

DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
SILVER RUN ANALYSIS AREA

Laramie Ranger District

**MEDICINE BOW-ROUTT NATIONAL FORESTS &
THUNDER BASIN NATIONAL GRASSLAND**

Albany County & Carbon County, Wyoming

T.15N., T.16N., & T.17N., R.78W. & R.79W.

February 2004

Lead Agency:

USDA FOREST SERVICE

Responsible Official:

Clinton D. Kyhl, District Ranger

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SUMMARY OF DECISION

Based upon the analysis and evaluation described in the Silver Run Environmental Assessment (EA) and associated record, comments received from interested parties, and direction from the 1985 Medicine Bow National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), it is my decision to implement the **Proposed Action** described in the EA with some modifications. Based on public comments received for the Draft EA, I have decided to drop one 26-acre clearcut unit (#13) from the final proposal in the vicinity of Barber Lake. See Map 1.

After consideration of all the alternatives, I believe this alternative best addresses both the purpose and need for the proposal and the significant issues and concerns for the Silver Run Analysis Area. A variety of silvicultural treatments have been designed to improve forest health and resiliency to insects and disease, create vegetative diversity, and contribute to the goal of providing for timber harvest within the Silver Run Analysis Area.

Silvicultural treatments include: 171 acres of clearcutting, 161 acres of overstory removal, 30 acres of sanitation/salvage, and 85 acres of shelterwood - seed cut, a total of 447 acres. Approximately 0.9 miles of new specified road construction and 0.7 miles of specified road reconstruction, along with an estimated 2 miles of temporary road, will be needed to perform these treatments. A number of soil and water projects have been identified within the project area. Implementation of these projects will help to reduce the effects of human-caused soil erosion in the area.

RATIONALE FOR DECISION

My decision is a solution that meets law and attempts to find balance with agency direction, forest needs, scientific analysis, and social acceptance. I have made this decision, following extensive public involvement. My decision meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by responding to the Purpose and Need, responding to Significant Issues identified in the planning process, and responding to comments received from the public during the EA comment period provided.

My decision is based on the Purpose and Need and Significant Issues identified for the Silver Run Analysis Area (EA pp. 8-18).

RESPONSE TO PURPOSE AND NEED

The Proposed Action responds to the purpose and needs that have been identified for the Silver Run Analysis Area:

- **Characteristic Landscape**

The Proposed Action harvest units have been concentrated in areas that have had past timber sale entries to consolidate and/or begin creating larger stands of trees with similar species, makeup, age, and structures.

- **Forest Health and Resiliency**

The Proposed Action includes a mix of treatment activities designed to reduce the spread of mistletoe and improve forest resiliency across the area to a larger extent than the other action alternatives.

- **Providing a Flow of Timber**

The Proposed Action does the most to meet the Forest Plan goal of providing a flow of timber from stands identified as being suitable for timber management within the 7E, 4B, and 2B management areas.

- **Watershed Restoration**

The Proposed Action includes watershed restoration projects designed to minimize human-caused erosion in the area.

RESPONSE TO SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

- **Clearcutting and Aesthetics/Visual Quality**

Based on public comments concerning impacts from the proposal to area aesthetics, recreation facilities, and trails received for the Draft EA, I have decided to drop one 26-acre clearcut unit (#13) from the final proposal in the vicinity of Barber Lake.

Under the Proposed Action, the clearcut prescription has only been proposed in units that have lodgepole with high to moderate amounts of mistletoe adjacent to uninfected lodgepole stands, or in stands where a new aspen stand is the objective.

Lodgepole and aspen typically regenerate new even-aged stands following a stand-replacing event such as a wildfire. Human intervention (i.e., management activities), fire, or some other disturbance event appears to be necessary for the continued maintenance of aspen on most sites (DeByle and Brown 1989).

Clearcutting most nearly matches the role formerly played by forest fires and is often considered the optimum method for regenerating aspen and lodgepole pine, and is also the most effective method for treating stands heavily infected with dwarf mistletoe. Implementation of uneven-aged harvest prescriptions within mistletoed lodgepole stands would increase the spread of mistletoe from the overstory to younger lodgepole in the understory.

Clearcutting silviculture is the most appropriate system for effectively regenerating those species of trees which naturally grow in even-aged stands and which cannot regenerate in the stand of other trees. Aspen and lodgepole are these kinds of trees (USDA, May 1992b, p.ii).

Clearcutting is listed as an appropriate harvest method for all forest cover types on the Forest (Forest Plan, page III-42). The District Silviculturist has found clearcut and overstory removal prescriptions to meet the requirements of NFMA (36 CFR Part 219.27).

- **New Road Construction**

The Proposed Action includes 0.9 miles of new specified road construction. Design features will be applied to reduce or prevent undesirable effects that might be caused from this minimal amount of road construction. All new roads that are constructed or (currently closed) reconstructed for the timber sale will be closed following completion of the proposal.

BACKGROUND FOR THE DECISION

The Silver Run Analysis Area is situated on the eastern slope of the Snowy Range. Located one air mile to the west and northwest of the town of Centennial, almost the entire estimated 31,000-acre analysis area is within Albany County, Wyoming. A small part of the northernmost portion of the analysis area is within Carbon County, Wyoming. The legal description for the area is T.15, 16, and 17 N., R.78 and 79W.

The analysis area includes portions of the Snowy Range, Libby Flats, Middle Fork, and French Creek Inventoried Roadless Areas. The majority of the 1,400-acre Glacier Lakes Ecosystem Experiments Site (GLEES) lies along the northwestern boundary within the Snowy Range roadless area. The Snowy Range Research Natural Area is situated in the western portion of the analysis area within the Libby Flats roadless area. There are no wilderness areas within the vicinity.

