

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/23/2021 11:00:00 AM

First name: Matthew

Last name: Ward

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

Title: Resilient Forests Program Manager

Comments: The Nature Conservancy in Idaho (TNC) submits the following comments on this proposed project:

For many years, TNC has actively participated in prescribed fire projects across the country and advocated for the use of prescribed fire to restore forest and rangeland ecosystems. We strongly support increasing the focus of the U.S. Forest Service on using prescribed fire to increase landscape resiliency in a changing climate, help create fire-adapted communities, and improve safe and effective response to wildfires. We believe that identifying new efficiencies in analysis and using new partnerships with prescribed fire implementation is key to accelerating forest restoration and fire risk reduction through the use of this valuable tool.

When combined with an appropriate fire suppression and managed wildfire strategy, we believe a comprehensive prescribed fire program is essential to create climate resiliency. It is also supported by the best available scientific research and literature, as demonstrated in the recent a recent publication by Prichard, Hessburg, et. al. in Ecological Applications:<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/eap.2433>.

We have reviewed the proposed action associated with this project, and believe the purpose and need, design elements, and implementation checklist are comprehensive and thorough.

Combined with the expertise of the natural resource and fire staff on the Forest, we are confident that this strategy establishes a strong justification and foundation for increasing prescribed fire on the Sawtooth NF while ensuring unintended consequences or impacts to the human or natural environment are minimal. Consequently, we strongly support the Forest-Wide Prescribed Fire Restoration Project as proposed.

We encourage you to prioritize prescribed fire projects adjacent to completed fuel reduction projects in the wildland-urban interface, while also developing a balanced geographic and topographic portfolio of projects to ensure maximum flexibility in your annual prescribed fire program. We trust that you will ensure an appropriate level of public and stakeholder engagement on the annual prescribed fire program of work, and before individual burn projects are initiated.

We encourage you to proactively engage with partners such as TNC to help increase the capacity for implementing this project and ensure that public and political support for the prescribed fire program is maintained.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve the vision established in this proposal.