



Honey Badger Project Overview

Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District Idaho Panhandle National Forests

March 2020

Welcome to the Honey Badger Project!

Over the past year or so, we have been working to develop a proposal to address resource concerns in an area of the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District identified as the Honey Badger Project Area, named for two landmarks in the area – Honey and Badger Mountains. The project area is located within Kootenai County, east of the communities of Hayden, Dalton Gardens, and Coeur d'Alene (a vicinity map is provided on page 2).

We would like to share with you some information about current conditions in the area, and the activities that could improve those conditions. Also provided is project timeline, a description of the opportunities for giving us input or being further involved in the project, and links to additional informational materials (which are posted on the project webpage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56220>).



The District Ranger is the responsible decision making official for the project, and will work with an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists, the Panhandle Forest Collaborative, Trails Working Group, tribes, state and local stakeholders, and other members of the public to make those choices, based on input we have already gotten and expect to receive as the project moves forward.

Why is this area a priority?

In 2016, using a collaborative planning approach that included members of local governments, tribal representatives, and individuals from existing collaborative groups, the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) identified high-priority planning areas across the Forest for vegetation and fuel management. The Honey Badger area was identified as one of those priority landscapes.

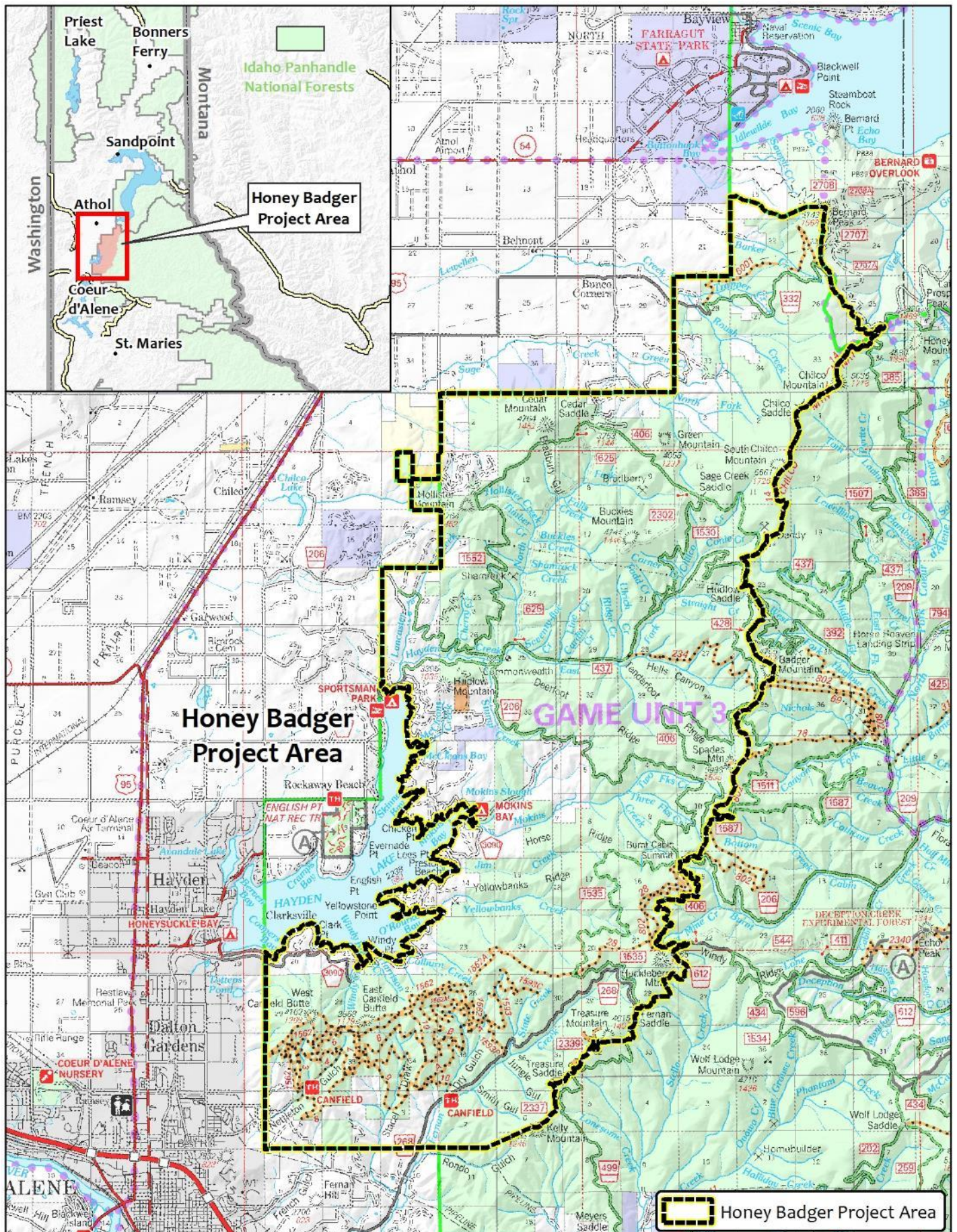
The Forest Plan designated lands within the project area as General Forest (MA-6), with the exception of Canfield Mountain Recreation Area, which is MA-7, Primary Recreation.

