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Comments: The Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF) proposal to log the South Plateau area bordering Yellowstone National Park near West Yellowstone is another example of the Forest Service's quack chainsaw medical policies.

The CGNF says the goal of the logging is to 1- to decrease insect and disease infestation, to reduce fuels in the WUI, and provide for subsidized logging to benefit private timber companies.

The CGNF is like the old-time snake oil salesman selling a magic elixir—chainsaw medicine—that will cure the forest of perceived future ills. If the agency were a medical group, we would sue them for malpractice.

The fact that the agency sees insects and disease as a reason for [ldquo]treatment[rdquo] demonstrates its Industrial Forestry Paradigm. Dead trees and snags are critical to healthy forest ecosystems. Some studies show that more species depend on dead trees than live trees. So how does the killing and removing of trees [ldquo]improve[rdquo] forest health?

The CGNF uses euphemisms to deflect concern about what they are proposing. They call for [ldquo]treatment[rdquo] of up to 5,551 acres with [ldquo]tools[rdquo] like clearcutting—read logging. Another 9,107 acres would be [ldquo]treated[rdquo] by thinning (read logging).

Treatment means killing the trees. The use of the word [ldquo]treatment[rdquo] is no accident. The CGNF is suggesting the forest is [ldquo]sick[rdquo] and needs chainsaw medicine, or God forbid, it might die from insects (bark beetles), disease (mistletoe), or wildfire.

The entire [ldquo]treatment area[rdquo] is nearly 40,000 acres which will be fragmented by numerous clearcuts and more than 56 miles of roads in an area that is an important corridor connecting Yellowstone to roadless lands further west.

Overall, 16,400 acres will be logged. To put this into perspective, a football field is about an acre.

The logic of the agency goes something like this. The lodgepole pine trees that dominate the area are reaching an age where they [ldquo]may[rdquo] be susceptible to, say, bark beetles, so they intend to [ldquo]increase[rdquo] forest health by randomly killing the trees with chainsaws.

Worse for our forest ecosystems, the CGNF has no idea which trees have a genetic resistance to beetles, mistletoe, drought, and even wildfire. Its wholesale slaughter of the forest doesn't leave much room for such considerations.

Using the CGNF logic, we should line up all the people over 50 years of age and shoot them, so we can [ldquo]improve[rdquo] the health of the local population who [ldquo]may[rdquo] die from cancer or heart attacks.

Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated that under extreme fire conditions (which are the only conditions where you get uncontrollable fires), thinning and logging increases the likelihood of fire spread.

We have many examples in Montana where heavily logged areas burned at high severity, including the Bitterroot Complex, Jocko Lakes Fire, Rice Ridge, and many others that had charred hundreds of thousands of acres that have been [ldquo]treated[rdquo] with chainsaw medicine and burned anyway when climate/weather conditions

favored large blazes.

By contrast, between 1972 and 1987, Yellowstone National Park allowed 235 backcountry fires to burn without suppression. Of these fires, 222 burned less than a few acres, and all fires self-extinguished. Why? Because the climate was cool and moist.

Then in 1988, half of the park burned in a single season.

So, what was different? Was there more fuel in 1988 than in 1987 or 1986? No. The only difference was the weather. In 1988 the Park suffered the worst drought in its history, combined with some windy days with low humidity and high temperatures, which enabled the fire to spread rapidly across the landscape.

Weather, not fuels, drives large blazes, an inconvenient truth that the agency continues to ignore because it won't support its hack forest treatment policies.

Among the other incongruent ideas espoused by the agency is agencies' definition of "wildlands urban interface," which conveniently includes just about the entire Gallatin County outside of the treeless Gallatin Valley. Defining an area as WUI means the agency can avoid many environmental regulations and analyses.

Of course, many scientists, including some of the Forest Service's researchers, have concluded that logging more than 100 feet from home provides no extra protection against fire. However, the agency ignores these studies to justify logging.

Chainsaw medicine is a quack medical practice, like bleeding a person to get rid of bad blood. The FS can do better and should.

Bio: George Wuerthner is an ecologist who has published several books on wildfire ecology, among other environmental topics. 541-255-6039