



VIA Email: [katherine.bushnell@usda.gov](mailto:katherine.bushnell@usda.gov)

July 26, 2024

Larabee Hat Vegetation Project #65687  
Kathy Bushnell  
2880 Skyway Dr.  
Helena, MT 59602

Dear Ms. Bushnell:

This letter is on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber in Deer Lodge, MT. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments for the **Larabee Hat Vegetation Project**. Sun Mountain Lumber is a family-owned sawmill that provides direct employment for approximately 300 mill and logging jobs in Deer Lodge and Livingston, MT. In addition to the potential of this Larabee Hat Vegetation Project providing raw material for our operations, we view these types of projects as creating a relationship in which our operations can assist the Helena Ranger District, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest in achieving their goals and objectives on NFS lands.

The Larabee Hat Vegetation Project proposed treatment area encompasses about 17,809 acres. The project area is located south of Highway 12 near Elliston, MT. The Forest is proposing treatments aimed at achieving desired conditions outlined in the 2021 Forest Plan that fall into one of four categories. These categories include:

- *Forested Resiliency, Diversity, and Restoration*
- *Modify fuels within the Wildland Urban Interface*
- *Wood Products*
- *Watershed Improvements*

We appreciate the public tour of the project area and look forward to getting to the implementation phase. While we support the purpose and need of the Larabee Hat Project, as a part of our comments we would be remiss if we didn't mention some items from our wish list. We would like to see more mechanical fuels treatment in the Electric Peak IRA. Certainly not all of this area is accessible or appropriate for mechanical treatment. However, these treatment methods could be more economically viable and effective than broadcast burn or hand treatment alone. We would also like to see more mechanical treatment prior to prescribed fire treatments. Mechanical treatment can facilitate favorable vertical arrangement of fuels and reduce fuels prior to ignition.

**Sun Mountain Lumber**  
**PO Box 389, 181 Greenhouse Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722**  
**406-846-9460 fax: 406-846-1672**

Additionally, we would like you to explore opportunities to recover merchantable timber while manipulating fuels for prescribed fire.

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. Please explore options for decommissioning roads in an economically viable fashion.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and I look forward to more projects.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Steinebach', with a stylized, flowing script.

Sean Steinebach  
Outreach Forester  
Sun Mountain Lumber  
181 Greenhouse Road  
Deer Lodge, MT 59722