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Sioux Ranger District
Carter County, Montana
Harding County, South Dakota

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Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration Project

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact



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**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement
And
Restoration Project**

USDA Forest Service
Sioux Ranger District, Custer National Forest
Carter County, Montana; Harding County, South Dakota

I. SUMMARY OF DECISION

After careful consideration of the potential impacts of the alternatives analyzed in the Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (issued for public comment on February 14, 2003), and public comment, I have selected management actions from Alternative 2: Proposed Action. These actions are designed to salvage fire-killed trees and reduce long-term hazardous fuel loading on National Forest System lands within the Long Pines Land Unit. The land unit was affected by the 2002 Kraft Springs Fire (65,550 acres total, 40,700 acres on National Forest Land within the Long Pines Land Unit).

Project activities will occur on approximately 16,050 acres within the 70,100 acre Long Pines Land Unit, located about 5 miles northwest of Camp Crook, South Dakota on the Sioux Ranger District, Custer National Forest. The majority of the project area is actually within Carter County, Montana, with a small amount of the project area in Harding County, South Dakota ([See Appendix A, Maps #1a-b](#)).

A summary of the actions included in my decision is to:

- Reduce fuels on approximately 6,260 acres using a combination of commercial and non-commercial fuel treatment on fire-killed trees.
- Reduce fuels (immediate treatments on 1,980 acres, delayed treatments on 2,650 acres) using only non-commercial fuel treatment on fire-killed trees.
- Reforest burned areas by planting trees on 7,860 acres.
- Construct 20.5 miles of temporary roads to access commercial fuel treatment units.
- Improve 67.0 miles of existing specified roads through reconstruction and improvement activities.

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- Implement all of the Project Design Features detailed in the Environmental Assessment in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1 (pages 27-29), and all Project Monitoring activities in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2, page 30, respectively.

A detailed discussion of the selected alternative and a complete list of the actions included in my decision are disclosed in Section VIII of this document.

II. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Brewer Fire - 1988

The Brewer fire occurred in 1988 and burned approximately 58,220 acres in the Long Pines Land Unit and adjacent private landholdings. Much of that burn area (approximately 24,500 acres) experienced stand replacement wildland fire that converted some stands of mature and mid-aged forested stands to early grass-forb-shrub-seedling stages

North Long Pines Project – 2001-2002

Prior to the Kraft Springs fire an analysis and project proposal development was occurring on the Long Pines Land Unit. This project proposal was called the North Long Pines Project, and the purpose was to protect the forest stand structure diversity (mid-aged and mature forest stands) by reducing the fuel/fire hazard to the existing green forested stands left intact after the Brewer fire of 1988. A scoping letter dated July 25, 2001 notified the public that the Sioux Ranger District was considering this specific project analysis in the northern portion of the Long Pines Land Unit and requested information about the area.

The North Long Pines Project area was largely consumed by the 2002 Kraft Springs wildfire and the North Long Pines proposal was replaced by the current Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration Project proposal.

Kraft Springs Fire –2002

In August-September 2002, the Kraft Springs wildfire burned approximately 65,550 acres, and 40,700 of those acres were on National Forest System lands in the Long Pines Land Unit. In addition, approximately 23,650 acres were on private lands within or adjacent to the Long Pines Land Unit. Of the Forest Service acres burned, approximately 62% were forest vegetation types and 38% were grassland vegetation types. The Kraft Springs Fire area is located near Camp Crook, South Dakota. The area affected by the wildfire is located within Carter County, Montana (about 95%) and Harding County, South Dakota (about 5 %).

The fire was started by a lightning storm on August 30, 2002, and burned from the southern part of the Long Pines Land Unit to the northern portion in just a few days. Much of the area experienced a stand-replacing wildfire and many of the green-forested stands remaining in the northern portion of the Long Pines Land Unit were subjected to a moderate or high intensity wildfire. The subsequent Burned Area Emergency Restoration (BAER) report¹ provided a

¹ Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Report-Kraft Springs Fire. Sept. 2002. Custer NF, Sioux Ranger District. 96 pp. Unpublished report on file at the Custer NF.

summary of the fire effects on the landscape that occurred during the fire and some emergency actions were implemented for public safety and road rehabilitation needs.

III. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The 2002 Kraft Springs wildfire affected large areas of green forested stands and previously burned and planted areas from the 1988 Brewer Fire in the Long Pines Land Unit. Approximately 70 percent of Kraft Springs Fire burned over the same area burned in the 1988 Brewer Fire. As a result of the Kraft Springs Fire, a potential wildland fire hazard will be created similar to the fuel situation following the 1988 Brewer Fire. Estimated fuel loading at the ground surface ten years after the Brewer Fire was upwards of 32 tons per acre² of Coarse Woody Debris (CWD)³.

A similar fuel loading (est. 30-40 tons per acre) is expected to occur in areas that experienced a high or moderate intensity burn from the Kraft Springs fire. CWD in excess of 25-30 tons per acre results in high fire hazard due to the high resistance to control (Brown et al. in press). CWD loading of 5-20 tons per acre scattered as discontinuous separate pieces across the landscape is considered the optimum range for maintaining a low fire hazard. The primary objective of this project is to reduce existing fuels and avoid future high fuel loads that will result from trees killed by the Kraft Springs Fire. In addition, there is an urgent need to quickly harvest fire-killed trees that are of commercial value before the wood loses economic value.

The specific project objectives are listed below for the Kraft Springs Project:

- Reduce the long-term CWD fuel loading from dead and dying trees from an estimated 30-40 tons per acre to a range of 10-15 tons of CWD per acre.
- Recover the economic value of dead and dying merchantable trees.
- Provide for the reforestation of ponderosa pine stands destroyed by the fire.
- Provide for the recovery of aspen stands and woody draws.
- Restore and stabilize the existing road system.

IV. ISSUES

The proposed action (Alternative 2) was developed during the fall of 2002 and was provided to the public for comments during scoping in November 2002. Issues were identified through both public and internal scoping. Issues are used to refine the proposed action using project design features or generate alternatives to the proposed action. The following eight (8) issues were determined to be within the purpose and need for the proposal and within the scope of the project decision.

² Information based on fuel transects data 2002 and fuel observations made by District staff since 1988 Brewer Fire.

³ CWD is defined as standing or down woody material generally greater than > 3" diameter.

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Issue #1: Commercial salvage and temporary roads

There is a concern that commercial salvage and temporary road construction will have an effect on soils, watershed, and wildlife.

Issue #2: Snag management for Wildlife species

There is a concern that the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action may have an effect on availability of snags for snag-dependent wildlife species.

Issue #3: Wildlife Security Cover

There is a concern that the project area is lacking in hiding and security cover for big game wildlife during the big game hunting season.