In 2017 and 2018, existing condition information was collected about natural and social resources within the

project area. We compared existing conditions to desired conditions described in the 2015 IPNF Land Management Plan ([Forest Plan](#)), and found the most important needs are to improve forest health and reduce high-intensity wildfire risk, followed by providing a sustainable trail system for the public (especially in the Canfield Mountain area), and reducing sediment delivery to streams and restoring aquatic organism passage.

In designing the project, it will be important to ensure the existing transportation system can support proposed activities, meet long-term management needs, and provide recreational opportunities for the public.

Land Ownership	
(acres)	
National Forest	42,000
Private lands	10,000
Industrial timber	600
BLM	20
TOTAL	52,600
<i>(acreages are approximate)</i>	



Early Public Engagement

The Honey Badger area is important to a diverse number of user groups with different values, perspectives, and interests. In 2017, we reached out to groups known to have an interest in similar projects on the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, to share what we knew about the area and discuss ideas for potential solutions. Interested members of the public were contacted through news releases, emails, telephone calls, and social media. Some discussions occurred as part of ongoing relationships, for example, with the Panhandle Forest Collaborative and IPNF Trails Working Group. In addition, District Ranger Dan Scaife introduced the project to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe at the Government to Government consultation meeting in Plummer, Idaho in June 2017, and continued to update the Tribe throughout the pre-scoping process. We have also provided briefings, field trips to the area, and held open house meetings ([Pre-scoping Overview](#)) in an effort to inform and receive input from the public before we started into a more formal planning process.

With input from the public, we have identified potential activities to address conditions in the area, consistent with Forest Plan guidance. The needed changes and proposed activities are described briefly in the following pages, with links to additional information and maps, all of which are provided on the project webpage (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56220>).

What Is Proposed and Why?

There is a need to establish and maintain resilient forest stand structure and species composition – more healthy western larch, western white pine, and ponderosa pine.

Forest Health

The composition, structure and pattern of forest stands throughout the Honey Badger project area is very different from desired conditions described in the [Forest Plan](#). A combination of root disease, blister rust, historic selective harvest, and other environmental factors has reduced the diversity of the overstory and made the landscape less resistant to insects, diseases, drought, and fire.

