

### Roads (EA, p. I-13)

There are approximately 22.2 miles of existing road within the project area that currently provide access for recreation, wildfire suppression, permit administration, and access to private lands. The current condition of the roads is inadequate to support activities associated with the management of forested vegetation. The present location of existing roads is causing resource damage to soils and water quality in certain areas.

*This decision will:*

- ◆ support traffic generated from activities;
- ◆ provide for public safety and access;
- ◆ minimize impacts to other resources (vegetation, heritage, water quality, big game cover).

### Wood Products (EA, p. I-14)

There is a demand for wood products from the Ashland Ranger District to supply sawmills in the area.

*The decision will:*

- ◆ supply approximately 4,130 CCF (2.5 MMBF) of wood products;
- ◆ contribute to the Annual Sale Quantity identified in the Forest Plan.

## SIGNIFICANCE DETERMINATION OF THE FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

Based on information disclosed in the EA and the project file, I have evaluated the Forest Plan Amendment described above against the following criteria as outlined in the Forest Service Land and Resource Management Planning Handbook.

**Timing:** This Forest Plan Amendment becomes effective immediately. From actual on-the-ground standpoint, the effects will be noticed as projects are implemented within the project area.

**Location and Size:** The Forest Plan Amendment that I am making in this decision is applicable on those specific stands on the Ashland Ranger District identified on the map attached to the Amendment (EA, Appendix C). These 109 acres represent less than a one percent increase in the amount of suitable acres on the Custer National Forest. I find that this increase in suitable acres is minor.

**Goals, Objectives and Outputs:** Overall goals and objectives for these areas will be as they are presently shown in the Forest Plan. There are no proposed changes to these goals and objectives. Applying this Amendment will result in no discernible change in outputs.

**Management Prescriptions:** This Forest Plan Amendment does not change current Management allocations. These areas will remain in Management Area B (33 acres) and D (76 acres), with the same overall goals and objectives as described on page 1 and 2 of this Decision Notice.

Based on the above discussion, I find that this amendment does not alter any of the long term relationships between the levels of goods and services projected in the Forest Plan. Therefore, this amendment is non-significant under the regulations implementing the National Forest Management Act [36 CFR 219.10(f)] and Forest Service Manual 1922.51.

#### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

Alternatives to the proposed action were formulated in the context of the Custer National Forest and National Grasslands Management Plan, which was prepared as directed by the National Forest Management Act (42 U.S.C. 4332). Reasonable alternatives to the proposed action were considered in the analysis by the ID Team. Alternatives were developed in response to the driving issues, management concerns, and resource opportunities. The Forest Plan provides direction regarding the conduct of management practices. The alternatives in this analysis reflect a difference in management emphasis, rather than a range of outputs. Development of alternatives is discussed in detail in the EA, Chapter II.

In addition to the alternatives described below, three alternatives were considered but eliminated from further study (EA, Chapter II, p. 11).

##### **Alternative A (No Action)**

This is the No Action Alternative as required by NEPA. Under this alternative, no actions are proposed other than continuing current management direction and level of management intensity in the area. However, the condition of the ponderosa pine ecosystem in the area would deteriorate as a result of increased loss of trees due to age, insects and disease. The susceptibility of the area to large, uncontrollable wildfires would not be changed and the loss of the grassland ecosystem would continue due to pine succession and colonization.

Although the quantity of big game cover is expected to remain the same in the near term, I chose not to implement this alternative because of the expected long term decrease in big game cover due to overstocking and resultant mortality from insects and disease. Open road densities would remain at 2.2 miles per square mile. Long term northern goshawk habitat would degrade through the process of succession, and eventually become unsuitable. Plant succession would eventually close niches for prey species due to the loss of understory diversity, thus reducing the ability of the northern goshawk to capture prey. The risk of large, uncontrollable wildfires would continue to be present and would become even greater due to non-treatment of areas with heavy surface fuels, contiguous ladder fuels, and closed canopies. In regard to the protection of the area from wildfire, this alternative would result in none of the forested stands in the area moving into a low risk category.

##### **Alternative B (Proposed Action)**

This is the Proposed Action as referred to in the public scoping letter and EA (Chapter I, II, and IV).

This alternative proposes to implement vegetation management by utilizing the management tools of commercial timber harvest and prescribed burning. The emphasis of this alternative is to maximize long term big game habitat quality and effectiveness, while minimizing short term big game habitat degradation. The desired condition (target stand) is the same as for that of commercial timber

**MONITORING**

The Selected Alternative will comply with the specific monitoring requirements identified by the Forest Plan (Forest Plan, Chapter IV, pp. 105 through 110).

**DOCUMENT AND PROJECT FILE AVAILABILITY**

The project file contains detailed information concerning the project. The Environmental Assessment Decision Notice, and supporting documents area available for review during regular business hours at

Ashland Ranger District  
Highway 212  
Box 168  
Ashland, MT 59003

For further information regarding this decision, contact District Ranger Bill Ott or Ron Hecker at the address noted above, by telephone at 406-784-2350, or by the Internet at [bott/r1\\_custer@fs.fed.us](mailto:bott/r1_custer@fs.fed.us) or [rhecker/r1\\_custer@fs.fed.us](mailto:rhecker/r1_custer@fs.fed.us)

**APPEAL RIGHTS AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the regulations found at 36 CFR 215. The written Notice of Appeal must be submitted within 45 days (36 CFR 215.13) from the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the *Billings Gazette*, Billings, Montana to:

Dale Bosworth, Regional Forester  
USDA, Forest Service, Northern Region  
P.O. Box 7669  
Missoula, Montana 59807

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period (36 CFR 215.10). If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

Nancy J. Curriden  
NANCY T. CURRIDEN  
Forest Supervisor  
Custer National Forest

June 19, 1998  
DATE

**D. Suitability for Timber Production [36 CFR 219.14 and 219.27(e)(1)]**

No timber harvest, other than salvage sales or sales to protect other multiple-use values, shall occur on lands not suitable for timber production [16 U.S.C. 1604 (k)]. The harvest that has been scheduled on unsuitable land is for the purpose of restoring ponderosa pine and grassland ecosystem, and the long-term enhancement of wildlife habitat.