Issue #4: Noxious Weeds

There is a concern that the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action may have an effect on the spread of noxious weeds within the project area.

Issue #5: Soil productivity

There is a concern that the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action may have an effect on detrimental soil disturbance and long-term soil productivity within the project area. A Regional standard states that detrimental soil disturbance must not exceed 15% of area.

Issue #6: Sediment

There is a concern that the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action may have an effect on erosion and sedimentation to project streams.

Issue #7: Woody draws

There is a concern that the effects of the Kraft Springs fire, combined with ongoing big game and livestock browsing, could retard recovery in woody draws.

Issue #8: Effects of proposed tree planting on Livestock grazing

There is a concern that the proposed action and alternatives, specifically the acres of proposed tree planting, may result in loss of forage for livestock use on areas where the management emphasis (MA B) is for livestock forage production.

V. ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Alternative: Use of Prescribed Fire Only

An alternative was proposed that would use only prescribed fire as a management activity to reduce the long-term fuel hazards. This alternative was considered; however, this alternative will not reduce fuels in the immediate short-term. Prescribed fire will only be effective after the fire-killed trees fall to the ground in 1-2 decades. Project objectives require that an immediate short-term fuel reduction treatment is needed to avoid large acreages of dead trees falling to the ground and becoming unmanageable in the long-term. Prescribed fire will be widely used to accomplish maintenance treatments in approximately 1-2 decades. For these reasons, this alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

VI. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

The following (3) alternatives were considered in the EA. [Table DN-1](#) summarizes the activities for each alternative.

Table DN-1: Comparison of the Alternatives

Activities and Outputs	Alt. #1: No Action	Alternative #2 Proposed Action	Alternative #3
Commercial fuel reduction treatments	0.0 acres	6,260 acres	0.0 acres
Non-commercial fuels treatments-immediate	0.0 acres	1,980 acres	5,170 acres
Non-commercial fuels treatments-delayed	0.0 acres	2,650 acres	5,730 acres
Tree planting for reforestation	0.0 acres	7,860 acres	7,860 acres
Temporary roads	0.0 miles	20.5 miles	0.0 miles
Road Improvement (NFP funding) of system roads	0.0 miles	67.0 miles	67.0 miles
Road maintenance	0.0 miles	82.0 miles	0.0 miles

Alternative #1-No Action

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1502.14d) requires that a "no action" alternative be analyzed. This alternative represents the existing and projected future condition against which the other alternatives are compared. The management activities that are proposed would not occur; however, it does not preclude ongoing activities in this or other areas, or management proposals for the area at some time in the future. Alternative #1 is the same as the current condition after the 2002 Kraft Springs Fire.

Alternative #2-Proposed Action

The proposed action alternative will treat approximately **16,050** acres of stands burned by moderate and high intensity fire in the Long Pines Land Unit during the 2002 Kraft Springs Fire. A combination of commercial and non-commercial fuel treatments will occur on 6,260 acres. Noncommercial fuels reduction of non-merchantable trees will occur on another 4,680 acres. This alternative is the selected alternative and is described in detail in Section VIII : Decision and Selected Alternative.

Alternative #3-Noncommercial Fuel Reduction

Alternative #3 was developed in response to concerns over the use of commercial salvage and temporary road construction needed to implement those treatments, and the potential effects on soils, sediment and wildlife. For this alternative only non-commercial fuel treatments would be used and no temporary roads would be needed. Road reconstruction and reforestation proposals are the same as in Alternative #2-Proposed Action.

VII. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In addition to the following specific activities, the Kraft Springs project was listed on the Custer National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in the 4th quarter 2002. The documentation of the scoping and public involvement is found in the project file. To date, the public has been invited to participate in the project in the following ways:

On October 29, 2002, a scoping letter was mailed to the public providing detailed information on the proposed action that the Sioux Ranger District was considering in the Long Pines Land Unit for the Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration Project. The letter was mailed to approximately 216 individuals and groups, including federal and state agencies, tribal governments, municipal offices, and businesses. A total of seventeen (17) responses to this scoping letter were received (letters are contained in the project record).

The proposed action as defined in the initial scoping letter for the Kraft Springs project was listed on the Custer NF website at: (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer/>), and scoping information and maps were available to the public effective Oct. 29, 2002. A project briefing was presented to the County Commissioners for Carter County, Montana on November 18, 2002. A newspaper article on the briefing with the Carter County commissioners about Kraft Springs Project by the Sioux Ranger District was published in the Ekalaka Eagle, MT on January 24, 2003.

The complete environmental assessment (EA) was available on the Custer NF website effective February 14, 2003, and copies of the EA were mailed to those that responded to the initial scoping letter (Oct. 29, 2002). Legal notices announcing a 30-day comment period for the environmental assessment were published in the Billings Gazette (Feb. 14, 2003), Nation Center News (Feb. 13, 2003), and the Ekalaka Eagle (Feb. 14, 2003). In response to the EA 30-day comment period (Feb. 14, 2003 to March 17, 2003), seven (7) comments or letters were received. The Forest Service responses to all comments received are attached as [Appendix C](#).

VIII. DECISION AND SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

As the Responsible Official for this project, I have decided to implement commercial and non-commercial fuel reduction treatments, salvage logging, tree planting and road improvement activities within the project area. To that end, I have selected Alternative 2: Proposed Action, hereafter referred to as the Selected Alternative, and it is described in the following paragraphs.

Please note all of the acre figures I use to describe the selected alternative are considered estimates based on computer mapping and could be slightly different when treatment areas are actually located on the ground. I do not expect variations in acres or locations between the planning phase and implementation phase of this project to be consequential.

Details of the Selected Alternative (Alternative #2: Proposed Action)

The selected alternative will treat approximately 16,050 acres of stands burned by moderate and high intensity fire in the Long Pines Land Unit during the 2002 Kraft Springs Fire. The initial management objectives are to reduce hazardous fuels in the form of dead and dying trees, provide for reforestation of forested lands, recover the economic value of the dead and dying trees, and to restore and stabilize the existing road system. Commercial salvage will use only ground-based tractor yarding. Temporary roads will be used to access the commercial salvage units, and those temporary roads will be decommissioned after treatment activities. No new specified road construction will be needed. Road improvement and maintenance will occur on main system roads in the Long Pines Land Unit.

Maps showing the management activities for the selected alternative are found in [Appendix A, Maps #2 to #5](#) (color versions of the maps are on the Custer NF website). The activities for this alternative include the project design features described later in this section. The activities for the selected alternative are summarized in [Table DN-2](#) and are discussed in more detail in following sections.

