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Comments: The following are my comments on the EA for the proposed Big Creek Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project.

I am pleased to see you are proceeding with this very important project. This is something that is long overdue. The fire situation in Big Creek is truly critical. As a home owner in Big Creek I live in constant fear during the summer that our next visit will be to a pile of ashes caused by a wildfire that started on National Forest Lands. Winter can't come too soon for us.

Much of the EA addresses the consequences of doing fuels reduction on various resources, but underplays the consequences of failing to take action on these same resources. Just this year the fire induced massive slides in the Upper East Fork of the Salmon are creating big resource issues for that very important drainage. We recognize the primary underpinning for this project is to protect private lands from fires beginning on Federal Lands. However in the proposed project there will be some broad resource benefits. The project may lessen wildfire growth beyond the project boundary and will also reduce the possibility of large wildfires originating from within the project area.

In general I continue to support the project proposal, I observed several improvements in the project since 2018 (one example is the change in road treatment along the Golden Cup Road - removal along that road is basically impossible without major road reconstruction). We were pleased to see that the mastication option was used sparingly in the area of summer homes. Good job on both of these actions. Because of the aesthetics mastication has not been used on summer home properties in Big Creek.

I still have concerns about some details of this project.

A major concern is lack of detailed planning in the EA for prescribed burns. We do recognize the Payette NF has reduced the frequency of unplanned events for prescribed burns, and we wish you continued success in this trend. We believe we can contribute to this trend if you allow us to collaborate on the development of prescribed burn plans in an open and transparent methodology. The current EA on page 13 indicates the Burn Plans will be created following the approval of the EA. We believe this important phase of the overall project plan should be included in the EA. The public and private landowners are very much impacted by prescribed burns - much more than all the other activities included in the project. We are impacted by things like time of year, equipment/resources to be committed (this could be public & private), timing of the individual burns and also timing as related to when other fuel reduction activities occur, and finally a projected time line for the entire project.

We do question the timing of the comment period & the lack of serious opportunity for persons to interact with decision makers. If you truly want public input, we believe it was a poor idea to make the initial announcement of the comment period just before Thanksgiving, and then the comment period includes two more National Holidays plus the Christmas school vacation period. In addition, the November 25 announcement letter included the following : "A public meeting during the comment period is being considered in the Big Creek/Edwardsburg area, additional details will be announced on the web site." This is a poor idea. As of that November 25 date all roads to Big Creek were closed by snow to standard wheeled vehicles (and continue to be closed as of this letter date). Weeks before November 25th there were numerous high clearance 4x4 vehicles with chains on all 4 wheels getting stuck going over Profile Gap. We were there travelling on over snow tracked machines, and personally viewed this. The location for this vitally needed meeting must be in a location that is readily accessible, and should be scheduled after the holidays along with an extension of the comment period so meaningful comments can be submitted following the meeting.

At least one of the questions we would have for the meeting regards the numerous ford repairs on "OHV trails" in the Smith Creek Drainage. As you know we have been working hard to maintain motorized access on the Krassel RD. We are unaware of any OHV trails in the Smith Creek Drainage as described on page 37 of the EA. Could this be the Smith Creek ATV trail, and are these the same crossings that were rebuilt in August 2014? If this is the Smith Creek ATV trail, how does this mesh in with the Big Creek RAMP NEPA document where Valley

County was to receive a FRTA easement & the route would be managed as a route open to all vehicles?
Thanks for your working on the Hazardous Fuels problem in Big Creek: I would like to be of assistance in the effort.