

# WESTERN MONTANA COOPERATIVE BIOLOGIST REPORT

DAVID NIKONOW

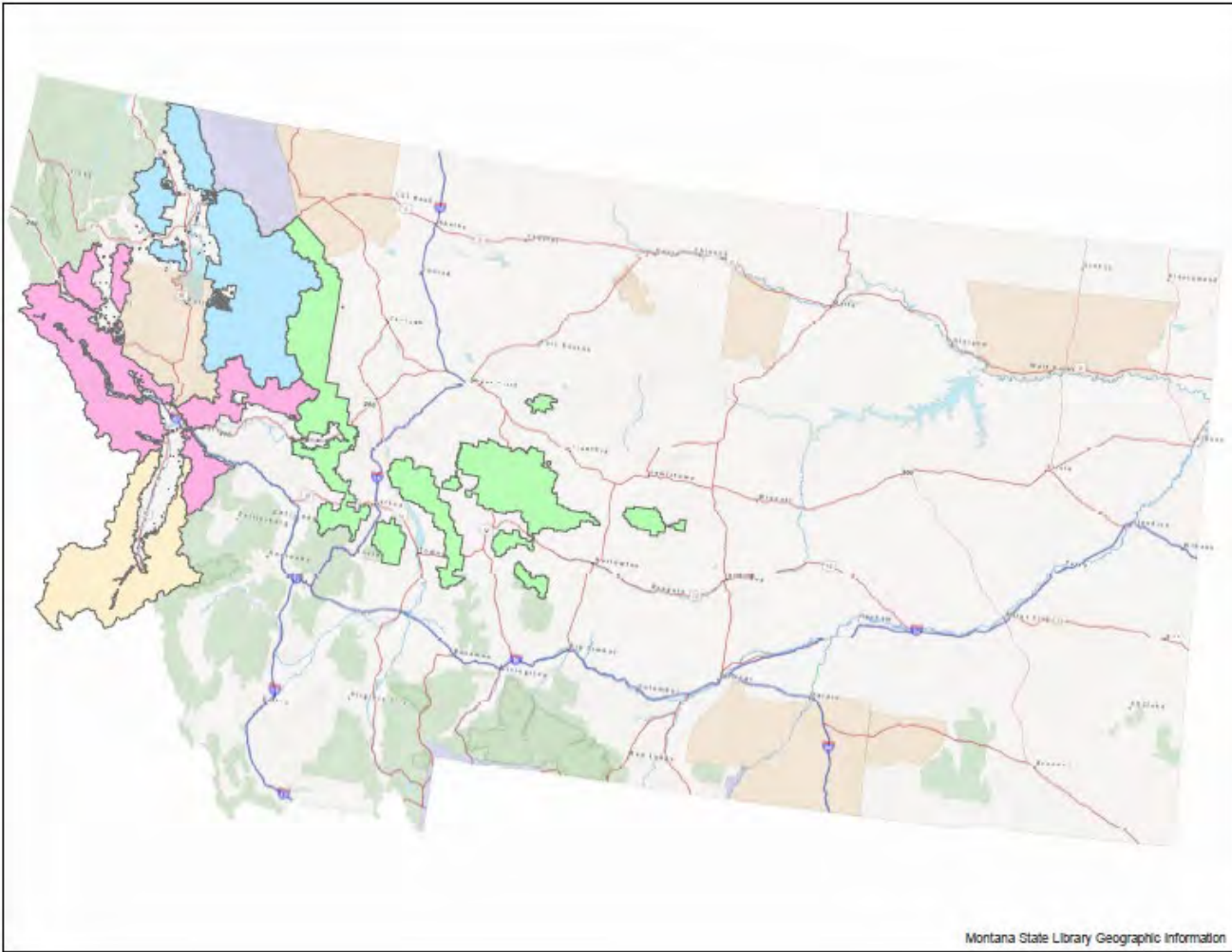
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UGBEP FALL 2023 CAC MEETING

9/19/2023



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**UPLAND GAME BIRD  
ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**  
MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS



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# REGION 2 UGBEP STRATEGIC PLAN

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- Program Delivery
  - Opportunities to affect populations of upland birds in a meaningful way to measurably improve upland bird hunting in Region 2 potentially exist through forest management planning on public lands, which is accomplished through the work of area biologists when providing input on Forest Service and other public timber sales or other land management activities.
- Upland Game Bird Enhancement Opportunities
  - The major limiting factors for upland game birds in Region 2 are:
    - Habitat fragmentation and losses
    - **The lack of management of forest succession and composition** across millions of mountainous acres on public lands.