Table DN-2: Alternative 2-Selected Alternative Treatments

Fuel Treatments	Acres
Fuel reduction using a of combination of commercial salvage with non-commercial fuel treatments	6,260
Non-commercial fuels reduction (immediate)	1,980
Non-commercial fuels reduction (delayed)	2,650
Tree planting on acres with no commercial or non-commercial treatments	5,160
Tree planting on acres with commercial and non-commercial treatment	<i>(2,700)¹</i>
Total Acres Treated	16,050
Road Management Activities	Miles
Temporary Roads	20.5
Restoration/Improvement of Existing Roads (NFP funding)	67.0
Maintenance of Existing Roads ²	82.0

¹ These acres are included in the commercial and noncommercial treatment acres and do not contribute to the figure for total acres treated.

² Existing roads used for the proposal is 82.0 miles; however, of that, approximately 18.0 miles will be improved under the NFP road treatments proposal and are included in that figure of 67.0 miles. Existing roads used for the proposal and not improved under NFP proposal is approximately 64.0 miles. These miles of existing roads used for the project will have required maintenance to allow use for access and treatment activities.

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Fuel Treatment using Commercial Opportunities that include Salvage

Dead and dying trees will be harvested on approximately 6,260 acres that were affected by a moderate to high intensity wildfire. All trees with a live crown (green) greater than or equal to 50 percent will be left standing⁴. Logging residue and dead trees not meeting merchantability standards will be treated to reduce the future fire hazard. This material will be reduced to a post treatment surface fuel loading of woody material less than or equal to 3 inches in diameter, similar to NFFL⁵ Fuel Model 2 or 9 (< 4 tons/acre), by means of whole tree yarding, machine piling, prescribed burning, or a combination thereof. The post-treatment CWD fuel loading will be reduced to 10-15 tons per acre and scattered as discontinuous separate pieces across the landscape

This treatment is not intended to preclude opportunities to treat these large fuels by some other method of disposal. A number of methods of disposal that will be used include: skidding and decking the material in landings, chipping, burning, and removing from the site.

Non-Commercial Fuel Treatment--Immediate

Dead and severely damaged trees will be felled and treated to reduce the future fire hazard on approximately 1,980 acres. This material will be reduced to a post treatment surface fuel loading of woody material less than or equal to 3 inches in diameter, similar to NFFL Fuel Model 2 or 9 (< 4 tons/acre) by means of whole tree yarding, machine piling, prescribed burning, or a combination thereof. The post-treatment CWD fuel loading will be reduced to 10-15 tons per acre and scattered as discontinuous separate pieces across the landscape. Treatment of these areas will begin in 2003.

Non-Commercial Fuel Treatment--Delayed

Dead and severely damaged trees will be felled and treated to reduce the future fire hazard on approximately 2,650 acres. Treatment of these areas, except for roadside trees, will be delayed until at least 2008 to provide habitat for snag dependent species in the short-term. This material will be reduced to a post treatment fuel loading similar to NFFL Fuel Model 2, or 9 (< 4 tons/acre) of woody material less than 3 inches in diameter, by means of machine piling, whole tree yarding, machine piling, prescribed burning, or a combination of methods. The post-treatment CWD fuel loading will be reduced to 10-15 tons per acre and scattered as discontinuous separate pieces across the landscape. Dead trees within 75 feet of system roads will be treated starting in 2003 to reduce the potential safety hazard to people using the roads.

Planting

On areas where natural regeneration of ponderosa pine is not expected to occur within a timely period due to the lack of an adequate seed source, tree seedlings will be planted. It is estimated that approximately 7,860 acres will require planting. Of that figure, approximately 5,160 acres will not require any fuel treatment prior to planting. The remaining 2,700 acres proposed for planting will require fuel treatment prior to planting, and are included in the

⁴ USDA Forest Service and State and Private Forestry. 2000. Post-Fire Tree Survivability and insect interactions. 10 p. Deterioration of Fire-killed Conifers. 11 p. In Forest Health Protection. Report 2000-13.

⁵ National Forest Fire Laboratory, Missoula MT.

acreage figures for those treatment types above. Areas planted will generally be the east, northeast, north, and northwest aspects of forested lands affected by stand replacement event.

Road Management Activities

No new specified road construction will be needed to access treatment areas. Approximately 67.0 miles of existing specified roads will be restored/improved using NFP funding. Approximately 82.0 miles of maintenance will occur on existing roads. Approximately 20.5 miles of temporary road spurs will be needed to access treatment areas. Temporary roads will be closed and rehabilitated after management activities were completed.

All roads used to facilitate the commercial fuel treatment operations will receive pre-haul maintenance; haul maintenance, post-haul maintenance, or a combination thereof. Road maintenance activities include where applicable surface blading, dust abatement, slide removal and slump repair, surfacing repair, shoulder maintenance, ditch cleaning, maintenance of minor drainage structures, clearing roadway vegetation, cutting roadside vegetation, seeding, maintenance of major drainage structures, maintenance of miscellaneous structures, maintenance of traffic signs, and vegetation establishment.

Road Improvement Activities (funded by NFP)

The Snow Creek Road, Speelmon Creek Road, Exie Road, Capital Rock Road, Plum Creek Road and Pendleton Road are collector roads, which provide primary access within the Long Pines Land Unit and the project area. The operational and objective maintenance level of these roads is level 3 – suitable for passenger vehicles. These roads are not currently maintained to level 3 standards because the design, drainage and surfacing of these roads are not adequate. [Table DN-3](#) shows the collector roads that will be reconstructed under the Proposed Action.

Table DN-3: Collector Roads Reconstructed

Road Number	Road Name	Maintenance Level	Miles
3048	Pendleton	3	1.9
3116	Capital Rock	3	8.3
3117	Snow Creek	3	16.9
3118	Plum Creek	3	8.0
3119	Exie	3	4.6
3818	Speelmon Creek	3	5.0
Total			44.7

Reconstruction needs on these roads are a high priority to bring the roads up to standard and provide resource protection. Lack of sufficient drainage and surfacing material is a concern on the unsurfaced portions of these roads. Additionally, sections or in some cases the entire length of these roads need additional road width, turnouts, reshaped ditches, additional ditch-relief culverts, and culvert replacements for both capacity and length. Un-surfaced segments will be surfaced with gravel.

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The existing system of local roads provides sufficient access for resource management needs including recreation, range, and fire access. The operational and objective maintenance level of the local roads is generally level 2 – suitable for high clearance vehicles, with a few being level 1 – closed to vehicular traffic. Many of the level 2 roads are not currently maintained to standard, largely due to a lack of funding, but also in part, because design and drainage are not adequate. [Table DN-4](#) shows the local roads that will be reconstructed under the Proposed Action.

