



THE CITY-COUNTY OF Butte-Silver Bow

Water Treatment
Jim Keenan, Water Plant Superintendent
Ph: 406-475-4541 E-Mail: jkeenan@bsb.mt.gov

June 20, 2023

Tim Lahey
Butte District Ranger
1820 Meadowlark
Butte, MT 59701

Ref. Basin Creek – Butte Watershed Project #63295

Dear Tim,

This is a comment letter pursuant to the Draft EA for the Basin Creek—Butte Watershed project. The Basin Creek Municipal Water Supply is the most productive and economical source of drinking water for the Butte area, supporting nearly 35,000 people. The Basin Creek Water Treatment Plant was completed in 2017 at a cost of over \$30 million. The treatment plant ensures that water quality standards are met and has the secondary benefits of saving energy and reducing withdrawals from the Big Hole River. Reduced withdrawals from the Big Hole can increase water volume in the river benefiting local fish populations as well as important recreational and agricultural based economies. A major wildfire in the Basin Creek Watershed could render the treatment plant inoperable and create a situation where Butte would be required to exercise its full water right on the Big Hole River. It should be noted that the Big Hole River is already seeing tremendous pressure from recreation, ranching, drought, and other factors. This could create an even more desperate situation on this already stressed resource. If wildfire were to occur in the Basin Creek Watershed, Butte's most productive and economical water supply would likely be rendered unusable and full recovery could take a decade or more. Water treated at the Basin Creek facility requires approximately 503 kWh per million gallons (MG) of water treated compared to approximately 3,303 kWh/MG from the Big Hole Supply. If the Basin Creek supply were unavailable for 10 years, the total estimated increase in power costs alone would be up to \$4.3 million and the total costs associated with recovery could be much higher.



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The Basin Creek-Butte Watershed EA appears thorough and well-conducted, and I commend BDNF District Ranger and all other BDNF staff involved in drafting this EA for their thoughtful and thorough assessment of this project and their dedication and hard work in completing the draft EA.

I support the proposed actions outlined in the EA and believe these actions will significantly reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve overall forest health in the area. I also strongly support an Emergency Situation designation for the project given the high probability of catastrophic wildfire in the watershed and the potential impacts to human health and safety to surrounding communities that wildfire presents. I believe the proposed actions in the draft EA would adequately address health and safety issues associated with wildfire risk in the project area.

Thank you for considering my input and for your dedication to responsible forest management and the residents of Butte-Silver Bow County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Keenan". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jim Keenan

Water Plant Superintendent
Butte-Silver Bow