# FOCUS AREAS AND IMPLEMENTATION

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- Region 2 does not provide habitat capability and suitability sufficient to deliver meaningful upland bird and hunting enhancements within focus areas. Instead, Region 2 intends to utilize the UGBEP within existing habitat conservation efforts as a supplement, where fitting, for upland game birds to expand conservation accomplishments. This would include areas of Region 2, such as the Blackfoot River, where FWP and partners continue to work on a variety of restoration and conservation projects on private and public lands. There may be opportunities to incorporate UGBEP funds or other assistance as part of larger conservation incentives to perpetually protect connected native rangelands and a diversity of wildlife from further subdivision and development. Similarly, there may be opportunities to apply UGBEP incentives toward forest management projects on public lands or intermingled private lands to broadly affect upland bird distribution and abundance across thousands of forested acres over time. In both situations, **the major FWP inputs would be expertise and advisement in partnership with governmental agencies and non-profit organizations to influence landscapes broadly for multiple habitat benefits, of which upland birds would represent a resource of increased consideration at the planning table.**



# PRIMARY DUTIES

- Provide technical assistance to Forest Service managers and specialists on projects before and during implementation to improve upland game bird habitat quality
- Fill USFS capacity voids to assure project analyses or implementation is completed on time
- Assist in grant writing to supplement implementation funding
- Assist in project planning during NEPA to assure projects benefit upland game bird habitat



# TARGET TREATMENT AREAS

- **Ponderosa Pine Savanna**

- Restore open forest conditions through conifer harvest and/or prescribed fire
- Removing overstocked Douglas fir understory
- Increased vigor of grasses and forbs which improves insect abundance for poult forage
- Increased growth of berry producing shrubs which provide fall and winter forage for ruffed grouse and wild turkeys



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# TARGET TREATMENT AREAS

- **Montane Grasslands and Shrublands**

- Often on south facing slopes
- Treatments include prescribed fire and thinning to reduce conifer encroachment on meadows and shrub fields
- This retains a high abundance of grasses and forbs which are critical for high insect populations improving summer forage for wild turkeys and dusky grouse
- Rx burning can also increase the abundance of soft mast producing shrubs for fall forage



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# TARGET TREATMENT AREAS

- **Aspen and Cottonwood Forest**

- Restore and enhance aspen stands through conifer removal with harvest, hand felling, or Rx fire
- Reduced competition for light and water along with site disturbance will increase suckering and enhance aspen quality
- Improves spring/summer forage and nesting habitat for wild turkeys and ruffed grouse
- Aspen forest types have extremely high levels of biodiversity including an abundance of insects which are critical for brood rearing