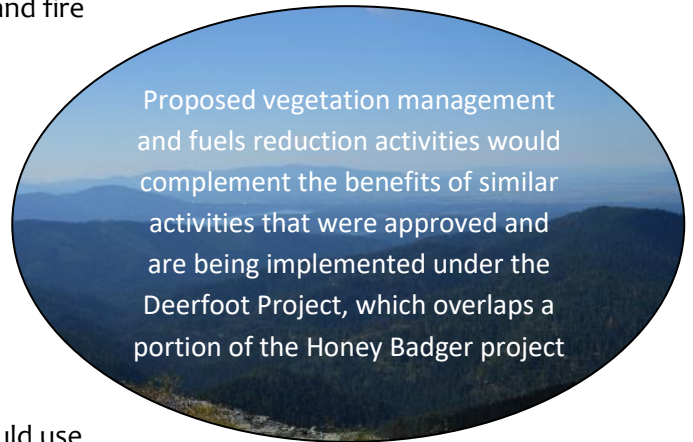
The Forest Plan desired condition for vegetation is a forest dominated by western white pine, ponderosa pine, western larch, and whitebark pine, which are root disease-tolerant species that have a better chance of surviving progressive losses from root disease. Unfortunately, these species are not as abundant as is desired in the project area. Instead, stands in the area are largely grand fir, Douglas-fir and western hemlock, which are highly susceptible to root disease. As trees die, gaps will allow natural regeneration but those gaps will primarily fill in with the same root disease-susceptible species already present. Stand productivity, average tree age and tree heights would slowly decline over time as a result. Areas already declining from root disease will continue to be the most prone to continued opening of the stand through a combination of root disease and wind-throw.

A [forest health evaluation](#) was conducted in 2018 and root diseases were found to be widespread across the project area, the effects of which range from scattered mortality to large root disease centers spanning several acres, with variable amounts of canopy thinning. Root disease hazard ratings indicate the relative likelihood that root diseases are common throughout the project and are causing significant impact to susceptible species. According to the 2018 evaluation, approximately 8 percent (over 4,000 acres) of the Honey Badger project area were designated as having a high root disease hazard. Although not all acres designated as high hazard will have root disease, those designated as high hazard have the greatest tendency for severe root disease to occur on the ground and for significant losses to occur. The proportion

of the Honey Badger project area rated to have moderate root disease hazard was nearly 81 percent (over 40,200 acres), with the potential for root disease to be an agent of change in the near future within the project area. Insect concerns were also identified in the area and include the fir engraver, Douglas-fir beetle, and mountain pine beetle infestations, which could further degrade current vegetation conditions if active management is not applied.

In mixed conifer stands such as these, regeneration harvest followed by planting with desired species such as western larch, western white pine, ponderosa pine and, where appropriate, lodgepole pine would help mitigate future stand decline due to root diseases and insects, and create a mosaic of size and age classes that are more resilient to insect and disease agents and fire mortality over time.

Initially, approximately 21,000 acres of the project area were considered for vegetation treatment. After further consideration, areas with rocky or unstable soils, wet areas, designated old growth, and other environmental or management concerns were removed from future consideration. At this time, there are approximately 12,000 acres where commercial timber harvest and tree planting are proposed. Nearly all (98 percent) of the harvest would use even-aged silvicultural systems, including clearcut, seedtree and shelterwood systems; approximately two percent would be commercially thinned. Even-age systems are proposed because the extent and severity of root disease, insect and storm damages preclude successful application of other options. Removal of harvested trees would be done with a variety of logging systems. Skyline cable yarding, skyline swing with tractor, and log forwarder would be used, as well as potentially a small amount of helicopter yarding. The logging system used will depend upon feasibility and actual site conditions.



The IPNF Forest Plan requires minimum amounts of snag and green tree retention within even-aged silvicultural systems, so there would be retention of live trees within all harvest units. In particular, healthy larch, western white pine and ponderosa pine would be retained as seed trees. In addition, the design of the harvest units will include both dispersed individual trees and aggregated patches of trees within them in as well as protected riparian areas, sensitive soils, or other small scale areas with logistical or resource based constraints.

