

Squeezer Meadow Multiple Timber Sale Project: Newsletter #1



Introduction

In this newsletter, we would like to highlight our project objectives, update you on project development since the scoping period, introduce the Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) and decision maker, summarize issues that were identified during the scoping period, and inform you of further opportunities to comment on the project.

Project Development

The primary objectives of this project are to:

- promote biodiversity by moving forest stands toward historic covertime conditions and species composition.
- improve forest health and productivity by addressing insect and disease issues.
- generate revenue to the Common Schools trust for funding public education and to benefit local economies.
- contribute sufficient volume towards DNRC’s annual sustained yield target of 60 million board feet (MMbf) as required by state law (77-5-221 through 223, MCA) while incorporating and meeting important ecological commitments.
- develop and improve the transportation system and infrastructure for long-term management, fire suppression, and public access.
- improve water quality by removing and rehabilitating sediment point sources and meet *Best Management Practices* (BMPs) on all project roads, including haul routes to Highway 83.
- reduce fuel loads and wildfire hazards by decreasing ground and ladder fuels.

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ID Team

Under the guidance of the *Montana Environmental Policy Act* (MEPA, MCA 75-1-201), DNRC uses an interdisciplinary approach when planning timber sale projects and analyzing potential effects of these projects on natural and human environments. During the initial stages of project development, DNRC formed the Squeezer Meadow ID Team. The ID Team consists of several resource specialists trained in various disciplines that are closely related to the project under consideration. The ID Team assists with determining relevant issues, developing project alternatives, assessing both the existing environment that may be affected by the project and the potential impacts of each alternative, and recommending measures to avoid or mitigate adverse impacts of the proposed alternatives.

Public Scoping

Beginning April 12th, 2022, DNRC conducted a 30-day initial scoping process for the Squeezer Meadow Multiple Timber Sale Project. We received input by letter, email, and/or phone contact from 23 individuals, 5 organizations, and 3 government agencies.

*Please see page 11 for further opportunity to get involved with the project.

Issue Development

After reviewing the responses from the public scoping period and concerns identified internally by DNRC specialists, the ID Team identified 67 issues and comments. The ID team reviewed the comments and internal issues to develop formal issue statements that will guide alternative development and the analysis for each resource. In all, 53 formal issue statements were developed, which will be addressed in the DEIS.

Vegetation

The proposed activities may affect forest cover types through tree species removal and subsequent changes in species composition of treated stands.

The proposed activities may affect stand age classes through tree removal.

The proposed activities may affect forest old-growth amounts and quality through tree removal.

The proposed activities may affect forest patch size and shape on the landscape through tree removal.

The proposed activities may increase forest fragmentation on the landscape through tree removal.

Harvesting activities may affect forest stand vigor through tree removal.

The proposed activities may affect forest stand structure through tree removal.

The proposed activities may affect forest crown cover through tree removal.

The proposed activities may affect forest insect and disease levels through tree removal (both suppressed/stressed and infested/infected).

The proposed activities may affect forest fuels and fire behavior through tree removal.

Harvest activities may affect sensitive plant populations through ground disturbance or influence their abundance due to changes in water yield or nutrient levels.

Harvest activities may increase the abundance and spread of noxious weeds through ground disturbance and road use.

Fisheries, Watershed, and Hydrology

The proposed activities have the potential to increase water yield, which in turn, may affect erosive power, in-stream sediment production, and stream-channel stability.

The proposed activities may increase sediment delivery into streams/lakes and affect water quality.

The proposed activities may adversely affect water quality by reducing shade and increasing stream temperature.

The proposed activities may affect fish populations' presence and genetics.

The proposed activities may affect fish habitat by modifying stream connectivity.

The proposed activities may affect fish habitat by modifying flow regime, which may impact sediment delivery and channel form and function.

The proposed activities may affect fish habitat by modifying riparian function including; large woody debris, stream shading, and stream temperature.

The proposed activities may affect fish habitat by modifying stream nutrients.

Wildlife

The proposed activities could result in changes in the distribution of different cover types on the landscape which could affect wildlife.

The proposed activities could alter the representation of stand age classes on the landscape which could affect habitat for wildlife.

The proposed activities could affect wildlife species associated with old-growth forests by reducing the acreage of available habitat and increasing fragmentation.

The proposed activities could result in disturbance or alteration of forested corridors and connectivity, which could inhibit wildlife movements.

The proposed activities could reduce forested cover which could adversely affect habitat linkage for wildlife.

The proposed activities could result in disturbance or alteration of forested corridors and connectivity, which could inhibit wildlife movements.

The proposed activities could reduce landscape connectivity and the availability of suitable Canada lynx habitat, reducing the capacity of the area to support Canada lynx.

The proposed activities could reduce bald eagle nesting and perching habitats and/or disturb nesting bald eagles

The proposed activities could result in disturbance of wolves at denning or rendezvous sites, which could lead to pup abandonment and/or increased risk of mortality.

The proposed activities could result in reduction of hiding cover important for grizzly bears, which could result in: 1) increased displacement of grizzly bears, 2) avoidance of otherwise suitable habitat, and or 3) increased risk of bear-human conflicts.