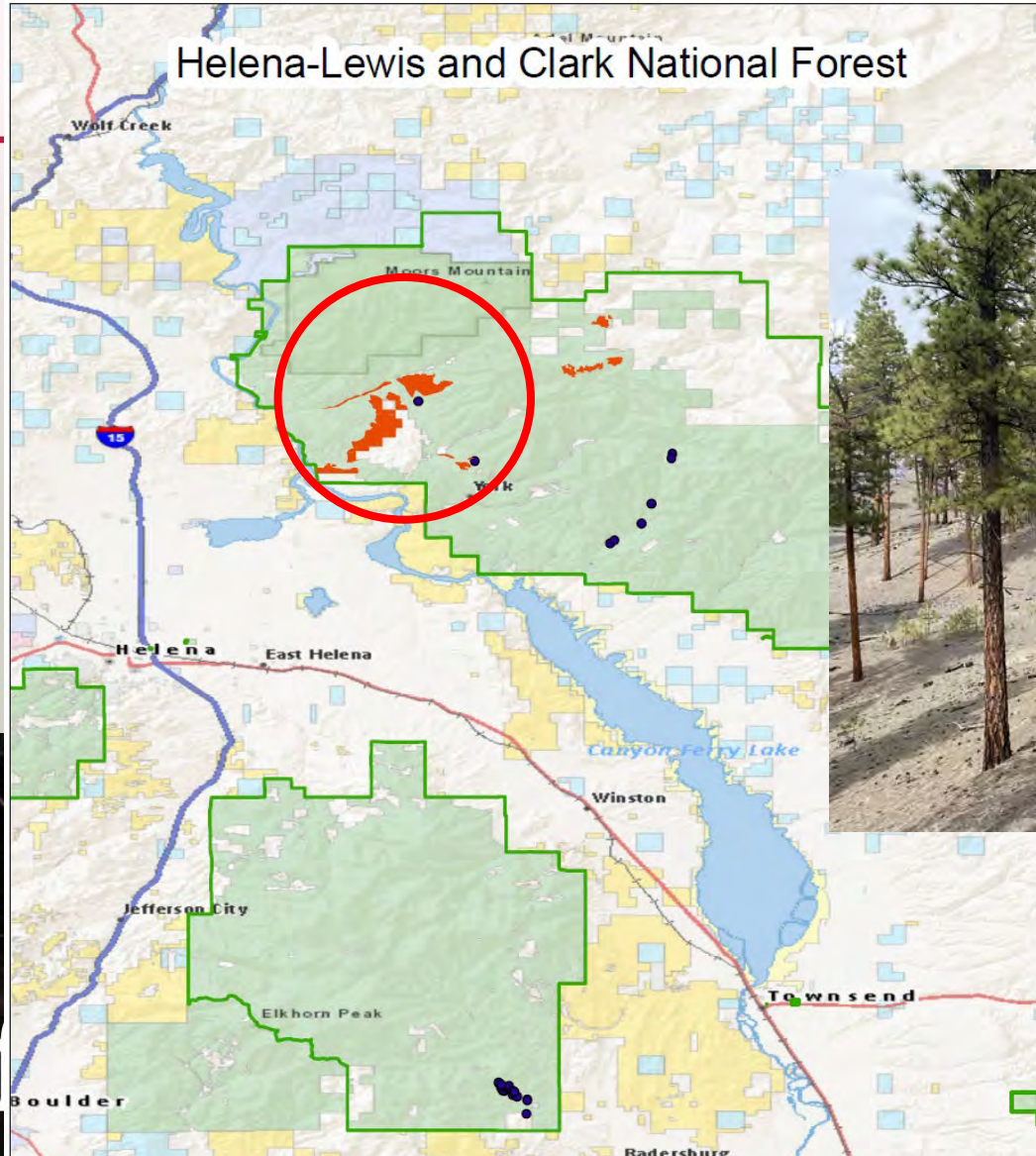


# PROJECT UPDATES



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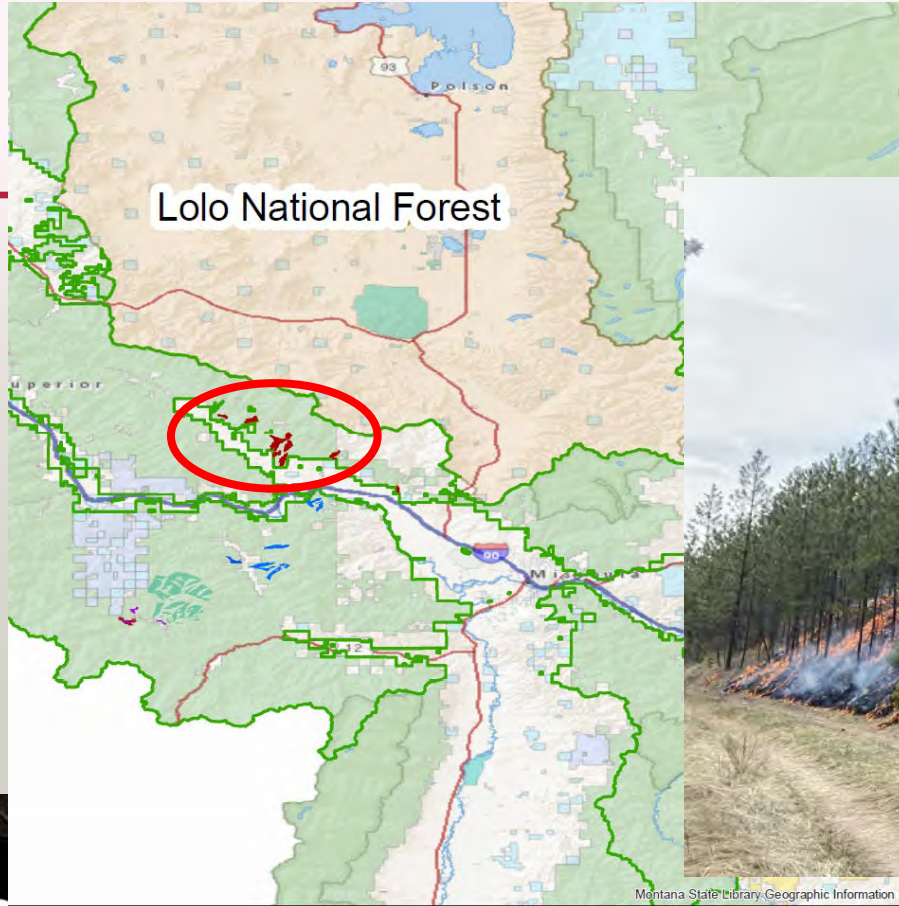
# HELENA – LEWIS & CLARK NATIONAL FOREST



