

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

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September 11, 2023

Lisa Timchak, Forest Supervisor
Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
420 Barrett Street
Dillon, MT 59725-3572

Re: Comments on Basin Cataract Buttermilk Fuel Break Project Proposed Action

Dear Ms. Timchak :

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Action for the Basin Cataract Buttermilk Fuel Break Project. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) has fire protection interests and manages state trust lands in the area. Our agencies share the common goals of reducing fire risk and improving forest health in Montana's forest landscapes.

The proposal would address hazardous fuels along miles of existing roads southwest of the town of Boulder, MT and other fuel break is north of Basin, MT. The purpose of the projects is to pre-treat fuels along existing roads in strategic locations to reduce the spread and intensity of wildfire. This will reduce the risk to first responders and raise the probability of success during direct and indirect engagement on wildfires. Providing fuel breaks in advance of wildfire emergencies represents a pro-active approach to protecting communities and landscapes from the impacts of uncharacteristic wildfires that are occurring more frequently with changing climate.

The growing number, size, and intensity of wildfires in Montana points to an urgency for action to prepare for wildfire in advance of emergencies. This also provides a more environmentally-sound approach to this action than is possible during the emergency of an actual wildfire.

DNRC supports the proposed action which includes the use of mechanical and hand thinning and prescribed burning treatments to create shaded fuel breaks on approximately 1,426 acres along existing roads in the North Fork Little Boulder River, Basin Creek, Cataract Creek areas and the nearby communities of Basin and Boulder. The treatments would be primarily within and adjacent to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Both commercial and non-commercial treatments will be used. The outcome of the treatments will be reduced ladder fuels and tree densities up to 1,000 feet in width along strategic roads and trails.

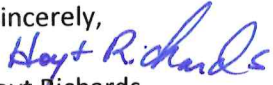
The treatments will facilitate fire remaining near the ground and not spreading through the trees as a crown fire. This will create areas that are advantageous and safe for firefighters to take a stand

against a progressing wildfire. An added benefit is increased spacing between trees to maintain or improve forest health, tree growth, and desired species composition.

We urge you to consider ways to utilize residual wood material from this project. With roadside treatments there may be interest in firewood, posts and poles, or other products.

Following treatments, the fuel breaks should be evaluated for effectiveness in meeting the purpose. DNRC would like to be invited to the post-treatment evaluation.

DNRC is committed to continuing a positive working relationship with the Beaverhead-Deerlodge 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 management and restoration, benefiting the missions of both agencies.

Sincerely,

Hoyt Richards
Area Manager, Central Land Office
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

CC: Heidi Crum, Unit Manager, Helena Unit; Steve Kimball, Local Government Forest Advisor