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Ben Burr, Executive Director
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70220 E Highway 26
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BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC) is writing to provide feedback for the Basin Thinning Project. BRC is a national non-profit organization that champions responsible recreation and encourages a strong conservation ethic and individual stewardship. We champion responsible use of public lands and waters for the benefit of all recreationists by educating and empowering our members to secure, protect, and expand shared outdoor recreation access and use by working collaboratively with natural resource managers and other recreationists. Our members use motorized and non-motorized means of recreation, including OHVs, horses, mountain bikes, and hiking to enjoy federally managed lands throughout the United States, including those of the Mt. Hood National Forest. BRC members visit this national forest for motorized recreation, snowmobiling, sightseeing, photography, rockhounding, hunting, wildlife and nature study, camping, observing cultural resources, and other similar pursuits. BRC members and supporters have concrete, definite, and immediate plans to continue such activities in the future.

General Comments

We support any additional comments that encourage the USFS to designate the maximum number of routes in this area as open. Many of our members are organizations with extensive on-the-ground experience.

Roads and Infrastructure

BRC supports the maintenance and repair of system roads. BRC also recognizes the need for temporary roads to complete the proposed project. However, because these roads would be created along the current footprint of previous roads the USFS should at least analyze adopting these temporary roads into the forest road system permanently. Additional routes would be compliant with current administrative priorities, EO's and SO's. Road maintenance and classification actions should maximize the number of roads available for recreation, management, and fire suppression.

We oppose the proposed removal of any roads from the Forest Service road system. There should be no road decommissioning as a result of this project as this would directly undermine the agency's ability to perform vegetation treatments, conduct fuel reduction, respond to wildfires, and manage recreation. As outlined in numerous USDA analyses, road access is critical for forest health, wildfire suppression, and emergency response. Removing access only increases long-term costs and risk.

Active Vegetation Management and Forest Health

We urge the Forest Service to pursue the most aggressive vegetation treatment options available within this project. Vegetation treatments that reduce wildfire risk and improve forest resilience may temporarily affect visual resources but will have far greater long-term ecological and safety benefits.

Section 40806 of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law directs the reduction of hazardous fuels near infrastructure such as roads and trails. The Basin Thinning Project is an ideal candidate for these proactive treatments. The agency should integrate road and vegetation management to create defensible space and reduce catastrophic fire risk while maintaining recreation access.

Recreation and Forest Plan Consistency

Federal policy now emphasizes the expansion of recreation opportunities. The EXPLORE Act requires agencies to expand outdoor recreation—including motorized access—and directs them to plan for growth, not reduction, of recreation use. For this reason, USFS should have analyzed an additional alternative to keep these temporary miles of roads open.

Conclusion

We would like to close by saying we support "shared use". As long as overall visitation numbers are appropriate for the affected resources, motorized and non-motorized users can be compatible with one another so long as individual users understand designations and plan their activities accordingly. Indeed, motorized and nonmotorized recreation use often overlap as OHV's often increase accessibility to non-motorized recreational activities such as hiking,

camping, equestrian use, etc. We also hold that responsible recreational use of public lands can exist in harmony with ecosystem needs.

BRC would like to be considered an interested public for this project. Information can be sent to the following address and email address:

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brmedia@sharetrails.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping letters that appear to be 'B' and 'B', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ben Burr
Executive Director
BlueRibbon Coalition

A handwritten signature in black ink, written in a cursive style, appearing to read 'Simone Griffin'.

Simone Griffin
Policy Director
BlueRibbon Coalition