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Comments: I am familiar with the area of the proposed Youngs Rock Rigdon project and have walked through many of the units in the proposed project area.

Once you are 50 feet away from existing roads, the forest opens up into a diverse, mature stand with no ladder fuels. The area is very open and park-like with many large diameter (>72 in. dbh) trees. The existing network of trails in the area could easily be expanded to increase the recreation in the area, which already sees dozens of vehicles every day of the week all summer long.

The units I have walked through had multiple, large stone outcroppings; large diameter fire-scarred remnant trees; intact nurse logs; and lush riparian zones. There is a diversity of tree species and underfoliage. In one unit alone, I identified the following diverse mix of trees: Grand Fir, Douglas-fir, Incense Cedar, Ponderosa Pine, Chinquapin, Madrone, Western Red Cedar, Dogwood, Cottonwood, Big Leaf Maple, and Vine Maple.

The proposed action does not meet the "purpose and need for action" as stated in the Forest Service's Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS:

"The overall purpose of the Youngs Rock Rigdon EIS is to restore and enhance the ecological, social, and economic aspects of the landscape. The actions proposed in the Youngs Rock Rigdon project are needed to improve stand and landscape diversity, structure, and resiliency; strategically reduce hazardous fuels; sustainably manage existing trail systems and dispersed recreation while minimizing impacts to natural resources; identify a sustainable road system needed for safe and efficient travel and for administration, utilization, and protection of National Forest System lands; and provide a sustainable supply of forest products."

Taking 65 million board feet of timber from a highly trafficked recreation area is not sustainable and will bring a higher risk of fire due to new roads and logging operations.

It appears the true purpose of the project is to harvest timber from public lands for private gain. More importantly, one possible unstated purpose of the project, and what would result from this project, is the federal funding of a road system that could aid adjacent private landowners in accessing and harvesting their currently inaccessible timber.

The scope of the EIS should be expanded to consider the following actions as an alternative to the proposed action.

1. Action needed in this area for the stated purpose of "strategically reduc[ing] hazardous fuels" would be a small hand crew to thin and stack crowded areas that are adjacent to existing roads that have been previously commercial thinned.

2. Build a network of trails to increase the recreational availability and accessibility in the area. Youngs Rock trail and Middle Fork trail could be expanded into loop hikes through the project area (rather than out and backs).

Sincerely,

Nathaniel Mitchell