The Forest Service has responsibility for implementing the Forest Plan by completing analysis and evaluation of site-specific projects. The Forest Plan guides natural resource management activities and provides the Forest Service, forest users, and the public with an overall strategy for managing the Forest. The intent of this plan is to manage National Forest System lands for multiple-use and not for any single purpose.

District resource specialists have examined database information and conducted a number of field surveys within the Silver Run Analysis Area to determine the feasibility of potential projects in the vicinity. Extensive surveys of existing condition were conducted and completed to determine the health and condition of the timber resource, natural fuels, aspen occurrence, raptors, and streams, in addition to surveys of the area's existing transportation system.

Desired future condition refers to how an area would appear and function in the future under various management scenarios. A desired condition is developed, based on what exists now, knowledge of how it got that way, what is ecologically possible, what is economically feasible, and what is socially desirable. A description of a desired condition provides the management goals for an area. Goals for each resource are fairly broad under these descriptions, and are built on the general desired condition discussed in the Forest Plan. Based on the Forest Plan and an analysis of existing condition, a preliminary desired future condition was developed for the Silver Run Analysis Area.

Under this desired future condition, the vicinity will be managed to provide a mix of quality habitat to promote viable populations of native wildlife species. Large blocks of mature (old growth) forest for dependent wildlife species are maintained within the Snowy Range and Libby Flats roadless areas and designated old growth stands. Areas with past and future harvest in the northern and southern portions of the area will provide habitat for generalists and early successional species.

In areas that have had past timber harvesting, historical timber type patterns will serve as a guide as to what tree specie(s) will be emphasized within these blocks of stands. Associated with elevation, harvesting will be used to maintain and promote aspen at the lower elevations, aspen and lodgepole pine at the middle elevations, and spruce-fir at the higher elevations. A special emphasis is placed on consolidating areas that were clearcut in the past to better emulate the natural patch size of forested stands in the vicinity. Treatments are also used to improve the health and resiliency of the area's forested stands by decreasing their susceptibility to insects and disease. The resulting Silver Run area landscape will consist of a mix of large stands of undisturbed, mature forest and smaller stands in earlier successional stages.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Based on an analysis of the existing condition and Forest Plan management direction, the following resource management needs have been identified for the Silver Run Analysis Area:

Characteristic Landscape - Before fire suppression was initiated, the characteristic landscape was composed of generally larger patches of vegetation following natural breaks in topography. Harvesting--especially alternate strip clearcutting, and road construction in the area since 1950 has reduced the patch size of a number of stands in the area, which has decreased their value for big game security and as potential habitat for dependent wildlife species - such as the northern goshawk.

Forest Health and Resiliency - Low to high levels of dwarf mistletoe are present in approximately 75% of the lodgepole pine stands within the analysis area. Associated with this mistletoe, there are a number of stands where annual tree mortality exceeds annual tree growth. Mistletoe deforms trees, causes rot, and weakens the tree so that it is more susceptible to insects and disease.

Providing a Flow of Timber - The National Forests have as a legitimate use, the sale of timber resources. This use originates in the Organic Act of 1897, and is reaffirmed in the 1960 Multiple Use - Sustained Yield Act and the 1976 National Forest Management Act. The Medicine Bow Forest Plan states as a goal (p.III-4): Provide for timber harvest to support local dependent industries and management of the many forest resources in a manner that meets silvicultural needs of timber species, places timber stands under management, minimizes timber management costs, and supplies wood products to meet national needs. Much of the proposed project area is within a 7E management area, which places emphasis on wood production.

Watershed Restoration – Stream surveys in the project area have found there are several adjoining disturbed areas that could be rehabilitated through erosion control measures and revegetation. There are a number of open roads within the project area that have been identified as requiring maintenance to reduce soil erosion and sediment entering area creeks.

FOREST PLAN DIRECTION

Management emphasis within the analysis area is distributed among several management area prescriptions. The largest management area is 4B, which emphasizes wildlife habitat for one or more management indicator species. Situated in the northern and southern portions of the project area, the 4B area constitutes approximately 11,971 acres, or 39% of the analysis area.

The next largest management area is 2B, which emphasizes rural and roaded natural recreation opportunities. Situated along the Snowy Range Hwy corridor, the 2B area constitutes approximately 5,105 acres, or 16% of the analysis area. It is also within this corridor and the western part of the area where there are a number of other management areas with recreation emphases, including: 2A semi-primitive motorized recreation (2,826 acres), 3A semi-primitive non-motorized recreation (2,400 acres), 1A developed recreation site(s) (1,178 acres), and 1B winter sports site (1,273 acres).

Situated in the northeastern portion of the project area, the 7E management area, which emphasizes wood fiber production and utilization, constitutes approximately 2,766 acres of the analysis area. The remaining area is divided up between a number of management areas, including: 5A big game non-forested winter range (766 acres), 5B big game forested winter range (451 acres), 10A research natural area (749 acres), 4D aspen management (738 acres), 7C management of steep forested areas (168 acres), and 9A riparian emphasis (52 acres). There are approximately 13,400 acres within the analysis area that are currently classified as being suitable for timber harvest.

The 1985 Medicine Bow National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan contains the following direction that is pertinent to this analysis:

- Forest Plan direction (p. III-4) Manage fish and wildlife habitats, including plant diversity, to maintain viable populations.
- Forest Plan direction (p. III-14) Maintain structural diversity of vegetation.
- Forest Plan direction (p. III-20) Design and locate vegetation manipulation in a scale, which retains the color and texture of the characteristic landscape.