Even-aged harvest systems would create large openings in the forest canopy. After harvest is completed and fuels are treated in the regeneration units, those areas would be planted with tree seedlings – ponderosa pine on drier sites, and western white pine/western larch on moist sites. This would increase the patch size of young forest stands of disease-resistant species in order to trend the pattern of forest vegetation toward desired conditions in the Forest Plan. Forest Service policy normally limits the size of harvest openings to 40 acres or less in size; however, exceptions are allowable with Regional Forester approval. Of the 91 harvest units, 62 would result in openings larger than 40 acres in size in order to meet the objective described above. Most would be under 300 acres in size, but several would be larger, with the largest opening being nearly 1,200 acres in size. A request to exceed the size limit will be made in accordance with Forest Service policy.

The proposed vegetation treatments would help move forested ecosystems within the area toward improved health and increased resiliency to disturbances such as fire, insects, diseases, and drought. Forest management activities would also contribute to the local economy and to the sustainability of the local forest products industry, which is also a consideration in the Forest Plan, who provide the necessary infrastructure for helping to accomplish restoration goals, objectives, and desired conditions identified in the Forest Plan.



For additional information about current conditions and proposed vegetation activities follow the links below:

- [Proposed Action Map for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Proposed Regeneration Openings for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Over 40-Acre Openings Map for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Root Disease Hazard Map for the Honey Badger Project Area](#)
- [Dominance Groups Map for the Honey Badger Project Area](#)
- [Tree Size Classes Map for the Honey Badger Project Area](#)
- [Past Harvest Map for the Honey Badger Project Area](#)
- [Desired and Current Forest Composition at the Forestwide Scale](#)
- [Forest Health Assessment \(2018\) for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Forest Plan](#) goals, objectives and desired conditions for forest vegetation (pages 11-18)

There is also a need to reduce the potential for high-intensity wildfire while promoting desirable fire behavior characteristics and fuel conditions to provide safer conditions for firefighters and the public.

Wildfire Risk

Healthy, thriving ecosystems are less vulnerable to extreme large scale wildfires that can alter ecosystems, and threaten public health and safety. The Forest Plan directs us to reduce hazardous fuels within the wildland urban interface and to manage forest vegetation in these areas in an effort to reduce the risk of large wildfires. The continued loss of more fire-tolerant species such as ponderosa pine and western larch has led to forests that are less resilient to fire, with an increased probability of crown fires, due to stand density, that would likely be more expensive and more difficult (and dangerous) to suppress. The need to address these conditions is especially important because 86% of the project area is within the wildland urban interface, with significant infrastructure that would be at risk, including homes, a powerline, and electronic communication sites.



In addition to the proposed timber harvest, which would primarily help to reduce ladder fuels, approximately 4,000 acres of prescribed landscape burning is proposed on dry sites where burning is most responsive and can be used as an effective tool to manage for ecological conditions. While no timber

harvest is proposed within designated old growth, prescribed burning may occur on some dry sites where old growth is present. Prescribed burning (in both harvested and unharvested areas) would help return fire to the landscape, maintain or enhance forest resilience, manage wildlife habitat, and would complement work that is already approved and being implemented under the Deerfoot and Kootenai Fuels Reduction projects.

The combination of proposed prescribed burning and timber harvesting would help reduce flame lengths and lower fire intensity, resulting in the type of fire behavior that can be more easily managed, with safer conditions for firefighters and the public. Approximately 76% of the proposed landscape (fuels) burning and 65% of the proposed vegetation treatments would occur within the WUI.

Despite the numerous benefits prescribed fires provide, we recognize that planned fires and smoke can affect forest visitors and local communities. Understanding air quality regulations is crucial to success whenever prescribed fires are conducted. Specialists write site specific burn plans for prescribed fires that identify – or prescribe – the best conditions under which trees and other plants will burn to safely obtain the best results and minimize impacts to the public. Burn plans consider temperature, humidity, wind, moisture of the vegetation, and conditions for the dispersal of smoke. Prescribed fire specialists compare conditions on the ground to those outlined in burn plans before deciding whether to burn on a given day. Communication is important both before and during a prescribed burn, to notify neighbors and those potentially impacted by smoke. In addition to working through the media and making door to door notifications, we are researching a variety of applications that may give concerned members of the public the ability to sign up to be notified prior to implementation of a prescribed burn.



