



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Black Hills
National
Forest

Northern Hills Ranger District ph: 605-642-4622
2014 N Main Street
Spearfish, SD 57783-2917

File Code: 1950

Date: November 20, 2003

Greetings:

Land managers for the Black Hills National Forest are initiating analysis for the Geranium Vegetation Management Project on the Northern Hills Ranger District. The Geranium project would implement the 5-year action plan as part of the 1997 Revised Black Hills Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the 2001 Phase I Amendment (Forest Plan). Proposed vegetation treatments include thinning, shelterwood seed cuts, seed tree cuts, overstory removal with reserve trees, products other than logs, hardwood enhancement, aspen enhancement, prescribed burning or mechanical fuels reduction, and fuel breaks. Associated road improvement and closures are also proposed.

The attached fact sheet describes the proposed actions and its purpose. We invite you to help us identify and resolve issues related to the proposal. The proposed actions do not represent a decision; these proposals are a starting point. Your issues will be considered in an Environmental Assessment (EA), scheduled for completion in 2004. Once the EA is released, you will have another 30-day comment period. The Deciding Officer (District Ranger or Forest Supervisor) will address public comments and document the reasons for the decisions in a Decision Notice.

You received this letter because you are a neighbor, permittee, or have otherwise expressed interest in this type of project. Comments will be accepted via mail, email, phone or fax (see below) and must **be received by December 29, 2003** to be addressed in the EA. Please contact us if you would like to receive a copy of the EA or be kept informed of the status of the project, even if you do not have comments at this time. Your name will be removed from the mailing list if you do not respond in any way to this outreach.

Thank you for your interest in management of the Black Hills National Forest.

Sincerely,

/S/ Pamela E. Brown

PAMELA E. BROWN
District Ranger

MAIL COMMENTS TO:
Geranium Vegetation Management Project
ATTN: Dave Atkins, USFS
Northern Hills Ranger District
2014 N. Main
Spearfish, SD 57783

FOR MORE
INFORMATION
CONTACT
Dave Atkins
Team Leader
Phone: 605-642-4622

Email: daatkins@fs.fed.us



Geranium Project Area

Black Hills National Forest – Northern Hills Ranger District
November 2003

The Northern Hills Ranger District of the Black Hills National Forest is proposing a forest management project in the Geranium Project Area, located approximately 15 miles southwest of Spearfish in Lawrence County, South Dakota. (see attached maps)

Landmarks and Legal Descriptions

Activities that would change the condition of forest vegetation, fuels, or roads are proposed in the following area:

Project area location		
Legal description		
Township	Range	Section
3 North	1 East	3-5, 8, 9, 16
4 North	1 East	1-18, 20-29, 32-34
4 North	2 East	6, 19
5 North	1 East	34-36
5 North	2 East	31
<i>Black Hills Meridian</i>		

The project area is approximately 18,040 acres in size, including about 17,451 acres of Black Hills National Forest system lands and about 589 acres of private lands. Landmarks in the vicinity include Little Spearfish Creek, Geranium Park, and Limestone Plateau.

Forest Plan Direction

The Revised Forest Plan assigns a management emphasis to each portion of the Forest to meet multiple-use objectives. For each designated management area (MA), Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan includes a description of desired future condition, goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines. National Forest land in the Geranium project area is allocated to the following management areas (see attached maps):

3.32 – Backcountry Non-motorized Recreation Emphasis (424 acres)

These areas are managed to provide recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting. Summer use is non-motorized. Over-the-snow vehicles could be allowed in snow season. The portion of Management Area 3.32 within the project area involves a section of Little Spearfish Creek.

4.1 – Limited Motorized Use and Forest Product Emphasis (559 acres)

These areas are managed for non-motorized recreation, while providing for timber production, forage production, visual quality and a diversity of wildlife. Roads provide intermittent commercial access, but are normally closed to other than administrative use. The portion of Management Area 4.1 within the project area involves the Eagle Cliff Cross Country Ski Area.

4.2A – Spearfish Canyon (301 acres)

This area is managed for recreational opportunities in roaded settings that appear natural.

5.1 - Resource Production Emphasis (14,238 acres)

These areas are managed for wood products, water yield and forage production, while providing other commercial products, visual quality, diversity of wildlife and a variety of other goods and services.

5.6 – Forest Products, Recreation and Big Game Emphasis (1,929 acres)

This area is managed for timber production, motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities, and big game habitat value, with low open road densities and near-optimum arrangement of forage and cover areas.

Purpose of Project and Need for Action

The primary purpose of the activities proposed in the project area are to bring about the forest conditions and public benefits targeted for this area by the Forest Plan. This specifically includes:

- Produce commercially valuable timber to meet the objectives of the Forest Plan and increase forest growth.
- Harvest existing Mountain Pine Beetle infested trees and reduce the risk of future infestation.
- Complete fuel reduction activities including thinning, fuel breaks and prescribed burning to reduce the risk of high-intensity ground fires or crown fires.
- Identify specific vegetative treatments to provide the diversity of tree species, stand structure, and age classes targeted by the Forest Plan
- Develop an effective transportation system that recognizes watershed, wildlife, and road maintenance concerns, as well as future resource management transportation needs.
- Restore riparian habitat.

Summary of Proposed Actions

The following activities are proposed in response to the needs and opportunities identified above. (see attached maps)

Proposed Commercial Silvicultural Treatments	Acres (approximate)
Commercial thinning	3,193
Overstory removal with reserve trees	1,032
Shelterwood seedcut	664
Seed tree cuts	311
Aspen enhancement	7
Hardwood enhancement	13
Products other than logs	14

Proposed Riparian Treatments	Acres (approximate)
Riparian restoration	6

Proposed Fuel Treatments*	Acres (approximate)
Fuels reduction (prescribed burning or mechanical treatment)	2,397
Fuel breaks	445
Thinning – commercial (wildland-urban interface fuel reduction adjacent to private land) **	202
Thinning – precommercial (areas unsuitable or inaccessible for commercial timber harvest)	108

*In most situations, prescribed burning or mechanical treatment would be utilized as part of the silvicultural prescription to reduce fire hazard created from logging slash.

**This is a benefit of the commercial thinning described above in the Proposed Silvicultural Treatments table and not a separate fuels treatment.

Proposed Travel Management*	Miles (approximate)
Roads currently seasonally closed changed to year-round closure	11.3
Roads currently open changed to year-round closure	5.1
Roads that would be decommissioned	12.0
New road construction	0.6
Existing snowmobile trails currently open to all vehicles changed to snowmobile use only	8.1

*Existing roads may be reconstructed or improved to provide access for vegetative treatment.

What's Next?

The next step is to receive comments on this proposal from interested parties. Your comments add to the relevant information, ideas, and concerns we have gathered and applied so far. They help us refine the proposal or develop alternatives to it.

Please provide your comments by December 29, 2003.

Send written comments to:

**Attn: Dave Atkins
USDA Forest Service
Northern Hills Ranger District
2014 N. Main St.
Spearfish, SD 57783**

You may also e-mail comments to daatkings@fs.fed.us or call **605-642-4622**.

Those providing comments on this proposal with a return mailing address will receive future updates on the project. Others wishing to receive updates should notify project leader Dave Atkins.

Thank you for participating in the management of the Black Hills National Forest.

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