

June 2009



Montana  
Department of Natural  
Resources and Conservation  
Forested State Trust Lands

Habitat Conservation Plan

Draft EIS | Environmental  
Impact  
Statement

Volume I



Montana Department of Natural  
Resources and Conservation



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service



June 24, 2009

Dear Reader:

The enclosed Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Habitat Conservation Plan (Draft EIS/HCP) is now available for your review and comment. The Draft EIS/HCP is the result of over 6 years of collaboration between the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The conservation strategies contained in the HCP and analyzed in this EIS are intended to conserve the habitats of three threatened species – grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and bull trout – on 548,500 acres of western Montana’s state trust lands over the next 50 years.

Development of the conservation strategies in the HCP included a review by the public and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Their reviews helped strengthen the documents along the way. We appreciate the dedication of every individual who has contributed their time and expertise to this project.

DNRC and USFWS will continue to work diligently to incorporate comments into the Final EIS/HCP. We welcome and encourage your review of this important document.

A 90-day public comment period will begin the day the Draft EIS/HCP is filed by EPA in the Federal Register (anticipated to be on or about June 26, 2009—check local news releases or the HCP website for final dates and deadlines). Submitted comments will be responded to in the Final EIS/HCP if received within the 90-day comment period.

Comments may be submitted through our project website at: [dnrc.mt.gov/HCP](http://dnrc.mt.gov/HCP) or by U.S. mail at:

Attn: HCP  
MT DNRC  
2705 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804

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2 **Draft Environmental Impact Statement**  
3 **for the**  
4 **Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation**  
5 **Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan**

6 **Lead Agencies**

7 U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

8 and

9 Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

10 The following persons may be contacted for additional information concerning this document:

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17  
18 **Abstract**

19 The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) has applied for an  
20 incidental take permit (Permit) authorizing the take of terrestrial and aquatic species under Section  
21 10 of the Endangered Species Act, relative to forest management activities on forested state trust  
22 lands. In compliance with both the National Environmental Policy Act and Montana Environmental  
23 Policy Act, this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) has been prepared to evaluate  
24 the environmental effects of the proposed action and three alternatives. The No-action Alternative  
25 is evaluated based on potential effects from not issuing the Permit and continuing under the state's  
26 current forest management program. The Draft EIS also evaluates three action alternatives, which  
27 represent conservation strategies for the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) species with varying  
28 levels of conservation commitments and management flexibility under which the USFWS would  
29 issue a Permit for incidental take. The Draft EIS is available for review at <http://dnrc.mt.gov/HCP>.  
30 Following a 90-day public comment period on the Draft EIS, the USFWS and DNRC will review  
31 and respond to comments in writing and/or as changes in the Final EIS. Based on the comments  
32 received, DNRC may make, and/or the USFWS may suggest to DNRC, changes to the proposed  
33 HCP. The resulting Final EIS will be published for an additional public review period, after which  
34 DNRC will prepare a Record of Decision formally documenting the conservation strategies it will  
35 implement for covered species, while the USFWS will prepare a Record of Decision formally  
36 documenting its decision on whether to issue a Permit.

