



DECISION MEMO
BLACK MOUNTAIN BLOWDOWN
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
CARIBOU-TARGHEE NATIONAL FOREST
ASHTON/ISLAND PARK RANGER DISTRICT
BAKER DRAW/FISH CREEK
FREMONT COUNTY, IDAHO

Purpose and Need

A wind event or small microburst occurred on the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District sometime during the summer of 2018. Swaths of mature trees were blown over or broken by these winds. The Ashton/Island Park District Ranger proposes to harvest portions of these areas damaged by the wind event. Removal of mature blown over and broken trees will provide forest products such as sawtimber and firewood to the local economy. This project also presents an opportunity to reduce hazardous fuels within the area affected by the wind event along two main Forest Service Roads. Areas within 300 feet of Fish Creek and Baker Draw roads have been identified in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Proposed Action

The project area is located approximately 30 miles northeast of Ashton, ID at the junction of the Baker Draw Road (FS Road 161) and the Fish Creek Road (FS Road 082). The legal description for the project is: T.12N., R.45E., Sections 16, 17, 20, 21, and 29. Four (4) units, totaling 138 acres are proposed for tree removal to accomplish the salvage operation. Trees will be removed that were affected by the wind event in the units identified on Maps 1 and 2. The proposed action includes mechanically removing all down trees and broken off trees that have been damaged or affected by the wind. Trees affected by the wind event that would remain are those trees that are straight standing and are firmly anchored to the ground. Incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing may occur. Temporary roads may be necessary to facilitate the logging operations. If temporary roads are constructed they will not exceed half-a-mile for the entire project and will be restored to a natural state following timber sale operations.

The proposed action also includes creating a fuel break along the roads. Hazardous fuels in the form of surface fuels will be reduced by masticating (grinding) any down woody material greater than five tons per acre within 300 feet of the Fish Creek (FS Road 082) and Baker Draw (FS Road 161) roads within the treatment units. Approximately five tons per acre less than three inches in diameter will be left on the ground. This treatment will aid in reducing fire behavior and creating a fuel break along the roads where firefighters can safely deploy fire suppression tactics.

Decision and Rationale

I have decided to approve and implement the proposed action as stated above which includes removal of trees damaged by the wind event. I have also decided to approve masticating (grinding) down woody material within 300 feet of the Fish Creek and Baker Draw Roads within the treatment units. This decision implements the purpose and need of providing material to the local forest product market while accomplishing the removal of fuels to modify fire behavior along this major Forest road system.

The decision complies with the 1997 Targhee Revised Forest Plan (RFP) as stated in the Resource Specialists' reports.

In reaching my decision, I considered public input, as well as input from Forest Service resource specialists who analyzed the proposal. No significant issues were identified that could not be mitigated, and all practical means have been employed to avoid and/or minimize environmental impact.

My decision includes the implementation of Best Management Practices and Management Requirements, as defined below, which will minimize impacts to resources.

The project area has been reviewed by Forest Service specialists for impacts to vegetation, cultural resources, hydrology, wildlife, soils and fuels.

Management Requirements & Best Management Practices

To eliminate, or minimize potential resource impacts (e.g., vegetation, cultural resources, hydrology, wildlife and soils), this decision incorporates pertinent Management Requirements and Best Management Practices (BMPs). The following Management Requirements and BMPs are intended to reduce and/or avoid potential impacts associated with approved projects. They are required as part of this decision.

Vegetation

- Tree removal would occur from July 1st (for the protection of migratory bird breeding activities) until site conditions are unfavorable to log or until December 15th whichever comes first.
- There will be NO piling or burning of slash or down woody material within the units. Excess material at the landings will be piled and burned.
- All mature live five-needle pines would be avoided during implementation.
- Five to ten tons per acre of down woody material greater than three inches in diameter would be left throughout the treatment units; except in the fuel break where no more than five tons per acre would remain following mastication treatment.
- Noxious weeds where they exist would be treated (sprayed with the appropriate chemical) every year for five years following harvest.

Cultural Resources

- No cultural resources were identified within the project area. If cultural resources are found, all operations will cease and the Forest Archeologist would be contacted to determine the next steps to protect cultural resources.

Hydrology

- No roads or skid trails would be located along the length of an ephemeral draw.
- Avoid ephemeral draws where practical.
- Temporary access roads shall be held to a minimum not to exceed a total of 0.5 miles.

