

Dear Forest Supervisor:

I am encouraged to read the proposed Environmental Assessment for the Sawtooth National Forest to pre-authorize a wide range of prescribed burns across the Sawtooth National Forest. I support responsible utilization of natural resources on public land, and I believe that our national forest leaders should always strive to deliver the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Anyone paying attention to the growth of wildfires in the West can attest that these catastrophic fires aren't serving the greatest good. We need active management in our forests, and responsible prescribed burns are an important active management tool. It is preferable to introduce fire onto the landscape through prescribed burns as opposed to the misguided policy of attempting to manage wildfires in a way to produce similar outcomes. The "unplanned fire in the right place and right time" policy has led to many wildfires growing beyond the control in a way that has threatened communities, ecosystems, and the lives of firefighters.

I support Design Elements RSL 1 - RSL 24, which are designed to protect and maintain recreation resources in the Sawtooth National Forest. I note that in Design Element RSL 4 it states "If a trail is widened for fireline purposes it would be rehabbed to pre-burn conditions or if the trail itself was damaged we would mend or recontour it." RSL 22 also states, "Damage to or loss of Forest System trails from prescribed fire activities would be repaired or mitigated." It isn't clear from the Environmental Analysis how it will be communicated to the public when it will become necessary to repair damaged or lost trails. There are many design elements that require the FS to rehabilitate newly constructed firelines. I don't want to see any inadvertent road closures or road rehabilitations result from this action. I recommend adding a process to the Implementation Checklist to notify the public of any trail damage or loss that would require attention under design elements RSL 4 and RSL 22.

It is clear from the Design Elements that the Forest Service recognizes the value of mechanical line treatments and roads and trails for use in controlling wildfire. Given the persistent risk facing Western communities and ecosystems from wildfire - even after successful prescribed burn treatments are accomplished - it would be worth considering if exceptions could be made to Design Elements ALL 2, ALL 3, SBW 2, and RSL 6 to analyze if any mechanical lines could be converted into permanent routes. If these same mechanical lines are effective at containing prescribed fire, they would also be effective for containing wildfires. They would also likely serve the purpose and need of providing additional recreation experiences. 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) Authorizes the USFS to construct or reconstruct roads and trails through use of a Categorical Exclusion. USFS should analyze if Categorical Exclusions can be used ahead of any prescribed burn treatment maintain a portion of newly constructed firelines as new roads and trails.

Sincerely,

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