

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

Northwestern Land Office

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HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601

August 25, 2022

Scott Snelson, District Ranger
Spotted Bear Ranger District
P.O. Box 190340
Hungry Horse, MT 59919

Re: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Comments on the Spotted Bear Mountain Project Draft Decision Notice

Dear Mr. Snelson,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Draft Decision Notice for the Spotted Bear Mountain project. Our agencies share the common goals of reducing fire risk and improving forest health in Montana's forest landscapes. This project aligns well with the Montana Forest Action Plan which emphasizes active management across boundaries to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health, and retention of a forest industry in Montana.

About 42% of the project area is within the Wildland Urban-Interface as identified in the 2021 Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The Spotted Bear Ranger Station is within the planning area and there are permitted guest ranches nearby. These facilities, and the agency staff and public using them, are currently at risk from wildfires.

DNRC supports the selection of the Proposed Action Alternative for implementation. This alternative includes 1,040 acres of vegetation management on national forest lands. The treatments will help reduce fuel loads in this area. However, as we stated in our previous comments, more burning following thinning will be needed to effectively reduce fire intensity and increase firefighter and public safety. Without accompanying surface fuel reduction, thinning can contribute to high-intensity surface fires. We encourage you to plan follow-up prescribed burning (or piling and burning) for most of the commercial treatment areas and in pre-commercial thinning areas where it can be done without losing substantial residual trees.

DNRC looks forward to working with you in implementation of the project. Consider the use the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) which will retain timber revenue to help fund additional restoration projects.

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 reduce the ability of this project to meet wildfire risk and forest health goals, 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 Flathead 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 blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Poncin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Greg" and last name "Poncin" clearly distinguishable.

Greg Poncin
Area Manager
Northwestern Land Office
MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

CC: Clay Stephenson, Unit Manager, Swan Lake Unit; Stephen Kimball- Local Government Forest Advisor