Wildlife

- Project activities should be concentrated in space and be of as short a duration as is practical.
- Temporary roads would be effectively closed to all users within one year of project completion.
- Maintain a minimum 7000-acre security area adjacent to this timber sale. No timber harvesting or similar type of disturbance activity would occur within the security area during the time the security area is designated.
- Maintain greater than 70 percent of the forested acres in vegetation that provides security cover for the grizzly bear and maintain greater than 20 percent thermal cover in the analysis area.
- Leave at least two pieces per acre of dead and down woody material over 12 inches in diameter in all treatment units where available.
- Snag habitat would be maintained at 60 percent biological potential. Leave all standing dead trees within treatment units including trees affected by the wind event if the roots of that tree remain firmly rooted in the ground.
- Boreal Owl, Great Gray Owl, and Northern Goshawk surveys would occur within and adjacent to the project area. If an active nest is found all RFP management direction for these raptors would be applied to the treatment units.
- All Forest Service employees and contractors would abide by the food storage order. Emergency cessation or modification of activities will occur when those activities are in conflict with grizzly bear management activities.

Soils

- Install effective barriers to discourage illegal motorized use of skid trails and/or temporary roads.
- Maintain fine organic matter over at least 50 percent of the area and a minimum of five tons/acre of down woody material greater than three inches.
- Avoid timber operations if soil is wet. Rutting on temporary roads and skid trails would not exceed six inches in depth over 10 percent of the designated skid trail/temporary road system.
- Make sure all logging equipment is washed prior to entry onto National Forest Land to prevent distribution of noxious weed seeds.
- Locate log landings in dry upland areas.
- All four treatment units would be harvested using ground based logging equipment and skid trails would be designated to minimize compaction.
- Use existing roads where possible for temporary roads and skid trails.
- Cover disturbed areas with large amounts of slash or coarse woody debris (minimum of 75 percent cover).
- Break up the compaction of temp roads and landings.
- In the fuel break where mastication occurs, provide a variation of chip size and depth not to exceed three inches.
- During mastication operations, minimize the amount of passes over the area and minimize the turning of the masticator to reduce top soil displacement.

Public Involvement

A scoping letter describing the proposal for Black Mountain Blowdown was released for comment February 6, 2019 to interested or affected individuals and agencies. A legal notice was posted in the Post Register on February 8, 2019. Seven (7) letters/emails were received. Comments received during scoping are addressed in Management Requirements, BMPs, the proposed action, or resource specialists' reports. Comments were:

- Use a mulcher or spreader for fine fuels instead of reducing slash by fire. See Proposed Action.
- Impacts on groomed snowmobile trails (Baker Draw and Fish Creek Roads) after December 15th. See BMPs.
- Cavity nesting habitat and the snag habitat will comply with the Revised Forest Plan direction for Management Area 5.3.5 – Grizzly Bear Habitat. See BMPs
- Forest Raptors such as Great Gray Owls, Boreal Owls, and Goshawks. See BMPs

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of action is identified in agency procedures as 36 CFR 220.6(e)(13): *Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.* This category of action is applicable because the trees are dead or dying as a result of being blown over and their roots being severed from the ground. The treatment acreage is 138 acres. Three or four small temporary roads may be built to reduce skid distance but the total construction will be less than ½ mile.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures (1909.15, 31.2) that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species** – The Biological Assessment (BA) determined effects to Grizzly Bear, Canada Lynx and Wolverine. The determination for Canada Lynx is May affect, not likely to adversely affect; the determination for the Wolverine is No effect; and the determination for Grizzly Bear is May affect, not likely to adversely affect.

All management direction in the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction will be met for Canada Lynx. The Project Area is located in a secondary lynx area. Lynx may travel through this area but the project should not disturb traveling lynx. The Project does not remove any lynx habitat.

All management direction in the Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the RFP will be met.

A letter dated May 1, 2019 from US Fish and Wildlife concurred with the findings in the BA.

- **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds**

The project area is not within a designated municipal watershed. There are no wetlands or intermittent or perennial streams in the project area. There are three ephemeral draws that have very small floodplains. The project is designed to protect these small floodplains. No significant effects are expected and no extraordinary circumstances related to hydrology are anticipated. (Higginson, Hydrology Report, January 2019, p. 5).

- **Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas**

This project area is not located within or adjacent to designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, or natural recreation areas.

- **Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas**

This project area is not located in an inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.

- **Research Natural Areas**

This project is not located within any Research Natural Area.

