

**From:** Patrick O. Connell  
**To:** [FS-appeals-northern-regional-office](#)  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** [External Email]Mud Creek Vegetation Project Objection (Bitterroot NF)  
**Date:** Sunday, August 8, 2021 11:01:22 AM

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Objection Reviewing Officer  
USDA Forest Service, Northern Region  
26 Fort Missoula Road  
Missoula, MT 59804

This objection to the Mud Cr Vegetation Project is being submitted specifically to address an insufficient "Purpose and Need Statement" along with the EA's dismissal of "Water Yield" as a potential issue within the scope of the EA.

Understand, I do not wish to impede the scheduled implementation of this project due to this objection. Rather, I seek a formal clarification/amendment to the document to correct its shortcoming.

While this objection is substantive, it does not call into question the proposed vegetative management actions that are detailed within the EA. In particular, I acknowledge and fully support the rationale presented justifying the harvesting/removal of some "Old Growth" timber so as eliminate ladder fuels' wildfire risk from even more veteran old growth trees.

In my 16 September 2019 letter to SO Matt Anderson, I articulated the overwhelming importance to address "Water Flow" within the project's NEPA analysis; however, Water Yield was classified as an potential issue not carried forward for analysis. This flies in the face of recent empirical evidence in the greater Bitterroot Watershed. The proposed project area covered in the EA effectively represents the sole remaining headwater area of the Bitterroot River *not significantly* burnt by wildfire from 2000 onward. Rather than dismiss the "water yield" issue merely in terms of "Equivalent clearcut area (ECA)", this EA should actively defend the proposed actions from the stance of *defending* water flows, and its timing. Such justification would be a much stronger Court defense of the proposed actions of this EA than a subjective, qualitative "feel good" statement "...primary purpose is to work toward restoring a healthy ...forest ecosystem that meets multiple resource objectives..."

As is, this EA both ignores, and avoids its fundamental responsibility as laid out in the 1897 Organic Act that established the agency: "...for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flows" which subsequently was reaffirmed by SCOTUS in *US v New Mexico* (438 US 696).

Submitted

/s/

Patrick O. Connell, *Professional Forester*  
(fmr) MT State Senator & Chair of the Legislative Water Policy Committee