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May 8, 2019

From Gary P. Woodruff

To: the Objection Reviewing Officer  
USDA Forest Service, Region 2  
Rocky Mountain Region  
1617 Cole Boulevard, Building 17  
Golden, Co. 80401

The purpose of this communication is to object to the "Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis Project (LaVA Project) Final Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Record of Decision".

The Responsible Official for the MB LaVA Project FEIS and Draft Record of Decision is Russell M. Bacon, Forest Supervisor, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland.

My standing as an objector was established by my letter of comment concerning the MBNF LaVA Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The comment is catalogued as letter # 100 in appendix B of the MB LaVA Project FEIS.

When "Forest Service Chief Thomas L. Tidwell designated the majority of the MBNF as a landscape-scale insect and disease area under Section 602 (d) of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, as amended", he set in motion the preparation of an Environmental Impact analysis that culminated in the MBNF LaVA Project FEIS and Draft Record of Decision. The environmental impact analysis proceeded according to Section 104 of the HFRA, as amended. As a Hazard Fuels Reduction Project it required an EIS that included a No Action Alternative analysis.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Section 102 (2) provides for analysis of "the environmental impact of the proposed action" and "alternatives to the proposed action".

The Federal Register, Volume 82, issue 139 (Friday July 21, 2017) "notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement" states, in part, "The No Action alternative represents no change from current conditions and serves as the baseline for comparison among alternatives."

The MB LaVA Project Draft Record of Decision states on page 24, "(NEPA) regulations require the analysis of a no-action alternative; they also require it to be used as a baseline for comparing the environmental consequences of the other alternatives (40 CFR 1502.14 (d) and Forest Service Handbook 1909.14.1)."

March 22, 2017 Forest Service Chief Tidwell started a process which had the core purpose of restoring the health of large areas of insect and disease infested forest. The first step in that process was to prepare an EIS, to study the conditions and the dynamics of the forest. The central or baseline study was supposed to be the no action alternative for restoring forest health. The no action alternative is the natural processes alternative. Natural processes have been at work restoring the forest health since beetle-kill began in the 1990's. The natural processes means of restoring the forest will take decades to accomplish. It might take 150 years to complete. When the beetle-kill is reduced to soil it will be completed.

There is no way to analyze the No Action alternative except in the long term. A real no action analysis would ask and try to answer questions about forest conditions projected out to 15, 25, 50, 75, 100, 125 and 150 years in the future. Anything that sheds light on the natural processes of the forest through time should be analyzed. The no action analysis should be extensive. It is supposed to be the baseline study for making decisions about the forest's future. It's supposed to be an analytical and strategic guidance tool.

The MB LaVA Project Final Environmental Impact Statement does not contain a no action alternative that can serve as "a baseline for comparing the environmental consequences of other alternatives". I did not find any analysis of a no action alternative that addresses any issue beyond the 15 year time frame, in the FEIS.

In fact, both the DEIS and the FEIS turned the process upsided down by making alternative 2, the modified proposed action, the baseline study.

The no action, natural processes alternative cannot be analyzed in a time frame of 15 years. It cannot serve as the baseline alternative if it is not studied and analyzed in terms of many decades of natural processes restoring the forest health.

I think, Forest Supervisor, Russell M. Bacon did not fulfill an essential requirement of law. He did not comply with the dictates of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. He did not comply with the dictates of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, as amended. NEPA and the HFRA, as previously cited, require a thorough no action alternative analysis to serve as the "baseline" study "for comparing the environmental consequences of the other alternatives". He did not accomplish that goal. Therefore, the FEIS is not complete.

I think, a real analysis of a no action alternative should be completed. I think, the MB LaVA Project Draft Record of Decision should not be implemented because the FEIS is a seriously deficient document.

Gary P. Woodruff

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary P. Woodruff". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a solid black rectangular redaction box.