October 19, 2023

Abbie Jossie, District Ranger

Darby Ranger District

P.O. Box 388

Darby, MT 59829

Re: Montana Department of Resources and Conservation, Comments on the Proposed Action for the Lick Creek Demonstration/Research Project

Dear Ms. Jossie:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed action for the Lick Creek Demonstration/Research Project. The project is located south of Hamilton and north of Lake Como along Road FS 5621. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) has fire protection interests and manages state trust lands in the vicinity. Our agencies share the common goals of reducing fire risk and improving forest health in Montana’s forest landscapes. The project is not only important for the national forest system lands but also for the state and private landowners in the area.

DNRC supports the Purpose and Need for the project: to examine how different silvicultural systems, paired with and without prescribed burning, can be used to restore and maintain ponderosa pine dominated forests that are resilient to impacts from wildfire, insects and disease, and changes with climate.

DNRC supports the Proposed Action which includes follow-up treatments on study sites initiated in 1991, harvested in 1992, and prescribed burned in 1993-1994. Stand densities in the study areas have greatly increased over the 30 years, with dense Douglas-fir regeneration and ladder fuels developing in the understory.

The proposed treatments include:

1. Commercial Thinning (68 total acres; 60 treated acres, 8 untreated control acres);
2. Retention Shelterwood (69 total acres; 57 acres treated, 12 untreated control acres)
3. Selection Cut (23 total acres; 15 acres treated, 8 untreated control acres):

Mechanical thinning, hand thinning, low intensity prescribed fire, and maintenance burning would be used to implement these treatments.

This research aligns with the needs identified in the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Information gained on the effectiveness of various treatments would directly support fuels reduction and restoration projects on the Bitterroot NF, other national forests in the Northern Region, and state and private lands. DNRC would like to be a part of the post-treatment evaluation of this project.

DNRC is committed to continuing a positive working relationship with the Bitterroot 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 both agencies’ missions.

Sincerely,



Mike O’Herron

Area Manager, Southwestern Land Office

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Cc: Thayer Jacques, Unit Forester

Stephen Kimball, Local Government Forest Advisor