For additional information about current conditions and proposed fuel reduction activities follow the links below:

- [Proposed Action Map for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Potential Fuels Treatments in the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Wildland Urban Interface Map for the Honey Badger Project Area](#)
- [Fire Hazard Potential Map \(2018\) for the Honey Badger Project Area](#)
- [Fire Regime Condition Class Map for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Forest Plan](#) desired conditions and objectives for fire (pages 21-22)

There is also a need to develop, restore and maintain a sustainable recreation trails network.

Outdoor recreation is the fastest growing use within national forests and grasslands. The amount of public use in the Honey Badger project area has substantially increased in recent years, especially within the Canfield Mountain recreation area, located within the southern end of the project area. The area is well known for trails that provide opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, mountain bikes, dirt bikes, ATVs, OHVs, and full-sized vehicles.

The overall goal of managing the trails system in Honey Badger is to increase the social, economic, environmental, and logistic sustainability of the trails. Sustainable trails must be carefully located and designed to accommodate existing and future uses while only allowing appropriate uses. Conditions that help with trail sustainability include, for example, locating the trail on the contour or cross slope, avoiding trails that run down the fall line avoiding steep slopes, ensuring proper drainage, and minimizing stream crossings.

Some trail segments and recreational resources in the project area were not designed for the types and amount of uses occurring, and cannot sustain those continued uses. In identifying the potential changes that could occur to the trail system, the project interdisciplinary team worked with members of the IPNF Trails Working Group, which consists of representatives from a variety of trail user groups – both nonmotorized (hiking, horseback, mountain bike) and motorized (dirt bike, ATV, OHV, and full-size vehicles).



Discussions with the group identified a variety of trail work to improve long-term sustainability of trails; including rerouting, rehabilitation, development of loop trails, and decommissioning of unauthorized trails that are causing degradation of natural resources. We were not able to carry all recommended changes into the proposed action as they may not have been within the scope of the proposed action, would cause other resource concerns, or had legal access issues.

Wherever feasible, trails are proposed for reconstruction or realignment to address poor resource or design conditions. Where the trails are in chronically poor condition due to their location on the landscape, obliteration will be proposed. In some cases (not all), a new trail segment may be proposed to accommodate different access. There are opportunities to develop loop trails for expanded recreation opportunities and to decommission both system and user-created, non-system trails that are causing resource degradation. Both actions would help achieve forestwide desired conditions and meet goals and objectives for access and recreation. Parking areas and trailheads will also need to be improved to support the modified trail system.

Several single-track routes on Canfield Mountain currently have poor conditions, such as erosion issues, trail braiding, and in muddy areas. These conditions contribute sediment to streams, reduce user safety, and are not sustainable. Depending on actual ground conditions, a combination of activities are proposed, including segments of new construction, reconstruction, and rerouting.

To improve user experience, reduce conflicts with other uses, and increase sustainability, several trails will be improved and/or have the use designation changed to provide a loop opportunity for motorized wheeled vehicles, 50 inches or less in width (< 50"). As part of these changes, the District is proposing the conversion of some trails on the southern portion of the system to better allow access for maintenance and emergency services. This change will also increase the access for < 50" trails for the recreating public, reduce "cherry-stem" or dead-end trails on the system, and will help to spread use across a greater area.

Trails networks require maintenance over time, and we depend upon additional help from trail user groups to help manage our trails and could not provide the current or future recreational experience without that help.

