



NORTHERN REGION

Lolo National Forest

Frenchtown Face Project

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BACKGROUND

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed for the Frenchtown Face project in June, 2007. The EIS analyzed ecosystem restoration on 44,000 acres of National Forest System Lands within approximately 91,000 acres of intermingled National Forest, corporate timber, and small private land tracts just north of Frenchtown, Montana. The Frenchtown Face project includes lands between McCormick and Mill Creeks with many units directly adjacent to private property. In 2000, wildfires burned extensively near the project area, heightening public awareness of fire danger. The area is subject to noxious weeds and illegal off-road vehicle traffic, causing erosion and degrading water quality and wildlife habitat.

The Frenchtown Face project lies within the Community Protection Zone, formerly known as wildland urban interface (WUI). It is characterized by predominately low elevation warm and dry forests. Much of the area was harvested by Anaconda Copper for mining timbers in the early 1900s. Warm dry even-aged second growth ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch forests occupy these sites today. The vegetation treatments were designed to emulate the natural role of fire by reducing stand density and creating conditions conducive to regeneration of ponderosa pine and western larch. The silvicultural objectives are to:

- Reduce crown fire potential and restore fire as a process in low intensity, high frequency and mixed severity fire regimes.
- Reduce fuel loading to acceptable levels and maintain site productivity.
- Increase resilience to surface fire and bark beetles.
- Maintain or increase the species composition of fire resistant shade intolerant species (ponderosa pine, western larch) and design treatments to retain large diameter, old ponderosa pine trees and create stand conditions that could provide large trees in the future.
- Create conditions conducive to regeneration of ponderosa pine and development of a new cohort.

The purpose and need for the project is to:

- Reduce the potential for high severity fires while improving fire protection on private property.
- Re-introduce low intensity/high frequency fire into ponderosa pine habitat types.
- Maintain and improve forest health and reduce the risk of damage from insects and disease while maintaining a natural appearing landscape.
- Maintain and improve wildlife security and habitat and water quality and fish habitat.
- Prevent new and control existing noxious weed infestations.
- Reduce roads and maintain reasonable access for recreation while limiting new, unregulated recreational impacts.
- Protect and interpret historic sites.
- Locally improve cultural and recreational education focusing on reducing the impacts of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use.

The project includes approximately:

- 3600 acres of harvest followed by prescribed burning
- 6500 acres of prescribed burning
- 115 miles of road storage or decommissioning
- removal or replacement of 19 culverts
- 4600 acres of noxious weed treatments
- A variety of trail and developed recreation improvements.

In addition to the silvicultural objectives listed above, the prescribed burning treatments will restore and maintain habitats for a multitude of species including, white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, and wild turkey and upland game birds. Through collaborative efforts over the last three years, the Ninemile Ranger District has received partnership funding for prescribed burning from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

The Ninemile Ranger District continues to work closely with the Frenchtown Rural Fire Department on prescribed burns and future project planning to develop landscape treatments that will be cohesive across ownership boundaries. Based upon heavy fuel loadings, increasing human development, and emergency egress/access issues the project area was identified as a high risk to wildfire in the Missoula County CWPP from 2005 and a number one priority for treatment within the Frenchtown Rural Fire District. The project has received community wildland urban interface planning efforts which resulted in a Firewise Community status and aided in local fire departments receiving grants for hazard reduction on private ground.

A lot of the work was awarded as a ten year stewardship contract that has provided job opportunities within the Missoula Community for contracted thinning of smaller diameter Douglas fir regeneration. Currently the Ninemile Ranger District has completed all of the planned timber harvest acres for a total of 9.2 million board feet. Approximately 700 acres of under-story thinning and/or slashing treatment remain in the project. Additionally, approximately 6,000 acres remain in the project area for prescribed burning treatments. The following personnel have contributed to the implementation success of this project using both aerial and hand ignition: Ninemile RD, Missoula RD, Superior RD, Lolo IHC, Frenchtown Rural Fire Department, Mission Valley Heli-tack, Missoula National Heli-tack, Flathead NF, Minuteman Aviation, and Grayback Forestry Inc.

Frenchtown Face, Unit 22/23

Before/After

