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Comments: I am writing in supporting the proposed Mud Creek Project, Bitterroot National Forest (BRF), West Fork District. The proposed healthy forest management project is long overdue. It is not if but when there will be a catastrophic wildland urban interface (WUI) wildfire in the main West Fork and Little West Fork corridors and adjacent watersheds. I personally have witnessed repeated WUI threats and forest destruction the past decade from wildfires such as 2000, 2003 Upper Bitterroot Valley Fire Sieges and 2017 Lolo Peak fire as a Northern Rockies IMT Operations Section Chief. Loss of lives, property and ecological damage would be severe from additional major wildfire events in the West Fork WUI areas.

Mature, second and some old growth Ponderosa pine is being crowded out by thick unmanaged, unhealthy insect and disease infected Douglas fir understory ladder fuels. Douglas fir, Mountain Pine beetle and Western spruce budworm have severely impacted watershed timber stands. This is an unacceptable, unnatural forest condition in these forest types.

Mud Creek Project proposed active fuels and forest management must also consider improving critical elk and other wildlife habitat improvement.

Logging and thinning must be accomplished prior to any understory or pile prescribed burning due to the current hazardous fuel conditions.

Herbicide application is absolutely necessary as a tool to control spotted knapweed and other noxious weeds within the project area.

Trails and some roads will need to be temporary, decommissioned, relocated, removed or maintained with adequate drainage structures and properly sized culverts installed to protect the water quantity and reduce erosion within the Mud Creek watersheds.

I am hoping the Bitterroot National Forest's Mud Creek project staff would reach out to both private and the State of Montana forest landowners that lie within the proposed Mud Creek project. It would be beneficial for these other forest landowners if they could perhaps "dove-tail" some proactive forest and fuels management contractor work at the same time the BRF is especially regarding WUI fuels mitigation work.

Federal lands management agencies must stop blaming "past fire suppression activities" for the present day non-wilderness forest health issues. I spent thirty[shy] four career years in state and federal fire control and fire management activities. The real issue is the lack of active forest and range management activities' by land management agencies the past twenty-five plus years due to frivolous project lawsuits by environmental extremists and underfunded land management mandates. Fire suppression in non-wilderness forest environments especially areas lying with the western U.S's. WUI is not a dirty word: it is and always will be an essential function of the government. Active fuels management and public education are paramount in dealing with the West's current and expected worsening wildfire threats.

Thank-you for the opportunity to comment on a well- planned, sound forest and fuels management project. Best of luck in implementing the plan!

Respectfully:

Eric J. Kurtz