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First name: Xavier

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Reviewing Officer,

Thank you for this opportunity to object to the Mission Project. As a full time resident of the Libby Creek drainage I have personal interests in making sure that this place remains beautiful, abundant, and safe.

I am a believer that we as human beings can actively interact with our forests in a positive manner. After all, Native populations living in this area have done so for many generations, reducing fuel loads by using deadfall for firewood and setting intentional fires in the forest in 5-7 year cycles, and setting intentional fires to the sagebrush areas every couple of years, among other practices. As a homeowner, I spend a considerable amount of time hand thinning our property to enhance forest health and reduce the propagation of destructive wildfires.

The Mission Restoration Project claims that its implementation would result in increased forest health, increased resilience to wildfires, and a return to the historical conditions of the forest. Although these claims are in line with my own values I have to disagree once again that the Mission Project will actually reach these goals. Instead, I do believe that the alternative proposal from the Pacific Biodiversity Institute would have been much better at reaching those goals AND received great community support, but you failed to consider it seriously, presumably because it was not supported by the logging industry that has been working hand in hand with you on the Mission Project from the beginning.

The specific reasons why I still oppose the Mission Project are as follows.

1. It is my understanding that the only funded portion of the Project is the initial commercial logging and that there are no real outlined plan to fund the critical "restoration" phase in the future. By your own admission, it will be critical for forest health to come back to the Mission Project area in 15 years and clean out the small brush and trees that will inevitably creep in once the removal of commercially-viable trees is done. Therefore, if that clean up phase does not happen, the forest will actually find itself in a much worse state, and at a much greater risk of destructive wildfires than before. And yet you have no actual plan in place to fund that very critical clean up phase? I wish I could just take your word that it will happen no matter what but, unfortunately, it has happened many times that the logging companies have come to this drainage and others like it, taken out the large trees, and then ran with their newly earned money without coming back for the clean up phase. A great example of that is what happened in Elderberry Canyon, among others in the Methow Valley. It was once a healthy place with large trees and is now a real fire trap with closely packed small diameter trees.

Therefore, I oppose the Mission Project because it does not guarantee the necessary follow up to proper forest health and resilience to wildfires. Please provide a detailed plan on how the follow up phase will be funded and implemented or you will be held liable for any destructive fire that will spread through the logged areas.

2. The Mission Project states that one of its goals is to return the forest to within its historical range in terms of more fire-resilient vegetation. Yet, historical conditions include frequent small to medium intensity fires to spread through the area, which have for function to burn out accumulated fuels before they reach critical levels. Will the Forest Service allow those fires to burn and fulfill their historical functions, or will they be stopped at all costs, as is current policy? If you do not let fires perform their own cleaning functions in the natural cycle then you will have to find a way to do extensive prescribed burns on a regular basis, as the Native People did. However, unlike the Natives who had vested personal interests in maintaining the health of their environment, as a government agency you will have to provide funding for that forest clean up to happen. Which brings me back to my first point: where is the funding to actually do this? Without this proper long-term planning and guaranteed funding for

the regular clean up of accumulated fuels the Mission "Restoration" Project is nothing more than a plain old logging project.

3. Despite many earlier comments from the residents of the Libby Creek drainage, you haven't adequately addressed the issue of safety on our icy windy roads in the winter. Have you driven up Libby Creek road in the winter time? It gets very narrow after plow trucks push the snow to the sides and is consistently icy. The long time residents I talked to who have had to deal with previous logging activity up the Libby Creek drainage told me that they've had to throw their car into the ditch several times in order to avoid logging trucks coming down the road and being unable to stop at the sight of an oncoming car. One person actually died because of this! What are your plans to guarantee people's safety?

In conclusion, I agree with many that present forest conditions are not healthy and should be modified actively to restore them to a state of beauty, abundance, and safety. The ways to do that would be to carefully and mindfully hand-thin the areas at risk and use prescribed burns to reduce fuel accumulation. This would include frequent treatment of sagebrush areas. Unfortunately, the Mission Project falls short on being able to do all this.

Please consider that your decision will not only set a precedent for dealing with forest health for the decades to come, but will also impact the residents of this area in very real ways.

Sincerely,
Xavier Sonnerat, Ph.D.

PS: The link you provided in your email informing us of this opportunity to object was incorrect, as you forgot the hyphen between ecosystem and management in '<https://cara.ecosystemmanagement.org>'
I seriously hope this was an honest mistake on your part and not an intentional attempt to limit people's access to the correct page.