



South Fork John Day Watershed Council

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December 17th, 2020

Attn: Jacob Young, Sunflower Project Area
Ochoco National Forest
3160 NE Third Street,
Prineville, OR 97754

Subject: Sunflower Project Area

A cooperative landowner-based organization has existed in the South Fork John Day Watershed, to improve the watershed since the 1980's. It started as private landowners and different Government Agencies working to improve the area and has developed into the South Fork John Day River Watershed Council (SFJDWC). The Council's mission is to; maintain and enhance the health of the South Fork John Day River watershed and the long-term economic stability of the region, foster a better understanding of the multiple resources, represent broad and diverse geographies and interests, and work collaboratively to carry out voluntary watershed restoration activities.

The proposed Sunflower Project Area lies within the South Fork John Day Watershed, and the SFJDWC has collaborated with the ONF in planning in the area. The ONF and SFJDWC partnered to secure the Wind Creek Restoration Assessment, and secured funding to perform cultural surveys on the proposed Juniper removal areas.

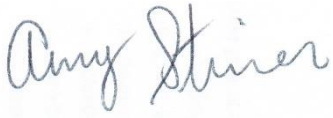
Upon review of the Sunflower project, the Council would like to commend the Ochoco National Forest (ONF) for their collaboration, information distribution, and proposed treatments and restoration for the project area. The proposed restoration activities align with the SFJDWC mission and will aid in improving watershed health.

Approximately 420,000 acres of National Forests and Grasslands in the Pacific Northwest Region are degraded by infestations of invasive, non-native plants. Invasive plants create a host of harmful environmental effects to native ecosystems including displace native plants; degrade or eliminate habitat and forage for wildlife; threaten Endangered species; impact recreation; affect fire frequency; alter soil properties; decrease biodiversity; and more. Invasive plants spread across landscapes, unimpeded by ownership boundaries. Infested areas represent potential seed sources for continuation of the invasion on neighboring lands. We recognize that the ONF is actively managing annual grass populations in certain areas and would urge you to consider actively combating annual grasses in the Sunflower project area.

The SFJDWC is also concerned about the overpopulation of wild horse herds in our region and throughout much of the American west. This area includes the Murderers Creek Wild Horse territory as well as Wild horses that occupy the Sunflower project area of the Ochoco National Forest. While people who are removed from the situation may view wild horses as a majestic symbol of the west, the reality is that the overpopulation of wild horses is degrading rangeland resources and threatening western livelihoods. Livestock operations, wildlife habitat, aquatic habitat, and rural communities are increasingly harmed as oversized herds decimate vital food and water resources on the arid western landscape. Their overpopulation now threatens the ecosystem and the multi-use values of the National Forest public lands. The Council would like to encourage the ONF to manage their wild horse numbers by removing them from the landscape, rather than re-locating them to other Forests such as the Malheur National Forest, or regions of their own managed lands.

The Council is in support of the treatments, and restoration that the ONF has proposed for the Sunflower Project area. We would like the Forest to reconsider adding treatments to mitigate the spread of invasive species such as the annual grasses, and feral horses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy Stiner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy Stiner
SFJDWC Executive Director