Table DN-4: Local Roads Reconstructed

Road Number	Road Name	Maintenance Level	Miles
3045	Foster	3	3.5
3057	Slick Creek	2	1.5
3059	Devils Canyon	2	5.6
3060	Aborgast	2	1.8
3061	Mowbry	2	4.7
3086	North Slick Creek	2	1.3
3117C	Iron Springs	2	0.4
3117G	Rustler Divide	2	2.7
3117E		2	1.2
Total			22.7

Reconstruction activities will bring these roads up to standard while protecting soil and water resources. Design attributes for the reconstructed local roads include: use of native surfacing, minimized use of culverts in favor of rolling dips (armored with pit run gravel), use of existing road width, out-sloping of road where needed, designing roads for limited use and high clearance vehicles, and minimized use of turnouts.

The development, use and reclamation of the aggregate sources needed for road surfacing and for completing the spot surfacing and armoring work on system roads, is a part of the road management activities.

Project Design Features for Alternative #2

I am including the following Project Design Features listed in [Table DN-5](#) as part of my decision. These project design features are identical to those described in the EA on pages 27-29.

Table DN-5: Project Design Features

Project Design Feature (By Resource Area)	Description of Project Design Feature
Fuels	
FU-1	Where fuel reduction by piling and burning is necessary, consider low-ground pressure equipment such as a grapple/excavator. Mechanical piling by this means can significantly lessen damage to residual trees, and discriminately leave partially decomposed woody material on the site for long-term productivity.
FU-2	Leaving some small "patches" of regeneration that start to appear within the next ten years during on-going maintenance treatments. Occasional patches of regeneration within a ponderosa pine stand mimic the natural historic landscape.
FU-3	Leave partially decomposed woody material and solid larger size bolewood, with a total loading in the range of 10 – 15 tons per acre. Ideally, these are lengths of bolewood are scattered throughout the surface fuel bed. Dead standing snags should account as component of this loading, even though it may not occur immediately. (<i>Reference Down Woody Biomass Table in Soils Specialists Report, identifying a variety of diameters and number of pieces equivalent to recommended 10 – 15 tons/acre.</i>)
Watershed/Soils	
WS-1	Utilize applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Montana Streamside Management Zone BMP's, Montana Forestry BMP's, and the Soil and Water Conservation Practices BMP's.
WS-2	All streams will receive a 50-foot streamside buffer. Wider buffers may be necessary where adjacent slopes are steep (See Hydrology/Soils section in Ch. 3))
WS-3	Coarse Woody Material should be left at a rate of approximately 10-15 tons/acre to help the recovery of long-term soil productivity. Of that amount, approximately 5 – 8 tons should be left as Large Woody Material (ground fuels or snags, 12 inches and greater in diameter). On high and moderate burn intensity areas, the remaining material (those fuels smaller than 12 inches in diameter) should be lopped and scattered onto the soil surface.
Wildlife	
WL-1	If a goshawk nest is found prior to or during project implementation, it will be protected by prohibiting project activities within ¼ mile of the nest from March 15 to July 20 or fledging. The ¼ mile is line of sight distance and may be reduced if topography and vegetation provide screening. If a goshawk nest is discovered during surveys or implementation, protect it with a minimum no activity buffer of 30 acres of suitable habitat surrounding the nest site. Using the control of operations ensure that the purchaser starts cutting and hauling from the southern portion of the project area (South end of the Long Pines).
WL-2	If an active raptor nest is found prior to or during project implementation, it will be protected by prohibiting activities within ¼ mile of the nest from March 15 to July 20 or fledging. The ¼ mile is line of sight distance and may be reduced if topography and vegetation provide screening.
WL-3	All project related activities will be prohibited from February 1 to May 1 annually within ½ mile of all eagle nests (historic and newly discovered). Annual surveys following an approved protocol will be required to establish occupancy by eagles of these sites. If a nest site is found active, or surveys are not completed annually, the prohibition date will be extended to July 15. (See project record for map of affected areas.)
WL-4	All project related activities will be prohibited from March 15 to July 15 annually within ¼ mile of all merlin and prairie falcon nests (historic and newly discovered). Annual surveys following an approved protocol will be required to establish occupancy by merlin or prairie falcon of these sites. If surveys determine a nest site is inactive, this design feature will not apply. (See project record for map of affected areas.)
WL-5	All known or newly discovered sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds (leks) will be protected by a ¼ mile no disturbance buffer from March 1 – April 15 annually. In addition, no ground disturbing activities (temporary road construction, etc) will occur within ¼ mile of these sites.
WL-6	Construct temporary roads at least 100 feet away from wet areas: seeps, springs, wet meadows, and riparian corridors.
WL-7	Decommission and seed all temporary roads within 6 months of unit completion with Forest Service approved seed mixture.
WL-8	When building temporary roads across dry grasslands, position the roads away from green trees larger than 8 inches diameter, or prohibit their cutting or removal. This will reduce potential for adverse impacts to western kingbirds and other species.
WL-9	Restrict mechanized equipment within 50 feet of wet areas: seeps, springs, wet meadows, and riparian corridors.

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Table DN-5: Project Design Features