- **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites**

The Forest Archaeologist found no cultural resources within the project area and the project will have no effect on any historic properties. Idaho SHPO concurred with the determination on February 14th, 2019 (Plager, Determination of Significance and Effect, February, 2019). Should anything of cultural significance be encountered during the course of the project, the Forest Archaeologist will be notified immediately and all ground disturbing activities will cease in that area until the Forest Archaeologist can take appropriate action in consultation with Idaho SHPO.

- **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas**

No archaeological sites or historic properties or areas were found during the cultural resource survey. Idaho SHPO concurred with these findings.

- **Forest Service Sensitive Species**

The Biological Evaluation determined effects to Forest Service Sensitive Species. The determination in the BE is: No impact to sensitive species except the Northern Goshawk which is a may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species.

A concern arose during scoping about bats and the effects of the proposed action on their habitat. Seven bat species may be in the project area and an evaluation of foraging and roosting habitat of the seven species demonstrates that roosts of hoary bat and long-legged Myotis may be affected. Long-legged Myotis is considered relatively common, while hoary bats are suffering population declines from wind turbines during migration.

The wildlife specialist report demonstrates that roosts of hoary bat and long-legged Myotis may be affected during the logging operation. Project design mitigates effects to roosts because live trees and snags would be removed only in certain circumstances. More areas outside the project area were also blown down providing additional habitat for these two species. The other 5 bats species expected to be in the project area will not be affected by the project.

- **Discharge of dredged or fill material into the waters of the US including wetlands.**

There are no wetlands or waters associated with this project except two ephemeral draws. See BMP's

- **Maintain at least 20 percent of Old Growth and Late Seral in the affected watersheds.**

The vegetation specialist report contains this analysis. Warm River Principal Watershed 12 has 20.1 percent of the forested acres classified as Late Seral and Old Growth within 300 acre blocks. This proposal would remove trees affected by the wind event within 27 acres of classified old growth/late seral. After the treatments, the Warm River Principal Watershed 12 would remain at 20.1 percent of Forested Acres of Late Seral and Old Growth within 300 acre blocks. This condition was not due to management actions but due to a natural wind event.

- **Grizzly Bear Management – Will there be 70 percent hiding cover and activity past September 15th?**

As analyzed in the Biological Assessment (BA) project activities could occur after September 15th and the bears have very little reason to be drawn to this area during that time because high quality foods such as whitebark pine seed or other food sources are not found in this area. The vegetation alteration associated with this project does not impact any special grizzly bear habitats, such as denning areas, areas with major food resources, or other important foraging areas. After vegetation alteration, the habitat may not be of lesser or greater value to grizzly bears. For example, cover that may function for security would be removed, but more open areas may produce more understory grasses and shrubs for forage resources. Most of the project area (95 percent) is within existing non-secure habitat adjacent to open motorized roads, so may not be habitats used by grizzly bears currently. Further, the project area is in an area of relatively low density of grizzly bear radio locations. Lastly, there is considerable alternate habitat available for grizzly bears since the project action area is only 138 acres.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below.

National Environmental Policy Act: This decision is in compliance with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500 - 1508) for implementing NEPA.

National Forest Management Act: This act guides development and revision of National Forest Land Management Plans. The proposed action is consistent with the NFMA and the 1997 Revised Targhee Forest Plan. This project incorporates all applicable Forest Plan forest-wide and management area prescriptions standards and guidelines as they apply to the project area and comply with Forest Plan goals and objectives. This includes additional direction contained in all amendments. All required interagency review and coordination has been accomplished (BA, BE, Specialist Reports).

Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Standards: No adverse impacts are expected with the implementation of the proposed action. The proposed action would be in compliance with applicable hydrology related standards and guidelines from the Revised Forest Plan. This decision incorporates Best Management Practices to ensure protection of soil and water resources (Hydrology Report and Soils Report, Project Record).

Wetlands Executive Order 11990: This order requires the Forest Service to take action to minimize destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands to preserve and enhance the natural beneficial values of wetlands. In compliance with this order, Forest Service directives require that an analysis be completed to determine whether adverse impacts would result. Based on the analysis contained within the project record, no adverse impacts to wetlands are expected with the implementation of the proposed action.

Floodplains Executive Order 11988: This order requires the Forest Service to take action to (1) minimize adverse impacts associated with occupancy and modification of floodplains and reduce risks of flood loss, (2) minimize adverse impacts of floods on human safety, health and welfare, and (3) restores and preserves the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains. The proposed action complies with this executive order by maintaining floodplain integrity. Based on the analysis contained within the project record, no adverse impacts to floodplains are expected with the implementation of the Proposed Action.

