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Title:

Comments: The George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited (GGTU) would like to provide the following comments on the Basin Creek - Butte Watershed Project. GGTU has over 400 active chapter members in Southwest Montana and GGTU has invested significant time and resources into opening the reservoir for recreational opportunities.

The Basin Creek Reservoir provides the community of Butte approximately 60% of its municipal water supply and is important habitat for the Westslope Cutthroat Trout. If the reservoir were to be threatened by wildfire; a scenario that is increasingly likely with time, it could endanger not only the water supply but also the state-of-the-art \$30 million water treatment facility by creating an overwhelming nutrient and sediment influx. The Big Hole River, which is already facing significant dewatering concerns, would be unreasonably taxed to replace this more sustainable water supply. The compounded demand on Big Hole water would be ecologically damaging and energy intensive, undermining years of effort designed to protect the river's fishery and flows.

The small watershed that feeds the Basin Creek Reservoir is dominated by thick stands of Douglas fir and lodgepole pine, primarily of the same age class. This is likely due to historic forest management practices and 100 years of fire suppression efforts. The lack of a major disturbance in recent times has created a potential fire hazard that could be devastating to Butte's main water supply. Forests like this one, that are the result of historic forestry practices, are at high risk for a burn that would heavily impact the benefits this small watershed is providing our community. In 2021, the Haystack Fire burned over 11,000 acres of comparable forest just a few miles north in Jefferson County. A similar fire; even a much smaller one, would have significant impacts to Butte's water source.

The silvicultural treatments proposed by the US Forest Service are conventional in that they remove fuels, open the understory, and cycle nutrients - all of which reduce fire risk and provide benefits for the ecosystem that protects the reservoir. When done correctly with a weed management plan, this project can lead to increased species diversity, create a more complex habitat, increase vegetation cover, and protect the riparian vegetation. The short-term injury created by operating heavy equipment is far outweighed by the long-term benefits the treatment would provide the watershed. The proposed plan would improve fire resiliency by creating a mosaic of vegetation on the landscape and create a shaded fuel break along the Continental Divide.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you have about our comments.

Sincerely,

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