



# **Decision Memo**

## **Armstrong Creek Restoration**

**USDA Forest Service**  
**Beartooth RD, Custer Gallatin NF**  
**Carbon County, MT**

### **Background**

During the June 2022 floods, Armstrong Creek, a tributary on the north side of East Rosebud Lake, avulsed (rapidly left existing channel, forming a new channel of flow, cutting dozens of feet of streambank, and bringing down large amounts of floodwater and sediment. The avulsion occurred about halfway between where Armstrong Creek came out of the canyon and where it emptied into East Rosebud Lake. The event deposited massive amounts of sediment and woody debris filling the historical channel of Armstrong Creek. This debris jam then forced water to flow unconfined across the Armstrong Creek alluvial fan (an expanding field of sediment deposited from historical flows), upturning uplands and down cutting a new stream channel. In response to flooding of cabins in the East Rosebud Lake Association the Forest Service excavated an emergency channel to temporarily stabilize Armstrong Creek shortly after the flooding event as part of a series of emergency flood response activities intended to reduce ongoing damage and restore access within the drainage. The current condition of Armstrong Creek within the excavated channel appears to be unstable. Another large flood event would likely cause water to again spill out of its banks and further impact the natural environment and cabins below.

### **Decision**

I have decided to realign Armstrong Creek into its historical, pre-flood channel through the construction of a diversion structure that will sit at the split of the pre and post-flood channels. This diversion will send base-stream flows down the pre-flood channel while the post-flood channel will be excavated and improved to serve as a flood channel carrying excess flow when the pre-flood channel exceeds bank full flows. In addition, the pre-flood channel will be excavated to convey all flows up to 180 cfs. The pre-flood channel will convey flows to East Rosebud Lake, while the post-flood channel will be used to convey flood level flows to East Rosebud Creek. The project will take place on lands owned by ERLA as well as Forest Service Lands.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as removing and/or relocating debris and sediment following disturbance events (such as floods, hurricanes, tornados, mechanical/ engineering failures, etc.) to restore uplands, wetlands, or riparian systems to pre-disturbance conditions, to the extent practicable, such that site conditions will not impede or negatively alter natural processes (36 CFR 220.6(e)(18)). This category of action(s) is applicable because 2022 floods filled Armstrong Creek with debris, driving flow out of the historical channel, and this project seeks to restore the creek to pre-disturbance conditions.



Upon careful consideration of the resource analysis, I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions and effects of the proposed action identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- ♦ (Wildlife and Botany) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – The project area is in management areas for, or includes habitat for Canada Lynx, Grizzly Bear, and North America Wolverine, however, project activities occur within existing disturbance and are short term. Therefore, the effects determination is “may effect, not likely to adversely affect.” There would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to whitebark pine or Species of Conservation Concern plants due to a lack of habitat.
- ♦ Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The design features listed in the hydrology report will be implemented, meeting Forest Plan requirements, avoiding extraordinary circumstances, and ensuring any impacts to water quality will be localized, short term, and minor.
- ♦ Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None are present in the project area.
- ♦ Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – None are present in the project area.
- ♦ Research natural areas – None are present in the project area.
- ♦ American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – The area is of low potential for American Indian religious or cultural sites. During implementation if any potential cultural resources are located, work in the area (within 100ft) will stop and a CGNF archaeologist will be contacted to assess the potential cultural resource.
- ♦ Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – The CGNFs work on Forest Lands and within the channel is located on lands that consist of a steep (>20% grade) alluvial fan and shifting river channel that has flooded historically. Previous inventories adjacent to the project area have not yielded precontact resources, and there are no historic resources within the project area. During implementation if any potential cultural resources are located, work in the area (within 100ft) will stop and a CGNF archaeologist will be contacted to assess the potential cultural resource.

## Public Involvement

This action was originally presented at a public meeting on September 27<sup>th</sup> 2023 covering the flood damage and necessary repairs on the Beartooth Ranger District. The meeting was hosted by the District Ranger and Specialists with a presentation and Question/Answer opportunity. Approximately 20 people attended the meeting. No comments about this project were received during the meeting. This action was also listed as a proposal on the Custer Gallatin National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and updated periodically during the analysis. No public comments were received during that period. No new information was received that presented changed circumstances, which would preclude the use of this categorical exclusion for this project.



## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Custer Gallatin National Forest Land Management Plan (2022) the Forest Service direction on Floodplain Management and Wetland Protection, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act

## Implementation Date

This project is expected to be implemented May 2025.

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Amy Haas, Beartooth District Ranger, 6811 US Highway 212, Red Lodge MT 59068 [amy.haas@usda.gov](mailto:amy.haas@usda.gov), 406-446-4529

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Amy Haas  
Beartooth District Ranger

Date

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