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12/20/2024

Horsefly Vegetation Project 53578
Supplemental Environmental Analysis
Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs Ranger District
204 West Folsom
White Sulphur Springs, MT 59644

Dear Project Manager:

This letter is on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber in Deer Lodge and Livingston, MT. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments for the **Horsefly Vegetation Project Supplemental Environmental Analysis (SEA)**. 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 Horsefly 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 White Sulphur Springs Ranger District, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest in achieving their goals and objectives on NFS lands.

As the purchaser of the Horsefly Vegetation Management Project, Sun Mountain Lumber fully supports the Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) prepared by the Forest Service. We recognize the importance of the SEA in ensuring that the Horsefly Vegetation Management Project complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. Acceptance of the SEA will enable critical vegetation management activities to proceed, fostering forest health, wildfire hazard reduction, and economic sustainability in our region.

The Horsefly Vegetation Management Project addresses several vital objectives:

1. **Improving Forest Health and Landscape Resiliency:** The project will enhance forest ecosystems by mitigating risks from diseases, pests, and drought conditions. Through thoughtful and proactive management, we can ensure a healthier and more resilient forest ecosystem for future generations.
2. **Reducing Wildfire Hazards:** The increasing risk of catastrophic wildfires poses a significant threat to local communities, wildlife, and forest ecosystems. By implementing vegetation treatments, the project will reduce fuel loads and create defensible spaces, significantly decreasing wildfire risks.

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3. **Providing Wood Products to Local and Regional Economies:** As a sawmill deeply connected to the local economy, Sun Mountain Lumber depends on a reliable supply of sustainable wood products. The Horsefly Vegetation Management Project will help support the forest products industry, creating jobs and economic stability for Meagher County and the surrounding areas.

We acknowledge and appreciate the comprehensive analysis in the SEA, particularly regarding the court order addressing monitoring of northern goshawk. The updated data and evaluations ensure that the project aligns with ecological and conservation standards. The detailed findings affirm that the proposed actions will maintain adequate habitat for goshawks at both the project and forest-wide levels. This demonstrates the Forest Service's commitment to balanced management that considers environmental, social, and economic factors.

Sun Mountain Lumber is committed to sustainable practices and responsible forest management. The Horsefly Vegetation Management Project aligns with our values and our mission to support forest stewardship while contributing to the local economy. Acceptance of the SEA will not only advance these goals but also address the urgent need to mitigate wildfire risks and promote ecosystem resilience.

We urge the Forest Service to proceed with the implementation of the Horsefly Vegetation Management Project as outlined in the EA and SEA. Thank you for your dedication to the sustainable management of our National Forests and for considering our input.

Respectfully yours,



Sean Steinebach
Outreach Forester
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