

# DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

Northwestern Land Office

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## STATE OF MONTANA

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September 21, 2023

Gary Blazejewski  
PO Box 190340  
Hungry Horse, MT 59919

Re: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Comments on the Flathead Fuel Break Project

Dear Mr. Blazejewski,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal for the Flathead 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 Flathead Fuel Break Project would create fuel breaks totaling about 1,784 acres along existing roads in the Good Creek, Ashley Lake, and Lion Hill areas to help protect nearby homes and communities. The project would modify fire behavior, reducing 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 (commercial and non-commercial) and prescribed burning treatments to create shaded fuel breaks along existing roads in strategic locations.

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.

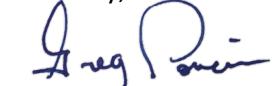
We urge you to consider ways to utilize residual wood material from this project. With roadside

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 Flathead 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,



Greg Percin

Area Manager

Northwestern Land Office

CC: Dave Poukish, Unit Manager, Kalispell Unit  
Stephen Kimball, Local Government Forest Advisor