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Controversial Logging Project Moves Forward On Kootenai Forest

By [Nick Mott](#) • 13 hours ago

On Wednesday, the Kootenai National Forest signaled that it's moving forward on a sprawling and controversial logging project.

The U.S. Forest Service says [the roughly 100,000-acre Black Ram Project](#) would reduce wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface near Troy, Montana, while encouraging fire's natural role in the ecosystem and restoring historic forest conditions.

Credit Josh Burnham

To do that, the agency proposes more than a 1,000 acres of logging in old-growth forest, and nearly 2,000 acres of clearcuts.

A document released by the Forest Service on Wednesday responded to and [dismissed objections on the project](#).

The Yaak Valley, where the project takes place, is home to part of a federally designated grizzly bear recovery zone — but only around two dozen bears inhabit the area. Critics say the project will compound existing pressures on the bruins, including development, poaching, and recreation.

Andrea Zaccardi, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity says, "Essentially the Forest Service has ignored the issues that we raised with the Black Ram Project, including negative impacts to grizzly bears."

Zaccardi said her organization will be looking closely at the Forest Service's objection responses and considering litigation as a next step.

The Forest Service hosted a virtual meeting last week to hear critics' concerns. Some supporters of the project said it should include more logging.

"These forests, particularly the Kootenai, are very important to the forest products industry and to our survivability," said Tom Partin with the American Forest Resource Council.

The project proposes about 4,000 acres for commercial timber harvest.

"By treating only a little bit over 5% of the project area, we really felt that that's a missed opportunity for taking some more volume off the landscape up there," Partin said.

*Black Ram Project map.
Credit Kootenai National Forest*

Environmental groups took particular issue with Black Ram's roads — a potential source of grizzly mortality.

A lawsuit on a separate timber sale nearby contributed in part to a months-long pause on Black Ram last year. Critics also said the Forest Service should conduct a more rigorous environmental analysis.

Rick Bass is board chair of the Yaak Valley Forest Council, he says, "The Forest Service has failed the land and the people, in our opinion, on this project."

In his objections response, regional forester Keith Lannom said the project meets all state and federal laws, as well as the [Kootenai National Forest Land Management Plan](#). He recommended the forest supervisor approve the project as soon as possible.