



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Butte Field Office  
106 North Parkmont  
Butte, Montana 59701-9701  
[www.blm.gov/mt](http://www.blm.gov/mt)

In Reply Refer To:

9200 (MTB070)

March 20, 2015

Dear Reader:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Butte Field Office is in the initial stages of developing proposed project work in the Marysville Planning Area. This area is northwest of Helena, MT and includes approximately 14,723 acres of BLM-administered lands, surrounding the town of Maryville and Great Divide Ski Area. The legal description of the planning area includes public lands in T. 11 N., R. 5 W.; T. 11 N., R. 6 W.; T. 12 N., R. 5 W.; T. 12 N., R. 6 W.; T. 12 N., R. 7 W.; and T. 13 N., R. 6 W. (See attached map.)

The BLM has completed Land Health Assessments (LHAs) in the Marysville Planning Area over the last two years, with completion of an Environmental Assessment (EA) to follow. The EA will evaluate a variety of resource issues and develop a range of management actions to address those issues. To date, the preliminary issues identified include the following:

- Wildlife/ Implementation of food storage orders
- Grazing permit renewals for fourteen (14) different grazing allotments
- Vegetation treatments to return uplands to more of a reference condition
- Riparian treatments to restore healthy conditions to streams and wetlands
- Timber harvest to promote forest health, strengthen stand resistance and resiliency and provide timber products
- Treatment of nonnative and noxious plant infestations
- Hazardous fuels in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)
- Potential reroute of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST)
- Travel management/road maintenance

**Wildlife:** Grizzly bear and Canada lynx are species that could occur in the Planning Area listed under the Endangered Species, and effects to these species will be considered for all proposals. The Butte Resource Management Plan (RMP) includes direction to develop and implement human food storage regulations and guidelines in grizzly bear distribution zones. Because the Planning Area extends into grizzly bear Management Zones 1 and 2 as identified in the draft Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy (2013), food storage regulations will need to be developed.

**Livestock Grazing.** Grazing permit renewals are required for the following fourteen (14) allotments: Beartrap Gulch, Canyon Creek, Cemetary, Deadman, Deer Creek, Drumlmon-Skelly, Edwards Mounatin, Empire Creek, Lost Horse Creek, Missouri Gulch, Oglivie Gulch, School, Talseth, and Virginia Creek. Some adjustments to grazing regimes and range improvement projects, such as water developments and fencing may be considered to improve resource health.

**Upland and Riparian Vegetation Restoration Treatments:** Preliminary assessments indicate that upland and riparian vegetation communities in the project area are trending away from desired reference conditions. Portions of grassland/shrublands and riparian habitats have been colonized or encroached upon by conifers due to the interruption of the natural disturbance regime by long-term fire suppression. The Butte RMP provides direction to restore current altered vegetative conditions to their desired ecological conditions consistent with their appropriate fire regimes. Vegetation management may be implemented through hand-cutting, mechanical treatment, and/or prescribed burning in an attempt to reintroduce disturbance in these areas. These same treatment methods may be utilized to alter the overall composition and relative dominance of conifers and deciduous trees within riparian areas.

**Forests Vegetation and Timber Harvest:** Assessment of forest stands throughout the planning area have noted that many of the timber stands are experiencing mortality from insects and disease, along with other forest health issues such as overstocking and loss of stand diversity. Dense stands of Douglas-fir are susceptible to western spruce budworm activity. Trees stressed by increased competition for limited light and water resources decline in vigor. Lodgepole and ponderosa pine stands have been impacted by infestations of the mountain pine beetle. Many stands have high levels of mortality. Natural events such as insects, combined with blow-down, have resulted in high concentrations of fuels.

To promote healthy diverse forests, there is a need to reduce the density of trees to reduce the risk of insect related mortality, increase the vigor and health of stands, protect old-growth trees, reduce the hazard associated with large wildfire, and increase the diversity of understory vegetation within these stands. In cases where standing dead or down wood creates a high risk for large, uncontrollable or extreme fires, there is a need to remove standing dead or down woody material. Forest restoration activities, including timber harvest, would focus on thinning stands to remove subdominant and poor quality trees to promote a healthy forest with a range of size classes.