Executive Order 12898, "Environmental Justice": The selected Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, and Departmental Regulation 5600-2 directs federal agencies to integrate environmental justice considerations into federal programs and activities. Environmental justice means that, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, all populations are provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered on, are allowed to share in the benefits of, are not excluded from, and are not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by, governmental programs and activities affecting human health or the environment. Implementation of any of these alternatives will be consistent with this Order and will not have a discernible effect on minorities, American Indians, women or the civil rights of any United States citizen. Nor will it have a disproportionate adverse impact on minorities or low-income individuals. No civil liberties will be affected. Public involvement and comment was sought and incorporated into this document. The Forest Service has considered all public input from individuals or groups regardless of age, race, income status, gender, or other social/economic characteristics. Executive Order 12898 also directs agencies to consider patterns of subsistence hunting and fishing when an agency action may affect fish or wildlife. The decision would not alter opportunities for subsistence hunting by Native American tribes. Native American tribes holding treaty rights for hunting and fishing on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest were provided an opportunity to comment on the proposal (Tribal Consultation Meeting Notes, Project Record). Based on experience with similar projects on the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District, none of the alternatives would substantially affect minority low-income individuals, women or civil rights.

National Historic Preservation Act: A cultural resource review has been completed in the areas of proposed ground disturbance; it was determined and concurred upon by the State Historic Preservation Office that the proposed action would have no effect on any known historic properties and no effects to National Register eligible or listed heritage resources will occur (see Cultural Resource Report).

American Indian Religious Freedom Act and Grave Protection and Repatriation Act: The project was discussed with Shoshone-Bannock Tribes' staff in a letter dated February 6th, 2019 to Chairman Nathan Small as part of on-going consultation for various district activities. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes' staff did not voice objections to the proposed action at that time.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act: Because of the mitigation measure to start after July 1st, no impacts to applicable species are expected from the proposed action. The selected alternative was found to be in compliance with direction to protect migratory birds.

Endangered Species Act: This decision is consistent with the Endangered Species Act. A "May affect, not likely to adversely affect for the Canada Lynx; May affect, not likely to adversely affect the Grizzly Bear; and No effect for the Wolverine" determination was made for each listed species anticipated to be, or have habitat within, the analysis area (BA/BE).

Regional Forester's Sensitive Species: The evaluations prepared for this project resulted in a determination of "No impact to sensitive species except the Northern Goshawk which is a May impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species" was made for all sensitive species (Wildlife Specialist Report).

Other Laws and Regulations: This action is consistent with all other Federal, State, and/or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environmental and cultural resources.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (OBJECTION) OPPORTUNITIES

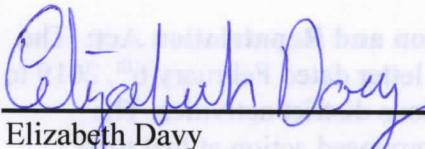
Pursuant to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Pub. L. No. 113-76) and the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) (Pub. L. No. 113-79), this decision is not subject to pre-decisional administrative review or administrative appeal. Further, it is not subject to legal notice and comment under the pre-decisional administrative review process (36 CFR 218.23).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project will be implemented after July 1, 2019.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Becky Nedrow, Forester, PO Box 858, 46 Highway 20, Ashton, ID 83420, phone (208) 652-1238.


