



BRIEFING STATEMENT

BLM-MONTANA/DAKOTAS

MONTANA STATE OFFICE • 5001 SOUTHGATE DRIVE • BILLINGS, MONTANA 59101 • WWW.BLM.GOV/MT

March 9, 2012

HEALTHY AND RESILIENT FORESTS

SUMMARY:

The BLM is working to restore the health and resiliency of our public land forests and to better work with our partners in managing the public's forest lands. Our efforts are focused on providing expedited environmental reviews and full public participation while ensuring that projects are carried out efficiently and effectively. We will continue to promote partnerships with local communities and local interests through the use of collaborative processes.

The importance of Montana/Dakotas public domain forests cannot be overstated. These forests provide for a wide array of public benefits from clean water, wildlife habitats, economic commodities, energy, recreational use, carbon storage, and nutrient cycling.

BACKGROUND:

Montana/Dakotas forests have undergone major changes during the last century due to the suppression of wildland fires, low levels of active forest restoration management, and increased insect activity. Frequent low-intensity fires play an important role in promoting and maintaining healthy and resilient forest systems. Natural fires promote natural plant succession cycles.

Today our forests are unnaturally dense, and forest ecosystem health has suffered significantly. When subjected to continued drought and excessive fuel buildup, these forests are vulnerable to unnaturally severe wildland fires. Insect attacks and disease are further stressing our forested systems. This downward spiral includes:

- Widespread forest insect attacks that have moved from natural endemic levels to outbreak proportions across Montana and South Dakota.
 - Mountain pine beetle – ponderosa, lodgepole, whitebark, and limber pines
 - Douglas-fir beetle – Douglas-fir and limited attacks on western larch
 - Balsam fir beetle – sub-alpine fir
 - Spruce budworm – Douglas-fir
- Forest disease appears to be increasing.
 - Blister rust –whitebark and limber pines
 - Armillaria root rot - conifers
- Sudden aspen decline – conifer competition along with aspen specific insects/disease is reducing the number and size of the remaining aspen clones.

On July 19, 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced through *Federal Register Vol. 76, No. 138* its finding to list *Pinus albicaulis* (Whitebark pine) as warranted for threatened or endangered listing. However, the listing of *Pinus albicaulis* is precluded by higher priority actions to amend the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. The impact to BLM's forest management program due to the listing of *Pinus albicaulis* has not been determined by the Washington Office at this time.

PUBLIC INTEREST:

Public interest is high and is expected to remain high as efforts to restore forest health and resiliency on public lands move forward. There is much public support to implement the measures outlined in the current laws and initiatives, but there is also coordinated special interest opposition to some forest management activities.

CONTACT:

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