



Stimson Lumber Company
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March 31, 2025

Sandpoint South #67684

Chris Noyes
Acting District Ranger
Sandpoint Ranger District
1602 Ontario Street,
Sandpoint, Idaho 83864

Dear Chris:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Sandpoint South Project located within the Sandpoint Ranger District.

I am familiar with this landscape from my work as a land manager for Stimson Lumber Company. Stimson is a private forest products manufacturer and timberland owner with forestland holdings in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Stimson owns a significant amount of timberland within this proposed project area and owns timberland immediately adjacent to planned treatment units.

Stimson has been advocating for fuels reduction treatments with the Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF). The Wildland Urban Interface in northern Idaho is vast and is surrounded by NFS lands. Many of these lands desperately need the type of fuels reduction and fire protection treatments you and your team have outlined in the Scoping Document. Untreated fuels and declining forest health on federal lands raises the threat of catastrophic fire to adjoining state and private lands, exponentially.

Stimson strongly supports the activities outlined in this proposed action. Documentation states that the project area is approximately 174,347 acres in size and that approximately 8,334 acres of federal ownership will see hazardous fuels and vegetation management. In response, Stimson encourages the IPNF to treat as many of the federal lands within the project area as possible.

While fuels reduction appears the primary goal of the project, we are encouraged to see that the project anticipates using a full menu of silvicultural treatments to manage these lands. In my observation, fuels reduction treatments that only address small ladder fuels and underbrush, do not fully achieve a highly functional and long-lasting fuels reduction and wildfire mitigation benefit. In other words, in as little as five years, the timber stands will have again filled back in with smaller, highly flammable forest fuels. Working for a private timberlands firm for over 40 years, it has become clear to me that to effectively manage forest fuels requires treating the entire forest profile. This will involve removing a component of the merchantable timber stand,

resembling a commercial thinning, while removing most of the undergrowth and ladder fuels. Effective fuels treatments should include reducing stocking levels through harvest activities including commercial thinning, selective harvest, and regeneration harvest methods. Reduction of basal area and removal of ladder fuels will be essential to provide optimum fire protection, both in the near and long term.

Completing fuel breaks around federal ownership will assist with keeping fire from moving between the treated and untreated federal land and adjacent private and state land. Fuel breaks should be effectively positioned on the landscape to provide the highest degree of protection from an approaching crown fire. In some cases, this may involve other property owners to ensure that the fuel break is effective. The fuel break should be designed so that it is wide enough to be effective and should focus on removal of most of the flammable fuels that will allow the fire to more easily be kept on the ground and be brought under control. Fuel breaks will provide added fire protection to significant private ownership within the project area. Protection of private property should be a key goal while ensuring the safety of nearby residents, the recreating public and agency firefighters.

In closing, Stimson Lumber Company strongly supports the work you are proposing on Sandpoint South, and we are encouraged that the IPNF and the Sandpoint Ranger District are addressing the high threat of wildfire within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). We highly support fuel reduction treatments on NFS lands adjacent to our private property boundaries and support a focused approach to addressing fire hazards within the WUI on the IPNF. Utilizing partners such as IDL through Shared Stewardship and Good Neighbor Authorities is also highly recommended to add capacity to the work you are undertaking in this important landscape. We look forward to seeing the full implementation of your proposal.

Sincerely,



Barry N. Dexter
Senior Resource Advisor
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