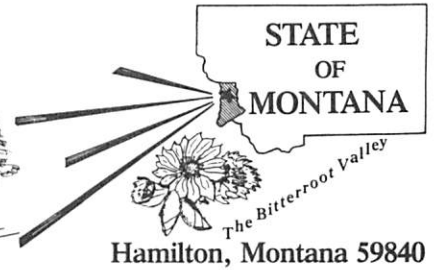


COUNTY OF RAVALLI



RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
215 S. 4th Street, Suite A
Hamilton, MT. 59840
406-375-6500
commissioners@rc.mt.gov

September 14, 2023

Matt Anderson
Forest Supervisor
1801 N First Street
Hamilton, MT 59840

RE: Ravalli County Comments on the Bitterroot Front Draft Environmental Assessment (EA)

Dear Matt,

The Board of Ravalli County Commissioners (BCC) would like to thank you and project team for your collaborative efforts on developing the Bitterroot Front Project. We look forward to working with you on the implementation of this project.

The Bitterroot National Forest (BNF) contains five of the 250 highest-risk fire sheds in the nation; four of these are in the Bitterroot Front project area. The Montana State Forest Action Plan has identified the area as having high wildfire risk to communities and infrastructure and significant forest health concerns. Based on the immediate threat to public health and safety from wildfire risk, the Ravalli County Commissioners fully support the use of the emergency authority for this project.

The Ravalli County Commissioners support the purpose of the project:

- 1) Reduce fire behavior and intensity by reducing the fuel quantity, modifying the arrangement of the fuels, and reducing the current and future wildfire risk to people, private lands, and resource values.
- 2) Improve forest landscape health and resilience by reducing the risk or extent of, or increasing resilience to, insect and disease infestation.

- 3) Reduce the risk to first responders and raise the probability of success during direct and indirect engagement on wildfires by treating fuels to modify fire behavior and increasing operational opportunities to protect values.

Ravalli County supports the proposed project boundary and the proposed 144,000 acres. We support the landscape-scale proposal to address the immediate threat that wildfire poses to our community. The Ravalli County Commissioners and an overwhelming majority of our citizens support the desired outcomes and conditions for a healthier forest, resilient to disease, insects and fire, a safer forest for our firefighters and emergency responders, more productive wildlife habitat, increased recreational opportunities and economic opportunities for our community in the forest products sector. Ravalli County does not believe these outcomes and conditions are mutually exclusive. This project is an opportunity to achieve these conditions.

We support an adaptive management approach that gives our local forest experts the suite of actions that allow them the flexibility to best achieve the projects desired conditions.

The Bitterroot Front Project area is a very high fire hazard area not only statewide, but recognized nationally. These high fire hazard areas are due to insects, disease, stand density, and/or understory fuels that result in catastrophic wildfires. These wildfires have resulted in devastating impacts to public lands, private property, wildlife habitat, water quantity and quality and the health and safety of our community.

Ravalli County is currently updating the 2006 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and is expected to be complete the beginning of 2024. The Ravalli County Commissioners request that the Bitterroot National Forest consider the updated CWPP in future implementation decisions.

The Ravalli County Commissioners believe there will be significant adverse impacts to public health and safety, infrastructure, the local economy, water quantity and quality, and wildlife and wildlife habitat from a no action alternative.

We support the proposed treatment options and the associated activity cards.

Ravalli County wants to ensure that impacts to county road infrastructure are mitigated from significant traffic increases from project implementation. We also want to ensure that impacts to our communities with privately maintained roads are mitigated. The public health and safety, cultural, ecological, recreational and economic benefits of the Bitterroot Front project are supported broadly in our community. The Ravalli County Commissioners support the Bitterroot Front project proposal.

Please consider these comments as part of the official record for the Bitterroot Front project. We look forward to being actively involved with this project's implementation.

Sincerely,

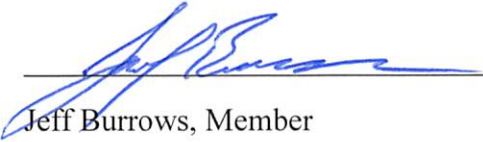
Ravalli County Board of Commissioners

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dan Huls", written over a horizontal line.

Dan Huls, Chairman

The word "ABSENT" written in blue, uppercase, sans-serif font, positioned above a horizontal line.

Greg Chilcott, Vice-Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Burrows", written over a horizontal line.

Jeff Burrows, Member