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First name: Kathryn

Last name: Tilly

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To the Bitterroot National Forest:

I would like to submit the following comment on the proposed Bitterroot Front Project. I congratulate the Forest on attempting to make an integrated plan for the Bitterroot Front. Because the project covers a very large area and allows for treatment based on the conditions at the time of action, I have some general comments, plus specific comments about the plans for the Lost Horse-Camas area, where I live and spend a lot of time in the forest. I am not an expert on forestry, so I am basing my comment on articles that I have read and personal observation. First, I am happy to see that there are no treatments proposed in Wilderness Study Areas or Inventoried Roadless Areas that would affect their ability to become designated Wilderness in the future. Very little land in the contiguous 48 states remains qualified for Wilderness, so that land should be only minimally manipulated. Second, I appreciate the effort to reduce fuels in the Wildland-Urban Interface to historic levels, in an effort to create a zone that may lower the intensity of a wildfire approaching private lands. Third, I hope that, as much as possible, large and old growth trees be spared, as they store concomitantly more carbon, which is a priority in the face of climate change. I realize that a healthy, actively growing forest is the best for withdrawing carbon from the atmosphere, but we need to also prioritize storing carbon now, not just in the 50 years that it takes a thinned forest to reach net carbon storage again. Fourth, I hope that road construction will be minimized, as roads increase cost, create barriers to wildlife migration, and increase sedimentation. While increased access for forest visitors is a benefit for them, it is often detrimental for wildlife and the forest itself.

With regard to the Lost Horse-Camas area, I feel very strongly that the North Fork and South Fork opportunity areas should be left as is, while allowing more fire activity when natural fires ignite. Both of these drainages are relatively far from inhabited areas, with historic fire or managed forest between the drainages and WUI, have beautiful, healthy forests, and are difficult to access, with an often-challenging creek crossing at the South Fork trailhead and a very steep, rocky start to the North Fork trail. The Lost Horse Road corridor is a cherry stem into the Wilderness, which has minimal impact as it is. This corridor should not be logged or thinned further, beyond what is necessary to protect the cabin and campgrounds. Again, the forest is beautiful, with mature trees and abundant wildlife, and it provides excellent opportunities for natural fire to play an increased role. I think that the road should not be significantly improved, except to minimize sedimentation and watershed damage, as canyon usage is now limited by the challenging road conditions. Too much activity on the road and/or increasing the size of the road corridor by managing timber along the road would increase its significance as a barrier to wildlife migration.

With regard to the Camas-Hayes area, there has been significant logging and thinning in the lower parts of this area, which, in combination with the scars from the Observation and Roaring Lion fires, have made those of us who live nearby feel safer in the face of wildfire. These factors make me believe that little further action is necessary in this area.

Again, thank you for attempting long range and integrated planning for the Bitterroot Front, and I look forward to

the opportunity to comment further as plans progress.