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BLM APPROVES HORSETHIEF PROJECT

The Bureau of Land Management Billings Field Office has issued a decision allowing the Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction Project to proceed. An environmental assessment analyzing the impacts of the project was made available for public review on July 18, 2003.

The proposed project area is just west of Roundup in the wildland-urban interface. BLM-administered lands in the 10,300-acre project area contain overstocked stands of ponderosa pine and juniper that are very receptive to ignition. The purpose of the proposal is to change fire behavior to protect the town of Roundup, structures in the Horsethief subdivision, and natural resources.

The approved Proposed Action calls for mechanical and manual vegetation treatments of ponderosa pine and juniper vegetation on 2,275 BLM-administered acres located approximately three miles west of Roundup. The 7,275 acres of grassland or sagebrush-grassland in the project area would not be treated. The treatments could include some commercial thinning. Approximately 800 acres near drainages would not be treated in order to minimize impact on soil and water resources. Treatments would also be designed to provide visual variety, wildlife hiding cover, and wildlife travel corridors.

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The Horsethief project was selected by Secretary of the Interior Norton as a pilot project for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) streamlining under President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative. One of the goals of the initiative is to improve regulatory processes to ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency, and better results in reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires by restoring forest and rangeland health.

Legal notice of the decision will be published in the legal section of the August 27 editions of the Billings Gazette and the Roundup Record-Tribune.

The decision record is available on the Internet at www.mt.blm.gov or by calling the Billings Field Office at 406-896-5013.

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