



NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Forest Service
Helena National Forest
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Helena, MT 59602

For Immediate Release

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Forest Seeks Comments on Red Mountain Flume Chessman Reservoir Project

HELENA, MONT., March 19, 2013—Helena District Ranger Heather DeGeest is asking members of the public to comment on the proposed Red Mountain Flume Chessman Reservoir project, located in the Tenmile watershed, by April 5, 2013.

The Red Mountain Flume Chessman Reservoir project will focus specifically on maintaining the water quality, supply and its infrastructure through a variety of fuels treatments along the segment of the flume located on National Forest System lands, and adjacent to Chessman Reservoir.

Upper Tenmile is the municipal watershed for the City of Helena that, after treatment, provides drinking water to nearly 30,000 city residents. Although the Forest has a landscape-scale project scheduled to begin later this year, there is an immediate need to treat fuels and remove hazard trees along the flume and reservoir to maintain the water quality, supply and infrastructure; as well as compliment the mitigation activities already implemented by Helena city officials on neighboring lands along the flume.

To fully mitigate the risk to water quality and supply to city residents, additional treatments need to be implemented along Chessman Reservoir. Water runs through the Red Mountain flume into Chessman Reservoir as a "holding tank" until it is treated at the Helena Water Treatment Plant and moved through to residents of Helena.

"The purpose of this project is to implement activities that will ultimately maintain quantity and quality water to the City of Helena," DeGeest said. "Not only is it something that the Forest is directed to do in its forest management plan, it's a project that is necessary to be good neighbors and stewards for the community that depends on this system for its drinking water."

"We're pleased to have this portion of treatment started and we appreciate the cooperation and enthusiasm of the Forest Service," Helena City Manager Ron Alles said. "We've started the process by treating nearly 1.5 miles of City and private property along the flume and the Forest Service project will be a continuation and complement of our work in the area. There is a distinct difference between the areas we've treated on City and private land and the untreated areas in the Forest Service property; it's absolutely critical that the Forest Service begin work to protect a major component of our water supply as soon as possible."

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Due to decades of fire suppression and the recent mountain pine beetle epidemic, the Tenmile watershed has experienced significant tree mortality and uncharacteristic fuel loading. As directed by its management plan, the Forest is responsible for proactively managing the municipal watershed, to maintain sufficient water quality and supply to the City of Helena.

“Red Mountain Flume Chessman Reservoir is a small-scale project that is specifically designed to mitigate hazards that pose an imminent threat to the City of Helena’s water quality and supply,” DeGeest said. “This project does not replace other landscape-level vegetation analyses, specifically those in the Tenmile and Telegraph drainages, that are scheduled to occur in the future.”

Forest managers are analyzing the potential to remove hazard trees and implement some prescribed burns along the flume and reservoir. Management activities will help reduce the threat of damage to the wood flume itself, as well as minimize the risk of uncharacteristic, severe fires that could lead to soil erosion, sedimentation and ash flow into the reservoir. Prescribed burns would be implemented within specific parameters outlined in a burn plan, and could include pile and broadcast burning. As part of this project, it is anticipated that a site-specific amendment is needed for the Forest Plan’s wildlife standard 4a, which is specific to elk hiding cover, in this area.

The Helena City Commission formally accepted the Tenmile Creek Water Supply Fuel Reduction project in 2009. Funds from a FEMA grant of \$312,831 combined with City of Helena matching funds of \$104,277 provided the implementation funding necessary for the project.

“In summer/fall work seasons of 2011 and 2012, City of Helena contractors along with contributing efforts from City Parks Department staff completed 72 acres of forest clearing work within private ownerships located adjacent to the Red Mountain flume,” Helena City Natural Resource Specialist Brad Langsather said. “In the absence of any unforeseen delays approximately 95% of the FEMA-funded forest fuel mitigation within the Tenmile Creek Water Supply Fuel Reduction project is slated for completion on or before December 31, 2012.”

The Helena National Forest will host an open house meeting on Tuesday, March 26 from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. for people to get more information and/or ask forest specialists questions about the project. To comment on the project, members of the public can send specific comments to the Forest via email to comments-northern-helena-helena@fs.fed.us with “Red Mountain Flume Chessman Reservoir” in the subject line; or send it through regular mail to: Helena National Forest, ATTN: Red Mountain Flume Project, 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT 59602. Comments need to be sent by April 5, 2013.

Additional information, photos and maps are available on our website at www.fs.usda.gov/helena/. If you have other questions, contact Forest Public Affairs Officer Kathy Bushnell at 406-495-3747.

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