- Forest Plan general direction (p. III-34 #1) Use both commercial and non-commercial silvicultural practices to accomplish wildlife habitat objectives.
- Forest Plan general direction (p. III-36 #3) Improve habitat capability through direct treatments of vegetation.
- Forest Plan direction for Management Area 7E (p. III-77 #3) Maintain stands in a variety of age classes and sizes.
- Forest Plan general direction (p. III-46 #3) Clearcuts may be applied to dwarf mistletoe infected stands of any forest cover type.
- Forest Plan general direction (p. III-47 #6) Lists commercial thinning as an appropriate practice.
- Forest Plan direction (p. III-84) Prevent or suppress epidemic insect and disease populations that threaten forested tree stands with an integrated pest management approach consistent with resource management objectives.
- Forest Plan direction for Management Area 7E (p. III-193) Apply intermediate treatments to maintain growing stock levels.
- Forest Plan direction (p. III-4) states as a goal: Provide for timber harvest to support local dependent industries and management of the many Forest resources in a manner that meets silvicultural needs of timber species, places timber stands under management, minimizes timber management costs, and supplies wood products to meet National needs.
- Also stated as goal within this section (Medicine Bow p. III-4): Treat vegetation to provide a Forest environment for the uses compatible with the Management Area Objectives.
- Forest Plan direction for Management Area 7E (p. III-189) Management emphasis is on wood fiber production and utilization.
- Forest Plan general direction (p. III-74) Maintain soil productivity, minimize man-caused soil erosion, and maintain the integrity of associated ecosystems.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DECISION (Proposed Action)

Situated primarily in a 7E timber emphasis (49%), along with 2B roaded recreation (30%), 4B wildlife habitat emphasis (18%) and 1A developed recreation site (3%) management areas, under the Proposed Action timber harvesting and associated slash treatment is designed to move the vicinity's vegetation towards the desired future condition for the Silver Run Analysis Area. To better emulate pre-settlement vegetation patterns and patch size, harvest units have been concentrated in areas that have had past timber sale entries to consolidate and/or begin creating larger stands of trees with similar species makeup, age, and structures.

Along with consolidating areas with past harvest, clearcutting and overstory removal harvest methods will be used to promote new and maintain existing regeneration in the understory. These same harvest methods, along with the sanitation/salvage and shelterwood – seed cut treatments, will be used to reduce the spread of mistletoe and improve forest resiliency across the area. The overstory removal and shelterwood treatments will also be used to encourage new mixed conifer regeneration within these stands. See Map 1.

Approximately 0.9 miles of new specified road construction, 0.7 miles of specified reconstruction, and 2.0 miles of temporary road would be needed for this proposal. All new roads that are constructed or (currently closed) reconstructed for the timber sale will be closed following completion of the proposal.

Associated projects would include personal use firewood cutting, post sale evaluation, regeneration surveys, slash treatment, pile burning, release/weed thinning, noxious weed treatment, and native grass seeding. Consideration will be given to allowing personal use firewood cutters temporary access on closed roads opened for the timber sale proposal to help clean up logging slash. A number of soil and water projects would also be implemented to minimize human caused soil erosion in the area. See EA Appendix A for a list of these watershed restoration projects. There are no proposed harvest units or road construction within any of the vicinity's inventoried roadless areas under this proposal.

Following are the silvicultural treatments and estimated acreages:

Table 1. Proposed Action - Treatments

Prescription	# of Units	Acres Treated	Volume (MBF)
Clearcut *	10	171	2,103
Overstory Removal	6	161	1,513
Sanitation/Salvage	2	30	120
Shelterwood -Seed cut	2	85	383
TOTAL	20 Units	447 Acres	4,119 MBF

* The Proposed Action described in the EA included 197 acres of clearcut.

Following are the estimated road construction and reconstruction totals:

Table 2. Proposed Action - Roads

Type of Road	New Construction	Reconstruction Existing	Total Miles
Specified	0.9	0.7	1.6
Temporary	1.5	0.5	2.0
TOTAL MILES	2.4	1.2	3.6

Description of Silvicultural Prescriptions

Clearcut - Under the Silver Run analysis, the clearcut prescription has only been proposed in units that have lodgepole with high to moderate amounts of mistletoe adjacent to uninfected lodgepole stands, or in stands where a new aspen stand is the objective. Consideration has also been given to using clearcutting to increase patch size of areas that have had past harvesting. Under this treatment, all merchantable lodgepole and subalpine fir is harvested (100%). Slash treatment varies from lop and scattering, roller chopping, and/or spot piling, depending on the amount of residue slash left after harvest.

Overstory Removal - The overstory removal prescription has been proposed in units that have a predominantly lodgepole overstory with high to moderate amounts of mistletoe over a lodgepole, fir, and spruce seedling/sapling understory. Along with reducing the spread of mistletoe from the lodgepole overstory to the lodgepole understory, consideration has also been given to using overstory removals to increase patch size of areas that have had past harvesting. Due to inadequate existing regeneration in some portions of these units, there will be areas (most less than an acre in size) that will resemble a clearcut following harvest. Under this treatment, all merchantable lodgepole, subalpine fir, and Engelmann spruce is harvested (80%). Slash is lopped and scattered.

Sanitation/Salvage - Under this treatment, 20 to 30% of the overstory is removed to improve the resiliency of the stand to insects and disease. An emphasis is made on harvesting diseased and trees of poor form. Slash is lopped and scattered.

Shelterwood – Seed Cut - Under this second step of a three-step shelterwood, 40 to 60% of the overstory is removed, retaining the healthiest trees with the best form to act as a seed source. An emphasis is made on harvesting diseased and trees of poor form. Along with improving the resiliency of the stand to insects and disease, this treatment provides growing space for new and existing regeneration in the understory. Slash is lopped and scattered.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 19-37.