The proposed activities could result in an increase in density of open roads, which could result in increased displacement of grizzly bears and increased risk of bear-human conflicts.

The proposed activities could result in a decrease in secure areas for grizzly bears, which could result in increased displacement of grizzly bears and increased risk of bear-human conflicts.

The proposed activities could reduce the availability and connectivity of suitable fisher habitat and increase human access, which could reduce habitat suitability and increase trapping mortality risk.

The proposed activities could alter the structure of flammulated owl preferred habitat types, which could reduce habitat suitability for flammulated owls.

The proposed activities could result in increased human disturbance that could alter wolverine use of suitable habitat.

The proposed activities could reduce tree density and alter the structure of mature forest stands, which could reduce habitat suitability for pileated woodpeckers.

The proposed activities could remove forest cover on important winter ranges, which could lower their capacity to support big game.

The proposed activities could remove elk security cover, which could affect hunter opportunity and the quality of recreational hunting in the local area.

Geology and Soils

The proposed activities have the potential to compact and displace surface soils which reduces hydrologic function, macro-porosity, and soil function.

The proposed activities have the potential to increase erosion of productive surface soils off-site.

The proposed activities may cumulatively affect long term soil productivity.

The proposed activities have the potential to increase slope instability through increased water yields, road surface drainage concentration, and exceedance of resisting forces.

The proposed activities may remove large volumes of both coarse and fine woody material through timber harvest and may reduce the amount of organic matter and nutrients available for nutrient cycling possibly affecting the long-term productivity of the site.

Air Quality

The proposed activities may adversely affect local air quality through dust produced from harvest activities, road building and maintenance, and hauling.

The proposed activities may adversely affect local air quality through smoke produced from burning slash piles and other prescribed burning.

Recreation

The proposed activities may affect public motorized use, non-motorized uses, and hunting.

The proposed activities may affect the revenue generated by recreational uses.

Aesthetics

The proposed activities may adversely affect local viewsheds and scenic vistas.

The proposed activities may increase local noise levels.

Economics

The proposed activities may have economic impacts associated with generating revenue for the trust beneficiaries.

The proposed activities may have economic impacts associated with creating timber-related employment and stimulating the local economy.

The proposed activities may have economic impacts associated with non-market issues within the area.

