

**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION**
Northwestern Land Office



STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

STATE OF MONTANA

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January 22, 2021

Carolyn Upton, Forest Supervisor
Lolo National Forest
24 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Re: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Support for the Sawmill Petty Project Draft Decision Notice and Request for Interested Party Status.

Dear Ms. Upton,

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) strongly supports the Draft Decision for the Sawmill Petty Project. DNRC has fire protection interests in this area and manages State Trust Lands in the vicinity. Our agencies share the common goals of reducing fire risk and improving forest health in Montana's forest landscapes. The project is not only important for the national forest system lands but also for the state and private landowners in the area. DNRC supports the Selected Alternative, Modified Alternative B. The 18,980 acres of vegetation treatments proposed will increase vegetation diversity, effectively reduce wildfire risk, and increase resiliency to uncharacteristic disturbances. The treatments would reduce the risk of wildfire to communities, decrease potential for high intensity fire, increase public and firefighter safety, provide a road system that supports public and administrative needs, and contribute to a sustainable supply of timber. The proposed road treatments will provide watershed benefits and maintain access needed for fire management and future restoration.

For implementation of this project we encourage you to consider the use of Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and stewardship contracts which retain timber revenue to help fund additional restoration. Stands in the WUI, particularly near property, should be thinned enough for fire to drop to the ground and provide safe conditions for firefighter engagement. This may result in wider spacing and more openings than what is prescribed for other management objectives. We encourage you to coordinate project implementation with state and private landowners. DNRC has programs to assist private landowners with treatments on their lands.

Because of our strong interest, DNRC is requesting to remain an "interested party" regarding all objections to the Draft Decision. If changes requested by another party present the potential to reduce the ability to meet wildfire risk and forest health goals, impact access to state trust

lands, or adversely affect DNRC's fire protection of state and private lands, DNRC requests participation in objection resolution discussions.

DNRC is committed to continuing a positive working relationship with the Lolo National Forest, specifically relating to landscape resiliency, wildfire response, community protection, and sustainable forest management. By working together, we can more effectively work towards an "all lands" approach to forest and watershed management and restoration benefiting both agencies' missions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael O'Herron".

Mike O'Herron
Area Manager, Southwest Land Office
MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
406-542-4261, moherron@mt.gov

CC: Northern Region Objection Reviewing Officer; Jonathan Hansen – Missoula Unit Manager;
Stephen Kimball, Local Government Forest Advisor