During the project development process, we discussed the potential to address safety issues and resource concerns associated with the Hayden Creek shooting range. We found there were many people interested in keeping a free public shooting area, but no recommendations on how to resolve the extensive resource problems that exist, such as littering, road damage, resource destruction, and unauthorized motorized travel. We will continue to work with the public to find the best solution for the area, but it is apparent that solution is complex and the issues would not likely be resolved within the timeline of the Honey Badger project. As a result, these issues will be addressed under a separate environmental and public involvement process.



For additional information about current trails and proposed trail activities follow the links below:

- [Proposed Action Map for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Description of proposed changes to the trail system in the Honey Badger Project Area](#)
- [Map of the current trail system in the Canfield Mountain Recreation Area](#)
- [Map of the proposed trail system in the Canfield Mountain Recreation Area by segment](#)
- [Map of the proposed trail system in the Canfield Mountain Recreation Area](#)
- [Map of the proposed trail systems in the Honey Badger project area](#)
- [Forest Plan](#) desired conditions and objectives for access and recreation (pages 34-36)

There is a need to reduce sediment delivery to streams from the road and trail networks and to restore aquatic organism passage.

Aquatics

Unmanaged recreation and the existing road network in the project area are contributing factors to watershed health conditions that do not meet goals and desired conditions in the Forest Plan. Many of the roads and trails in the project area are in need of maintenance or require surface work and drainage improvements to reduce or prevent sediment from entering streams. Management of unauthorized or pioneered routes is an ongoing effort across the District under the [Travel Management Plan](#) for the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District.

Barriers to aquatic organism passage (AOP) have been identified at multiple stream crossings (culverts) in the project area. It is proposed that those culverts on open motor vehicle travel routes be replaced with AOP structures. The rest of the identified AOP barriers are located on stored or decommissioned roads; it is proposed that those barriers be removed by excavating the stream crossing and reconstructing a channel.



For additional information about current aquatic conditions and proposed improvement activities follow the links below:

- [Proposed Action Map for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Forest Plan](#) goals, objectives, and desired conditions related to watershed (pages 22-29)

Road work is proposed for long-term transportation management and to support proposed activities.

Managing a large road network on the District and providing reasonable access to the area is challenging due to an aging transportation system. We used a Travel Analysis Process (TAPS) to determine which existing roads pose a risk to natural resources and are not needed for long-term forest management. We also look at areas that may need additional roads for long-term management. We try to use existing road prisms wherever possible before recommending new road construction. Recommendations are made based on consideration of all risks and benefits, and the proposed action incorporates those recommendations where necessary and feasible.

The project proposes an estimated 35 miles of permanent road construction and 21 miles of temporary road construction. However, several of the roads would be located on old road prisms, and would likely only need to be reconstructed rather than full construction. Field verification will better identify the actual level of construction needed, which is anticipated to be less than current estimates. The permanent road construction would be used for administrative use only, such as for timber stand management and fire suppression activities, and would be stored after project activities are complete. Stored roads are blocked with a gate, earthen berm, or other barrier, or have a short section of the start of the road obliterated. Stored roads remain as part of the National Forest transportation system and can be re-opened if needed in the future. Temporary roads would be obliterated after completion of project activities.

Roads not needed for long-term management (currently estimated at 50 to 80 miles) are proposed for decommissioning (physical removal) to help reduce impacts to water quality and reduce maintenance costs (for example, old roads located in the bottom of drainages that are contributing sediment to streams or are not physically drivable or would not be safe to do so). Roads identified as needed for long-term management (but not having any foreseeable use anticipated in the next 20 years) are proposed for storage. None of the roads proposed for decommissioning or long-term storage are currently available for public motorized use. All mileages are based on current proposed activities, and may change as a result of public input, analysis findings, or field verification.

Maintenance activities include clearing brush from the road shoulders to improve sight distance, blading and shaping the road, cleaning ditches, improving drainage structures, and adding gravel to road surfaces. Road reconstruction typically includes the activities described for road maintenance, plus activities such as short segments of realignment, road widening, the addition of turnouts and the improvement and/or addition of drainage structures.

