

## Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis project

### Background

In August 2017, a few citizens in Albany County first heard about a proposed project on the Medicine Bow National Forest, euphemistically titled the Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis project. The project as proposed in August included "vegetation treatments" over the next 10 to 15 years on 844,000 acres of the national forest in the Snowy Range and Sierra Madre, including 561,000 (51.2%) acres made available for "mechanical treatment" (i.e., logging).

With no public notice in Laramie, few citizens knew about the proposal or were able to submit comments during the initial public comment period. Nevertheless, enough people did contact the Forest Service that they have revised the proposal so it now calls for 613,000 acres available for "treatment", without specifying how much of that acreage would be available for logging. Because of the mileage of roads for logging and the recent *Boomerang* article, it looks to be 350,000 acres, one third of the forest. According to the Forest Service's press release:

“This large-scale analysis will provide the environmental foundation for 10-15 years’ worth of projects in one decision. It is a different kind of analysis which is based on rapidly changing environmental conditions and is responsive to actual on-the-ground conditions.”

As far as we can tell the project still calls for 600 miles of temporary roads. This arrangement leaves the Forest Service with free rein to construct 600 miles of roads but they don't know where. While the roads are supposed to be temporary, the reality is that it is extremely difficult for the agency to manage the existing road system and prevent illegal use of supposedly closed roads, and construction of hundreds of miles of new roads will dramatically exacerbate the problem. The Bow is a relatively small National Forest. Six hundred miles is from Laramie, 60 miles into Iowa.

Recreational activities in the Snowy Range already contribute significantly to the economy of Albany and Carbon County, and that will continue to grow if we maintain wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities on the forest. On average, more than 1,000 cars daily pass the Forest Service's Visitor Center just west of Centennial, headed into the Snowies for a variety of activities, including hikers, family campers, snowmobilers, skiers, and hunters.

Wide scale commercial logging is not compatible with these recreational uses. Small, targeted logging projects are important for the local economy in Saratoga and Encampment, and it should be permitted and managed at a long-term sustainable level. Logging should not, however, be permitted at a scale that impacts recreational uses and important wildlife habitat in either the Snowy Range or the Sierra Madre.

What can the public do?

First and foremost, participate!

The Forest Service is developing a draft Environmental Impact Statement, which they expect to release in May. When the draft plan is released, there will be another formal public comment period.

In the meantime, the Forest Service will hold one or more public open houses, so they can update concerned citizens about the project as the plan is being developed. While this is not a formal public comment period, there is great value in attending these meetings and telling the Forest Service what concerns you have about the proposal, what you value about the Medicine Bow National Forest, and how you want the Forest Service to manage these public lands for the future. Some points you may wish to consider in your comments could include:

- Because the public has largely been shut out of the process until now, the Forest Service should listen to the local community, withdraw the current proposal, and (if they wish), start over with a new proposal that includes full public participation.
- The scenic, wildlife, and recreational values of the Snowy Range and Sierra Madre far outweigh large-scale commercial logging values or benefits. Commercial logging should be demonstrably sustainable and not destructive of other forest values.
- Claiming that logging will reduce fire risk or improve forest ecological function following bark beetle infestations is not supported by current scientific research.
- Even as it is evolving, the proposed project is still far too large. Putting off detailed environmental evaluation for specific treatments, including logging, is not acceptable. We need to know up front what is being proposed, specifically where it is being proposed to occur, and what the environmental impacts would be.

A recent Forest Service News Release says, “Public input and feedback is welcomed at any stage of this and any other projects.” The contact person is Melissa Martin, Project Team Leader, Medicine Bow National Forest, 2468 Jackson, Laramie, WY 82070, [mmmartin@fs.fed.us](mailto:mmmartin@fs.fed.us), (307) 745-2371