Alternative 1 - No Action

Under this alternative, natural succession would be allowed to continue during this entry in the Silver Run vicinity. Undeveloped lands are valued for their very existence in this state. This value is held by both users of the area, and intrinsically by those who place value on such undeveloped areas simply knowing they exist. In proposing no action, Alternative 1 would do the most in addressing the significant issues and concerns for the use of the clearcut prescription, maintaining area aesthetics, and new specified road construction. It also best addresses concerns for maintaining unharvested, intact mature stands in the area.

Alternative 1 would do the least during this entry in moving the area's forests towards the desired future condition. This alternative would allow the conversion of aspen to conifer stands, and lodgepole pine stands to predominantly subalpine fir stands, to continue within the vicinity, in time reducing the diversity of forested stands and their value as habitat to some wildlife species in the area. Dwarf mistletoe would continue to increase in already infected lodgepole stands, spreading into adjacent uninfected stands. The maintenance of a predominantly mature and overmature mistletoe infected lodgepole pine forest across the area will increase the future possibility of an insect epidemic affecting the pine of the area, along with increasing the potential for a stand replacing fire to burn portions of the area. By not addressing watershed restoration concerns, this alternative does not address the identified need of minimizing human-induced erosion and stream sediment.

Alternative 2 – No Clearcutting

Situated primarily in the northeastern 7E timber emphasis portion and in the southeastern 4B wildlife habitat emphasis part of the watershed, under Alternative 2, timber harvesting and associated slash treatment would be used to move the vicinity's vegetation towards the desired future condition that has been identified for Silver Run Analysis Area. This alternative differs from the Proposed Action, in that it is designed to address concerns for using the clearcut treatment. In addressing this significant issue, Alternative 2 drops all harvest units (197 acres) in which clearcutting has been proposed—including all proposed units within the 2B roaded recreation emphasis management area. Consideration was given to treating these dropped stands with other partial cut prescriptions. Due to moderate to high levels of mistletoe in the existing lodgepole overstory, it was felt that partially cutting these units would only exacerbate the mistletoe problem and further promote its spread.

As with the Proposed Action, to better emulate pre-settlement vegetation patterns and patch size, harvest units have been concentrated in areas that have had past timber sale entries to consolidate and/or begin creating larger stands of trees with similar species makeup, age, and structures. Along with consolidating areas with past harvest, overstory removal harvest method will be used to promote new and maintain existing regeneration in the understory. These same harvest methods, along with the sanitation/salvage and shelterwood – seed cut treatments, will be used to reduce the spread of mistletoe and improve forest resiliency across the area. The overstory removal and shelterwood treatments will also be used to encourage new mixed conifer regeneration.

Approximately 0.4 miles of new specified road construction, 0.7 miles of specified reconstruction, and 1.0 miles of temporary road would be needed for this proposal. Associated projects would include post sale evaluation, regeneration surveys, slash treatment, pile burning, release/weed thinning, noxious weed treatment, and native grass seeding. As with the Proposed Action, a number of soil and water projects would also be implemented to minimize human-caused soil erosion in the area (see EA Appendix A). There are no proposed harvest units and/or road construction within the inventoried roadless areas.

Table 3. Alternative 2 - Treatments

Prescription	# of Units	Acres Treated	Volume (MBF)
Overstory Removal	6	161	1,513
Sanitation/Salvage	2	30	120
Shelterwood -Seed cut	2	85	383
TOTAL	10 Units	276 Acres	2,016 MBF

Table 4. Alternative 2 - Roads

Type of Road	New Construction	Reconstruction Existing	Total Miles
Specified	0.4	0.7	1.1
Temporary	0.5	0.5	1.0
TOTAL MILES	0.9	1.2	2.1

Alternative 3 - No New Specified Road Construction

Harvest units are situated primarily in the northeastern 7E timber emphasis portion, the central 2B roaded recreation emphasis area, and in the southeastern 4B wildlife habitat emphasis part of the watershed. Under Alternative 3, timber harvesting and associated slash treatment would be used to move the vicinity’s vegetation towards the desired future condition that has been identified for Silver Run Analysis Area. This alternative differs from the Proposed Action and Alternative 2, in that it is designed to address concerns for constructing new specified roads in the area. In addressing this significant issue, Alternative 3 drops all harvest units that would need to be accessed by new specified road construction.

As with the Proposed Action and Alternative 2, to better emulate pre-settlement vegetation patterns and patch size, harvest units have been concentrated in areas that have had past timber sale entries to consolidate and/or begin creating larger stands of trees with similar species makeup, age, and structures. Along with consolidating areas with past harvest, overstory removal (OR) harvest method will be used to promote new and maintain existing regeneration in the understory. These same harvest methods, along with the sanitation/salvage (S/S) and shelterwood – seed cut (SWS) treatments, will be used to reduce the spread of mistletoe and improve forest resiliency across the area. The overstory removal and shelterwood treatments will also be used to encourage new mixed conifer regeneration.

Approximately 0.7 miles of specified road reconstruction and 1.0 miles of temporary road and would be needed for this proposal. Associated projects would include post sale evaluation, regeneration surveys, slash treatment, pile burning, release/weed thinning, noxious weed treatment, and native grass seeding. As with the Proposed Action and Alternative 2, a number of soil and water projects would also be implemented to minimize human-caused soil erosion in the area. There are no proposed harvest units and/or road construction within the inventoried roadless areas.

