



VIA Link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59803>

July 2, 2024

Objection Reviewing Officer
USDA Forest Service
Northern Region
Attn: Coyote-Divide
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Dear Reviewing Officer:

This letter is on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide a letter of support for the **Coyote-Divide Project** during the objection period. We are invested in and supportive of the development of this project and we were happy to provide scoping comments in October of 2022 and Draft EA comments in August of 2023.

Sun Mountain Lumber is a family-owned sawmill that provides direct employment for approximately 250 mill and logging jobs in Deer Lodge and Livingston, MT. In addition to the potential of this Coyote-Divide Project providing raw material for our operations, we view these types of projects as creating a relationship in which our operations assist the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest in achieving its goals and objectives on the ground.

We believe that the Proposed Action Alternative would achieve the purpose and need of the project allowing the Forest to accomplish Forest Plan goals and objectives. We support the different vegetation treatments over the approximately 7,940 acres within the project area and applaud the recovery of economic values. Recovery of these values may in turn allow the Forest to achieve those goals that provide ecological benefits without economic returns. Additionally, the recovery of economic values during treatment will provide some level of support for counties that are experiencing higher than average poverty and unemployment rates in Montana. Those counties include: Powell, Deer Lodge, Meagher and Cascade.

Regeneration and intermediate harvest are an excellent prescription for the forest types prevalent in the Coyote Divide Project area. It is our opinion that a mosaic of age classes would most closely replicate stands created through historic fire regimes and should be employed even when greater than 40 acres and/or in IRA. Science has shown that a

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mosaic of age and size classes creates lodgepole pine stands that are not only more resilient to forest insects and disease, but reduce fire hazard.

This project would provide infrastructure benefits in the form of much needed maintenance and bringing roads up to the standards of *Montana's Best Management Practices*. We support the responsible reduction in road densities and associated sedimentation. Specifically, when these densities are caused by clandestine or poorly planned roads.

We believe that this project will have benefits for the adjacent landowners, area wood products facilities and other infrastructure. Additionally, larger project areas such as this Coyote Divide Project could provide greater balance of ecological benefits and benefits to local infrastructure while providing economy of scale.

Lastly, whenever possible please carefully consider timing of operation restrictions and allow flexibility for operators.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Steinebach', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a letter of support during the objection period and we look forward to more projects.

Respectfully yours,

Sean Steinebach, Outreach Forester