Project Design Feature (By Resource Area)	Description of Project Design Feature
WL-10	Prohibit fuel treatment project activities within ¼ mile of active calving and fawning habitat from May 1 to July 1. The exception will be salvage operations during 2003-2004.
WL-11	During the Montana big game rifle season all roads within the Long Pines Land Unit will be closed to public travel with the exception of NFSR 3048 (Pendelton Road), 3116 (Capital Rock), 3117 (Snow Creek), 3117A (Lantis Springs Campground), 3118 (Plum Creek), 3119 (Exie), 3120A and 31233B (Whikham Gulch Picnic Area), and 3818 (Speelmon). This project design criteria will be implemented under a special closure order to reduce big game vulnerability until sufficient hiding cover is established adjacent to roads throughout the Long Pines. Sufficient hiding cover will probably occur within 8 to 15 years.
WL-12	<u>Snag Retention within Commercial Salvage Units</u> - Un-merchantable dead trees greater than or equal to 11 inches in diameter, at least 10-feet tall, and more than 75 feet from a system road will be left standing as snag habitat within treatment areas when they do not pose a safety hazard during treatment operations.
WL-13	<u>Snag Retention within Noncommercial-Immediate and Noncommercial-Delayed Units</u> - During treatment of these areas, where still present up to 6, with a minimum of 2, snags per acre greater than or equal to 11 inches in diameter (with preference being given to leaving the largest diameter snags available) will be left standing to provide long-term habitat for cavity nesting species. The intent is to manage snag density on a treatment unit basis and not on an acre basis. As such, snags could be grouped in small "patches" or "leave islands" within the noncommercial units as long as the overall snag density meets a minimum of 2 per acre within these units. Snags will not be retained within 75 feet of system roads to reduce the potential safety hazard to people using the roads.
WL-14	Restrict project activities to 25% or less of the deer winter range from December 1 to April 30 annually. The winter of 2003-2004 will be excluded from these requirements, to minimize loss of commercial value of salvaged material.
Archeology	
AR-1	All heritage field inventories will be completed for temporary roads, and landing locations. In addition to already completed surveys, there will be field inventory on 183 acres proposed for fuel treatment using salvage, 807 acres proposed for fuel treatment using a combination of mechanized with hand cutting and piling, and 645 acres of proposed planting.
AR-2	All sites within ground disturbing units will be reviewed by the Forest Archaeologist and individual treatment prescriptions assigned prior to ground disturbing activities.
AR-3	Forest Archaeologist will monitor all approved treatments. Forest Archaeologists will be notified prior to conducting the approved treatments.
AR-4	All activity fuels will be piled outside the perimeter of all heritage sites. No mechanized equipment will be allowed to operate within the heritage site boundaries unless specifically allowed by the prescribed site treatment.
Noxious Weeds	
NX-1	All off-road commercial harvest and road building equipment will be cleaned (washed) prior to coming on to the project area.
NX-2	Seed, straw, and other materials for rehabilitation will be certified noxious weed free.
NX-3	An approved seed mix will be used, as needed, on landings, rock sources, temporary roads, classified and un-classified roads, and similarly disturbed sites after activities occur.
Visual Resource	
VR-1	Implement activities in such a way as to avoid straight lines and consistently regular spacing of leave trees.
Recreation	
RE-1	Before treatment activities begin, inform the public that work is going to begin in order for them to avoid travel in the area.
RE-2	During treatment activities, sign the road access points into the Long Pines to inform people work is going on so they can avoid it if possible.

Project Monitoring for Alternative #2

I am including the following project monitoring activities noted in [Table DN-6](#) to ensure project activities are carried out as described and to monitor the effectiveness of the project design features.

Table DN-6: Monitoring Activities

Monitoring (By Resource Area)	Description of Monitoring Activity
Watershed/Soils	
WS-m1	Implementation and effectiveness monitoring should be conducted to determine if project design features are being implemented and whether or not they are effective in protecting soil and water resources. <u>Responsible Staff:</u> Forest or District Soils/Hydrologist.
Wildlife	
WL-m1	Continue to monitor existing land bird monitoring transects. <u>Responsible Staff:</u> Forest or District Wildlife Biologist
WL-m2	Continue sharp-tailed grouse monitoring and surveys. <u>Responsible Staff:</u> Forest or District Wildlife Biologist
WL-m3	Continue goshawk surveys and monitoring. <u>Responsible Staff:</u> Forest or District Wildlife Biologist
Archeology	
AR-m1	The Forest archaeologist will monitor the sites receiving protective treatments during project implementation and upon completion of the project to assure the preservation and protection of the heritage resources and determine the success of the proposed treatments. <u>Responsible Staff:</u> Forest or District Archaeologist
Noxious Weeds	
NX-m1	Monitor for noxious weeds on a yearly basis until project activities are completed. <u>Responsible Staff:</u> Forest or District Range Conservationist

IX. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

My criteria for making a decision on this project was based on how well the management actions analyzed in the EA meet the purpose and need of the project, and address issues that were raised during the scoping process and the comment period on the EA. I considered the Custer Forest Plan and Record of Decision standards and guidance for the project area, and took into account competing interests and values of the public.

In part, I have made my decision based on four other items:

- As demonstrated following the Kraft Springs Fire, soil productivity is at risk where high fuel loads exist due to the increased intensity of the fire (Kraft Springs Fire Recovery Emergency Situation Documentation, March 2003).
- Wildlife habitat is at risk if fuel loads persist on the landscape. The Long Pines Land Unit contains about 66,000 acres of intermixed ecosystem of ponderosa pine and grasslands. Prior to the Brewer and Kraft Springs fires, approximately 38,000 acres existed as forested wildlife habitat, providing hiding and security cover for big game along with habitat for a

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wide range of bird species. Following these two fires, the landscape providing forested wildlife habitat was reduced to just 12,000 acres. These remaining acres of habitat are critical to providing adequate habitat and will be placed at risk of loss from another fire if fuels remain in the area (Kraft Springs Fire Recovery Emergency Situation Documentation, March 2003).

- Private resources are at risk. As a result of the Kraft Springs fire, private landowners, within and adjacent to the Long Pines Land Unit, and grazing permittee's, experienced significant economic loss estimated at \$2.8 million. Without fuel treatments, the risk of similar economic loss occurring is greatly increased (Kraft Springs Fire Recovery Emergency Situation Documentation, March 2003).
- Alternative 2 has a greater likelihood of implementation over a shorter period of time with less dependency on appropriated funding.

A. Meeting the Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for action and objectives for the Kraft Springs project area are noted in the EA, Chapter 1, Section 1.3.1. With the exception of Alternative 1 (No Action), all alternatives result in "movement" toward desired conditions described in the Forest Plan. All action alternatives respond in various ways to the purpose and need for action, but I believe the Selected Alternative (Alternative 2) will more fully meet the purpose and need, and the project objectives by recovering the economic value of the dead merchantable trees ([Table DN-7](#)) displays this information.

Table DN-7: Comparison of the Alternatives: Purpose and Need /Project Objectives

Purpose & Need/Project Objectives	Alt. #1: No Action	Alternative #2 Selected Alternative	Alternative #3
Fuels reduction on stands with dead and dying trees <i>(Measured in acres treated)</i>	0.0 acres	10,890 acres	10,890 acres
Recover economic value of fire-killed trees <i>(Measured in Direct Benefits dollars)</i>	\$0	\$1,018,140	\$0
Reforest pine stands with tree planting <i>(Measured in acres planted)</i>	0 acres	7,860 acres	7,860 acres
Restore and stabilize road system <i>(Measured in miles of road restoration/improvement)</i>	0.0 miles	67.0 miles	67.0 miles

The Selected Alternative #2 will meet all of the project objectives as noted below:

- Hazardous fuel levels will be treated and will result in a long-term low fire risk on an estimated 10,890 acres.
- Commercial salvage will occur and an estimated \$1,018,140 in economic value will be recovered from the fire-killed trees. Alternative #3 recovers no economic value for the fire-killed trees.
- 7, 860 acres of suitable forest will be planted and reforested. Natural regeneration will occur on the rest of the Long Pines area.

- Project activities involve leaving areas of slash adjacent to woody draws to provide for aspen and woody draw recovery.
- Restore and stabilize 149 miles of existing roads in the Long Pines Land Unit.

