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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I write as a former US Senate candidate from Montana, a former longtime resident, and as someone who loves the Bitterroot NF. I have spent much time there as a hunter, fisherman and hiker, and have camped there many times with my family. I am also a former USFS consultant on many projects throughout the west of the United States.. My father-in-law, Bill Lucas, was Chief Forester of USFS Region 2, and was a ranger in the Mud Creek district early in his career. My wife grew up on ranger stations there, and like myself she is very committed to defending the area from environmentally destructive projects like this one.

It is incredible that today, when so little old growth forest is left in the United States, and after the USFS has clearcut and roaded nearly every piece of public land that it is supposed to manage for the public good, that you should still be attempting to trash what little is left. This area is so unique that you ought to be battling to preserve it untouched in every way you can. Having myself taken many forestry courses I can assure you that your proposed action will have tragic and irreversible consequences on the entire area, as you surely know.

Here are but a few of the disastrous consequences of your proposed project:

1. It will destroy, no doubt intentionally, lands of Wilderness value, which are now protected as Recommended Wilderness, Inventoried Roadless Areas, and Wilderness Study Areas. Once you have ruined these areas, they can never be designated as Wilderness, which as I said is the reason for your project.

2. Large clearcuts such as those proposed have enormous negative impacts on soils, vegetation, erosion issues, visual quality, recreation, hunting, hiking, wildlife, microclimate, downstream fisheries and many other resources.

3. The sparse amount of old growth habitat remaining in the US means that every acre should be protected, not vandalized as you are planning with this project.

4. Essential habitat for lynx, marten, wolverine, wolves, sheep, grizzlies, black bears, owls and eagles and many other bird species will be destroyed, and will never be restored.

5. Tree regrowth on large clearcuts such as these is severely hampered by their changes to local microclimates, as well as soil loss, soil heating, accelerated erosion, road damage, and many other impacts. USFS-managed areas in the West are covered with millions of acres where clearcuts such as these have never regrown and never will.

6. Downstream riparian resources, trout habitat, water quality, and many other resources will be irreversibly damaged by runoff from these enormous clearcuts. This will have permanent impacts on recreation and on the protection of threatened fish and wildlife.

7. Your underhanded refusal to provide site specifics and specific logging plans is simply a way to implement logging and roading without giving the public sufficient opportunity to reject these plans.

8. You should remember, as everyone in the US Forest Service should remember, that the National Forests do not belong to you to sell off to logging companies at the lowest possible cost. These National Forests belong to every American citizen, not to you, and you have no legal or moral right to irreversibly destroy them.