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Triple Tree timber harvest must be thoughtful

By Jeff Yates Guest columnist Mar 18, 2016

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The Montana DNRC plans a timber harvest and sale on the Gallatin front range adjacent to the Triple Tree and Eagle Rock subdivisions. This harvest has the potential to significantly change the forests and available wildlife in this area, which sports some of the most popular trails and roads for recreation that are enjoyed by the broader Bozeman community.

I encourage those individuals and groups who enjoy the Triple Tree trails and roads, and the exceptional, unspoiled beauty of this area, to learn more about the "Limestone West" project and to help shape the DNRC's final plan by submitting comments by the April 10 deadline at <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/trust/forest-management/limestone-west>.

The initial scoping of the project involves clear cutting stands of lodgepole pines and thinning some of the douglas firs by extending an existing logging road that starts east of Eagle Rock through the front range winding below and beyond the Triple Trees with a spur dropping down on the ridge that the western section of the upper Triple Tree loop follows. The spur would enable the project to reach the trees in the lower loop of the Triple Tree trail.

Those of us living in Triple Tree of course are highly concerned. This is to be expected. We invested in properties precisely in order to have views of this beautiful front range. But in Triple Tree, we also feel a stewardship to help preserve the beauty of this area and the abundant wildlife present here, so that it can be enjoyed by the broader Bozeman community. We welcome the many hikers, bikers, wildlife enthusiasts and hunters who enjoy our Triple Tree trails and roads every day.

Now, we need the help of individuals and groups in the broader Bozeman community to weigh

in with the DNRC to make sure that any timbering project that is undertaken is approached extremely carefully, with a high sensitivity to the importance of this area for recreation, wildlife habitat and preserving an attractive view shed.

Specifically, we ask DNRC to limit any timbering to dead or diseased lodgepole pine stands, preserving any healthy groups of lodgepole pines, douglas firs, aspens or other species found within or adjacent to these diseased trees. By preserving such healthy lodgepole pines and other species within and adjacent to the stands that are timbered, we will further diversify these area for the future. We believe any thinning of douglas firs should be extremely limited to situations where growth is being impeded or disease is present. DNRC also should shape any timbering that is done so that these areas appear as natural meadows when completed and that any tree cut should be within 6 inches of the ground.

In addition, it is extremely important that the road/spur construction be kept to a minimum, both in disruption to stands of mature and healthy trees and in minimizing the road's visibility when viewed from areas outside the DNRC lands. These roads should also be closed to motorized recreational traffic.

We also think it is critical for the DNRC to design the road and areas to be timbered with a sensitivity to protecting these areas for wildlife habitat and we hope the wildlife organizations in town will assist DNRC in this regard.

We recognize that forests are living, dynamic systems, and we share DNRC's dedication to keeping them healthy. We ask DNRC to replant/replace a significant amount of the lumbered trees with seedlings to stabilize the ground from erosion, and provide for as natural a recovery of the habitat from the timbering project as possible.

Jeff Yates is the chair of the Triple Tree Ranch Owners' Association board of directors.