

**File Code:** 2400; 3400**Date:** APR 27 2018**Route To:****Subject:** Sawtooth National Forest Insect & Disease Treatment Area Designation Resubmission**To:** Leslie Weldon, Deputy Chief, National Forest System

On November 22, 2016, the Sawtooth National Forest requested the addition of additional landscape-scale areas 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 (commonly known as the 2014 Farm Bill). On March 2, 2017, you approved the additional acres but adjusted for National Forest System Proclaimed Land areas and removed non-Forest Service inholdings including inventoried roadless areas and wilderness.

I am requesting to re-submit Roadless Areas that were excluded in their original request for the Sawtooth National Forest on November 22, 2016. Designation is needed to provide the Forest with additional tools to aid in addressing current insect or disease threats in several at risk watersheds. These at risk areas encompass approximately 166,525 acres across the north end of the Forest outside of designated wilderness (see the attached Map). To ensure that the Sawtooth National Forest is consistent with the Roadless Rule, the Sawtooth National Forest must submit a briefing paper to the Regional Forester for concurrence, and the project must be presented to and reviewed by the Idaho Roadless Commission. The treatments within Roadless Areas would consist of hand treatment activities (chainsaw) and prescribed fire. This would enable the Sawtooth National Forest to improve Threatened and Endangered Species (TES) and sensitive species habitat, restore ecosystem composition, structure and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildland fire effects in the Primitive and Backcountry Restoration Areas.

The Sawtooth has primarily Primitive (95,550 acres) and Back Country (61,415 acres) within the Roadless Area continuum. Looking at the Sawtooth's Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) GIS layer combined acres total Primitive (18,200 acres) and Back Country (9,294 acres). This accounts for 19 percent (Primitive) and 15 percent (Back Country) in the WUI. In regards to Fire Regime Condition Class approximately 23,000 acres are in Fire Regime Condition Class 2 for Primitive and Back Country. Many of the Community Protection Zones (CPZ's) were pre-defined by Alternative 4 Modification- Idaho Roadless Rule Management Themes and are consistent with the Forests WUI layer.

In reading Kathleen Geier-Hayes Fuels Management and Fire Suppression Specialist Report for Roadless Area Conservation, she states, "At least 87 percent of the WUI and community public water systems are available to treat with prescribed fire and mechanical tools. Access is prohibited on 28 percent of the WUI acres and 41 percent of the community public water systems. Therefore, 66 percent of the WUI acres and 16 percent of the community public water system acres could be treated with prescribed fire and mechanical with temporary roads."




In response to the original 2014 request, the Sawtooth had 122,897 acres that have been approved, 75,548 of these acres are in Roadless Areas (61percent). Since then, Road 210 Farmbill CE has been signed on July 21, 2015. 9 percent (283 acres) of this project is hand treatment in Roadless. A briefing paper on this project was submitted to the Regional Forester and then reviewed by the Idaho Roadless Commission who agreed that the Sawtooth National Forest was consistent with the Roadless Rule. Currently, the Sawtooth National Forest is working on the Elk Mountain East Farmbill EA. Overall 37 percent of this project lies within Roadless Areas, we are treating 12.7 percent (230 acres). This project has also been submitted to the Regional Forester and reviewed by the Idaho Roadless Commission and it was consistent with the Roadless Rule. Given our success under the Farm Bill authority, the Forest is committed to pursuing active restoration in the additional areas described above using tools available under this designation.

After consultation with Sawtooth Area Ranger and District Rangers, Forest Silviculturist, and timber, and fuels specialists, I have concluded that the 166,525 acres in Roadless Areas meet the 2014 Farm Bill criteria and would benefit from designation (see the attached map). All proposed watersheds meet one or more of the criteria outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill. (See list of proposed watersheds). Annual surveys have found that these watersheds are experiencing declining forest health conditions. The watersheds are experiencing increased bark beetle activity and tree mortality. The National Insect and Disease Risk Map shows these watersheds to be at risk of substantially increased tree mortality over the next 15 years due to insect or disease infestation.

I am requesting designation of the Roadless Areas that had been excluded from the 2016 request to be included as part of the 2014 Farmbill Authority. If Roadless Areas are not designated, this will result in an increase in NEPA complexity to treat acres, prevent access to non-Roadless Areas and reduce our capacity for restoration projects.

Please contact Mike Dudley, Director State & Private Forestry, at 801-625-5253 or mdudley@fs.fed.us or Steve Clezie, Forest Fuels Planner, at sclezie@fs.fed.us or 208-737-3256 for any additional information or questions.



NORA B. RASURE
Regional Forester

Enclosures

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