United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Northern Region
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Public Notice and Opportunity for Comment

Date: June 22, 2026

The Northern Region is proposing emergency salvage efforts in response to weather events in December 2025 and March 2026. In April 2026, President Trump declared a major disaster in all the affected Montana and Idaho counties, many of which include National Forest System Lands. Severe windstorms resulted in patches of catastrophic blown down timber across the Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Lolo, Flathead, Bitterroot, and Kootenai National Forests.

Wind-felled and damaged trees of conifer species native to the Northern Rockies are highly susceptible breeding material for associated native bark beetles, including pine engraver beetles, spruce beetle, Douglas-fir beetle, and potentially fir engraver, and several species of woodboring insects. It is expected that one or both insect groups will infest and reproduce to epidemic populations in wind-damaged trees. Bark beetle and woodboring insect populations are variable across northern Idaho and western Montana, influenced by multiple years of drought conditions that stressed trees and created susceptible stand conditions. The combination of existing beetle pressure and the vast extent of preferred host material created by recent significant wind events are expected to facilitate epidemics lasting multiple years (Kärvemo et al. 2023; Bentz et al. 2010; Furniss et al. 1979). There is also an increase in fuel loading across the Forests. The recoverable value of downed and damaged trees decreases with time. Timber value and quality are affected by colonization of blue-stain and decay fungi, weather checks, and attack by woodboring insects. Rates of decay and deterioration vary widely depending on tree species, season, temperature and moisture (Aho and Cahill 1984). Potential merchantable value will decrease rapidly within one to two years. Additionally, down or damaged trees are posing life hazards to both the public and Forest staff along roads, trails, and other developed high-use sites.

- Immediate action is necessary to:
- Mitigate localized bark beetle and woodboring insect epidemics from becoming established in blowdown patches which can spread into adjacent forest.
- Reduce fuel loading from recent blowdown events.
- Capture value from damaged trees in a timely matter.
- Reduce life/safety concerns in developed recreation sites and near roads and trails from hazardous conditions created by the wind events.

The Northern Region (Region 1) has shared our project information here: https://www.fs.usda.gov/r01/nezperce-clearwater/projects/328084

Emergency Actions pursuant to 7 CFR 1b.9(v)(2)(iv) to address imminent threats to life, property, and important natural, cultural, or historic resources have been granted by the Chief of the Forest Service. Alternative arrangements allow implementation to begin while an Environmental Assessment (EA), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and associated emergency consultation (Endangered Species Act (ESA), State Historic

Preservation Office (SHPO), and Tribal) are finalized. This analysis is being conducted pursuant to 7 CFR 1b.5 and 7 CFR 1b.6. The Final EA and Finding of No Significance (FONSI) will be posted to the Forest Service (USDA) website.

The entire 2026 Blowdown Emergency project area falls within the landscape identified by Secretary Rollins (April 3, 2025) in the Emergency Action Determination under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) section 40807, and this project will contribute towards forest resilience, community protection, and ingress/egress. Acting Regional Forester, Troy Heithecker, has approved the use of the Forest Health and Hazardous Fuels EAD for the 2026 Blowdown Emergency project. This project will not be subject to the pre-decisional objection review process (36 CFR 218).

Where natural catastrophic events such as fire, windstorms, or insect and disease epidemics have occurred, forest plan maximum size for openings may be exceeded without 60-day public review and Regional Forester approval, provided the public is notified and the environmental analysis supports the decision (FSM 2471.1 Region 1 Supplement). The 2025 and 2026 wind events are qualifying catastrophic natural events. The public is notified of the potential for larger than forest plan maximum openings by this notice, and the EA will provide the rationale for the large openings. Therefore, Regional Forester approval is not necessary.

Emergency Consultation is being conducted consistent with Executive Order 14225 Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production, signed by President Trump March 1, 2025.

