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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Subject: Comment letter on proposed Cooke City Fuels and Forest Health Project.

Date: April 25, 2025

Having lived in the communities of Cooke City and Silver Gate the past 18 winter seasons, I have several concerns about the long-term, negative impacts this project will have on all aspects of the surrounding forest ecosystem, as well as potential public safety and private property issues.

I frequently cross-country ski between these two communities on the Bannock Trail, and know residents who have property along this road and its adjacent area south of highway 212 below Wall and Republic mountains which lie in this high-risk avalanche and debris flow zone (Fig.1a,b.). The existing north-facing mature forest provides a protective avalanche barrier and serves to direct debris flow into established channels. Therefore, removal or thinning this forest area without an EIS that fully evaluates those considerations needs to be made before implementing your fuels reduction treatments - anything less is irresponsible.

Another reservation I have about the logging aspects is "if you build it they will come." Any indication of a 'road' or opened fuels thinning area will get motorized to an abusive extent. Inadequate signage and maps, plus no enforcement abilities fuel that sad situation too much already, especially south of Soda Butte Creek in the wintertime. That's why I suggest it would be best to omit treatments south of 212.

Your proposal stated the project's impacts would only be temporary, but how will you be able to accomplish that hopeful outcome when the project spans a ten-year timeframe. Where's your verification of valid specifications and requirements for the various types of project areas that have different vegetation and environmental conditions? Let alone mitigate negative impacts on sensitive wildlife (Fig.2).

And what about the unavoidable, accidental tipping points that won't be recoverable in our foreseeable future? Putting project funding toward more secure forest health measures that would also help mitigate climate disruptions - such as planting Whitebark Pine seedlings higher in elevation, where their future is due to the warming climate. Thinning current WB Pine areas will likely cause drying then subsequent runoff, and siltation - just more issues to deal with.

I love our national forests and appreciate your work. Therefore, my final request: Please ask the right questions that will assist your managing this project with best practices and continued oversight, so you can protect all aspects of our treasured forests and all the life they support!

Sincerely,

Catherine P. Logan

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