



**BACKCOUNTRY  
HUNTERS & ANGLERS  
MONTANA**

September 28, 2023

Gary Blazejewski  
Hungry Horse Ranger District  
PO Box 190340  
Hungry Horse, MT 59919  
gary.blazejewski@usda.gov

Re: Dry Riverside Project

Dear Mr. Blazejewski,

The Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is a grassroots conservation organization representing roughly 3,000 dues-paying members in the state. Our members value productive habitat, public access, and quiet recreational opportunities to hunt and fish. With many of our members living and recreating in northwest Montana, the Flathead National Forest is an area of keen interest.

While elk herds remain at or above objective in many other parts of the state, elk in FWP's Region 1 are still struggling to meet population objectives. Habitat quality has been cited as one of the greatest impediments to growing our elk herd in this area. A 2023 spring count in the South Fork Drainage reported the lowest elk numbers in the area in a century. Mixed secessional growth, a more open canopy, and less stand density can help create a healthier forest and provide improved habitat for animals like elk, deer, and bears, among others.

Forest projects like this that enhance habitat will go a long way in protecting the future of our elk herd, fostering a healthy ecosystem, and creating more opportunities for hunters. It also



promotes forest health, and fire resistance, which is important considering that due to a changing climate, recent years have seen drier and hotter than normal summers (ie longer and more intense fire seasons). Large, high-intensity fires like the Ridge and Doris Point fires have become common. Proactive, prescribed burning combined, with selective thinning will lead to the project area having a healthy mix of fire-resistant species such as Douglas fir and Western larch. We encourage USFS to work with Montana FWP to maximize the habitat enhancement aspect of this project as fully as possible, and we're happy to see that this proposal includes 2257 acres of prescribed burning and 714 acres of whitebark pine restoration.

We appreciate the minimal road densities and the decision to utilize roads at the "minimum standards necessary" to complete the project, along with the temporary roads being "rehabilitated following timber harvest"... "and made impassable (as defined in the forest plan) to wheeled motorized vehicles," as well as the reassurances that "no road construction is proposed within the inventoried roadless area." Further, we appreciate that the project "does not propose any changes to public motorized access in the project area." These will ensure that the area returns to a productive security habitat with quiet recreational opportunities for backcountry hunters.

Overall, Montana BHA is supportive of this project, and we appreciate the opportunities to comment.

Sincerely,

Aaron Agosto  
Flathead Valley Leader  
Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