If you wish to provide substantive comments that meaningfully inform consideration of reasonably foreseeable impacts on the human environment, the resulting significance determination, decisions on how to proceed (alternatives), or compliance with applicable laws, executive orders, and regulations on this proposal, please do so by June 29, 2026. Comments received should include names, addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers. Comments can be made here: https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=328084

Thank you for your interest in this project and in the management of your public lands.

2026 Blowdown Emergency Project

Figure 1: Example of blown down trees.

For More Information Contact:

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Purpose and Need for Action

In December 2025, Montana and Idaho were affected by a severe straight-line wind event. Additional wind events in March 2026 caused more damage. In April 2026, President Trump declared a major disaster in all the affected Montana and Idaho counties, many of which include National Forest System Lands. In Montana, portions of the Lolo, Flathead, Bitterroot, and Kootenai National Forests overlap the counties of Lincoln, Flathead, Sanders, Mineral, Missoula, Ravalli, and Powell. In Idaho, portions of the Idaho Panhandle and Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests overlap the counties of Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Benewah, Shoshone, Latah, Idaho, and Clearwater.

Wind-felled and damaged trees of conifer species native to the Northern Rockies are highly susceptible breeding material for associated native bark beetles, including pine engraver beetles, spruce beetle, Douglas-fir beetle, and potentially fir engraver, and several species of woodboring insects. It is expected that one or both insect groups will infest and reproduce to epidemic populations in wind-damaged trees. Bark beetle and woodboring insect populations are variable across northern Idaho and western Montana, influenced by multiple years of drought conditions that stressed trees and created susceptible stand conditions. The combination of existing beetle pressure and the vast extent of preferred host material created by recent significant wind events are expected to facilitate epidemics lasting multiple years. There is also an increase in fuel loading across the Forests. Additionally, down or damaged trees are posing life hazards to both the public and Forest staff along roads, trails, and other developed high-use sites.

Immediate action is necessary to:

- Mitigate localized bark beetle and woodboring insect epidemics from becoming established in blowdown patches which can spread into adjacent forest.
- Reduce fuel loading from recent blowdown events.
- Reduce life/safety concerns in developed recreation sites and near roads and trails from hazardous conditions created by wind events.
- Capture value from damaged trees in a timely matter.

All National Forest System Lands on the Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Lolo, Flathead, Bitterroot, and Kootenai Forests are included in this proposal **EXCEPT** Wilderness.

Actions would be **limited to areas affected by these wind events and where applicable laws, regulations, policy, standards and guidelines of Forest Plans, or other management plans allow treatment**.

Figure 2: ***Acres that may be considered for treatment and Wilderness acres where No treatments will be considered.***

Forest	Acres Suitable for Timber Production	Acres Not Suitable for Timber Production (*treatments may take place in accordance with applicable Forest Plan Standard and Guidelines*)	Acres of Wilderness – NO treatments
Nez Perce- Clearwater Forest	1,042,519	1,757,478	1,139,059
Lolo Forest	1,238,704	806,522	363,308
Idaho Panhandle Forest	950,900	1,125,900	9,900
Bitterroot Forest	389,820	808,650	24,700
Kootenai Forest	793,700	918,100	93,700
Flathead Forest	1,202,600	857,667	1,069,933

Location of Project

The Project is located on National Forest System Lands in Montana and Idaho counties affected by a severe straight-line wind event in December 2025 and March 2026. This includes lands in the following Forests: Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Lolo, Flathead, Bitterroot, and Kootenai. In Montana, portions of the Lolo, Flathead, Bitterroot, and Kootenai National Forests overlap the counties of Lincoln, Flathead, Sanders, Mineral, Missoula, Ravalli, and Powell. In Idaho, portions of the Idaho Panhandle and Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests overlap the counties of Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Benewah, Shoshone, Latah, Idaho, and Clearwater.

Proposed Action

The 2026 Blowdown Emergency Project is emergency response to the severe wind events in December 2025 and March 2026. This project has been designed to avoid or minimize potential impact on other resources and will comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and direction. Compliance will be achieved through applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines, implementation of project-level and unit specific design features, and contract implementation.