Table 5. Alternative 3 - Treatments

Prescription	# of Units	Acres Treated	Volume (MBF)
Clearcut	9	137	1,685
Overstory Removal	5	137	1,288
Sanitation/Salvage	2	30	120
Shelterwood -Seed cut	1	24	108
TOTAL	17 Units	328 Acres	3,201 MBF

Table 6. Alternative 3 - Roads

Type of Road	New Construction	Reconstruction Existing	Total Miles
Specified	0.0	0.7	0.7
Temporary	0.5	0.5	1.0
TOTAL MILES	0.5	1.2	1.7

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

The table below provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where difference levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 7. Comparison of Alternatives

Treatment	Proposed Action	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 No Clearcutting	Alternative 3 No new specified road construction
Clearcut	171 acres	0 acres	0 acres	137 acres
Overstory Removal	161 acres	0 acres	161 acres	137 acres
Sanitation/Salvage	30 acres	0 acres	30 acres	30 acres
Shelterwood – Seed cut	85 acres	0 acres	85 acres	24 acres
TOTAL	447 acres*	0 acres	276 acres	328 acres
Purpose & Need				
Characteristic Landscape	Designed to address the purpose and need for the proposal, all harvest units are adjacent to areas that have been strip clearcut and/or had past harvest since 1950.	With 0 acres of harvest treatment, No Action would not address this need.	With 197 acres less harvest than Proposed Action (*473 acres before modification), addresses need to a lesser extent.	With 145 acres less harvest than Proposed Action (*473 acres before modification), addresses need to a lesser extent.
Forest Health & Resiliency	Designed to address the purpose and need for the proposal, harvest treatments will reduce mistletoe spread and improve stand resiliency in 4% of area lodgepole stands.	With 0 acres of harvest treatment, No Action would not address this need.	Harvest treatments will reduce mistletoe spread and improve stand resiliency in 2% of area lodgepole stands.	Harvest treatments will reduce mistletoe spread and improve stand resiliency in 3% of area lodgepole stands.

Purpose & Need	Proposed Action	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 No Clearcutting	Alternative 3 No new specified road construction
Providing a Flow of Timber	Designed to address the purpose and need for the proposal, Proposed Action would produce an estimated 4.1 MMBF.	With 0 acres of harvest treatment, No Action would not address this need.	Would produce an estimated 2.0 MMBF.	Would produce an estimated 3.2 MMBF.
Watershed Restoration	Designed to address the purpose and need for the proposal, Proposed Action includes all watershed restoration projects.	With no watershed restoration projects, No Action would not address this need.	Includes all watershed restoration projects.	Includes all watershed restoration projects.
Significant Issues				
Clearcutting	Includes 171 acres of clearcut.	No clearcutting will take place.	Designed to address issue, includes no clearcutting.	Includes 137 acres of clearcut.
Aesthetics/Visual Quality	Includes 447 acres of harvest treatment, with 171 acres of clearcut.	With no treatments, No Action will allow natural succession to continue.	Designed to address issue, includes 276 acres of harvest treatment, with no clearcutting.	Includes 328 acres of harvest treatment, with 137 acres of clearcut.
New Road Construction	Includes 0.9 miles of new specified road construction.	No new specified road construction will take place.	Includes 0.4 miles of new specified road construction.	Designed to address issue, includes no new specified road construction.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Original Proposed Action

A number of potential harvest units were eliminated from the original proposed action to better address Forest Plan standards and guidelines. In addition, all proposed units that fell within areas meeting the criteria of Inventoried Roadless were dropped from consideration. It was felt that by including these units, it would preclude a decision on the future classification of these lands under the Medicine Bow National Forest Plan Revision.

Uneven-aged Management

This alternative would only use selective harvesting or uneven-aged management to treat potential harvest units within the area. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because the majority of stands considered for harvest within the analysis area are dominated by and/or have as a primary objective the promotion of disturbance dependent species such as aspen and/or lodgepole pine. Although uneven-aged management can be used to promote Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir, which typically grow in uneven-aged conditions, this treatment would create potentially unnatural conditions within aspen and lodgepole pine stands that typically grow in even-aged stands. Uneven-aged management within aspen stands would promote and speed up the invasion of other conifer species such as subalpine fir, further reducing the amount of aspen in the vicinity. Implementation of uneven-aged harvest prescriptions within mistletoed lodgepole dominated stands would increase the spread of mistletoe from the overstory to young trees in the understory.

Using Fire to Emulate Natural Disturbance Regimes

This alternative would use prescribed burning in the form of a stand replacing fire instead of management activities (such as timber harvesting) to mimic natural disturbance regimes and accomplish vegetation goals. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because of potential adverse environmental effects and the risk of not confining a stand replacing, prescribed fire to the treatment area. Though the use of stand replacing fire(s) would be the best means to replicate natural disturbance patterns and encourage disturbance dependent species in the analysis area (such as aspen), potential detrimental impacts to cultural resources, soils, water quality, channel stability, wildlife habitat, developed recreation sites, and adjacent private land make this alternative unfeasible.

ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES AND MONITORING

In addition to Forest Plan standards designed to mitigate adverse impacts, I have identified the following mitigation measures as being appropriate for the Silver Run proposal. These design features will be applied to reduce or prevent undesirable effects resulting from management activities.

Soils

The Watershed Conservation Practices (WCP) Handbook (FSH 2509.25) provides the Standards as well as the Guidelines or Design Criteria for the Forest Plan. Mandatory Best Management Practices per 33 CFR 323.4(a)(6) to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act will be implemented, with the following specific mitigations to protect the soil, water, and riparian resources during project implementation.

