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First name: Bo

Last name: Walker

Organization: Powell County Montana

Title: Extension Agent

Comments: January 10, 2023

Tim Lahey

Butte District Ranger

1820 Meadowlark

Butte, MT 59701

Dear Mr. Lahey,

The Powell County, Montana Commission wishes to express strong support for the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project. The seat of Powell County, Deer Lodge, Montana, is located approximately 50 miles downriver of the Basin Creek reservoir. Both Butte-Silver Bow and Powell County's economies share several linkages, one of which is the timber market and industry.

Powell County is home to one of Montana's largest operating timber mills and other industries that support timber operations. The local timber industry and its partners rely on timber sales associated with projects like the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project to provide the raw materials necessary to both timber mill and other industries' operations across Powell County. As such, Powell County not only supports the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project, but also strongly encourages the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest to utilize mechanical treatments when and where mechanical treats are a reasonable option. Mechanical treatments, as opposed to handcrews, offer the Powell County timber industry and its partners the opportunity to economically benefit from this project. Mechanical treatments also allow for the utilization of a variety of timber resources that may otherwise be unused if other treatment strategies, like handcrews, are employed alone. In addition to the benefits of this project, a reliable output of restoration projects could help boost the number and types of operators. There is room for biomass utilization facilities, various equipment capabilities, small diameter tree utilization and myriad other systems. If there is work, the infrastructure will build. Failing to fully utilize the variety of timber resources provided by the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project will exclude Powell County industries from the primary economic benefits of the project.

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Butte-Silver Bow and Powell County's economies are also linked via the outdoor recreation and tourism industry. Basin Creek is one of the main headwater tributaries of the Clark Fork River, which flows through the Deer Lodge, Montana, the seat of Powell County. The Commission of Powell County is concerned that a large fire in the Basin Creek drainage may negatively impact recreational opportunities enjoyed by Powell County residents and visitors associated with the Clark Fork River. Due to the possibility and potential implications of large-scale fires in the Basin Creek drainage as a result of the degraded forest conditions of the National Forest lands surrounding Basin Creek and the potential ramifications of fire for the Powell County outdoor recreation and tourism economy, Powell County also encourages the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest to employ a landscape-scale fuel treatment. This approach will significantly reduce the potential for large wildfire risks in the Basin Creek Drainage and therefore assist in ensuring that the outdoor and recreation opportunities associated with the Clark Fork River will remain available to Powell County residents and visitors. Ensuring that the recreation opportunities associated with the Clark Fork River remain undegraded by fire in the Basin Creek drainage directly supports the economic vitality of many Powell County businesses.

The Powell County Commission, on behalf of the residents of Powell County and in solidarity with Butte-Silver Bow, supports the Forest Service's efforts to analyze and respond to wildfire risks in the project area. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project and thank you for the great work you and your staff do. Powell County looks forward to providing comment upon release of the draft EA.

Signature page appended.