- **Standards** are mandatory constraints on project and activity decision-making established to help achieve or maintain the desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet applicable legal requirements (36 CFR 219.7(e)(1)(iii)).
- **Guidelines** are constraints on project or activity decision-making that allows for departure from its terms, so long as the purpose of the guideline is met. Guidelines are established to help achieve or maintain a desired condition or conditions to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects or to meet applicable legal requirements (36 CFR 219.7(e)(1)(iv)).

- **Design Features** are constraints or requirements that are included as part of the proposed action through an iterative interdisciplinary process, to avoid or minimize adverse impacts. (7 CFR 1.11(a)(11)).

The Proposed Action includes both intermediate and regeneration harvest. Intermediate (Salvage or Sanitation) harvest would occur where sufficient stocking remains undamaged by wind. Regeneration harvest would occur where blowdown was so severe that areas do not have enough undamaged trees to be considered sufficiently stocked or where undamaged trees are not appropriate species for the site. Appropriately stocked will be defined by each forest and takes site and the forest plan into consideration.

- **Blowdown areas** are defined as groupings of trees where greater than 25 percent of trees as measured by trees per acre or basal area (cross sectional area of all trees as measured at 4.5 feet above the ground, measured on the uphill side) have more than 45 degrees of lean from vertical **and/or** have wind induced structural damage (Krist et al. 2014)
- **Intermediate harvest** means that at the conclusion of harvest, stands will be stocked, they include:
    - Salvage: The removal of dead trees or trees being damaged or dying due to injurious agents other than competition, to recover value that would otherwise be lost.
    - Sanitation: The removal of trees to improve stand health by stopping or reducing actual or anticipated spread of insects and disease.
- **Regeneration harvest** means that a stocked stand will not be left post harvest; stands will be restocked naturally or planted. Regeneration methods may have leave trees (less than 10 percent stocked) or reserve trees (more than 10 percent stocked). These methods include:
    - **Clearcut:** A stand in which essentially all trees have been removed in one operation to produce an even-aged stand.
    - **Seedtree:** An even-aged regeneration method in which a new age class develops from seeds that germinate in fully exposed micro-environments after removal of the previous stand, except for a small number of trees left to provide seed.
    - **Shelterwood:** A method of regenerating an even-aged stand in which a new age class develops beneath the moderated micro-environment provided by the residual trees.
- **Trees may be harvested with ground-based, tethered, skyline, or aerial logging systems.**
- **Construct temporary roads only as necessary to facilitate vegetation treatments.**
    - Decommission temporary roads within 3 years of construction.

- **Conduct Road Maintenance on existing roads as needed for safe operations and timber haul.**
- **Reduce slash generated from harvest and prepare sites for planting (regeneration) within three years using mechanical or hand piling, jackpot or underburning, and mastication.**
- **Reforest the harvested areas as needed to meet National Forest Management Act (NFMA) – planting or natural regeneration.**
    - Before and after planting, treatments for animal damage control may occur where necessary.
- **No actions will be taken in areas designated as wilderness. Actions in other management areas will be guided by Forests' individual land management plans**.
- **Intermediate and regeneration harvest, temporary roads, and mechanical, hand, and fire treatments will not occur within riparian zones as defined in forest plans except within developed and admin areas**.

Scope of Analysis

This proposal will consider National Forest Service Lands on the Idaho Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Lolo, Flathead, Bitterroot, and Kootenai Forests. These forests were affected by wind events in December 2025 and March 2026. Forest boundaries were chosen as the effects boundary as the wind damage is wide and variable across the landscape. Specialists will consider effects on resources that may be within the affected areas across the forests based on the potential impacts of the proposed action.

As this is a response to an emergency, specific defined areas of damage are not currently available. More reconnaissance will take place this summer (2026) both on the ground and aerially, to identify areas that need treatment.

It is anticipated that it will take approximately 3 to 5 years to complete actions associated with this proposal.