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Comments: The Ravalli County Economic Development Authority (RCEDA) is the county's lead economic development organization. We work closely with the county, city, towns, and our many public and private partners in economic planning and implementation. RCEDA strongly supports the Bitterroot Front project and the project goals. Mitigating severe fires and preserving our recreational land in a healthier state are critical to the community and its economic resiliency.

Businesses that service the recreation industry are among those most severely impacted by the wildfires, however, the entire community suffers irreparable harm each time a catastrophic fire occurs in our valley. The loss of revenue and the damage to individual health is not recoverable.

Nonresident Travel Spending in Ravalli County in 2019 was nearly \$31 million dollars. More than 70% of this spending occurs from April through September. According to Six Sigma calculations for recovering from loss, it requires \$37,333 to recapture \$5,500 in loss. Even the smallest micro-businesses in Ravalli County's recreation economy have lost more than \$5,500 during fire season. It takes years for these businesses to recover from a season of loss and, some go out of business. In rural communities the loss of social, civic, and economic capital may never be recovered.

Ravalli County's businesses are 65% small (2-9 jobs), 21% sole proprietors, and 12% small to medium (10 to 99 jobs). In 2019, there were about 2,500 business establishments and a few large corporations employing from 100 to 499. The temporary loss of jobs and revenue for our recreation economy, due to extreme fires, negatively affects the economy of the entire community. There are 380 lodging establishments in Ravalli County, and 76 food and drinking establishments that employ about 871 with a total payroll of \$12 million - they rely on the recreation economy.

Ravalli County is the bio-tech center of Montana with GSK, Rocky Mountain Laboratories, Tonix Pharmaceuticals, Lubrizol, and Marcus Daly Memorial Hospital (more than 1,400 existing jobs).

GSK is the city's largest, and the county's second largest, property tax payer. Many citizens in the Bitterroot are low and moderate income - they cannot afford to pay higher taxes, or any of the other financial hardships that would come to pass should these clean industry, global companies, remove their investment from the Bitterroot due to continual wildfires.

Many businesses rely on the incredible outdoor beauty and recreation of the Bitterroot to give them a leg up as they compete for workforce. Obviously a valley filled with smoke each year removes that incentive and makes hiring that much more difficult. It is challenging enough to attract and retain businesses and good paying jobs in a rural community without being railroaded in to accepting an annual fire season that is modifiable.

According to the Bitterroot National Forest, they saw an increase of 80-90% on some of their recreation sites in the summer of 2020. With some improvements to trail heads and parking we presently we have significant land mass on which the additional users can be distributed. However, if a large swath of the WUI is turned to stump and ash due to fires our ability to absorb recreation diminishes. Uncontrolled fire creates a scarred economy and community just as it does to the landscape. Thank you to the USFS for undertaking this important project to maintain our health, our businesses, our watershed / wildlife, and our personal property.