

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/4/2024 2:58:22 PM

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Comments: The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office supports the land management actions proposed under the Lower North-South Vegetation Management project. Much of the lands proposed for treatment are located within Jefferson County and the work proposed is critical to restoring the health of forested ecosystems and reducing the risk of a catastrophic wildfire. The Sheriff's Office Wildland Fire Management Program has responsibility for coordinating wildfire response actions including supporting fire protection districts which cover portions of the Lower North-South Vegetation Management project area. As such, the work being proposed will not only help restore forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and other disturbance events but will ensure maintenance of the lands which will both allow for fire (prescribed fire and wildfire) to play its natural role into the future.

In addition, Jefferson County lands located within the project area footprint are designated as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) per the recently updated county Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) due to the communities and homes located in or adjacent to the project area as well as the importance and value of the watershed in which the project area covers. Protecting lives and private property are foundational to the mission of the county Wildland Fire Management Program and the proposed treatments will facilitate aggressive fire suppression actions from first responders and mitigate the threat from wildfire both with fire coming off of USFS managed lands as well as fire spread from private lands. The South Platte Watershed serves as the primary municipal watershed serving over 2 million people on the Colorado Front Range and a catastrophic wildfire would have significant water quality and quantity as well as financial impacts affecting a large population. The treatments proposed through this project will help protect and maintain this critical watershed.

Much of the USFS managed lands identified for treatment are also identified at high risk/high priority for treatment and consistent with treatment recommendations and action items from the county CWPP. Working cooperatively with the county and affected fire protection districts, the treatments proposed in the project area offer an opportunity to complete strategic work at a landscape scale that will maximize the effectiveness of preventing large scale wildfires and mitigating the impacts of any wildfire. The treatment prescriptions outlined in the EA follow the best available science and are consistent with the approach and outcomes applied to other project areas located along the Colorado Front Range.

One recommendation from the county is to consider the high priority treatment units (map attached and data available from the county) located primarily along road corridors within the project area, that have been identified in the county CWPP. Utilizing the county identified treatment units as part of the overall prioritization and placement of USFS treatment units would increase effectiveness and efficiency of the planned work. In some cases, the county identified road corridor units are located on or adjacent to USFS managed lands and in other cases the treatment units could be additive to the work the USFS is planning. Maximizing the work completed along these critical road corridors would serve as strategic fuel breaks to minimize fire spread and serve as critical evacuation routes for homeowners and recreators who could be impacted by a wildfire incident.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Wildland Fire Management Program supports the Lower North-South Vegetation Management Project and views the USFS as a critical partner in managing lands within Jefferson County to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire impacting its citizens and other high priority values that make Jefferson County such a great place to live. The county Wildland Fire Management Program is available to help coordinate and assist the USFS in future treatment unit planning and implementation to ensure that mutually beneficial objectives are maximized as this project is implemented.