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First name: William

Last name: Novotny

Organization: Johnson County

Title: Commissioner

Comments: July 24, 2024

District Ranger Thad Berrett

Powder River Ranger District

Bighorn National Forest

1415 Fort Street

Buffalo, WY 82834

RE: Protest of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service environmental assessment (EA) and draft decision and finding of no significant (DB/FONSI) for the Pole Creek Vegetative Management Project.

Dear Ranger Berrett:

Please accept this protest for the EA and DB/FONSI for the Pole Creek Vegetative Management Project for the Powder River Ranger District for the Buffalo, Wyoming, which is timely filed by the following party:

Johnson County Board of Commissioners

Attn: William J. Novotny, III

76 North Main Street

Buffalo, WY 82834 (307) 684-7555 bnovotny@johnsoncowy.gov

Interest of the Party:

Johnson County's protest is based on a long-standing interest in the Bighorn National Forest and specifically the Pole Creek Recreation Area. Johnson County provided comments on the proposed plan on February 13, 2023. In Wyoming, counties serve as a legal arm of the state entrusted with carrying out statutory and regulatory goals at the local level. Counties operate at the forefront to ensure our communities are economically vibrant, safe, and healthy places to live and work.

Furthermore, as co-regulators, Johnson County has prepared a Comprehensive Land Use Plan and a Natural Resource Management Plan to serve as the basis for communicating and coordinating with the federal government and its agencies on land and natural resource management issues. Wyo. Stat. 18-5-208(b). Communication, coordination, and collaboration with the Forest Service is vital, especially where significant Forest Service timber exists, and management decisions can significantly impact the regulatory framework, customs, culture, and socioeconomics of our county.

Johnson County is filing a protest to Alternative 2, the proposed action, which proposes approximately 8,000 acres of commercial timber harvests including clearcuts greater than 40 acres in size, approximately 5,400 acres of fuel reduction thinning, prescribed burning treatments, 800 acres of aspen and 8,300 acres of riparian habitat

improvements, and road system changes. Alternative 2 fails to protect the outdoor recreational opportunities at Pole Creek.

Proper stewardship of the Bighorn National Forest is critical. Thinning and clear cutting have their appropriate uses as you work to manage the timber, prevent wildfire, and protect private property on the mountain. While some areas of thinning were removed from the Pole Creek Recreation Area, additional timber harvest was identified for Powder Pass 449 area.

This proposed action fails to recognize the year-round recreation that happens at Pole Creek and its vital importance to Johnson County's economy and the quality of life for our citizens. Thousands of manhours and hundreds of thousands recreation dollars have been invested in this area. Degrading the recreational experience by removing the timber is unwise and counterproductive. The disturbance that will occur in this area will make it more susceptible to invasive weeds which Johnson County works to prevent and control.

Removing the Pole Creek Recreation Area and Powder Pass 449 from the proposed timber harvest is critical under Alternative 2 is critical.