



December 15, 2022

Tim Lahey
Butte District Ranger
1820 Meadowlark
Butte, MT 59701

Dear Tim,

This letter is on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments for the **Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project #63295**. We are very happy with the work you have done so far. You have been transparent and diligent throughout project planning. Thank you for the good work.

Sun Mountain Lumber is a family owned sawmill that provides direct employment for approximately 200 mill and logging jobs in Deer Lodge, MT. In addition to the potential of this Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project providing raw material for our operations, we view these types of projects as creating a relationship in which our operations assist the Butte Ranger District, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in achieving their goals and objectives on the ground. We applaud the collaborative effort and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group that provided input on project activities and desired outcomes.

We support the purpose and need of the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed project. Specifically, we support the reduction of fuels in the project area. It cannot be overstated that a wildfire in this watershed could render a \$35,000,000 water treatment facility useless. It should be noted that decomposition rates of dead trees has also created the potential for negative impacts on municipal water quality.

We support the different management actions over the approximately 2,500 acres within the project area and applaud the recovery of economic values over the commercial treatment acres. Recovery of economic value ensures that you have robust infrastructure to help achieve goals AND should make it possible to treat more acres.

Intermediate Harvest Thinning and Regeneration Harvest are excellent prescriptions for the forest types prevalent in the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project area. We agree that thinning in Douglas-fir and mixed conifer stands will reduce risks of crown fire and improve effectiveness of suppression efforts. Additionally, there will likely be an increase in forest health by reducing competition. We are skeptical that thinning lodgepole pine stands in the IRA will produce an outcome better than regeneration

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harvest. Hopefully there are larger Douglas-fir in the IRA to leave while reducing lodgepole pine occurrences?

We applaud your consideration of non-traditional mechanical treatment opportunities in the Inventoried Roadless Area. To complete a project as difficult and critical as the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project all mechanical treatment options should be explored.

This project would benefit all the residents of Butte, MT and the agricultural and recreational users of the Big Hole River. It would have positive impacts on area wood products facilities and other infrastructure. Additionally, project areas such as the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project provide greater balance of ecological benefits and benefits to local infrastructure while achieving goals and objectives of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Inflation Reduction Act and the Ten Year Wildfire Strategy.

Lastly, whenever possible please carefully consider timing of operation restrictions and allow flexibility for operators. LOP's can often be counterproductive by extending time needed for operating and extending exposure to disturbance.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and we look forward to more projects on the Butte Ranger District.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Steinebach', with a stylized, flowing script.

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