

May 1, 2020

From: Gary P. Woodruff
To: Objection Reviewing Officer
USDA Forest Service, Region 2
Rocky Mountain Region
P.O. Box 18980
Golden, Colo 80402

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

The Responsible Official for the MB LaVA Project Modified FEIS and Reissued DROD is Russell M. Bacon, Forest Supervisor, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest 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 chapter 4 of the MB LaVA Project Modified 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 Modified FEIS and Reissued DROD. The environmental impact analysis proceeded according to Section 104 of the HFRA, as amended. It required an EIS that include 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 Reissued DROD states on page 35, "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 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 the process was to prepare an EIS, to study the conditions and 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 1990s. 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, 50, 100 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 is supposed to be an analytic and strategic guidance tool.

The MB LaVA Project Modified FEIS 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 MFEIS. The fact is, the DEIS, the FEIS and the MFEIS turned the process upside down by making alternative 2, the modified proposed action, the baseline study.

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

The Forest Service has not effectively informed the public about the environmental consequences of allowing nature to restore the forest's health. NEPA's most crucial purpose is to require understanding of the natural environment as a basis for judging the impacts of human activities. In the case of the Medicine Bow LaVA Project, the Forest Service is obligated to acquire that understanding and share it with the public. Rather than do that, the Forest Service has steadfastly refused to address the issue, substantively. Apparently, the Forest Service does not aspire to understand Medicine Bow National Forest ecology. For some reason, the Forest Service seems to be more interested in the other aspects of the project.

I think, Forest Supervisor, Russell 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 a "baseline" study "for comparing the environmental consequences of the other alternatives". Mr. Bacon did not accomplish that goal. Therefore, the Modified Final Environmental Impact Statement is not complete.

I think a real analysis of the No Action alternative should be completed. I think the Medicine Bow Lava Project Reissued Draft Record of Decision should not be implemented because the Modified Final Environmental Impact Statement is a seriously deficient document.

Gary P. Woodruff

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Gary P. Woodruff", written over a solid black rectangular redaction box.