

LIFESTYLE

HANNA FLATS PROJECT FOCUSES ON FOREST HEALTH

By NICK IVIE
The Beacon

PRIEST LAKE – A large group of stakeholders in the Idaho Panhandle National Forest took a field trip into the woods on Saturday to provide input on the proposed Hanna Flats Good Neighbor Authority Project.

The Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF) and the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) have partnered on the project designed to address forest health and hazardous forest fuel concerns, while also producing timber products.

Around 30 individuals from a wide variety of fields met at the Priest Lake Ranger Station. Representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Priest Community Forest Connection, Priest Lake Nordic Club, Selkirk Conservation Alliance and Bonner County Board of Commissioners were on hand, as well as local firefighters, pilots and loggers.

"We're trying to show the stand treatment opportunity in the area and get your thoughts on treatment," said project team leader David Cobb, USFS. "Right now the main objective is decision making for the formal proposal later this month. So let's have a good, honest discussion."

The project was first identified in 2012, and

includes about 6,800 acres of forest service lands identified to benefit from treatment. In total, 89 percent of the land has been identified in the Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF) Forests plan as MA6, which is called "General Forest" and has a focus on timber production. There are also a couple of privately owned inholdings within the project area boundaries.

Recently, the USFS entered into a formal agreement with the IDL to move the project forward. This is the only GNA project in the State of Idaho.

"The GNA seemed like a great match for the Hanna Flats Project because there are minimal environmental concerns, good road systems in place, and a strong need for forest management," Cobb said.

The project identifies four resource objectives, as well as objectives related to the use of the GNA. The objectives and the underlying needs are to reduce insect and disease, treat hazard trees, reduce fire risk, restore white pine and ponderosa pine, remove biomass and provide timber to the market.

"I'm excited to see the forest service working with the State of Idaho on this Good Neighbor Authority," Bonner County Commissioner Jeff Connolly said. "The objective is to increase opportunities for activity in the forest and this is another tool to use to do that."

In October, ITD will



– Photo by NICK IVIE

Stakeholders bathed in bug spray before making a trek into the woods on Saturday for a field trip showing the proposed Hanna Flats Good Neighbor Authority Project.

conduct any necessary field surveys to determine existing conditions, potential impacts, refine treatment areas and finalize design criteria.

ITD members will complete a specialist report in October and ensure the project is consistent with forest plan direction and other laws and regulations. If analysis confirms the project meets all categories, a decision memo will be written, the forest supervisor would approve the project and notice would be sent to the public in early January 2018.

The group of stakeholders convoyed a short way north and the first stop along Raven Ranch Road near the junction with Road No. 2519B. A short hike into the stand and visitors were surrounded by a nice pocket of larch trees battling for sunlight in the dense canopy.

The stand also showed evidence of what Cobb

described as a, "drastic shift of composition in our forests." He said western white pine trees have decreased by 90 percent due to an extreme shift in species in North Idaho.

The project area occurs in the heart of the natural range of the western white pine tree. However, largely due to the accidental introduction of a non-native fungus known as white pine blister rust, this species now dominates less than five percent of its historical occurrence in the forest.

The stand on the south side of the road is recommended for a treatment type of seedtree with reserves. The plan would call for leaving natural aspects in the stand, such as white pine and western larch trees, while also planting to get regeneration in right away.

The field trip continued on to a stand along Hanna Flats Road, Road No. 313, Road No.

1345 and Lamb Creek Road.

The stand on the north side of Hanna Flats Road is recommended for a treatment type of variable density mosaic. On the south side of the road, a stand is recommended for a treatment type of pre-commercial thinning.

Along Road No. 313, a stand has been recommended for a shelterwood with reserves treatment.

Road No. 1345 showed a stand recommended for a commercial thin treatment type, which favors shade intolerant species. No lumber will be produced from these treatments.

Other project activities include forest vegetation management and hazardous fuels reduction, including timber harvest, temporary road construction, road maintenance, prescribed burning, tree planting and pre-commercial thinning.

The GNA has clear direction not to build any new permanent roads. With the current proposal, there would be 1.7 miles of temporary roads, 1.3 miles of excavated skid trail and maintenance of 30 miles of existing roads.

Human uses in the area include cross country ski trails, snowmobile races, dogsled races, hiking trails, triathlon and the Priest Lake airstrip. Other uses in the project area include grizzly bear recovery, lynx habitat, goshawk nests, native fisheries, grazing allotment, historical sites and powerlines.

Approximately 86 percent of the total National Forest Service acres within the project area are suitable for timber production, as defined in the forest plan.