- Beaver Soup/ Bull Sweats Rx Burning – 126 acres & counting



# LOLO NATIONAL FOREST



- Frenchtown Face RX Fire - 297 acres



# FRENCHTOWN FACE 19



Sept. 9, 2018



Sept. 24, 2018



August 1, 2022



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# FRENCHTOWN FACE 19



Sept. 19, 2018



Sept. 24, 2018

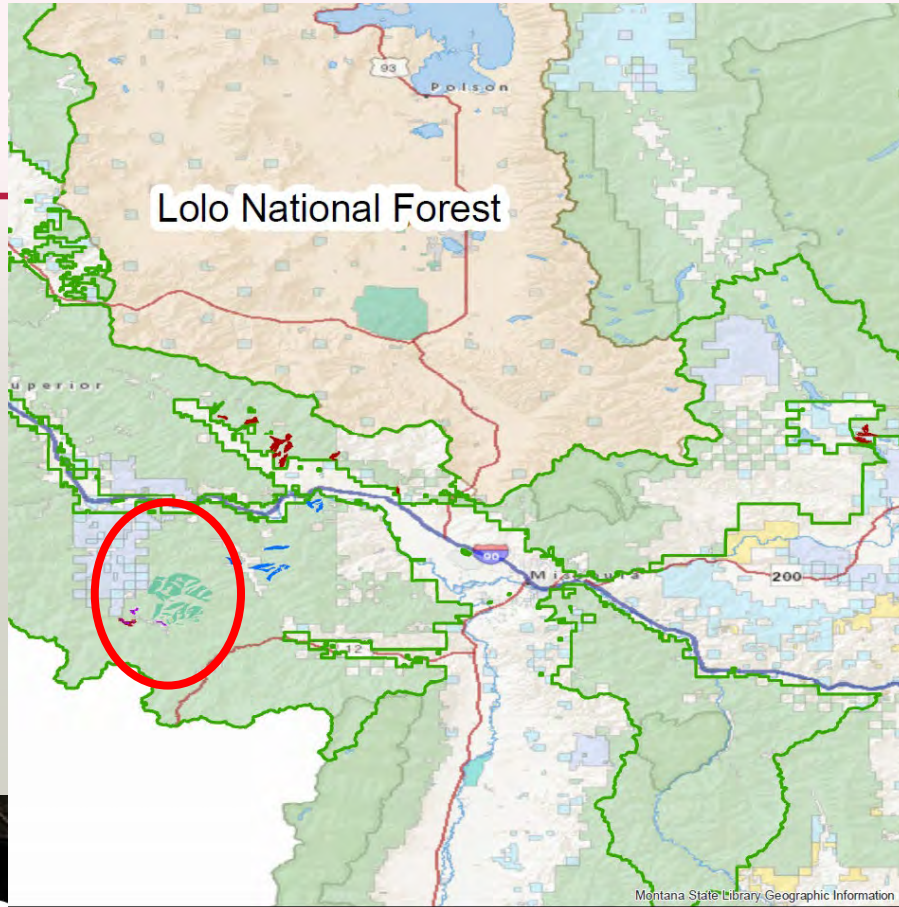


August 1, 2022



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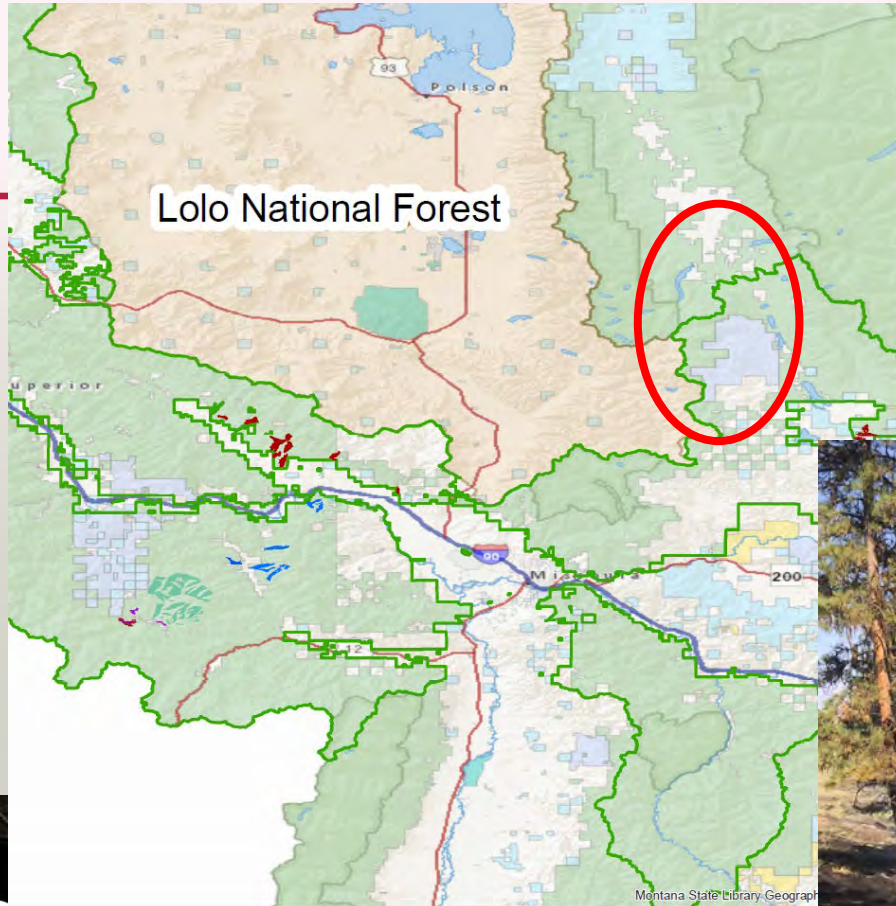
# LOLO NATIONAL FOREST



- Frenchtown Face Rx Fire - 297 acres
- Burdette Creek MANAGED Fire - 128 acres (currently)



