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Letter to the USFS

I write this letter of objection to the LaVA project with a series of questions supporting the foundation of my objection. Has the USFS done "due diligence" regarding project analysis, forest analysis, pre-scoping, scoping, and analysis? I have studied the NEPA, MFEIS and LaVA documents within the federal regulatory and policy framework. I must ask "What are the true drivers of this project?" I cannot conclude that the answer is embedded in 2020 best practices of forest management and environmental stewardship. It appears the project is being championed by the logging industry and pushed through the process by the USFS for simple economic gain.

I quote US Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen: "Shared Stewardship is about working together in an integrated way to make decisions and take actions on the land." My question is whether or Mr. Bacon and staff have used "authority, science, and stakeholder facilitation" on this project? I can not find sufficient evidence for any condition except "authority".

Objections listed on the website reference a variety of stakeholders. I have read the opinions of university scientists and scholars. It is clear to me that scientific knowledge has not been considered. Oppositions raised by regional scientists, most notably at the University of Wyoming and Colorado State University, are clear regarding the impact of heavy logging and exponential road development on forest regeneration, ecology, and soil management. The Medicine Bow National Forest is one of the most fragile ecosystems. The scars of clear-cut logging fifty years ago are still visible.

What is also clear is the lack of true public participation guaranteed under NEPA and adequate consideration of comments that have been provided. The Wildearth Guardians wrote a 44-page opposition letter claiming the public has had no opportunity to meaningful comment or challenge in violation of NEPA. There are letters from prior USFS employees challenging the standing policies of USFS and how this project goes against best practice. There are letters from environmental groups, landowner associations and the public against this project. The objections carry a common theme: limited opportunity for input from multiple stakeholders, the massive size of the project with an "adaptable management plan" requiring no public input after the MFEIS is enacted, and unsound economic gains at the expense of the forest ecology and environmental stewardship.

For over five generations, my family and I have enjoyed the beauty, rugged and yet fragile ecosystem of the Medicine Bow. It is a "scenic route" with all its splendor. The area holds significant value for hiking, fishing, camping, backpacking, snowshoeing, skiing and simple respite. I find it hard to understand why I am now just learning about this project. What efforts were made to notify the public in Cheyenne, Laramie and other cities and towns in this region?

In closing, I simply ask the USFS to consider what is happening to our country and the world during COVID 19. Please put LaVA on pause and reset this project. Do not use your authority over the objections of scientists and public stakeholders. Do not take advantage of the societal shut down to further this project. Please take the time to do your "due diligence" on a decision that will have a forever impact on the Medicine Bow National Forest. This project as it currently stands is too broad in scope and sacrifices our natural forest. Please take another approach to integrate the management of forest health, impact of beetle kill and related threats of wildfires. Do not become another federal agency that has lost the trust of the people you serve by forsaking your stewardship responsibilities.

Thank you for considering my observations and concerns.