B. Consideration of the Issues

A variety of issues were considered by the interdisciplinary team in the process of preparing the proposed action, developing alternatives to respond to those issues, and identifying the consequences of the alternatives in the EA. The following section will address how I believe my selection of Alternative 2 responds to the project issues or those issues that drove alternatives to the proposed action. [Table DN-8](#) displays a comparison of alternatives in response to the issues.

Table DN-8: Comparison of the Alternatives and Issues

Issues and Indicators	Alt. #1 No Action	Alternative #2 Selected Alternative	Alternative #3
Issue # 1: Commercial salvage and temporary roads <u>Indicator:</u> acres of commercial salvage <u>Indicator:</u> miles of temporary roads <u>Indicator:</u> % security cover <u>Indicator:</u> Average annual tons sediment delivered to stream channels	0.0 acres 0.0 miles (See Issue #3 below) (See Issue #6 below)	6,260 acres 20.5 miles (See Issue #3 below) (See Issue #6 below)	0.0 acres 0.0 miles (See Issue #3 below) (See Issue #6 below)
Issue # 2: Snag management for wildlife species <u>Indicator:</u> % of project area with >= 2 snags/acre	18.4%	8.9%	18.4%
Issue # 3: Wildlife security cover <u>Indicator:</u> Open road density during big game season <u>Indicator:</u> % security cover	2.1 miles/sq. mile 7%	0.4 miles/sq. mile 66%	0.4 miles/sq. mile 66%
Issue # 4: Noxious weeds <u>Indicator:</u> Potential increase in acres	UK	340 acres	335 acres
Issue # 5: Soil productivity <u>Indicator:</u> High risk of Detrimental Soil Disturbance <u>Indicator:</u> % of area with Detrimental Soil Disturbance ¹ <u>Indicator:</u> CWD left on-site in tons/acre	0% High Risk 0% 30-40 tons/acres	10% High Risk 10% 10-15 tons/acres	10% High Risk 10% 10-15 tons/acres
Issue # 6: Sediment <u>Indicator:</u> Average annual tons sediment delivered to stream channels	0.0 tons of sediment	21.0 tons of sediment	20.0 tons of sediment
Issue # 7: Woody draws <u>Indicator:</u> Measures to protect woody draws (both current proposal and foreseeable National Fire Plan proposals.	Several NFP measures to monitor and protect woody draws	1. Areas with available dead trees will be jackstrawed on edges of woody draws. 2. Several NFP measures planned	1. Areas with available dead trees will be jackstrawed on edges of woody draws. 2. Several NFP measures planned
Issue # 8: Effects on tree planting on livestock grazing use in Management Area B <u>Indicator:</u> Acres of tree planting in MA B	0.0 acres of tree planting in MA B	7,860 acres of tree planting in MA B	7,860 acres of tree planting in MA B
¹ The EA has an error in Chapter 1, page 15, Section 1.7.1.6. There is a statement that refers to a Forest Plan standard that detrimental soil disturbance will not exceed 15% of the area. That 15% standard is a USFS Region 1 Standard (FSM 2554, R1 Supplement 2500-99-1).			

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The Selected Alternative #2 will address all of the project issues except Issue #1 as noted below:

Issue # 1: Commercial salvage and temporary roads

Commercial salvage and temporary roads will be part of the alternative and this issue will not be addressed in the Selected Alternative #2. However, I feel that the need to recover the economic value of fire-killed trees is more important than the public perception that commercial logging on the National Forests causes great environmental harm. The analysis in the Kraft Springs EA clearly shows that although there are some adverse impacts to some resources, those impacts are thought to be short-term and not significant.

Issue # 2: Snag management for wildlife species.

Snag management issues are resolved through project design features WL-12 and WL-13.

Issue # 3: Wildlife security cover

Wildlife security cover issues are resolved through project design feature WL-11 and WL-14.

Issue # 4: Noxious weeds

Alternative 2 will result in slightly more potential noxious weed acres than Alternative 3, however the acres difference is negligible, estimated at a 5-acre difference. Noxious weed issues are reduced through project design features WL-7, NX-1, NX-2, and NX-3.

Issue # 5: Soil productivity

Soil productivity issues are resolved through project design features FU-1, FU-3, and WS-3. *(The EA has an error in Chapter 1, page 15, Section 1.7.1.6. There is a statement that refers to a Forest Plan standard that detrimental soil disturbance will not exceed 15% of the area. That 15% standard is a USFS Region 1 Standard (FSM 2554, R1 Supplement 2500-99-1).*

Issue # 6: Sediment

Sediment issues are resolved through project design features WS-1 and WS-2. The sediment differences between Alternative 2 and 3 are negligible, estimated at 1.0 ton of annual, average sediment difference. This is not considered to be a significant difference in sediment outputs.

Issue # 7: Woody draws

When available, dead trees will be used to jackstraw around edges of fire damaged woody draws. In addition, future National Fire Plan monitoring will be used to determine if additional protection is needed for woody draws

Issue # 8: Effects on livestock grazing

Livestock grazing and tree planting issues are resolved with the resolution identified in the EA under Section 1.7.1.9. The desired objective is to have a minimum of 200 established seedlings on suitable ground that was previously forested. On unsuitable ground (dry, hot, south aspects) only natural regeneration will occur and could be delayed up to several decades due site

conditions and lack of seed source. These areas will remain in the grass-forb vegetation stage for much longer periods and provide adequate livestock forage.

C. Consideration of Other Resource Areas

Other resource areas were analyzed by the interdisciplinary team in the process of preparing the proposed action, developing alternatives to respond to those issues, and identifying the consequences of the alternatives in the EA. The following section will address how I believe my selection of Alternative 2 responds to other resource areas analyzed. There are no differences between the action alternatives to the other resource areas analyzed (Therefore, the selected alternative is clearly the best choice. [Table DN-9](#) displays a comparison of alternatives in response to the issues.

Table DN-9: Comparison of the Alternatives: Other Resource Areas

Other Resource Indicators	Alt. #1 No Action	Alternative #2 Proposed Action	Alternative #3
Wildlife TES or MIS species ¹	No significant effects on wildlife or fish species or habitat	No significant effects on wildlife or fish species or habitat	No significant effects on wildlife or fish species or habitat
Rare Plants-TES species ²	No effect	Non-significant impacts on 2 Sensitive species	Non-significant impacts on 2 Sensitive species
Heritage Resources	No impacts	No Impacts to heritage resources	No Impacts to heritage resources
Recreation	Short-term restrictions	Short-term restrictions	Short-term restrictions
Visuals	No effect	Changes from current, however, Forest Plan Guidelines will be met	Changes from current, however Forest Plan Guidelines will be met.

The specific differences between the alternatives for the MIS and TES wildlife and plants are noted in the EA in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, and Tables II-11 and II-12. No significant differences are noted between Alternative 3 and the Selected Alternative.

