



Emily Platt, Forest Supervisor
Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest
2880 Skyway Drive
Helena, MT 59602

Re: Comment for South Fork Judith Fuel Break CE Comment

Dear Supervisor Platt,

This letter is on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber in Deer Lodge, MT. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments for the South Fork Judith Fuel Break CE Project. We are invested and supportive in the development of this project.

As you know, 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 South Fork Judith Fuel Break CE Project providing raw material for our operations, we view these types of projects as creating a relationship in which our operations can assist the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest in achieving their goals and objectives on NFS lands.

We support the 2,996 acre South Fork Judith Fuel Break CE Project and commend the Forest Service for taking proactive steps to address the escalating wildfire crisis that has engulfed our state. We are particularly supportive of the proposed use of the Fuel Break Categorical Exclusion under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Section 40806. These types of projects will protect values at risk in a drastically more economical and environmentally responsible manner than during an incident.

The South Fork Judith Fuel Break CE Project is a proactive step to address hazardous fuel conditions adjacent to roads in the South Fork Judith River, Hay Canyon, Indian Hill, Dry Pole, High Spring, Burley Peak and Circle Park areas and the nearby communities of Neihart, Sapphire Village and Checkerboard, Montana. As both forestry professionals and concerned members of the public, we believe that this project is vital to reducing the wildfire risk in the region and protecting our communities and valuable resources.

The South Fork Judith Project, as proposed under Section 40806 of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021, represents a significant opportunity to enhance the safety and resilience of our communities. This project's objective to create a 2,996 acre fuel break adjacent to existing constructed linear features, such as roads, aligns with the broader

Sun Mountain Lumber
PO Box 389, 181 Greenhouse Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
406-846-9460 fax: 406-846-1672



strategy to reduce the spread and intensity of wildfires and mitigate the risk of uncharacteristic and catastrophic wildfires in Federal lands and neighboring communities.

We firmly believe that treating these areas now is not only a prudent measure but also a responsible one. The creation of this fuel break will increase the effectiveness of suppression efforts in the event of a wildfire and significantly contribute to maintaining the safety of the communities and area resources. By strategically reducing fuel conditions adjacent to roads, we not only provide a safer environment for firefighters but also enhance our ability to control and manage wildfire incidents.

The fact that projects like the South Fork Judith Fuels Break fall under Section 40806 of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is encouraging. This designation acknowledges the critical role that fuel breaks play in wildfire management and the need for expeditious action to address hazardous fuel conditions. Furthermore, the exemption from an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) demonstrates a commitment to swift and effective action when it comes to community safety and resource protection.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Steinebach", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sean Steinebach
Outreach Forester

Sun Mountain Lumber