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Title: Comments by Stimson Lumber

Comments: February 6, 2024Katkee Fuels #65300Douglas NishekIdaho Panhandle National Forest3232 West Nursery RoadCoeur d'Alene, ID 83815Dear Doug:Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Katkee Fuels Project located on the Bonners Ferry Ranger District.I am familiar with this landscape from my work as a land manager for Stimson Lumber Company. Stimson is a private forest products manufacturer and timberland owner with forestland holdings in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Stimson has significanttimberland ownership immediately adjacent to this project in northwestern Montana and several parcels on the west end of the project, near Naples.In my work with Stimson, we have been highly encouraging of this type of work with the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. The Wildland Urban Interface in northern Idaho and western Montana is vast and is surrounded by NFS lands. Many of these lands desperately need the fuels reduction and fire protection treatments you and your team have outlined in the Scoping Document.We strongly support the activities outlined in this proposed action. Documentation states that the project area is approximately 20,000 acres in size and that approximately 11,300 acres will see hazardous fuels and vegetation management. In response, we encourage IPNF and BLM to treat as much of the project area as possible. Additional funding for this type of work is available now and should be put to effective use, while it is available.Secondarily, fuels reduction appears as the primary goal of the project. In my observation, fuels reduction treatments that only address small ladder fuels and underbrush do not fully achieve a highly functional and long-lasting-fuels reduction and wildfire mitigation benefit. In other words, in as little as five years, the timber stand will have again filled back in with smaller, highly flammable forest fuels. Working for a private timberlands firm for over 40 years, it has become clear to me that to effectively manage forest fuels it requires treating the entire forest profile. This will involve removing some merchantable trees to resemble commercial thinning andremoving much of the undergrowth. Effective fuels treatments should include reducing stocking levels through harvest activities including thinning, selective harvest, and regeneration harvest methods. Reduction of basal area and removal of ladder fuels will be essential to provide optimum fire protection, both in the near term and the long term. Providing shaded fuels breaks along all permanent travel routes and using temporary roads to access timber stands will ensure that the area transitions to a more fire resilient state where, should a fire occur, it can be easily brought under control. This will ensure the safety of nearby residents, the recreating public, and agency firefighters.In closing, Stimson Lumber Company strongly supports the work you are proposing, and we are encouraged that the Idaho Panhandle National Forest is boldly approaching this area within the Chiefs Wildfire Crisis Strategy. We highly support fuel reduction treatments on NFS lands adjacent to our private property boundaries and support a focused approach to addressing fire hazards within the Wildland Urban Interface on the IPNF. Utilizing partners such as IDL through Shared Stewardship and Good Neighbor Authorities is also highly recommended to add capacity to the work you are undertaking in this important landscape. We look forward to seeing the fullimplementation of your proposal.