- Ground cover will be established or maintained on disturbed areas (native surface roads, landings, skid trails, etc.). These actions will be current with purchaser's operations and will be completed immediately preceding seasonal periods of precipitation or runoff to reduce erosion and the spread of noxious weeds.
- At logging sites, adequate amounts of coarse woody debris will be left at the site, especially in units that have very little to begin with. A variety of diameters will be left. Whole tree skidding will not be allowed.
- In units CC10 and CC11, logging equipment will go around poorly drained closed depressions, susceptible to compaction and rutting.
- Logging equipment will not run in the drainageways, but will cross them at a perpendicular angle. Extra attention will be given to the deeper, intermittent drainages in ITM 1 and ITM 6. Due to the potential of causing more erosion, trees 25 feet on either side from the center of the main drainage of ITM 6 will not be cut.
- Main skid trails, temporary logging roads, and landings will be ripped. Construct water bars where necessary.
- Burn piles for excess slash in the timber harvest (if necessary) will be limited to approximately 300 square feet. After the piles are burned, they will be spread out and the site will be reseeded. This size limit will prevent excessive soil heating from the burn piles. The seeding will help prevent noxious weeds from spreading.
- Best Management Practices (BMPs) (Wyoming DEQ 1997) will be followed to prevent soil erosion into wetlands or streams.

Aquatics

- Any culvert installations or removals, or other in-channel construction activities on flowing streams may require a site-specific erosion control plan in order to reduce turbidity and fine sediments. These projects will be evaluated to determine if a waiver to the state water quality rule is necessary, which allows a maximum turbidity increase of 10 NTU (Nephelometric Turbidity Units).

- Road reconstruction should improve existing drainage and erosion problems to reduce fine sediment contribution to nearby creeks. National Forest System Road (NFSR) 338 and 338.G are currently delivering sediment to local stream channels. NFSR 338 requires additional cross drainage (either ditch relief culverts or drain dips) and NFSR 338.G requires additional drain dips to reduce erosion of the road surface.
- Ditched roads below harvest units may need additional drainage to prevent increased flow from routing sediment to stream channels.
- The buffer area around glacial ponds and lakes will depend upon the type of wetland and riparian habitat. Three levels of mitigation have been developed to protect the types of wetlands specific to this project:
 - Buffer distance for glacial (kettle) ponds and lakes with permanent or persistent water through most of the summer, and well-defined wetland and/or riparian vegetation will be maintained at the standard 31 meters (100 feet) starting outside the riparian/wetland vegetation.
 - Glacial ponds which still retain riparian vegetation, but have silted in, become vegetated, and/or dried up, will be protected by the existing 31-meter (100 feet) buffer.
 - Equipment operation will be excluded from dry depressions (formerly glacial ponds) that lack riparian vegetation. Even though they are now dried up, the soils in their bottom are highly compactable. There are many of these dried up old kettle ponds within Units 10 and 11.
- Maximize use of existing skid trails, landing and temporary roads as feasible, to reduce overall disturbance and to facilitate water barring of existing, eroding trails.
- Buffer eroded trail/channel in Unit 6 by 7.6 meters (25 feet) to allow for woody debris recruitment.
- Temporary road rehabilitation will include adequate drainage (water bars) on roads to prevent erosion and/or failure of the road surface. Stream crossings will be removed and the road fill removed to restore stream channel width. Fill material will be removed from the floodplain as well. Site-specific erosion control will be developed jointly between the engineering and watershed staff for each culvert removal on flowing streams.
- Water bar old skid trails and roads within Units 4, 5, and 6 in the East Fork Tributary of North Fork of the Little Laramie River to reduce stream channel extension and sediment delivery.
- Fell trees along the eroded old trail/channel, which runs through Unit 6, to stabilize and restore the area.

Recreation

- Signs will be posted and other public information campaigns undertaken in an effort to notify area users of the sale and general timing of logging activities in order to minimize disruptions and provide for visitor safety.
- Roads used for log hauling will have warning signs posted during periods of log hauling.

- Log hauling will be prohibited on holiday weekends and weekends during big game rifle season, and where alternate routes for snowmobiles are not available, in order to minimize conflicts between these and recreation activities.
- Sand Lake Road (NFSR 101) shall not be plowed to a bare surface in order that snowmobiling on this designated winter trail may continue.
- Temporary roads, skid trails, and log landings will be closed and/or rehabilitated in such a manner to facilitate future dispersed camping adjacent to NFSR 338 and NFSR 101.
- Due to public safety concerns, all log hauling will be prohibited on the segment of NFSR 338 (Ehlin Road) between Hwy 130 and NFSR 307.
- Harvest operations within Management Area 1A will enhance visual quality and recreation opportunities on existing and proposed recreation sites, as required by the current Forest Plan.
- A minimum of a 50-foot buffer should shield the Corner Mountain/Barber Lake trails from the views of the clearcut unit 13. *This measure does not apply due to Unit 13 being dropped from the final proposal.*

Visual Resource

- The size and shape of clearcut and overstory removal units will mimic the size and shape of natural openings found within or adjacent to the analysis area.
- Follow the natural contour lines and avoid straight lines when laying units.
- Clean up all slash and cut stumps as low as possible within dispersed recreation sites.
- Within the immediate foreground of Forest arterial and collector roads and Forest trails, clean up all visible heavy slash and cut stumps as low as possible to meet retention and partial retention visual quality objectives (VQOs). Protect remaining trees and shrubs from logging equipment.
- Burn all slash piles within one year after completion of treatment to meet retention and partial retention visual quality objectives, and in three years to meet modification VQO.
- Shape and blend roads that are to be obliterated within the surrounding landscape. Scarify and seed the old road surface. When using large rocks for barriers, rocks will be buried at least 1/3 in the ground as to appear natural.
- To maintain aesthetics, an unharvested buffer of 200 feet will be retained between the edge of Snowy Range Scenic Byway (Highway 130) and Barber Lake Road (NFSR 351) and clearcut units 11 and 13. *This measure does not apply to Unit 13 due to it being dropped from the final proposal.*

Range

- Existing drift fencing in the North Fork #511 allotment will be protected from damage by logging activities and extended approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile.