D. Consideration of Public and Other Agency Comments

We invited neighbors who lived near the project area, government agencies, the general public, and other groups and individuals potentially interested in or affected by the project to review and comment on our initial proposal (proposed action) and the purpose and need for the project.

A 30-day initial scoping period was provided for people to make comments on the proposed action (October 29, 2002 – November 30, 2002) during this “scoping” process. We mailed letters to over 200 contacts, including Tribal governments, other Federal and State Agencies, Organizations and individuals. The following table lists the scoping contacts, excluding individuals. The complete mailing list is in the project record files.

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Alliance For Wild Rockies	Missoula	MT
American Wilderness Alliance	Laramie	WY
American Wildlands	Bozeman	MT
Audubon Montana Council	Helena	MT
Audubon Society	Billings	MT
Audubon Yellowstone Valley	Billings	MT
Bureau of Indian Affairs	Billings	MT
Bureau of Land Management	Belle Fourche	SD
Bureau of Land Management	Miles City	MT
Carter County Clerk/Recorder	Ekalaka	MT
Carter County Commissioners	Ekalaka	MT
Carter County Conservation District	Ekalaka	MT
Carter County Sheep & Cattle Association	Plevna	MT
Carter County State Representative	Otter	MT
Carter County State Senator	Glendive	MT
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	Eagle Butte	SD
Consolidated Farm Service Agency	Ekalaka	MT
Consolidated Farm Service Agency	Buffalo	SD
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe	Ft Thompson	SD
Crow Cultural Committee	Crow Agency	MT
Crow Tribal Council	Crow Agency	MT
Custer Rod & Gun Club	Miles City	MT
Doonan Gulch Outfitters	Broadus	MT
Ekalaka Eagle	Ekalaka	MT
Fallon County Commissioners	Baker	MT
Fallon County Planning	Baker	MT
Fort Peck Reservation	Poplar	MT
Grand Electric Cooperative	Bison	SD
Greater Yellowstone Coalition	Bozeman	MT
Harding County Commissioners	Buffalo	SD
Harding County Conservation District	Buffalo	SD
Harding County State Representative	Walker	SD
Harding County State Representative	Eagle Butte	SD
Harding County State Senator	Faith	SD
Harding County Stock Growers	Buffalo	SD
Inland NW Wildlife Council	Spokane	WA
Intermountain Forest Association	Rapid City	SD
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe	Lower Brule	SD
Mandan-Hidatsa / Arikara Tribe	New Town	ND
Medicine Wheel Alliance	Billings	MT
Montana Animal Damage Control	Billings	MT
Montana Board of Outfitters	Helena	MT
Montana Office of Lt. Governor	Helena	MT
Montana Dept Fish Wildlife & Parks	Miles City	MT
Montana Dept State Lands	Miles City	MT
Montana Logging Association	Kalispell	MT
Montana Outfitters & Guide Association	Seely Lake	MT
Montana State Representative	Billings	MT
Montana State Senator	Bozeman	MT
Montana Stockgrowers Association	Helena	MT

Montana Wilderness Association	Helena	MT
Montana Wildlife Federation	Helena	MT
Montana Wood Products	Helena	MT
Montana Woolgrowers Association	Helena	MT
Natural Resource Conservation Service	Bozeman	MT
National Wildlife Federation	Washington	DC
Nature Conservancy Office	Billings	MT
Neiman Sawmill Inc	Hulett	WY
North Dakota State Forester	Bottineau	ND
Northern Cheyenne Pine Company	Ashland	MT
Northern Cheyenne Tribe	Lame Deer	MT
Ogalala Sioux Nation	Pine Ridge	SD
Outdoor Information Service	Lolo	MT
People of Harding County	Belle Fourche	SD
Pope & Talbot Inc	Spearfish	SD
Powder River Outfitters	Broadus	MT
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Rosebud	SD
Schell-Long Pines Ranch	Camp Crook	SD
SD School & Public Lands	Pierre	SD
SDSU Ext Entomologist	Brookings	SD
SDSU Plant & Science Div	Brookings	SD
Sierra Club	Sheridan	WY
Sierra Club Black Hills Group	Rapid City	SD
South Dakota Animal Damage Control (ADC)	Pierre	SD
SD. Dept Environment & Natural Resources	Pierre	SD
South Dakota Dept Game Fish & Parks	Rapid City	SD
South Dakota Dept Game Fish & Parks	Buffalo	SD
South Dakota Dept of Agriculture	Pierre	SD
South Dakota Dept of Transportation	Belle Fourche	SD
South Dakota Division of Plant Ind	Pierre	SD
South Dakota Division of Tourism	Pierre	SD
South Dakota Game Fish & Parks	Pierre	SD
South Dakota Game Fish & Parks	Lemmon	SD
South Dakota Game Fish & Parks	Pierre	SD
South Dakota State Representative	Rapid City	SD
South Dakota State Senator	Rapid City	SD
South Dakota State Senator	Rapid City	SD
Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe	Fort Trotter	ND
Standing Rock Sioux	Fort Yates	ND
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa	Belcourt	ND
The Ecology Center	Missoula	MT
USDA/APHIS/SD Plant Health	Pierre	SD
USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services	Pierre	SD
Western South Dakota Fur Harvesters	Rapid City	SD
Wilderness Society	Bozeman	MT
Wildlife Society	Rapid City	SD
Wyoming Sawmill Inc	Sheridan	WY

The project was posted on the Custer NF website and detailed information on the proposed action, including maps was available to the public. Legal notices advising the public of the availability of this information was published in several newspapers, including the Billings Gazette (Feb. 14, 2003), Nation Center News (Feb. 13, 2003), and the Ekalaka Eagle (Feb. 14, 2003). In addition, the complete EA was available on the Custer NF website as of February 14,

2003 and was mailed to approximately 25 interested respondents to the initial scoping letter. A total of 17 letters and comments were received in response to the initial scoping letter sent out on October 29, 2003. Seven (7) letters and comments were received in response to the completed Environmental Assessment document (available to the public on February 14, 2003). Local County Commissioners in both Harding County, South Dakota and Carter County, Montana were briefed at their meetings. A newspaper article about the project appeared in the Ekalaka Eagle, MT on January 24, 2003.

Interested Tribal governments were contacted about the project via letter and they did not indicate any concerns with the project. Both the South Dakota Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources submitted comments, and those comments were considered in the analysis. In addition, Harding County Commissioners submitted supportive comments. No other Tribal, Federal, or State Agency submitted comments on the project.

