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First name: Robin

Last name: Barovick

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment as an abutting landowner.

First, I want to mention that the Invitation to Comment arrived just a few days prior to the January 21, 2026 public meeting at the Brandon Town Hall. This choice of a meeting venue had the effect of discouraging me and others in the Middlebury area—where the burn would actually take place—from attending. There was no apparent reason why the Forest Service decided to hold the meeting relatively far from the location of the planned burn (in a different county)—not to mention that the winter conditions made traveling difficult. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the meeting on such short notice.

Second, I read the Public Meeting Notes, which were helpful to get a sense of some of the questions asked at the open house. One of the questioners commented that “the best available science and analyses will be published after the comment period” and asked for a second meeting or a virtual meeting given the perceived unfairness that only those attending the meeting were provided with expert information that was not shared online. Christopher Mattrick’s response focused on the previous issues the Forest Service has had with virtual meetings but NOT the point that “the best available science and analyses will be published after the comment period.” Is that so? And if it is so, why? If that objection is correct, it gives the unfortunate impression that the Forest Service is withholding information, not providing it, with the consequence that neighbors and concerned citizens will not have the information necessary to ask the best questions and determine for themselves if they are comfortable with the planned Project. Can you please publish the best available science and analysis, and then hold another meeting in Middlebury?

Reading the Project Proposal—as much as I can understand as a layperson—I certainly agree in theory with the aims of the Project in promoting the resilience of certain tree species and flowers, and limiting others, and working to mitigate conditions to prevent out-of-control wildfires. But the devil is in the details, and the kind of details I am looking for are not answered in the Project Proposal. In addition, I do not understand what is being depicted in the various maps (my house would be near the Oxbow Unit), and how close the projected controlled burn would be.

My questions are as follows:

1. How big is the projected controlled burn in the Oxbow Unit, and how close will it be to the abutting residences? This is an obvious top of mind issue for residents concerned about the possibility of property damage. I looked at the Oxbow Treatment Area map with its RX Fire Treatment Areas, and the boundary on the west side seems pretty close to Forest Ridge Road in East Middlebury, where I live.
2. What fire departments will be monitoring the fire? A neighbor mentioned that he understood that fire control teams from out of state may be coming in to assist with monitoring the burn. If that is in fact the case, that does not strike me as a minor controlled burn but something much more major. Can you please provide more information on how the people envisioning the Project are planning for the appropriate coverage by fire departments to insure that the controlled burn does not become uncontrolled?
3. I am not clear as to when the controlled burns are planned for. Given that Vermont suffered drought last year, including our area, where water levels were much lower than normal and where outside burning was banned for long periods of time, have the Project planners accounted for that fact that such conditions may accelerate a burn, which in turn might make a controlled burn go out of control?
4. If the burn does become uncontrolled, and it damages our properties, what recourse will abutting landowners have to be compensated for damages, and from whom?
5. A number of residents in our neighborhood suffer from asthma. Their conditions were exacerbated last

summer when the wildfire smoke from Canada drifted our way for weeks at a time. Now the fires will be much closer. Have the Project planners taken into account how the fire's effects will impact the health of nearby residents and their families?

6. What mitigating effects are being included to protect wildlife in the burn areas?

As you can see, I have more questions than answers about the scope of the Project, and I know I am not alone. I would therefore request that the Forest Service schedule another meeting, this time in Middlebury, so residents might have an opportunity to question the Project Managers. I also hope that whatever information referred to in the Public Meeting Notes, concerning "the best available science and analyses" that would be "published after the comment period" might be published online prior to that meeting so that concerned parties can make an informed decision about whether they support or oppose the Project. That is only fair, and certainly is the objective of the Notice procedure in the first place.

Until I personally have such information, I will oppose the Project on the ground that the risk to abutting landowners from the controlled burn(s) is not clearly specified, nor are the mitigating factors (such as fire department oversight) and other contingencies should the fire burn out of control.