

Blackfoot Clearwater Landscape Stewardship Project Project Description, Spring 2007

Residents of the Blackfoot River Valley have a vision of a community and conservation approach to the entire watershed. This vision includes protecting traditional ranching, hunting, fishing and other uses, in concert with conserving water and wildlife, wilderness and sustainable forestry activities.

With the conversion of Plum Creek timberlands to other private, state and federal ownerships in the Blackfoot watershed, a concept is emerging that brings balance to the landscape by addressing restoration, sustainable logging, ranching, recreation and wilderness uses across the landscape. This balance is emerging from consensus after a two-year dialogue among key stakeholders. It demonstrates that wilderness and wildlife can be protected alongside historic and traditional activities on the landscape.

As a demonstration project for cooperative public-private stewardship across a landscape area, we are developing the *Blackfoot Clearwater Landscape Stewardship Project* that will facilitate cooperative stewardship on the landscape. This is a legislative proposal that includes Congressional funding for the Blackfoot stewardship pilot project and a biomass project in Seeley Lake, as well as inclusion of recommended tracts within the Bob Marshall-Scapegoat and Mission Mountain Wilderness totaling 87,000 acres. The project involves the 400,000-acre Seeley Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest within the Blackfoot watershed as well as lands within the public-private 41,000-acre Blackfoot Community Conservation Area.

This landscape proposal recognizes that the Blackfoot Valley is a unique ecosystem with significant forest, wildlife and wilderness resources. The proposal will facilitate forest stewardship on the landscape including sustainable logging and restoration work as well as watershed improvements and hazardous fuels reductions. The project will add logging and restoration jobs to the local economy over the long term. It is the culture of cooperation in the Blackfoot that makes a landscape project of this magnitude possible.

The valley has a strong conservation history including the first citizen-initiated wilderness in the nation - the Scapegoat Wilderness. Wildlife and wilderness add much to the local outdoor heritage, as well as providing the valley with sustainable jobs in outfitting, guiding, guest ranching, recreation and support services for hunters, anglers and outdoor recreationists.

The pilot proposes to maintain traditional wilderness pack trails on the Seeley Lake Ranger District as well as all of the existing groomed snowmobile trails and areas. Groups have agreed to additional snowmobile opportunities in the area between East Spread Mountain and Otatsy Lake. The participating groups agreed to a revision in the proposed Lolo Forest Plan to allow an approximately 2,000 acre "winter motorized use area" in this area.

The pilot project identifies a management approach that allows for most active management such as livestock grazing, logging and restoration work in the roaded lands found at lower elevations. Active management will change as one moves upslope to roadless conservation areas and

designated Wilderness in North Fork Blackfoot-Monture Creek areas, as well as Grizzly Basin of the Swan Range and the West Fork of the Clearwater.

All the activities of this pilot project are consistent with the proposed revisions to the Lolo National Forest Management Plan and provide mechanisms to implement the plan.

The proposal includes a funding request to allow the Forest Service to plan and implement landscape stewardship and restoration projects on 400,000 acres in the Lolo national forest portion of the Blackfoot watershed. These projects build on the lessons learned from Clearwater stewardship contracting and restoration experiences, implement the Lolo National Forest Plan revisions and apply the concept at a landscape scale as a demonstration project. This would allow for some logging, with the receipts from the logging being used for restoration work on the ground including watershed improvements, road rehabilitation work and weed eradication. Participants in this collaborative effort will work together to seek funding for the stewardship activities, as well as supporting a proposal to have Congress designate additions to existing Wilderness areas.

Within the 41,000 acre Blackfoot Community Conservation Area, cooperative management of timber, grazing lands, weeds, hunting and other recreational uses is being planned. Participants believe this proposal represents a new model for landscape-level conservation in Montana. This proposal would help keep historic and traditional activities as part of the landscape, add diversity and sustainability to the local economy with both recreation and forestry jobs, and enhance watersheds and the landscape.

Congressional Package

Designation of Wilderness Additions – Designation of Wilderness Under the Wilderness Act and as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, 87,000 acres would be included within the Bob Marshall-Sagegoat and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas:

- * 75,000 acres in the North Fork Blackfoot-Monture Creek and 6,000 acres in Grizzly Basin (Swan Range) would be included in the Bob Marshall and Sagegoat Wilderness Areas.

- * 6,000 acres in the headwaters of West Fork Clearwater River would be included in the Mission Mountains Wilderness.

Blackfoot Cooperative Landscape Stewardship and Restoration Pilot Project – It is anticipated that over the next ten years numerous key restoration projects will be undertaken through this project to address hazardous fuels reduction, habitat improvements, stream restoration, as well as improvements to access and hunting in the Blackfoot. It is also anticipated that USFS will annually achieve historic levels of harvesting (4 MMBF/Yr) as part of its forest management on the Seeley Ranger District. All receipts from Stewardship projects will go toward restoration work.

Authorizes appropriations of \$750,000 per year for 10 years for planning, management, restoration and monitoring in the Blackfoot Cooperative Landscape Stewardship Project area.

* Authorizes \$400,000 for restoration projects that includes:

- \$250,000 per year for 10 years for restoration activities on the Seeley Lake Ranger District as cost-share grants with a dollar for dollar match from private funds. Restoration to address water quality, sediment control and reduction, endangered species protection, weed management, habitat restoration and recreation needs. Restoration activities to include road relocation and closures; culvert and bridge replacements; stream restoration and bank stabilization; invasive species management; trail head and campground improvements, under story removal and vegetative treatment; tree planting and pre-commercial thinning; prescribed burning; and trail reclamation and relocation.
- \$100,000 per year for 10 years for restoration activities on the Seeley Lake Ranger District for in-house projects to address Forest Service priorities.
- \$50,000 per year for 10 years for restoration projects within the 41,000-acre Blackfoot Community Conservation Area.

* Authorizes \$350,000 per year for 10 years for planning, management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting for the Seeley Lake Ranger District tied to landscape stewardship projects. Funds will cover environmental analysis, USFS project management, project monitoring for compliance with forest service regulations, and monitoring committee support.

* Authorizes using funds for federal and non-federal land projects that meet the requirements of protection, restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and other resource objectives on federal and non-federal lands where projects will benefit resources of federal lands.

* The Seeley Lake Ranger District will appoint a monitoring committee comprised of diverse stakeholders to review on the ground activities conducted through stewardship contracts. Legislation would require, within 30 days of filing an appeal of a stewardship project, that the appellants meet face-to-face with Forest Service decision-makers and the monitoring committee, to attempt to resolve the appeal.

Seeley Lake Biomass Pilot Project- This seven million dollar project consists of the construction of a 3.2 megawatt co-generation facility and new boiler on 2 acres at Pyramid Mountain Lumber Inc Plant site in Seeley Lake, Montana. The Pilot project is structured in two phases over a 5 year implementation period utilizing cost-share and appropriated funds. Appropriates \$1.5 million (FY08) to cost-share a new boiler and \$3 million (FY09) to cost-share the co-generation facility.

The cooperative private-public pilot project will provide an outlet for excess forest fuels from private, state and Federal forestlands; increase the number of well-paying manufacturing, trucking and woods worker positions; attain self-sufficiency in increased needs for power and steam for Pyramid; and create the model and vision for rebuilding lost infrastructure in the West. This facility is anticipated to add 20 to 30 new jobs to the local economy.

Blackfoot Partnership -Authorizes Seeley Lake District Ranger for Lolo National Forest and Lincoln District Ranger of the Helena National Forest to serve on the Board of the Blackfoot Challenge and participate in the Blackfoot Community Project.

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For more information visit: www.blackfootclearwater.org