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Last name: Rector

Organization: Board of County Commissioners of Rio Blanco County, Colorado

Title: Chairman

Comments: Please review the full and complete comment letter attached to this filing.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments on the Yellow Jacket Project in the Blanco Ranger District. The Board of County Commissioners of Rio Blanco County, Colorado, herein "RBC" support and strongly encourage the implementation of silviculture practices to improve the health of the forest and watershed.

Working to find a balance between managing resources under numerous laws and regulations, maximizing local participation in the process, recognizing and protecting private property rights and promoting economic development are critical to our western way of life. As you are aware, Rio Blanco County has a population of 6,668 people and covers approximately 3,200 square miles in northwest Colorado. Seventy-Five percent (75%) of Rio Blanco County is Federal land. Rio Blanco County, Colorado has vast natural resources, including coal, natural gas, and timber. Our region is home to one of the largest elk and deer herds in the country. We also offer many great fishing and outdoor recreational opportunities. Additionally, Rio Blanco County has some of the oldest privately held ranches and agricultural operations in the state. Since its inception in 1889, our county has balanced agricultural, resource development, and recreation and boast some of the cleanest air and water in the country. Due to the large amount of federal land, government legislation, policies or procedures directly impact our economic and cultural prosperity. Balancing surface disturbing activity, conserving grazing and wildlife habitat, protecting private property rights and promoting continued energy development are essential to our livelihoods.

On May 20, 2016, The Board of County Commissioners of Rio Blanco County, Colorado, along with the White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts adopted a Land Use Plan titled: The 2016 Rio Blanco County Land and Natural Resources Plan and Policies ("LNRPP"). Pursuant to §30-11-101(k) C.R.S., and the following federal statutes, policies and rules: 43 U.S.C. § 1712, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, 42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq., 40 U.S.C. § 3312, 16 U.S.C. §530, 16 U.S.C. §1604, and 40 C.F.R. parts 1500 to 1508, Colorado county governments have the authority to coordinate with the United States Secretary of the Interior and the United States Secretary of Agriculture to develop land management plans that address hazardous fuel removal and other forest management practices, water development and conservation measures, watershed protection, the protection of air quality, public utilities protection, and private property protection on federal lands within such county's jurisdiction. Thus, based on these statutory authorities, the policies and powers of Rio Blanco County and the White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts encompass the obligation to protect the customs and culture of the local citizens, to provide for community stability, and to protect the natural environment and resources. As required by the current National Environmental Policy Act and other federal statutes, federal agencies are required to give meaningful consideration to policies asserted in plans developed by local governments. Succinctly stated, the primary reason for local governments to develop a Land Use Plan is to ensure the local socioeconomic wellbeing, the culture and customs of the constituents, and conservation of natural resources are considered in the federal decision making process. Please review this document in its entirety visiting the following address or by clicking on the following hyperlink: <https://www.rbc.us/578/Natural-Resources>.

Rio Blanco County supports the proposed Yellowjacket Project, including the opportunity for Timber harvesting. The Yellowjacket Project complies with the provisions of the 2016 Rio Blanco County Land and Natural Resources Plan and Policies (Plan) for public lands in Rio Blanco County. Please see the full section (Section 4.4) on Forest Management, Wildfire, and Community Wildfire Planning on pages 17 - 25. Below are specific policies supporting timber harvest.

4.4.3 Policy Statements:

#4. The reduction of fuels through silviculture and livestock grazing is necessary. Proactive management practices such as selective timber harvest and thinning, livestock grazing, and prescribed burns on federal lands will encourage ecosystems with varied age classes and successional states that support a variety of species and uses (including watershed improvement improved wildlife habitat), and decrease the risk of catastrophic wildland fires and disease.

#5. Long-term (i.e., 20-year) timber harvest leases, based on local market value, are important to allow private industry to take the financial risk and make an investment in the infrastructure necessary to maintain the timber industry and forest health in the County.

#6. Increased timber harvests (above the 425,000 acres identified in the 2002 WRNF revision) should be analyzed in the next forest plan update to improve the economic viability of logging in the County and improve forest condition.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on this very important issue. We encourage you to read the 2016 Rio Blanco County Land and Natural Resources Plan and Policies which encapsulates Rio Blanco County's right to participate in this process. As stated previously, Local governments must be allowed maximum opportunities to participate in the NEPA process and advocate for that balance.

Should you have questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our email address is bocc@rbc.us.

Jeff Rector
Si Woodruff
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Commissioner
Commissioner