



File Code: 2400

Date:

INVITATION FOR COMMENTS

MILL CREEK BLOWDOWN

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Teton Basin Ranger District of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest (CTNF) is seeking comments on a proposal to salvage timber from a blowdown wind event that occurred mid-summer of 2023. It resulted in a number of lodgepole pine and Engelmann spruce being broken and/or uprooted within an approximate 11 acre area. The project is located on the Teton Basin Ranger District, east of Driggs, ID in T44N, R118.3W, Sec. 6 Boise Meridian, in Teton County Wyoming. Access to the Blowdown is on an existing non-recognized old road that continues past the end of where the 046 Road ends.

The Purpose and Need for this proposal is discussed below, followed by a detailed description of the Proposed Action.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project would be to remove all fallen and uprooted trees. Prior to the blowdown, the existing stand was continuous, and even aged. Removal of the debris might promote regeneration and create a pocket of younger growth. As the trees currently lay, they are prime bark beetle attractants, as bark beetles tend to breed in fresh windthrown logs. By removing the timber, it might prevent a future beetle outbreak within the surrounding timber stand. Avoiding a beetle outbreak is especially crucial in this particular area, because of the high recreational use it attains, brought in by both Grand Targhee Ski Resort and Teton Canyon. Additionally, removal of the mature blown over and broken trees would provide forest products such as sawtimber and firewood to the local economy. This project would also have the potential to reduce hazardous fuels within the immediate blowdown site which resides within the wildland urban interface and is adjacent to a high use recreation area. Furthermore, a formal timber sale would result in a clean removal and harvest of trees rather than leaving the area open to the public for firewood harvest. A formal timber sale would allow us to manage the use of the non-recognized existing road in a way that would be consistent with our Forest Travel Plan.

Proposed Action

The proposed action for this project is to remove all down and uprooted timber. The unit we intend to salvage is located past the end of the 046 Road as shown on the travel map. Beyond the



046 Road is an existing non-recognized old road that continues past the spring to the blowdown location. No new road construction would be necessary for removal of the downed trees, but some road maintenance might be required to allow equipment to access the site. Tree stems lying on the ground or in a horizontal position as well as trees with exposed root wads would be included in the sale. Additional trees may be cut for operational purposes if pre-identified by the sale administrator. The entirety of this unit has slopes less than forty percent so all timber would be harvested using ground-based methods. Operations would be conducted reasonably to minimize soil erosion. Equipment would not be operated when ground conditions are such that excessive damage would occur. Landing sites would be preapproved by the sale administrator. Slash would be scattered throughout the sale area. Trees might be yarded with or without tops and limbs attached. If tops and limbs are left attached to the bole and yarded to the landing site, then landing cleanup would occur. This would entail piling of all slash that is accumulated at the landing site. Piles should be reasonably compact and free of soil to facilitate burning. Slash can also be used to close temporary skid trails. Harvesting equipment would be inspected for cleanliness prior to operations. Every time equipment is removed from the sale it would be reinspected. The timber sale contract should include installation of a permanent closure of the non-recognized existing road but would retain non-motorized trail access on the 132 trail to help comply with Forest travel plan direction.

Implementation Timing

Tree removal would begin on October 1, 2024. Operations would only occur from October 1 through February 28.

Categorical Exclusion

The Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations provide for categorical exclusions (CE) to allow Federal agencies to exclude from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) certain categories of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. Due to the minimal amount of disturbance expected with this proposed project, the Forest Service is considering analyzing this proposed project under a CE.

This proposal is consistent with the types of actions described within the Forest Service's National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30) contained in Sec. 32.2 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. Forest Service resource specialists have reviewed the proposed action and do not anticipate the proposed project to lead to any significant impacts or extraordinary circumstances, as described by Forest Service NEPA procedures at 36 CFR 220.6(b).

The Teton Basin District Ranger, Jay Pence will be the deciding officer on this project.

If this project is analyzed under a CE, 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 project 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).

We are interested in your comments on this proposed action. Please mail or email your comments to:

Heather Cossairt, Project Lead
P.O. BOX 858
ASHTON, ID 83420
email: heather.smith@usda.gov
phone: (208)652-1207

Please feel free to pass this letter on to others you think may have an interest or concern with this project. Comments would be most useful if received by February 8, 2024.

Sincerely,



Digitally signed
by JAY PENCE
Date: 2024.01.10
12:50:02 -07'00'

JAY PENCE
District Ranger

Enclosure: 2

cc: Heather Cossairt, Krista Reicis