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Organization: Missoula County

Title:

Comments: Mid-Swan project comments

Hello,

Please find the attached comments from Missoula County on the Mid Swan Landscape Restoration and Wildland Urban Interface Project. Thank you for your consideration and please let us know if you have any questions regarding our comments.

Dear Mr. Krueger,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Mid-Swan Landscape Restoration and Wildland Urban Interface Project.

The proposed project is important to us as the southern portion falls into the northern part of Missoula County and it will affect Missoula County's natural resources, economy, and residents. We support the large landscape approach to analyzing and addressing the biodiversity and management needs of the area. We support proposed activities designed to restore watersheds, return fire to the landscape, and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire events, as they can provide benefits to both the landscape and the public.

Missoula County is a member of the Southwest Crown of the Continent Collaborative (SWCC). That group submitted a comment letter that provides detailed comments, and we support all components of that letter. The letter focuses on concerns related to treatments in Canada lynx habitat; treatments in riparian management zones; treatments in Designated Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness, and Inventoried Roadless areas; treatments in large tree structures and old growth; road management and new road construction; monitoring; and on further public involvement. We agree that "there needs to be a clear opportunity for the public to review more detailed descriptions of desired conditions that specific management actions are designed to produce and for the Forest Service to truly consider inputs from the public concerning the desired conditions and treatment specifics. The SWCC would like to play an active role in further refinement of the specific treatments each year. We would like to see more details on how the public participation process will unfold in the final EIS and decision document."

Additionally, Missoula County encourages significant attention be paid to increasing public awareness of the importance of proper preparation and maintenance within the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ). Removing flammable materials near structures along with ongoing maintenance and treatment of vegetation in the HIZ greatly reduces structure ignition potential. Much of the home/structure destruction during wildfires occurs hours after the wildfire has ceased intense burning near a community and home ignitions result from conditions local to a home or structure. Emphasizing the importance of the HIZ and integrating it with other forest management efforts is critically important to taking a comprehensive approach to mitigating wildfire risk in the Wildland Urban Interface.

Involving the public and local government in the planning process is a crucial element of successful resource management. Missoula County sincerely appreciates your efforts to attain this goal. Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project and for your continued work to enhance natural resource values that are important to Missoula County residents.

Sincerely,