for your review and comment during a 30-day formal comment period (36 CFR 215). The project area is located about 2 miles southeast of the town of Ekalaka, Carter County, Montana.

The Environmental Assessment considered two alternatives in detail, Alternative #1-No Action, and Alternative #2-Proposed Action. In addition, several alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study.

The proposed action would implement hazardous fuels reduction treatments on 8,525 acres of NFS lands in the Ekalaka Hills Land Unit that include commercial thinning (4,870 acres), non-commercial thinning (2,480 acres), precommercial thinning (575 acres) prescribed fire (480 acres), aspen stand rejuvenation (120 acres) and activity fuels abatement on the commercial and non-commercial thinning acres. Approximately 30 miles of temporary road would be needed to access commercial thinning areas.

The Ekalaka Hills Land Unit, approximately 18,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands on the Sioux Ranger District, is at risk from a stand-replacing wildland fire that could affect the general forest stand diversity, BLM lands, state lands, and private property. Currently, forested stands in the Ekalaka Hills are represented by overly dense timber stands and snow damaged trees. The high likelihood of stand-replacing wildland fire poses unacceptable risks to the ponderosa pine ecosystem, private property, and human health and safety.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215, you are invited to comment on this proposal during a 30-day comment period. The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on a proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the newspaper of record (Billings Gazette, Billings, Montana). The publication date of the legal notice is the exclusive means for calculating the 30-day comment period. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their comments are received in a timely manner. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible for appeal must provide their name, address, and substantive comments on the proposed actions along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision prior to the close of this comment period. A signature or other verification of identity must be provided upon request (36 CFR 215.6).

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information:

1. Name and address;
2. Title of the proposed action;



3. Specific substantive comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
4. Signature or other verification of identity since identification of the individual or organization that authored the comment(s). (This is required for appeal eligibility);
5. For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and;
6. Individual members of organizations must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual. (Comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.)
7. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone (605-797-4432) or in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit comments. Oral comments must be received by close of normal business hours by the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day following the publication of the legal notice of opportunity to comment.

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, faxed, or e-mailed by 11:59 pm on the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day following publication of the legal notice of the opportunity to comment. Letters should be submitted to: **Rhonda O'Byrne, District Ranger, Sioux Ranger District, P.O. Box 37, Camp Crook, SD. 57724.**

An optional short comment form is also included for your use.

Submit comments via FAX to 605-797-4404. Electronic comments via email must be submitted in one of the following formats: an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to: [comments-northern-custer-sioux@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-custer-sioux@fs.fed.us). Use the name of the project as the subject line (**Ekalaka Hazardous Fuel Project**). Please provide name, address, and telephone number. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action, and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215.

The Forest Service will consider timely, substantive comments in reaching a final decision on this proposal. The subsequent decision notice will be sent to those that commented or requested it. The final decision notice is expected in September 2004.

In addition, the environmental assessment document with color maps showing the activities proposed are also available for viewing and downloading on the Custer NF website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer/>. For additional information contact John Clark at 605-797-4432

Sincerely,

*/s/ Rhonda O'Byrne*

RHONDA O'BYRNE  
District Ranger

*Attachments: Ekalaka Hazardous Fuel Project Environmental Assessment  
Optional comment form*