

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/11/2019 11:00:00 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Subject: Comments concerning preliminary proposed Buckhorn GNA Project

I am writing in supporting the proposed Buckhorn GNA forest health improvement project, Bitterroot National Forest (BRF), Darby/Sula Ranger District. The proposed healthy forest management project is long overdue. It is not if but when there will be another catastrophic wildfire in the proposed Buckhorn GNA project forests 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, insect and disease events in the proposed project watersheds and timbered zones.

Mature, second and some old growth Ponderosa and Lodgepole pine stands are 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. Critical elk and deer winter range habitat is also threatened by poor forest health conditions.

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 Buckhorn GNA watersheds.

I understand that the Bitterroot National Forest's Buckhorn GNA project staff has reached out to the State of Montana: DNRC state-trust landowner that lies adjacent to the proposed Buckhorn GNA project. These collaborative forest health and management (logging and thinning) activities would be beneficial for both the federal and state forest landowners "dove-tailing" some proactive forest and fuels management contractor work at the same time maximizing efficiency and safe forest management operations including road use, maintenance and decommissioning temporary roads as needed.

Federal lands management agencies must stop blaming "past fire suppression activities" for the present day non-wilderness forest health issues. I spent thirty-[middot] 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 and NEPA projects.

Fire suppression and active forest management activities 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 the BRF's proposed Buckhorn GNA science based forest and fuels management project. Best of luck during the planning process!

Respectfully:

Eric J. Kurtz