# LOLO NATIONAL FOREST



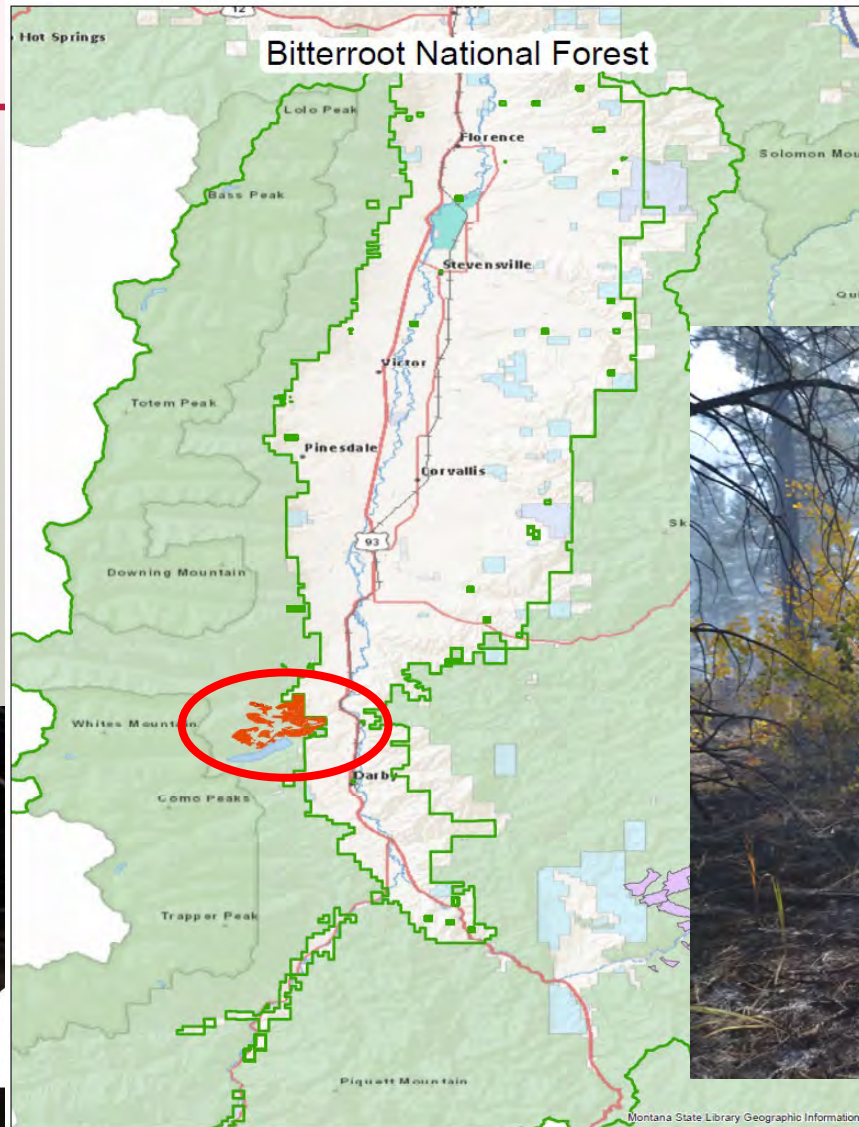
- Frenchtown Face Rx Fire - 244 acres
- Burdette Creek MANAGED Fire - 128 acres (currently)
- Horseshoe West/ Colt Summit Thinning and Rx Fire – 5 acres