Woodland habitats are typically Douglas-fir with an understory of sagebrush, grass and forbs. Historically, frequent fires would have maintained low tree densities in this habitat type. Forest restoration activities would be designed to remove a high number of trees, typically resulting in canopy cover less than 30 percent. Historically, fire events would have removed colonizing conifers from aspen woodlands. Thinning in aspen stands would decrease conifers and maintain aspen features on the landscape.

**Treatment of Noxious and Invasive Species:** Noxious and invasive species such as spotted knapweed, dalmation toadflax, yellow toadflax, common mullein, Canada thistle, whitetop, houndstongue, musk thistle, bull thistle, and cheatgrass are common in some parts of the

planning area, affecting native vegetation communities. Most infestations are found along roadways, corridors, and in disturbed sites. Management actions to prevent and reduce weed infestations would be considered.

**Hazardous Fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface:** The Wildland-Urban Interface Community at Risk Hazard Assessment of 2004 was completed to evaluate and identify areas with heavy fuel concentrations, mature and decadent fuels, and other abnormalities that increase the severity of fire behavior in the Marysville area. In addition, the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for Lewis and Clark County identifies the WUI area around Marysville to have a high fuel hazard, with potential for high-intensity crown fire.

With forested lands existing in the state as described above, there is a need to reduce the hazard and risk associated with wildland fire in the WUI and to restore or maintain forested areas to their desired ecological conditions consistent with their appropriate fire regimes. Fuels treatments would focus on reducing the hazard associated with large scale or uncontrollable fire in the WUI. Treatments could include thinning, pile burning, and or timber harvest. The stewardship contracting process may be used in the implementation of these treatments.

**Potential Reroute of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST):** This analysis may identify possible areas to reroute sections of the CDNST on BLM-administered lands. Portions of the CDNST are currently located on a designated motorized route and need to be relocated to a non-motorized trail to reduce conflict of use between motorized and non-motorized use.

**Travel Management/Road Maintenance:** Travel management was completed under a separate decision and will not be revisited under this analysis. Two exceptions include BLM motorized routes #050118 and #050119, which will be revisited due to a change in conditions. Due to the lack of public right-of-way across adjacent private lands these routes are not accessible to the public: therefore, the status of these routes will be re-analyzed in this analysis.

Field inventories show numerous locations where active sedimentation is occurring in live water at road – stream crossings. In most cases, the causes of erosion and stream channel diversion are undersized or unmaintained culverts. Where the funds and opportunities allow, the BLM would prioritize road maintenance in areas of greatest impact to water resources. Road maintenance may include replacing worn and/or undersized culverts, cleaning culverts, and cleaning ditches.

**Commenting:** We welcome your comments on any additional issues, concerns, or alternatives that should be evaluated by the BLM during this planning process. We will use your comments to develop specific proposed management actions which will be analyzed in an environmental assessment (EA) and made available for public review.

If you care to provide scoping comments, such as suggestions regarding resource issues, data sources, or alternatives to be considered in the environmental analysis, please make your comments as specific as possible and send them to:

BLM Butte Field Office, 106 N. Parkmont, Butte, MT 59701 or by e-mail to Charles Tuss at: [ctuss@blm.gov](mailto:ctuss@blm.gov).

Although comments will be accepted at any time throughout the process, comments submitted by **May 1, 2015** would be most helpful in development of the proposed action and EA. To be considered, all comments must contain the name and address of the submitter. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment -- including your personal identifying information -- may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you have questions regarding this project or if you would like to have your name removed from the mailing list, please contact Charles Tuss at the Butte Field Office at 406-533-7634 or e-mail him at [ctuss@blm.gov](mailto:ctuss@blm.gov).

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Scott Haight  
Field Manager

Enclosure

MTB070:ctuss:mjr:031715:x7634:marysvillescopingltr