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First name: Jeff

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Organization: Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife

Title: Executive Director

Comments: April 26, 2022RE: The Bitterroot Front ProjectDear District Ranger Brown, Thank you for the opportunity to make a comment on the proposed Bitterroot Front Project. Steve, I have resided in the rural Stevensville area for 25 years and there has not been a year that I have not been able to view a forest fire from my home, so this proposal is important to me personally as well as professionally. I am presenting these comments as the Executive Director of Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife (MTSFW). MTSFW is a non-profit sportsmen's membership organization committed to protecting our hunting, fishing, and trapping traditions, which is our mission. Ravalli County has some of the best wildlife resources within this state, which is why many of our members live, work, and recreate here. Our mule deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, and other wildlife species are very coveted by many hunters. This project provides the necessary active forest management measures that will create healthy habitat, which is crucial to maintain and improve these wildlife resources for future hunting and trapping opportunities. A widely accepted forestry practice to improve wildlife habitat, is to thin forests or woodlands to promote understory vegetation growth. This will enhance the nutrition intake of the ungulate population. MTSFW feels that this project will eliminate densely forested areas that are choked with dead dry beetle-killed trees. This will reduce wildfire fuels and improve browse for ungulates. The increase and improvement of these foraging areas hopefully will provide some relief of game damage to local landowners. The improvement of habitat on public lands is a key issue that the state's Elk Working Group is currently focused on. Improvement of habitat and forage on public lands will be a benefit for sportsmen, because it will cause ungulate distribution onto more public lands making them more available to hunters. MTSFW recognizes that environmentalist groups speak out against projects like this, so we feel it is imperative that you hear from local sportsmen and homeowners that are threatened by severe wildfires due to overgrown unhealthy forests. As the USFS, MTSFW feels that you are the managers of our forests and that you know best what needs to be done to provide for a healthy forest. The time has come to implement the Wildfire Crisis Strategies to protect Ravalli County residents, benefit wildlife, and improve the health of our forests. Sincerely, Jeff Darrah Executive Director MTSFW