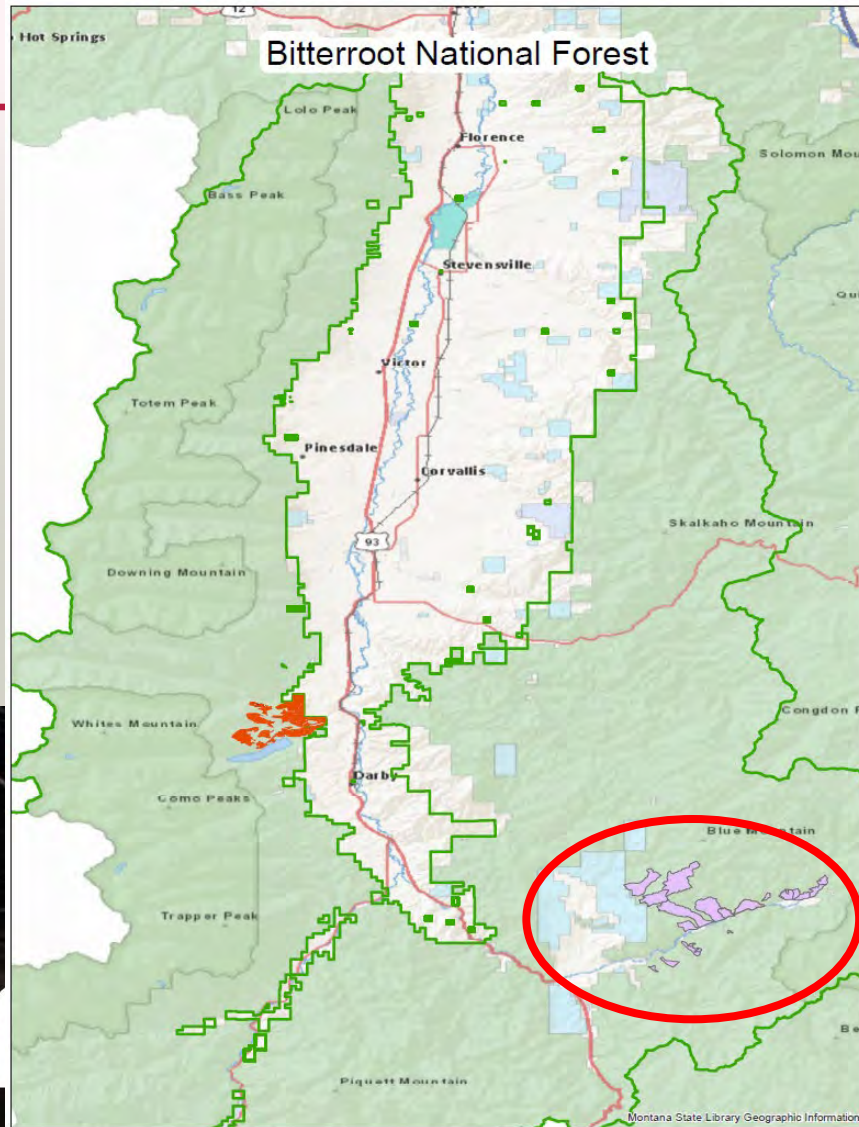


# BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST

- Como Horselick Rx Burning and Thinning – 75 acres



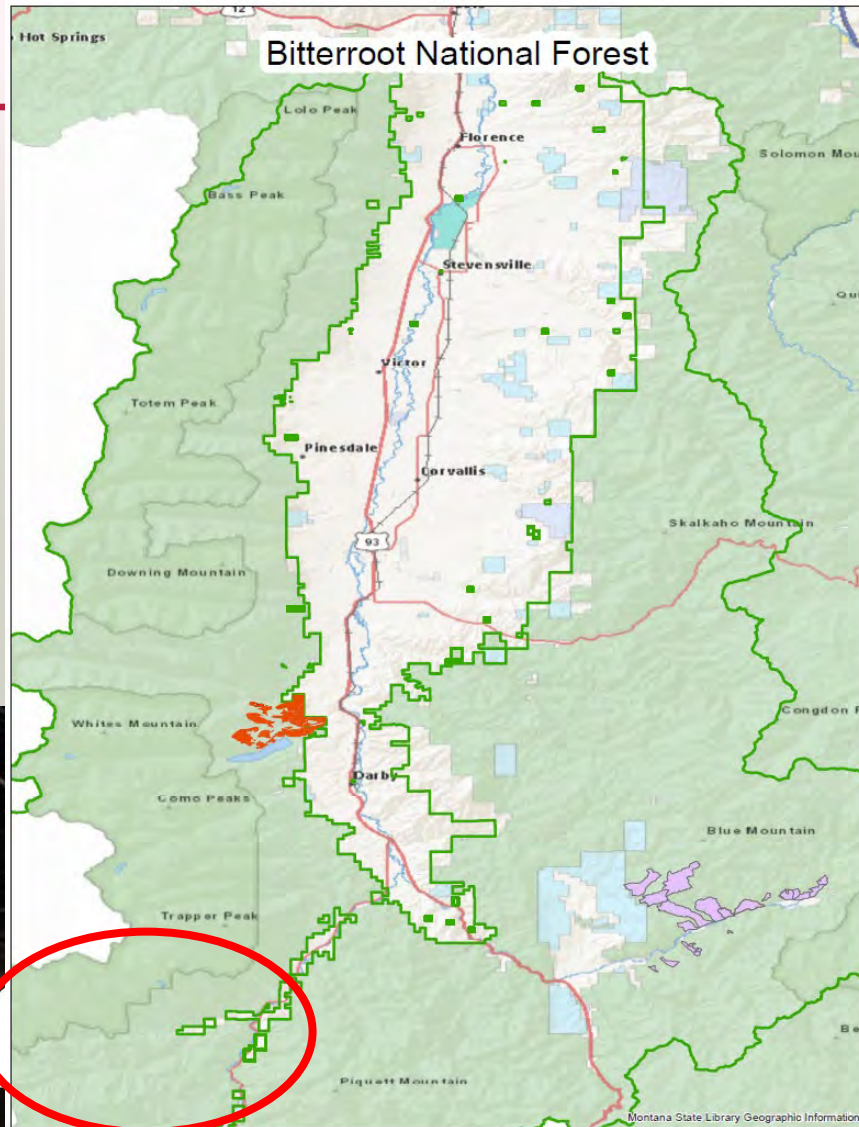
