



Date: July 13, 2021

Dear Objectors:

This letter is in response to your objections filed on the Bug Creek Environmental Assessment and draft Decision Notice released by Chris Dowling, Swan Lake District Ranger. First, I want to thank you for your continued interest in the work that occurs on the Flathead National Forest and I appreciate your involvement in our National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. I have reviewed your objection and have considered the information provided in the project record. My review of your objections was conducted in accordance with the administrative review procedures found at 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCESS

The regulations provide for a pre-decisional administrative review process of issues raised by objectors and suggested remedies that would resolve the objections. I considered issues including National Environmental Policy Act compliance, terrestrial wildlife, clean water, fisheries, vegetation and silviculture, noxious weeds, roads and travel management, fuels management, and climate change in my review.

OBJECTION RESOLUTION MEETING

I conducted a resolution meeting on June 16, 2021 to discuss possible remedies to objections. Four objectors attended the meeting: Tom Partin of American Forest Resource Council, Cameron Wohlschlegel of F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber, Marla Fox of WildEarth Guardians, and Willy Peck of Idaho Forest Group. In discussions with the responsible official as a result of the resolution meeting, Ranger Dowling has decided to limit the regeneration harvest openings to the forest plan maximum opening size (Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan, 2018, pp. 74-75). The responsible official will provide rationale regarding his decision in the decision notice.

RESPONSE TO OBJECTIONS

As specified at 36 CFR 218.11(b), this letter is my response to objections received to the environmental assessment, draft decision notice and, project record. Overall, the responsible official provided adequate analysis of issues raised and provided acceptable documentation of compliance with applicable law, regulation, and policy. However, I am providing the following instructions to help strengthen the rationale/documentation regarding compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act:

1. Clarify the spatial and temporal boundaries used to analyze cumulative effects and where applicable provide supporting rationale. Also ensure that recreational uses are appropriately addressed, if applicable, in cumulative effects analysis.
2. Further explain why alternatives suggested by objectors during comment opportunities were not analyzed in detail.



CONCLUSION

The responsible official may sign the decision notice for this project upon incorporation of these instructions. I have confirmed based on review of the EA and project record that no documented significant effects for activities would occur in this project as documented in the FONSI. The responsible official has provided adequate documentation and rationale for supporting this determination. After reviewing the FONSI and the project record I have confirmed the proposed action is compliant with the recently revised Forest Plan, and the effects analyzed in that programmatic environmental impact statement, and is comparable to effects documented in similar site-specific projects that have also been found to have no significant impacts within the Forest and Region. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required as requested by multiple objectors. My review constitutes the final administrative determination of the United States Department of Agriculture; no further review from any other Forest Service or United States Department of Agriculture official of my written response to your objection is available [36 CFR 218.11(b)(2)].

Sincerely,

Kurtis Steele
Forest Supervisor

cc: Chris Dowling, Michele Mavor, Michele Draggoo, Olga Troxel, Rita Bennett, Cody Hutchinson