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Comments: I am writing to oppose the Modified FEIS for the Medicine Bow National Forest regarding the Landscape Vegetation Analysis Project (LaVA). This plan is not only devastating for the forest, but is also going to have a significant negative affect on surrounding communities.

Planning to cut 260,000 acres of forest does not take into account research that shows the climate in this region, including in the Medicine Bow National Forest, is changing. It is drier. I have lived in Laramie since 1982 and have owned a cabin bordering on the Medicine Bow National Forest since 1985. My experience is that during the past 15 years, each summer is drier in the forest. In that time, I have cut about 100 trees on my land due to beetle kill and have planted about that many trees to replace them. It is a struggle to get the trees to grow due to drier summers, even though I water the trees on the days when I am there. Note that Stevens-Ruman and Morgan in their article, "Tree regeneration following wildfires in the western US: A review," published in Fire Ecology in 2019 have noted similar problems with tree growth after fires in the Rocky Mountain West. Their review of previous studies concludes: "Few or no tree seedlings are establishing on some areas of the 150+ forest fires sampled across western US, suggesting that forests may be replaced by shrublands and grasslands, especially where few seed source trees survived the wildfires." Due to climate change, a drier climate, and clear cutting, the effect of little or no tree generation is likely to be the same as for forests after forest fires. If you cut 260,000 acres, which is one third of the forest, it could well mean very little forest generation. This would dramatically affect wildlife populations that depend on the forest, including ungulates, birds, and fish.

Clear cutting to this extent would also affect instate and out-of-state recreationalists. There would be less reason to come to this forest and more attraction to go elsewhere. Summer and winter recreationalists who come to the Medicine Bow National Forest bring vital dollars into the economies of surrounding communities including Laramie, Centennial, Albany, Saratoga, and others. Given the current drastic decreases in state revenues from oil, gas, and coal, Wyoming must depend on its second major income earner, which is tourism. Altering the Medicine Bow National Forest in the ways you are proposing means greatly reduced dollars from tourism as potential visitors go somewhere else that is more pristine and appealing. This includes going to places that not only offer more forest and wildlife, but also less intrusion from timber harvesters with big trucks barreling down mountain roads. Further, one of the attractions for students to the University of Wyoming is recreating in our beautiful mountains. When you alter the Medicine Bow National Forest in the dramatic ways you are proposing, you make coming to this university less attractive to students-which directly influences the economy of the city, the university, and the state. Whatever money the Forest Service gets from the proposed timber harvest is likely to be greatly outweighed by loss of jobs and economic opportunities for people in communities like Laramie.

I submit that the tradeoffs are not worth it for the project you are proposing. With climate change, which is well proven by several thousand studies, doubt that many of the trees will grow back, and the economic effects of a greatly changed forest, it seems to this writer that your plan has far-reaching and unacceptable negative impacts. Considering the national emphasis on the economy coming from Washington, D.C., your plan also goes against the drive to build back our economy in this region.