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Title: Lands and Resource Manager

Comments: August 26, 2024

Seth Carbonari

Rexford and Fortine Ranger Districts

Kootenai National Forest

949 Highway 93 North

Eureka, MT 59917

RE: East Fork Fire Sunday Fire Salvage and Restoration Project

I would like to comment in support of the East Fork Sunday Fire Salvage and Restoration Project. As a professional Forester and the Lands and Resource Manager for F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co. I have been involved with numerous fire salvage restoration projects on USFS property in the past, including on the Kootenai National Forest. I have witnessed firsthand the benefits that come from salvaging the dead and dying timber. Salvaging the timber prepares the site for reforestation, removes fuel loading and hazards from the landscape all well providing material for our sawmill to utilize.

F.H. Stoltze is the oldest Family-Owned sawmill in Montana. Established in 1912 we have been managing our own private forest lands in Lake, Lincoln, and Flathead counties for over 112 years and currently depend on over 70% of our fiber supply to come from our national forests. Stoltze directly employs over 100 people and are supported by another 100 contractors. Having a steady, reliable, and affordable supply of timber for our mill from our national forests is imperative for our business and our employees' livelihoods.

The East Fork Fire occurred on the Kootenai National Forest (KNF) over a year ago in 2023. Much of this timber has already degraded past the point of viable economic return; especially white wood timber species such as Lodgepole Pine, Sub-alpine Fir, and Englemann's Spruce. Smaller diameter timber has also likely degraded into a condition that is unusable. It should be the forest and districts focus to advertise this project as soon as possible to recover what value is left and support our local economies. With that regard, I support their decision to pursue an Emergency Situation Determination so removal efforts can start ASAP.

The KNF also happens to be one of twenty designated High Priority Landscapes outlined in USFS Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Treating this area is essential so it's not prone to future wildfire. It is critical that the dead and dying trees are removed so there is not a continuous fuel load throughout the fire area. This fuel load if left untreated would be a tinder box for future wildfire and would impede any and all efforts to fight fire in this area as the fuel loading would be insurmountable. The fire triangle is composed of Heat, Oxygen, and Fuel; fuel is the only aspect we can manage.

I personally live, work, and play in the Kootenai National Forest and am heavily vested in seeing this project move forward. Recovering value from these trees will allow the USFS to improve and upgrade roads that access the project area while preparing harvest units for re-forestation of desired species and supporting our local communities. It is for all these reasons that I support the KNF on their proposed project.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Cameron Wohlschlegel

Lands and Resource Manager

F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Company

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