

[REDACTED]
Stevensville, Mt. 59870-0358
May 7, 2022

Matthew D. Anderson, Forest Supervisor
USDA Forest Service
Bitterroot National Forest
1801 N. First Street
Hamilton, Mt.
59840

Attn: File Code 1950
“Bitterroot Forest Project”

Dear Mr. Anderson,

Thank you for providing maps, descriptions and information about the proposed forest management activities in the “Bitterroot Front Project.” And thank you for giving us citizens of Ravalli County, Montana, the opportunity to comment on the proposed project.

I am pleased with the desired outcome of the Bitterroot Forest Project; ie, “to increase forest health and landscape resiliency, provide for public & firefighter safety, reduce fire risk to communities, improve wildlife habitat, contribute to community viability with forest products and jobs—all the while restoring fire to our fire dependent ecosystems.”

One does not need a degree in Forestry to see the need for detailed forest management in the Bitterroot Front. You have broken down into small sections on the maps, General Vicinity, Stevensville Opportunity Areas, and Darby Opportunity Areas, and the needs of each individual area. There are many diverse small areas where each has it’s own management need: ie, wetter areas have denser undergrowth and denser tree population that need the undergrowth to be cleared out, by whatever means fits that type of undergrowth, trees need to be thinned so that insects and diseases

do not take over and destroy healthy trees.

Shade tolerant tree species need to be replaced, if necessary, with less shade tolerant trees to keep the space under the trees from becoming “ladders” wildfire can quickly climb and ignite the crowns of adjoining trees.

With more open spaces on the forest floors, native grasses & wildflowers can return, even be reseeded if necessary, so the grazing wildlife could survive with natural grazing and feeding habits.

I had no idea that dwarf mistletoe presented such a threat to the life of a tree, starving it and making it die from the top down! Those areas where dwarf mistletoe takes over definitely need to be managed and maintained to reduce fire hazard and keep the health of the trees living there.

I am in favor of commercial timber harvesting, commercial thinning and improvement cuts to maintain or enhance desirable stand characteristics. All timber has a life span, and it is desirable to be able to harvest the timber and not waste it, while also providing jobs and income for citizens and the county.

The road less areas are having the natural habitat of wildlife, timber and ecosystem choked out by excessive undergrowth and timber growth. I would encourage non-commercial vegetation treatments that could safely be used to provide important wildlife and fish habitat in clearing these choked areas.

Replanting trees in burned off areas by wildfire is wise use of the land. Old burned trees should be cleared off and burned so they do not become home to beetles, insects and disease.

The time and effort you have taken to evaluate these diverse areas, and plan effective treatments where needed to enhance the health of our forests, wildlife, fish and water sheds is to be commended. Thank you again for the chance to comment on the “Bitterroot Front Project”.

Sincerely yours,

Susan McCreary