12369 S Shugart Flats Road

Leavenworth, WA 98826

February 5, 2021

Mr. Jeff Rivera

Wenatchee River District Ranger

600 Sherbourne

Leavenworth, WA 98826

Dear Jeff,

Subj: Comments on the Upper Valley Pilot Project Draft Environmental Assessment

My wife and I have lived in Chelan County for over 15 years. During that time, we have become increasingly concerned with the danger of catastrophic wildfires in our area. In recent years we have had numerous wildfires in and around Plain. Fortunately as a result of hard work by your organization and Lake Wenatchee Fire & Rescue no homes were destroyed or lives lost. However, stopping these fires required tremendous effort and costs. On more than one of these fires, a wind shift towards Plain would have resulted in significant loss of life and homes. In short, we got lucky.

We would like to start by complimenting you and your team with drafting this assessment.

We have several concerns with the EA as written:

* The EA does not give high enough priority to improving public health and safety. We STRONGLY suggest that you clearly identify and commit to reduce the fire danger on forest service property in areas where there is only one way in and out for residents.

These include Shugart Flats, Ponderosa, South Shore, and River Road. Most of these areas do not have a safety zone.

* We are VERY disappointed that nearly a 1/3 of the forest (25,000 acres) in the Upper Pilot area will not be treated. WHY? We recognize that the costs to treat are most likely significant; they will be insignificant compared to the loss of life and costs to replace homes destroyed by the event of a major wildfire. If people who are impacted could prove gross negligence for not maintaining the forests, costs to the government could be even higher.
* The EA needs to identify and give high priority to constructing 300 to 500 ft. fuel breaks around private and public federal interfacing lands. The EA also should identify how you will maintain these fire breaks in the future.
* We are also concerned that you don’t identify how you will clean up slash from logging operations. Some previous logging operations on forest service lands have actually increased the fire danger by not removing the slash.

As a Fire Commissioner and former Assistant Chief at Lake Wenatchee Fire & Rescue, I know firsthand how fires in areas with lots of dead or down material can rapidly get out of control.

Ours is an area of unmatched natural beauty, but we must remember, that it could be quickly destroyed by a catastrophic wildfire. Unfortunately funding limitations and conflicting environmental requirements have significantly increased the potential for major wildfires in our area.

We need to correct years of neglect and aggressively reduce the fire danger on public and private property.

Sincerely,

Mike and Becky Payne