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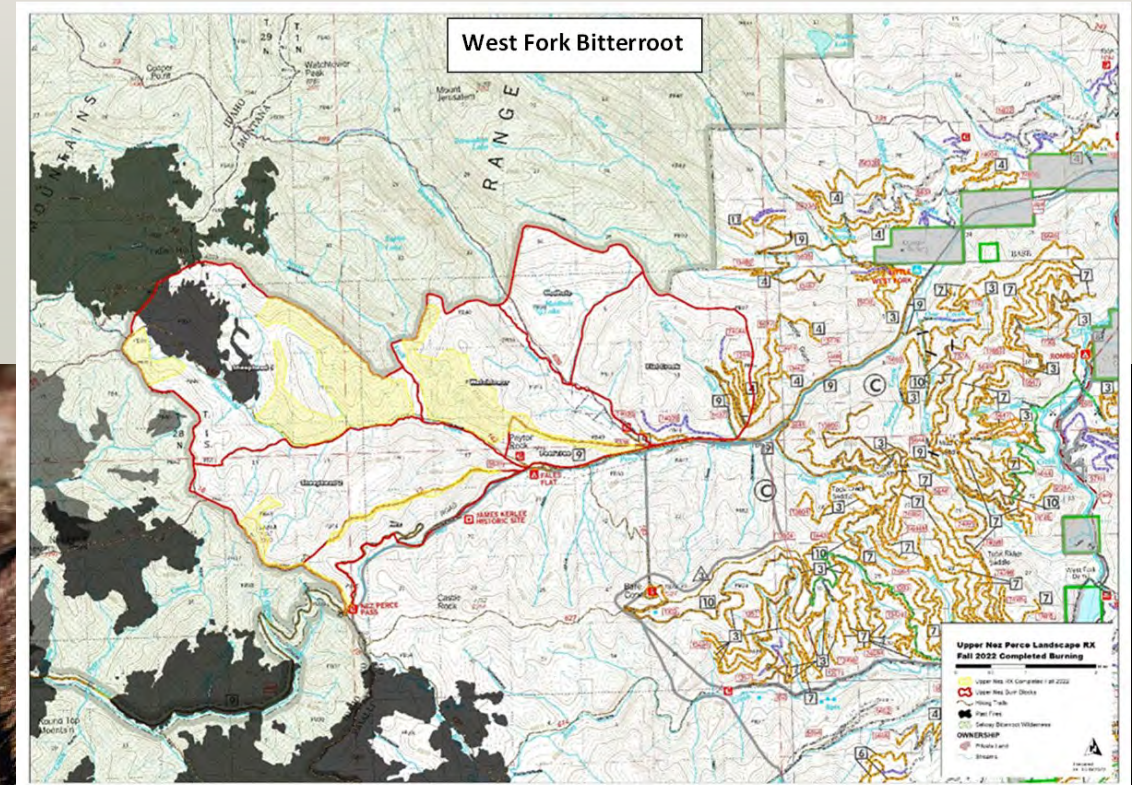
- Como Horselick Rx Burning and Thinning – 75 acres
- East Fork Bitterroot Rx Burning and Thinning – 1,237 acres



