Mr. Jeff Rivera January 29, 2021

District Range

Wenatchee River Ranger District

Leavenworth, Washington

Dear Jeff

This letter is our response to the request for comment regarding the UWPP (Upper Wenatchee Pilot Project) DEA (Draft Environmental Assessment).

The Lake Wenatchee/Plain Community, UWPP area, has approximately 2900 homes in the area. The population varies depending on how many tourists are in the area. A big attraction is Lake Wenatchee; during the year 500,000 people visit Lake Wenatchee State Park. Lake Wenatchee has its own volunteer fire department, LWFR. Leavenworth does not supply any support to the community, other than the hospital in Leavenworth, for which LWFR provide local ambulance/EMT support. In February 2020 81% of the tax payers in the community voted to increase the tax paid for Fire Department services from .54 to .82 per thousand, starting in 2021.

Within the past 25 years there have been 11 forest fires within 12 miles of our community. The most recent large wildfire was the Cougar fire in 2018 that burned 42,000 acres. Thanks to the USFS and local fire departments; No homes were destroyed and no lives were lost.

Of the top 25 places most likely to experience a wildland fire in Washington, Leavenworth and the Lake Wenatchee/Plain community are ranked number 1. If there were a major wildfire in the Lake Wenatchee/Plain community alone, the cost could be $4.2 Billion based on LWFAC research. This could mean 70% of the homes in the area are destroyed.

The USFS has created the UWPP, approximately 74,000 acres in size. The intent within the UWPP is to actively manage the forest to improve the health of the forest and reduce wildland fire risk. Included in this project area is 12,000 acres property not owned by the USFS. Most likely only about 48% of the acreage in the UWPP planning area will receive active treatment by the USFS; 25,000 USFS acres will be left in its current unhealthy condition. We want to see the maximum number of acres, treated for forest health improvement. Leaving 25,000 acres of forest untreated is not a good decision in our opinion.

Regarding the DEA, we submit the following:

1. Page 1-1, 1.2 and Page 3-163 3.8.5 states the UWPP is 6 miles from Leavenworth. How was that milage number determined?
2. Pages 2-14 and 2-15, Figure 2.2-3 We would like to see all USFS land in the 300-foot WUI (Wild-land Urban Interface) receive fire break treatment. Figure 2.2-3 does not show WUI treatment areas. We think the DEA should show those areas proposed for WUI treatment. We would like have the WUI treatment outlined in the DEA. Future scheduled WUI maintenance treatment needs to be outline in the DEA. We suggest a monitoring system, including local residence participation, be established.
3. Page 2-24 and Page 2-38 The DEA should specifically state which roads will be closed.
4. Page 3-161 section 3.8 This section should address the degradation of the Scenery {Scenic Integrity) if there is a major wild fire that destroys a significant portion of the UWPP area.
5. Page 3-195 Is there a way to quantify in dollar value the socioeconomics benefit of Alternative 1 if a wild fire, that destroys the community, does not happen?
6. Is the USFS willing to consider partnering with and allow neighboring land owners to treat USFS forests in the WUI area to reduce the risk of wild fire spreading to or from USFS land?
7. Is the USFS reviewing the litigation and related success with regard to the Mission project, lessons learned, to ensure success of the UWPP, if this is challenged in court?

Jeff, thank you, your team, OWNF, and the USFS for your efforts to improve forest health in our community.

Sincerely,

Jim and Gerri Passage

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