One organization (The Ecology Center) submitted a lengthy comment letter (27 pages) on the last day of the comment period for the EA. The Ecology Center had not responded during the earlier public scoping opportunity in November 2002. Their letter of March 17, 2003 raised many issues or concerns that had not been brought forward during the earlier scoping opportunity. I have considered the comments submitted by the Ecology Center and I find that the EA adequately addresses their arguments. I find that they did not provide any new or significant information that would change the analysis or result in additional alternatives or issues for consideration. Indeed, many of their comments were not specific to the Kraft Springs Project, but seemed in error and directed at some other project, or in the last page of the submitted letter, seemed to be comments directed to a proposal for rulemaking on CE's at the Forest Service Washington Office.

All of the public comments received were analyzed by the IDT Team and responded to in a table format to help us determine if there was a need for alternatives to the proposed action or whether we needed to analyze effects on certain resources. I have reviewed all the public comments and our responses to those comments and find that all concerns and issues have been addressed. The complete comment analysis ([Appendix C](#)) is attached to this Decision Notice.

I believe that we have done a good job in keeping our partners informed and involved with this project. I have considered all comments and opinions that have been received to date on this project in making my decision. I have addressed comments and concerns from the public under the previous section of this document ([IX-B: Consideration of the Issues](#)) and stated my opinions and position on those issues.

X. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations note that when an environmental assessment has been prepared, the responsible official shall review that document and determine whether the proposed action (selected alternative) may have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and if an environmental impact statement should be prepared (40CFR 1508.13).

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I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration Projects. I have also reviewed the project record for this analysis and the effects of the proposed action and alternatives as disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Implementing regulations for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. Significant, as used in NEPA required 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 1580.27):

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 evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27):

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effects will be beneficial.

Impacts associated with the project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. These impacts are within the range of those identified in the Forest Plan. The actions will not have significant impacts on other resources identified and described in Chapter 3. The effects of the decision to be made are not significant in the long and short-term (EA, Chapters 2 and 3). The analysis clearly shows that the beneficial effects and any economic return from the salvage of dead trees will not occur at the expense of other resources, (EA, Chapter 2, Section 2.6 Comparison of Alternatives).

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. The goals for the Desired Future Condition (DFC) are to achieve a “fire-safe” forested area to benefit firefighter and public safety, and provide protection to adjacent private property (EA, Chapter 1, Section 1.3.3 Desired Conditions Long-Term: Fire Hazard). This action and the range of activities is typical of management actions taken in the National Forests, including logging truck traffic and other activities that involve the harvest of timber or the cutting of trees.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, or ecologically critical areas such as historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, inventoried roadless areas, and wild and scenic rivers, (See EA Chapter 3, Section 3.14).4.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial with the majority of the interested and involved public (EA, Chapter 3). These activities are not likely to be highly controversial because they are proposed in a National Forest where timber harvest, salvage harvest, fuels reductions, prescribed fire and silviculture activities have occurred for the past several decades in an area compatible with those forest management activities. One organization (The Ecology Center, Missoula MT.) commented and expressed disagreement with all of the proposed actions. However, these proposed actions are the result of an Interdisciplinary Team process that used professional Forest Service foresters, silviculturists, fuels specialists, archaeologists, and biologists to develop the proposed actions, solicit comments from the public, develop issues and alternatives, and analyze the potential effects of those alternatives on the human environment and the natural resources of the area. These proposed actions, including the Selected Alternative are well founded in science, current research, and other available information that is relevant to the actions.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment is highly uncertain or involves unique or unknown risks.

Scoping did not identify highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks. The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or uncertain risks. The technical analyses conducted for determinations of the impacts to the resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment. The Forest Service has considerable experience with the types of salvage harvest and fuels reduction activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk, (See EA, Chapter 2, Section 2.6 Comparison of Alternatives).6.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This project is not setting a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The sites receiving treatments have been designated in the Forest Plan for grazing, wildlife, and long-term diversity (EA Chapter 1, Section 1.5.1.1 Forest Wide Management Direction and Management Areas). The management practices are compatible with the Forest Plan, and with the capabilities of the land (EA, Chapter 3).

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small components parts.

In the EA, Resource Sections 3.2 to 3.11, cumulative impacts are disclosed for each of the resource areas analyzed, and I find that cumulative impacts are not considered to be significant.

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8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, (See EA, Chapter 3, Section 3.8 and Chapter 3, Section 3.14.16).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. A Biological Assessment for T&E species was completed and no effects will occur on any T&E species, (EA, Chapter 2, Section 2.6, Chapter 3, Section 3.5, and Chapter 3, Section 3.14.21).

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (See EA, Section 3.14). The action is consistent with the Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, (See EA, Chapter 1, Section 1.5).

FONSI Summary

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the actions analyzed for the Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration Project is not a major federal action. In addition, the implementation of this project 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.

XI. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICIES

I have determined that my decision is consistent with all the laws, regulations, and agency policies related to this project. Chapter 3, Section 3.14 summarizes findings required by major environmental laws.

XII. IMPLEMENTATION

Except as noted in this section and unless appealed, implementation of the selected alternative may begin 45 days after publication of the Legal Notice for this decision in the Billings Gazette, the newspaper of record.

The Forest Supervisor is requesting an Emergency Exemption from Stay of Appeal to allow for removal of dead and dying trees on approximately 3000 acres of forestlands severely burned in the 2002 Kraft Springs fire. The request is made pursuant to (36 CFR 215.10(d)). Removal of this material is necessary to diminish the risk of loss of significant forest and rangeland resources resulting from a subsequent wildfire. Although the risk of wildfire is not imminent, immediate action allows the material to be removed through commercial timber harvest without cost to the American Public. If granted, the exemption would allow portions of project to be implemented five (5) days after approval of the exemption.

XIII. APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.7. As stated in 36 CFR 215.11, an appeal may be filed by any person or non-Federal organization (Federal Agencies may not appeal). A written Notice of Appeal must be in writing, must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Appeals must be filed at the address noted below within 45 days after the date that notice of this decision is published in the Billings Gazette, Billings, Montana.

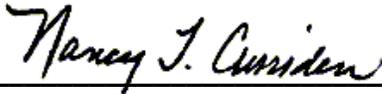
Appeals should be sent to:

**USDA, Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer
PO Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807**

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

Copies of the Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration EA are available for review at the Sioux Ranger District Office in Camp Crook, South Dakota, and at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Billings, Montana. In addition the complete EA, including project color maps is available on the Custer NF website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer/>. The supporting Project Record, which includes the internal scoping, public involvement, specialist reports, and road management plan, is available for review at the Sioux Ranger District Office.

For further information on this decision, contact George Foley, District Ranger, or John Clark, Project Leader, Sioux Ranger Station, Camp Crook, South Dakota (605-797-4432).



NANCY CURRIDEN
Forest Supervisor

March 28, 2003-----

DATE