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Comments: Dear Brandon:

I strongly support the use of the Farm Bill CE authority and am pleased to see the Heppner Ranger District (HRD) actively utilizing this tool. West End is a perfect example for use of this authority. The forests in this area are heavily overstocked which creates a number of serious issues including forest health decline due competition for moisture and nutrients, undesirable shifts in species composition, and an increase in the potential for severe wildfire.

As a forester, I fully support the fundamental purpose of the West End project which is to remove insect and disease affected trees and to reduce stocking levels to decrease competition for moisture sunlight and nutrients. I encourage the HRD to remove excess green trees that are competing for moisture and nutrients in addition to dead, dying or diseased trees. I also encourages the HRD to remove dead trees that are greater than 21 inches dbh if these trees have some commercial value that can be realized or if this dead material is significantly adding to the existing fuel load. I also encourage the HRD to aggressively treat as many acres as possible within the 3000 acre area covered by the West End CE.

I have been working with Wheeler County to update their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and the HRD National Forest System lands in the West End project ranked among the highest in the plan for risk of extreme wildfire moving off the Umatilla National Forest on to private lands. Field review of private forest land along the HRD boundary in this area revealed many acres of dense young ponderosa pine plantations that are also at risk from insects, disease and wildfire. After the Wheeler Point Fire in the 1990s, numerous private landowners salvaged the burned timber from

their lands and replanted the acres as required by law. Many of these plantations are now quite dense and provide a fire risk of their own. The West End project is both timely and very welcome for Wheeler County. Oregon Department of Forestry will be strongly encouraged to secure grant monies to help private landowners in this area to thin plantations and to reduce fuel loads on their lands. This work across boundaries is in the spirit of the National Cohesive Wildfire Strategy and shared stewardship. The revised Wheeler CWPP document will be publicly available within the next month.

I look forward to the next steps in the planning process on the West End project, which has the potential to provide significant ecological, social and ecological benefits to the local area and the region. Please feel free to contact me if I can assist you with determining the economic feasibility of silviculture treatments and logging system requirements.