Elizabeth Davy
Ashton/Island Park District Ranger

5-20-2019

Date

REFERENCES

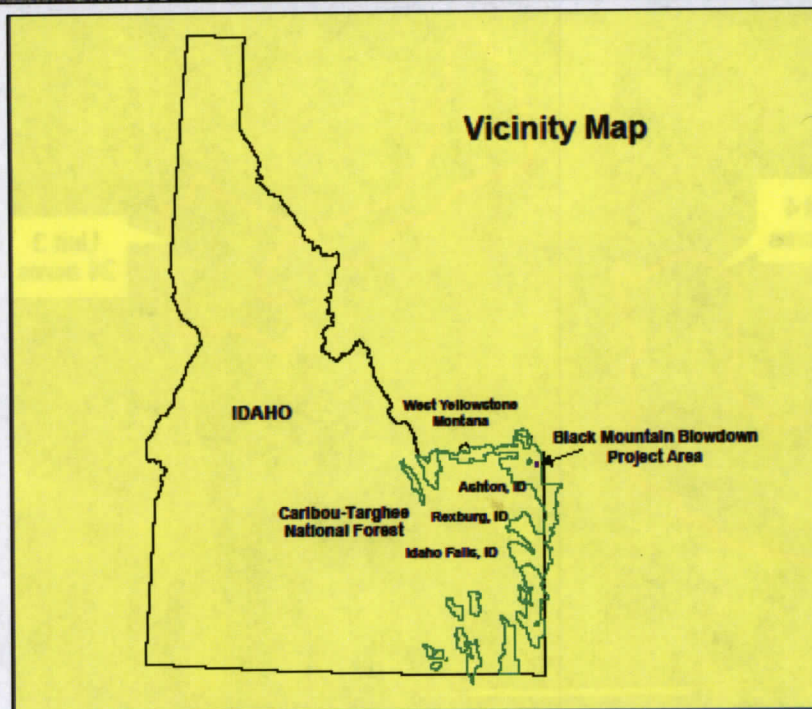
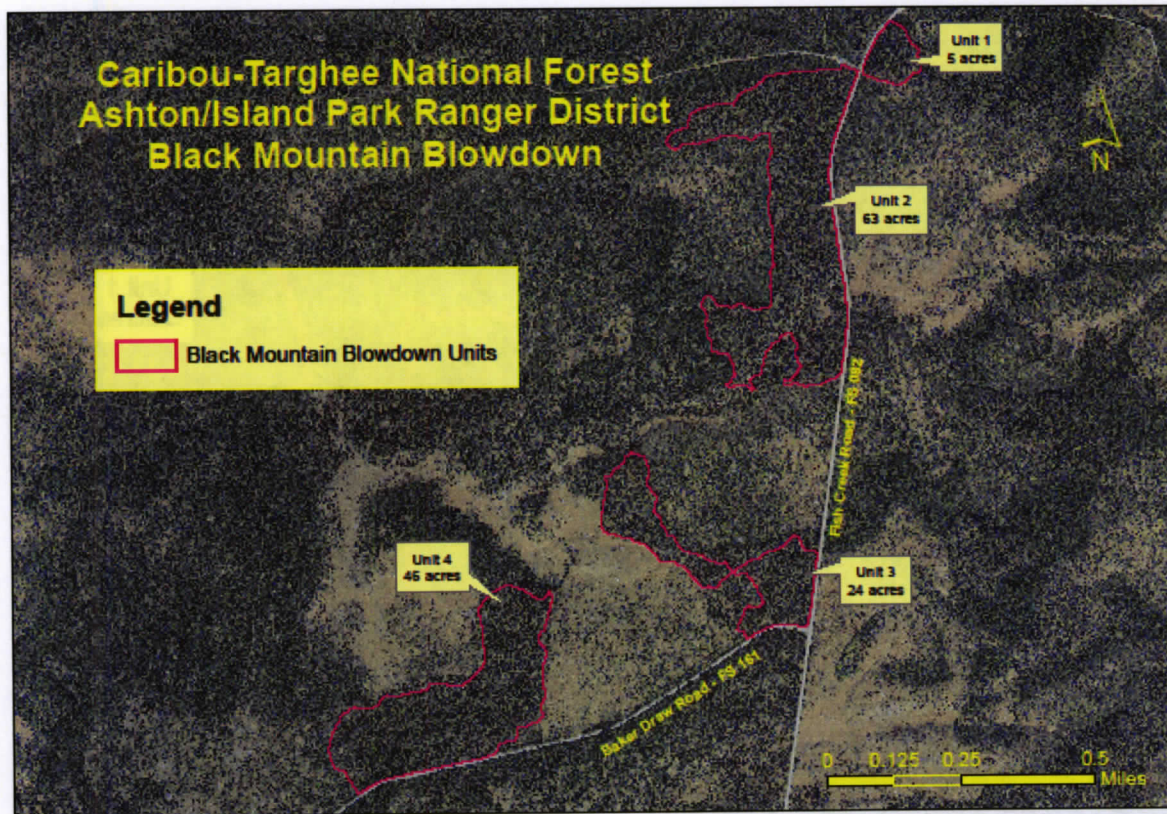
- Derusseau, S. (January 2019). *Biological Assessment for Canada Lynx, Grizzly Bear and Wolverine*.
Derusseau, S. (January 2019). *Biological Evaluation of Forest Sensitive Species*.
Higginson, B. (January 2019). *Hydrology Specialist Report*
Lehman, R. (January 2019). *Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation TES Species*
Marr, D. (January 2019). *Soil Specialist Report*
Plager, S. (February 2019). *Determination of Significance and Effect*
Targhee National Forest. 1997. *1997 Revised Forest Plan Targhee National Forest*.
Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Idaho Falls, Idaho.

