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Colorado

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April 23, 2024

USFS-Sulphur Ranger District
Eric Freels, District Ranger
PO Box 10, 9 Ten Mile Drive
Granby, CO 80446

Re: **RE: Big Meadows Fuel Break Project Proposal**

Dear Mr. Freels,

Grand County appreciates the opportunity to comment on the scoping request by the USFS for the proposed Big Meadows Fuel Break project. The remnants of the MPB epidemic in Grand County have left unprecedented amounts of standing dead and falling dead timber, contributing to surface loading in the County. This was well evidenced by the East Troublesome Fire in 2020 becoming the second largest wildfire in Colorado history in a few short weeks and the post fire hazards continue to be an issue for our northern watersheds, recreation areas and source water infrastructure.

The Big Meadows Project would be an integral piece of the West Fraser Fuel Break project involving the USFS, CSFS, Fire Protection Districts, Grand County Wildfire Council and private landowners, creating a significant WUI buffer for the Fraser Valley. The Grand County Wildfire Council and the 2023 updated Grand County CWPP have identified the Fraser Valley as a Priority Area for protection from wildfire due to the fuel loads surrounding the Valley from all directions. The concentration of human population, recreationists and the economic importance of the area to the Grand County economy as a whole brings additional desire for protection. The Fraser River watershed is an important contributor to the Colorado River watershed and provides water for local populations as well as for trans-mountain water diversions. In addition, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) Wildfire Ready Watershed program identified the watershed as highly susceptible to post fire hazard risk and an Action Plan is currently underway. As such, Grand County concurs with the **Purpose and Need** of the project whole-heartedly.

Proposed Actions listed in the project are sufficiently varied and Grand County agrees that all options should be considered, allowing for adaptive decision-making while the project is occurring, thereby getting as much work done as possible in the most efficient way possible.

In the **Project Integrated Design Features in Appendix A**, Grand County supports the Design Features as presented with the following specific comments:

- **Fire and Fuels**

- Support the methodology for any slash pile constructed being at least 6-feet-high and 6-feet in diameter and would support larger pile construction as needed. This area has significant snow depths in the winter months and larger piles burn hotter and cleaner through the snow deposited on the pile than smaller piles.

- **Hydrology, Soils, Watersheds and Aquatics**

- *Prescribed Burning* - We support the conducting of surveys of burn pile areas to identify if and when restoration activities are needed and where prescribed fire is planned, to keep these to low soil burn severity. These practices can mitigate the opportunity for noxious weeds to flourish in these areas after activity.
- *Chipping and Masticating* – keeping chip depths to a minimum, averaging 3-inch depth, and distributing any masticated wood chunks and chips in a discontinuous manner will improve ability of the sites to recover naturally.

- **Invasive Weeds**

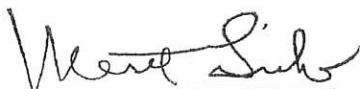
- Pre-cleaning of any and all equipment entering into the project area is **strongly** supported to prevent accidental spread of noxious weeds coming from somewhere else in the State or Country. This includes any and all USFS vehicles – trucks, ATV/UTVs, etc.
- Pre-project vegetation field surveys will be invaluable to post-project assessment of need for treatments; to include noxious weed treatment or any reseeding needed.

- **Wildlife**

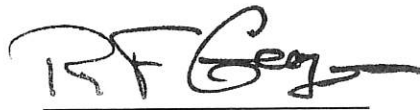
- Protection of elk calving areas as well as deer and elk winter range areas during critical periods is also supported.
- Maintaining the thermal cover and east-west elk seasonal movement areas within the project area are also appreciated and supported.

In this era of unprecedented Megafires, Fuel Break projects are desperately needed to mitigate future fire behaviors and bring conditions to a level where our wildland fire-fighters have a chance to keep impacts to communities to a minimum. Grand County again thanks the USFS ARNF for the opportunity to comment on this needed and supported project.

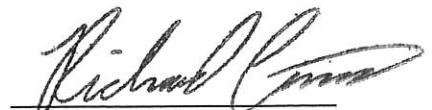
Sincerely,



Merrit Linke
Commissioner Chair



Randal George
Commissioner



Richard Cimino
Commissioner