



Crystal Stonesifer
Missoula Ranger District-Lolo National Forest
24 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

RE: Comments on the Tyler's Kitchen Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project

Dear Crystal,

This letter is on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber in Deer Lodge, MT. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments for the **Tyler's Kitchen 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 the Tyler's Kitchen 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 Missoula Ranger District, Lolo National Forest in achieving their goals and objectives on NFS lands.

We support the objectives of this project, which align with the need to reduce hazardous fuels, restore forest resilience, and provide a sustainable supply of wood products that contribute to the health of Montana's rural economies. And we commend the Lolo National Forest and Missoula Ranger District for advancing a thoughtful suite of treatments, including commercial harvest, prescribed fire, and non-commercial thinning across a landscape that has been severely impacted by insects, disease, and fuels buildup. We feel the proposed action is consistent with the Lolo National Forest's direction to create resilient conditions that withstand disturbance, support wildlife, and protect infrastructure such as the BPA transmission line and the I-90 corridor.

We support the inclusion of regeneration harvests in the project design. In stands with high mortality and susceptibility to Douglas-fir beetle and root disease, regeneration harvest is the most effective tool to reset forest conditions and promote the establishment of more fire- and insect-resistant species such as western larch and ponderosa pine. The scoping notice appropriately recognizes that some openings larger than 40 acres are necessary to meet ecological objectives and to create a mosaic of age classes across the landscape.

The Tyler's Kitchen Project proposes seven regeneration units greater than 40 acres, averaging 116 acres and ranging up to 278 acres. These treatments are critical for breaking up fuel continuity and addressing landscape-scale forest health challenges. Given the dissolution of the Forest Service's Regional Office structure and the recent elimination of Region 1, we ask for clarification on whether opportunities exist to increase regeneration harvest openings beyond the traditional 40-acre limit without separate Regional approval. Could this possibly change what happens in these units?

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We recognize that approximately 18% of the project area lies within the Silver King Inventoried Roadless Area. While road construction is limited, we support the use of carefully designed treatments—such as prescribed burning, mechanical thinning where appropriate, and selective commercial harvest—to reduce fuels, restore resilience, and improve access for fire suppression. Untreated conditions within the IRA represent a significant risk to firefighter safety, nearby communities, and critical infrastructure. The buildup of continuous fuels, coupled with insect and disease mortality, will only exacerbate the potential for high-intensity wildfire if no action is taken. We encourage the Forest Service to use the flexibilities available under the 2001 Roadless Rule to implement needed fuel reduction treatments in the IRA.

The continued viability of Montana's forest products infrastructure depends on a predictable supply of logs from National Forest System lands. Projects like Tyler's Kitchen are essential to sustaining mill capacity, supporting local logging contractors, and retaining high-quality jobs in rural communities. As one of the last remaining large sawmills in western Montana, Sun Mountain Lumber depends on projects of this scale to maintain operations and provide outlets for timber coming off the forest.

We urge the Forest Service to move forward quickly with implementation of the Tyler's Kitchen Project under the authorities available. Expanding flexibility for regeneration harvest openings will ensure this project achieves its stated purpose: reducing fuels, restoring resilience, and supporting communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and for your commitment to managing our forests in a way that protects both ecological and community values.

Respectfully yours on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Steinebach", with a large, stylized initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

Sean Steinebach