Other activities are proposed to stabilize and decommission user-created motorized routes, as part of the ongoing implementation of the district's Travel Plan.



For additional information about the current transportation system and proposed road-related activities follow the links below:

- [Proposed Action Map for the Honey Badger Project](#)
- [Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District Motorized Vehicle Use Map \(MVUM\)](#)
- [Forest Plan](#) desired conditions for the transportation system (pages 34-36)



Project Design

Proposed activities are carefully designed to balance a complex mix of multiple uses and public desires, and protect or enhance other forest resources and uses as guided by the Forest Plan, which is the guiding document for projects and has gone through a public involvement and environmental analysis process of its own. For example, as part of the desired conditions, the Forest Plan describes how scenic resources complement the recreation settings and experiences while reflecting health and sustainable ecosystem conditions ([Forest Plan](#), page 34]. We are using Forest Plan guidance to design the location, size, shape and visibility of harvest units and road work, striving for consistency with mapped scenic integrity objectives (which serve as the desired conditions for the scenic resources). For additional information, refer to the [Scenic Viewpoints](#) in the Honey Badger Project Area.

Design features will also be used to ensure protection of cultural resources, rare plants, wildlife, fisheries habitat, and other resources. Design features are primarily based on Forest Plan direction (standards and guidelines) and Forest Service policy, best available scientific information, standardized best management practices, and site-specific evaluations. Project implementation includes the physical on-the-ground design of the project completed by layout crews; timber sale contract administration; and reforestation activities such as site preparation and planting. Design features are applied on the ground through physical design as instructed in silvicultural prescriptions, marking guides, and cruise plans. Some features address conditions found on-the-ground during project activities, and are applied through the timber sale contract, which includes additional standard and site specific provisions for resource protection.

Help Us Design and Refine the Project

Your comments will be valuable in helping identify issues and concerns, refining the proposed action, developing alternatives to the proposed action, and refining the environmental analyses. Your input is most valuable to us if it is specific to the project, factual in nature and solution based. Comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider (36 CFR 218.2).

Written comments can be hand delivered or mailed to Honey Badger Project, Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, 2502 East Sherman Avenue, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814. Electronic comments can be submitted by email on the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56220>. On the right-hand side "Get Connected", click "Comment on Project" to submit comments on this project. Electronic comments may be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). Those submitting electronic comments should put the project name in the subject line. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

We can best use your comments in refining the proposal if they are received by **April 30, 2020.**

Project Timeline and Public Participation

Our goal is to have the project analysis completed and a decision issued by the end of 2020. The following describes the steps we need to take to reach that goal, and the approximate timing of each step.



Development and Design of Proposed Activities

We will refine the activities proposed in the area based on public comments and additional information gathered in the field. We can best use your comments in refining the proposal if they are received by **April 30, 2020**.



Review the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Provide Comments

An analysis will consider the potential effects of implementing the proposed action and any alternatives, we will document our findings in an EA that will be provided to the public for a 30-day formal comment period, satisfying requirements of 36 CFR 218.25.



Review the Draft Decision Notice (DN)

After considering public comments, a Draft DN will be issued, initiating the 45-day pre-decisional administrative review (objection) process. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) about this project or activity during the comment period will be eligible to file an objection.



Final Decision Notice (DN)

After considering all analysis findings and public input, including objection process results, a final DN will be issued.



Contact Us

Mail

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Future Communication on the Honey Badger Project

If you would like to receive future mailings about this project, you can subscribe to this and other Forest Service project electronic mailing lists and find information related to the project by accessing the Honey Badger project webpage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56220>. From the “Get Connected” menu, select “Subscribe to Email Updates” and provide your email address. You can manage the lists you want to be on and update contact information through the “Subscriber Preferences” link.

Information is also available on the Honey Badger Online Story Map, which can be reached by using your smart phone's QR Reader application.