- Approximately 30 acres of noxious weeds will be planned for treatment with KV funding following completion of harvest operations. Landings and temporary roads that are ripped or otherwise decommissioned will be seeded with a native grass, forb, and/or shrub seed mix in order to reduce the opportunity for noxious weed invasions on highly disturbed sites.
- Provisions for prevention/treatment of noxious weeds, seeding of disturbed areas with native weed-free seed and protection/extension of fences will be included in contract provisions and/or KV plans for the harvested areas.

Rare Plants

- Identify on the ground and buffer areas with high concentration (core populations) or other important occupied sites of clustered lady's slipper orchid associated with timber activities.
- The protection buffers for core populations of clustered lady's slipper orchid will be a minimum 100-foot radius from population boundaries. The protection buffer will maintain shading and micro-site conditions at the managed sites by retaining sufficient shrub and/or canopy cover so that plants are not exposed to more than intermittent direct solar radiation.
- Fell trees away from identified buffered populations.
- Exclude mechanized equipment from identified buffered sites.
- Do not place or burn slash piles or broadcast burn slash on identified buffered populations.
- Wherever possible, harvest activities in units known to contain clustered lady's slipper orchid plants will be carried out before emergence of the plants or after they wither. For our area this would mean avoiding harvest from around June 1 to August 15.
- The Forest Service maintains discretion to modify projects or contracts if other proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive (PETS) plant species are found in the analysis areas.

Wildlife

- Prohibit any timber sale related activities from March 1st to August 15th within ¼ mile of active goshawk nests.
- 30-acre nesting areas identified around active nests will remain in their current vegetative condition, thus providing a secure environment and stable landscape for continued annual nesting.
- Three 30-acre reserve areas containing suitable nesting habitat have been identified within the estimated goshawk territory. These areas will be retained in their current vegetative condition, provide additional nesting habitat within the post-fledging area, protect alternate nest sites which may not yet be identified, and provide returning goshawks with a wider range of options to avoid unforeseen project related disturbances.

Monitoring is done to assure that Forest Plan standards and guidelines are being met and adhered to during project implementation. Though field surveys were conducted for raptors--including northern goshawk, and the R-2 sensitive plant clustered lady's slipper, past experience has shown that yearly variations in climatic conditions greatly determine the presence or absence of this fauna and flora. Likewise, although heritage surveys and a report were completed for the project area, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) requests that the area be monitored for potential sites that may have been overlooked during project implementation. The following specific items were identified by the ID team as needing monitoring during preparation and implementation of potential projects:

- Best Management Practices (BMPs) and mitigation outlined above will be monitored for implementation and effectiveness during project activities, especially after any significant precipitation events. If monitoring reveals unexpected effects in any of the drainages, additional monitoring for sediment deposition, turbidity, and fish or amphibians may be initiated. Steps would then be initiated to reduce effects detrimental to water quality, species habitats, or populations.
- Amphibians were selected for monitoring in this project, because they have relatively stable populations where they exist within the analysis area.
- Photo document effectiveness of watershed improvement activities mentioned above: water barring of old skid trails and woody debris recruitment.
- Monitor proposed treatment areas that occur in the vegetation/elevational range preferred by nesting northern goshawks during project implementation.
- Monitor management activities to ensure that the visual quality objectives will be met.
- Monitor for Management Indicator Species (MIS) will continue in order to track changes in populations and habitat Forest-wide.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions quarterly reports in 1997, and each subsequent report thereafter. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping in June of 1997. Press releases on the scoping were sent to area newspapers and radio stations. Using comments from the public, other Federal and State agencies, and local groups, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of significant issues to address.

On October 24, 2003, a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was mailed to those who had requested the document, and was posted on the Medicine Bow–Routt National Forest Internet website. Responses were received from interested individuals, organizations, and public agencies. Responses to their comment letters can be found in Appendix C of the Final EA.

ISSUES

The following inter-connected issues and concerns were identified from public comments received for the scoping letter for the Silver Run Analysis Area:

Clearcutting

Many recreational users of this area are sensitive to the use of this silvicultural treatment on National Forest lands. There are concerns that there has been too much clearcutting within the analysis area. Use of this controversial harvest prescription could further degrade the aesthetics of the vicinity by creating logging slash and openings that do not blend in with the surrounding, natural landscape. Clearcutting will further reduce the amount of mature forest habitat that is available for dependent wildlife species.

Aesthetics/Visual Quality

The Silver Run vicinity has the highest and most varied recreational use of any watershed on the Medicine Bow National Forest. Bisected by the Snowy Range Highway National Scenic Byway (Hwy 130), Forest users of this area are sensitive to vegetation treatments that may negatively affect the natural appearance of the vicinity.

New Roads

Many feel there are already too many roads in the vicinity that are negatively affecting the natural appearance of the area.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed activities in the Environmental Assessment for the Silver Run Analysis Area. I have also reviewed the project record for this analysis and the effects of the proposed action and alternatives as disclosed in the EA. Implementing regulations for NEPA (40 CFR 1598.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. Significant, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity.