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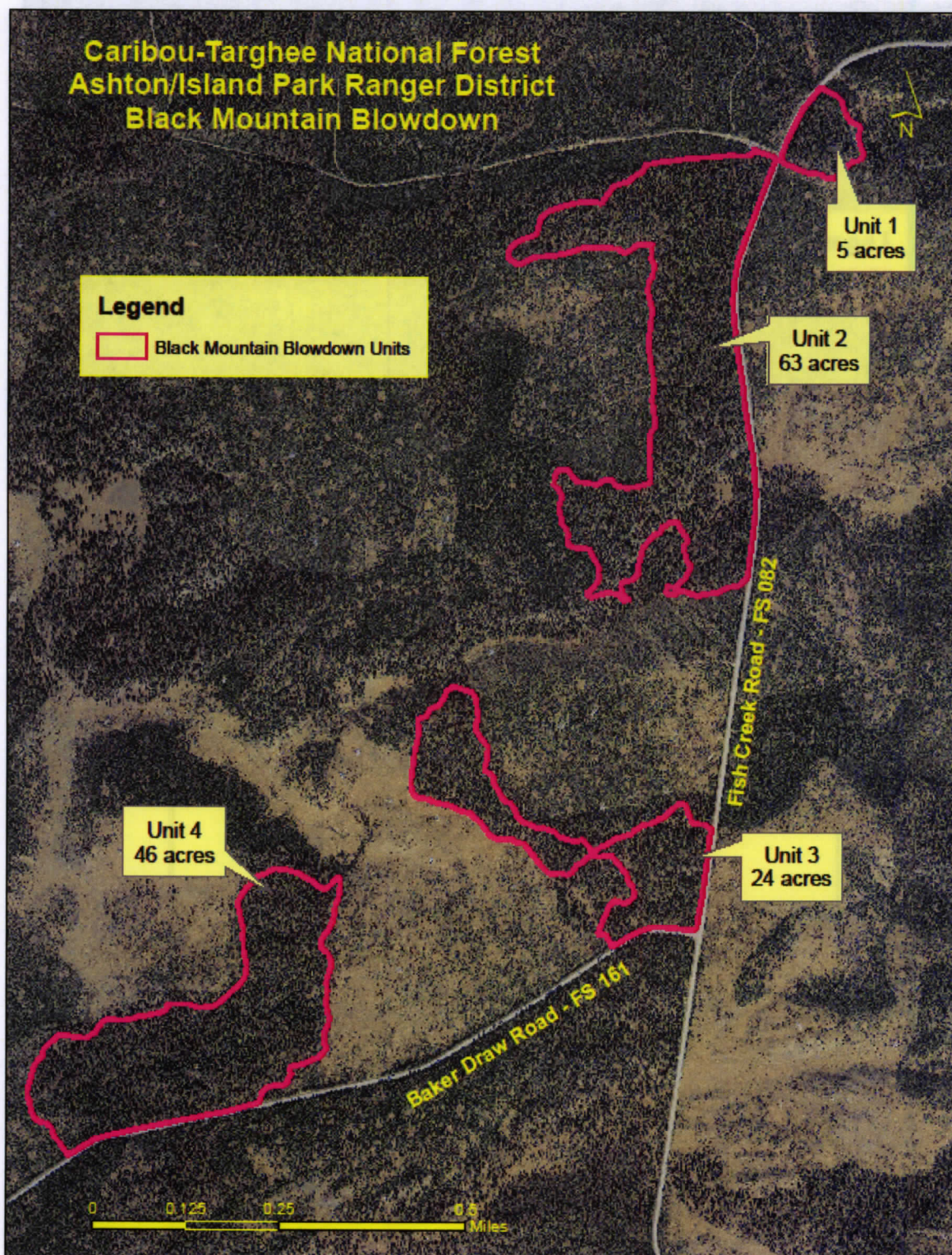
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APPENDIX A: MAP 1 - Black Mountain Blowdown Vicinity Map with Project Area



Map 2 – Black Mountain Blowdown Project Area



APPENDIX B



Unit 1 – Looking Northeast from the Fish Creek Road



Unit 2 – Looking West from the Fish Creek Road



Unit 3 – Typical wind thrown trees in Units 3 and 4. The trees are more scattered. There are no big areas of total blowdown.