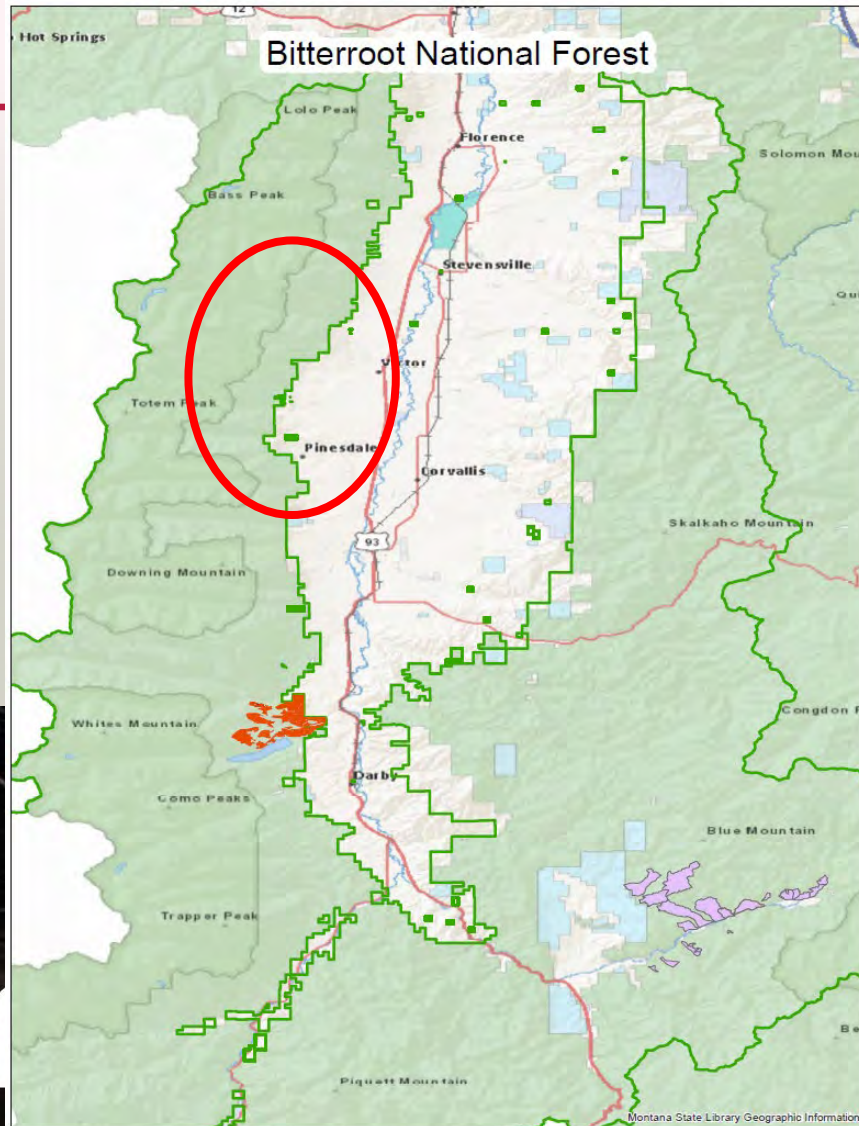
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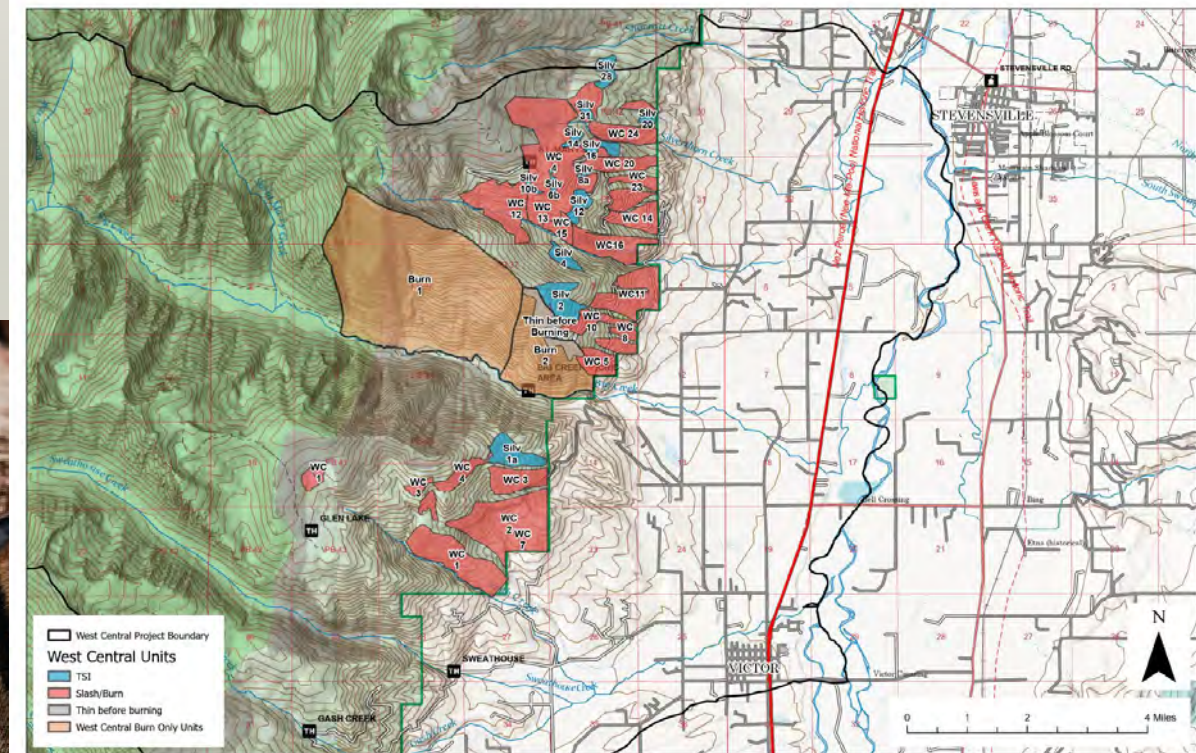
- Como Horselick Rx Burning and Thinning – 75 acres
- East Fork Bitterroot Rx Burning and Thinning – 1,237 acres
- West Fork Bitterroot Rx Burning – 625 acres



# BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST



- Como Horselick Rx Burning and Thinning – 147 acres
- East Fork Bitterroot Rx Burning and Thinning – 240 acres
- West Fork Bitterroot Rx Burning – 625 acres
- West Central Thinning – Assist in project mgmt. – 1,758 acres





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# ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2023

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4,251 acres of habitat restoration  
across the Lolo, Bitterroot, and  
Helena – Lewis & Clark NF



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE SEPTEMBER 2015

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- Accomplished 18,666 acres of Rx fire, thinning, or harvest treatments with my technical assistance/involvement
- Secured \$139,315 in grants for project implementation from partners beyond UGBEP
- Influenced 7,300 of “expected” acres through NEPA assistance



# THANKS TO THIS PROGRAM FOR...

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Continued support in my  
shared position.



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