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Subject: Healthy Forest Restoration Act Section 602(c): Request to Designate Additional Insect & Disease Acres for a project area on the Fairfield Ranger District, Sawtooth National Forest

To: Deputy Chief, National Forest System

We are writing to request the additional designation of an area on the Sawtooth National Forest in Idaho to address insect or disease threats under Section 602 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6591a), as added by section 8204 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, known as the 2014 Farm Bill.

After consultation with the District Ranger, Forest Silviculturist, Timber Staff Forester, and Fuels Specialists, we have found that 21,386 acres are in need of designation. This area includes portions of six watersheds at the sixth level HUC; Salt Creek-Big Smokey Creek (170501130401), Lower Little Smokey Creek (170501130204), Boardman Creek (170501130402), Skunk Creek-South Fork Boise River (170501130304), Lower Big Smokey Creek (170501130104), and Beaver Creek-South Fork Boise River (170501130404). Beginning in November 2015, two open house meetings and a scoping comment period initiated the collaborative planning process for a proposal to treat this area under the Section 602 authority as the *Salt Bowns Vegetation Management Project*.

The proposed area meets one or more of the criteria outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill. The area is experiencing declining forest health based on annual surveys (Map A); is at risk of substantially increased tree mortality over the next 15 years due to insect or disease infestation, based on the National Insect and Disease Risk Map (Map B); and/or contains hazard trees that pose an imminent risk to public infrastructure, health and safety.

Forest Health Protection completed an Insect and Disease Concerns report for the analysis area in May of 2015. The report outlines current insect and disease conditions stating, "*The majority of stands found within this analysis area are generally of an overstocked, low vigor, homogenous condition... This overstocked, low vigor, homogenous forest condition translates to high hazard for most of our major native insect and disease disturbance agents....bark beetles populations, the biggest biotic threat to trees in the project area, can increase in areas heavily defoliated or with other pathogen interactions such as dwarf mistletoe infections or root rot, especially when drought conditions persist. All of these conditions exist at this time within the project area.*" The report specifically names Douglas-fir beetle, western spruce budworm, western pine beetle, western balsam bark beetle, mountain pine beetle, and dwarf mistletoe as insect and disease agents of concern.



Based on the National Insect and Disease Risk Map, 26 percent of the proposed area is at risk of substantial tree mortality over the next 15 years. Please see Map B.

To date, the Sawtooth National Forest has successfully engaged in project planning and implementation in previously designated areas. The Redfish 210 Post-Insect Outbreak Fuels Reduction Project was the first NEPA project completed using the new CE authority for a 3,000 acre project near Redfish Lake on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Approving this additional insect and disease area designation would allow the Forest to proceed expeditiously with the *Salt Bowns Vegetation Management Project* as an Insect & Disease CE. The proposed management activities on approximately 2,978 acres would: address the insect and disease situation and improve forest stand conditions related to Forest Plan objectives for vegetative structure and species composition; reduce hazardous fuels in the WUI; and reduce the risk of hazard trees.

Please direct any questions concerning this request to Mike Dudley, Director of State and Private Forestry, at mdudley@fs.fed.us or 801-625-5253; or Lyn Snoddy, Team Leader, at 208-737-3246 or lynlsnoddy@fs.fed.us.


(for) NORA B. RASURE
Regional Forester

Enclosures

cc: Lyn Snoddy, Kit Mullen, Kris Lee