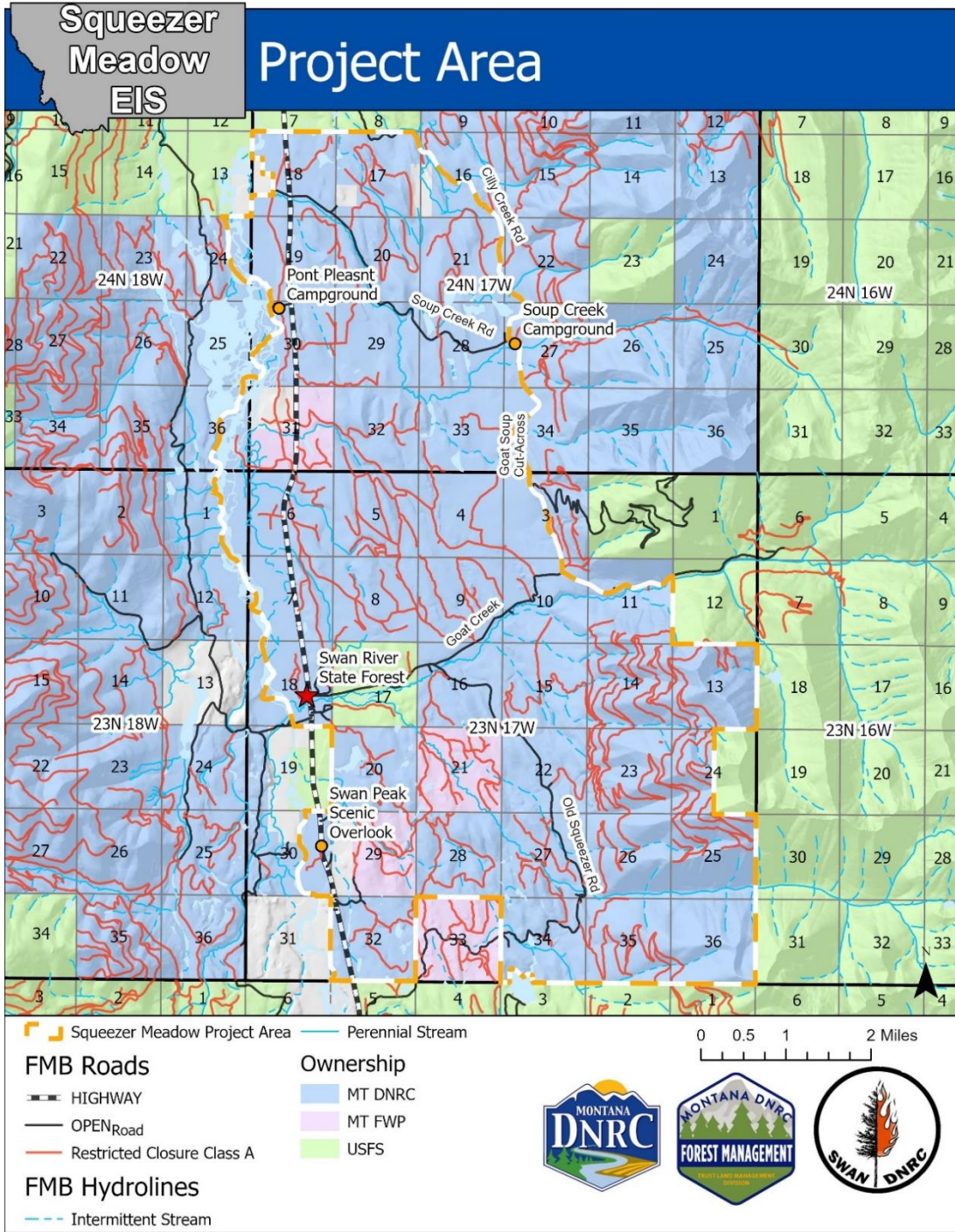
Cultural Resources

The proposed activities may affect local cultural resources.

Field Reconnaissance

The ID Team has been visiting the project area this summer to accurately assess the condition of resources that may be affected by the proposed project. Such assessments are critical in further identifying and describing potential issues, developing a range of reasonable alternatives, describing potential environmental consequences on the affected resources, and developing appropriate measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts of the proposed action. The types of information collected during field evaluations include, but are not limited to:

- Assessing presence or absence of fish species in streams in the project area.
- Assessing wildlife habitat conditions.
- Assessing the presence of old-growth forest.
- Identifying historic skid trails in previous harvest units to assess cumulative impacts on the soils resource.
- Ground-truthing the transportation plan and harvesting systems, and identifying potential roads to construct, improve, and reclaim.
- Identifying routes of connectivity important to various terrestrial species in the project area.
- Assessing insect and disease risks to stands in the project area.
- Assessing silvicultural needs for individual stands and recommending silvicultural prescriptions.
- Identifying sediment-point sources that are affecting, or could affect, water quality in the project area.



- Located in HCP Grizzly Bear Sub Zone #2 and #3
- Covers approximately 25,436 Acres
- Project area located in and adjacent to the Cilly Creek, Soup Creek, Napa Creek, Goat Creek and Squeezer Creek Drainages.

Proposed Project Timeline

The following dates display the Squeezer Meadow Multiple Timber Sale Project Timeline. Although the ID Team has specified times and methods for public input, input is not limited to these times; the ID Team accepts comments throughout the development of the project.

Squeezer Meadow Multiple Timber Sale Project Timeline

- ID Team Established – January 2022
- Public Scoping – April 12th to May 12th, 2022
- Issue Development – Spring 2022 (and ongoing)
- Newsletter #1 – July 2022
- Public Field Tour – October 2022 (tentative)
- Alternatives Developed – Fall 2022
- Newsletter #2 – Fall 2022
- Environmental Analysis and writing draft EIS – Fall 2022 and Spring 2023
- Draft EIS Internal Review – Summer 2023
- Draft EIS Public Review – Fall 2023
- Final EIS Published – Spring 2024
- Record of Decision – Spring 2024

Where Are We Now?

At this stage of development, the resource specialists are working on field reconnaissance in the project area and the project leader is working to identify potential harvest units. Information collected from the field will be compiled and reviewed by the ID team. Issues developed from internal and public comments and information collected from field reconnaissance will enable the ID team to begin developing alternatives.

Alternatives will include a full description of a no-action alternative (current conditions) and a reasonable range of action alternatives. The no-action alternative will serve as a baseline against which the action alternatives will be compared. Prescriptions for stands, transportation systems, and mitigation measures will be developed by the ID Team for each action alternative.

Public Field Tour & Opportunities for Public Input

The ID Team would like to gauge the amount of interest in a public field tour. Tentatively the date has been scheduled for early October 2022. If you are interested in attending a field tour, please notify us via the comment form and contact information on page 11. If you have a specific concern that you would like to see covered on the tour, please indicate that as well. If you did not comment during the initial scoping period and have comments or issues that differ from those listed under *Issue Development* (page 2), you may send them to us using the comment form on page 11.

What's Next?

PUBLIC FIELD TOUR - Depending on interest, a public field tour will be held in early October 2022.

NEWSLETTER #2 – In the Fall of 2022, the ID Team will distribute another newsletter detailing the alternatives developed for this project.

DEIS – The ID Team anticipates that the DEIS will be available for public review during the Fall of 2023. During this time, interested individuals will have 30 days to review and submit comments on the DEIS.

The ID team thanks you for your interest in our project and we look forward to hearing from you on future projects.



Comment Form and Contact Information Page:

If you would like future mailings regarding this project or a copy of this environmental document or its summary, and have not previously contacted us, please send this page with your name, mailing address, and comments to the below address.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Send me a paper copy of the environmental document

Send me an electronic copy of the environmental document

Send me a copy of the summary

I am interested in attending a field tour of the project area

Remove my name from the mailing list

Notes/Comments:

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