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Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Charles Rial. My family owns the in-holding above the Bass Creek Campground (SE 1/4 of Section 31 Township 10 North Range 20 West). Our family very much appreciates what the Forest Service does on the Bitterroot and in particular the Bass Creek Recreation Area and environs. In our view the best fire reduction strategy is to turn the most vulnerable parts of the Forest, in terms of fire danger and property loss, back to an old growth set of timber stands. This will take 2-3 generations, but it is what we are doing with our property. Old growth stands, whether they are ponderosa pine or Douglas fir have widely spaced trees with ladder fuels unable to reach their crowns. Intermittent fires typically take out immature trees but rarely effect the mature trees. My concrete suggestion is the the Bitterroot Forest designate several areas of the Forest for long-term management back to old growth. There are several advantages: economically the timber will be worth much more as "yellow pine" or mature Doug Fir; the recreational value of the selected areas will improve and tourism/recreation to see these great spots will also increase. Mitigation of fire will be at its maximum given the nature of the widely spaced trees, limbs above the likely ability for the fire to climb, and the likely eventuality that the fire will stay on the ground and not climb to crowns.

A complimentary strategy in these "old growth designated areas would be also to significantly mitigate invasive weeds. This will further enhance the beauty of the areas and increase recreation and educational opportunities. Western Montana's economy has shifted from timber production to recreation. This is not to say that timber production should cease but it should be in context of recreation economics. Newly constructed roads are not going to pay for themselves with the timber they would access. Clearly, the Forest should prioritize timber sales that aid fire mitigation and have adequate funds for weed management post-sale. The Larry Creek/Bass Creek Recreation Sale of about a decade ago did not have sufficient weed mitigation capacity post-harvest.

The two most utilized recreation areas on the Forest are Bass Creek and Lake Como. Considering the "Old Growth Management" designation for those two areas and several others is worthy of consideration. Thank you for my opportunity to comment and I look forward to the process.

Best regards,

Charles Rial

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