(a) Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):

The disclosure of effects in the EA found the actions limited in context. The project area is limited in size and the activities limited in duration. Effects are local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

(b) Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluation intensity (40 CFR 1508.27):

- (1) Environmental Effects – Environmental effects associated with the project are discussed in the Environmental Consequences section of the EA (pp. 39-124). These impacts are within the range of those identified in the Forest Plan and would not have significant impacts on resources identified and described in the EA.
- (2) Public Health or Safety – Treatment activities would be conducted in a safe manner to protect the public. Air quality is addressed in the Environmental Consequences section of the EA (pp. 39-124).
- (3) Unique Characteristics of the Area – There are no anticipated adverse effects to historic places or loss of scientific, cultural, historical, or other unique resources. This project is in compliance with the programmatic agreement between the State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The area will be monitored for potential heritage sites that may have been overlooked during project implementation.
- (4) Controversy – The effects of the proposed alternative on the various resources is not considered to be highly controversial by professionals, specialists, and scientists from associated fields of forestry, wildlife biology, fisheries, and hydrology, etc. I do not believe that there is significant controversy over the effects of this project.
- (5) Uncertainty – Scoping did not identify highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks. The technical analyses conducted for determinations of the impacts to the resources are supportable with the use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment. Therefore, I conclude that there are no highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks.
- (6) Precedent – This project does not establish a precedent for future action with significant effects.

- (7) Cumulative Impact – There are no significant cumulative effects on the environment, either when combined with the effects created by past and concurrent projects, or when combined with the effects from natural changes taking place in the environment or from reasonably foreseeable future projects of this type. Refer to Environmental Consequences section of the EA (pp. 39-124).
- (8) Properties on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; significant resources – A cultural resource inventory has been completed in the area, and all known cultural resources will be protected.
- (9) Endangered or threatened species – This project would not adversely affect endangered or threatened species or their habitat. Refer to Wildlife portion of Environmental Consequences section of the EA (pp. 97-119).
- (10) Legal requirements for environmental protection – This action complies with other Federal, State or local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the actions analyzed for the Silver Run Project is not a major federal action and that its implementation will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared for this project.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

The environmental analysis documented in the EA is tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the (1985) Medicine Bow National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (40 CFR 1500.4, 40 CFR 1502.20 and 40 CFR 1508.28). I have determined that this decision is consistent with the Forest Plan approved by the Regional Forester on November 20, 1985. The activities and projects approved in this decision are consistent with the standards and guidelines in Forest Direction and Management Area Direction on pages III-4 through III-193 of the Forest Plan.

The general environmental effects that result from implementing the activities of a project are described in Chapter IV of the 1985 Land and Resource Management Plan FEIS for the Medicine Bow National Forest (pages IV-1 to IV-189). Project specific effects of implementing alternatives are displayed in the Environmental Consequences section of the EA (pp.39-124).

This proposal has been compared to the selected alternative (D FEIS) of the Medicine Bow National Forest Plan Revision, which was approved on December 27, 2003. The analysis found that this decision is consistent with management area direction and standards and guidelines of the Revision (see project record).

All vegetative management proposals comply with the requirements listed at 36 CFR 219.27 which establishes the minimum specific management to be met in accomplishing goals and objectives for the National Forest System. The interdisciplinary team considered these requirements when designing the projects and concluded that the proposed projects will meet minimum specific management requirements.

The Proposed Action complies with 36 CFR 219.27(c)(3) which assures that the technology and knowledge exists to adequately restock the lands within five years after final harvest. The alternative also complies with 36 CFR 219.16 (a)(2)(iii) which assures that all even-aged stands scheduled to be harvested during the planning period will generally have reached the culmination of mean annual increment of growth.

Executive orders 11988, and 11990, dealing with floodplains and wetlands will be complied with under the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action complies with 16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(F) (i), which requires clearcutting to be certified as the optimum harvest method.

The Proposed Action complies with other laws and regulations such as the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. The best management practices will be applied to meet state water quality standards.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), this project was submitted for formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The final Biological Opinion, received on October 23, 2003, confirmed the determination that “the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Canada lynx” and that “the impact to habitat for Canada lynx would be insignificant or discountable.” It was also determined that all alternatives would have no effect on remaining federally threatened or endangered species, and is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any wildlife species proposed for federal listing.

IMPLEMENTATION

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Federal regulations at 36 CFR 215, “Notice, Comment, and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities.” Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing and filed (regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the Appeal Deciding Officer (§215.8) within 45 days following the date of publication of a legal notice of this decision in the *Laramie Boomerang*. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal (§215.15 (a)). Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Where to File an Appeal

USDA Forest Service
Region 2, Rocky Mountain Region
Attn: Appeal Deciding Officer
POB 25127
Lakewood CO 80225-25127

Delivery:
USDA Forest Service
Region 2, Rocky Mountain Region
Attn: Appeal Deciding Officer
740 Simms Street
Golden CO 80401-4720

Fax: 303-275-5134

Hours: Mon-Fri 7:30 am-4:30 pm

E-mail: appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us

(Acceptable formats for electronic appeals are: rtf, pdf, or word.)

For electronically mailed comments or appeals, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgment from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgment of the receipt of the comments, it is the sender’s responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.13 (a), only those individuals or organizations who submitted substantive comments during the comment period may file an appeal. It is an appellant’s responsibility to provide sufficient activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the Responsible Official’s decision should be reversed (§215.14 (a)). At a minimum, an appeal must include the following (215.14(b)):

1. Appellant’s name and address (§215.2), with a telephone number, if available;
2. Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
3. When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant (§215.2) and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
4. The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and that date of the decision;

5. The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either this part or part 251, subpart C (§215.11 (d));
6. Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
7. Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
8. Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
9. How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

Notices of Appeal that do not meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215.14 will be dismissed.

Implementation Date

If no appeal is received, implementation of the decision may begin on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period (36 CFR 215.15). If an appeal is received, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition (§215.2).

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact:

Terry DeLay, ID Team Leader
Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger District
PO Box 249
Saratoga WY 82331
(307) 326-2518

/s/ Clinton D. Kyhl

CLINTON D. KYHL

District Ranger
Laramie Ranger District
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests &
Thunder Basin National Grassland

February 24, 2004

DATE

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Map 1

