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Comments: As an individual with property interests in the Custer Gallatin National Forest, I respectfully submit the following comments on the proposed Red Lodge Mountain Fuels Project.

1. Address Concerns Regarding Wild Bill Lake

This proposed project includes two areas, the Red Lodge Ski Mountain and the area surrounding Wild Bill Lake (Areas 250-55 on "Treatment Types Maps"). The project's stated purpose is to manage fire conditions in the Ski Area. Nowhere does the Forest Service explain their reasoning for the operation that would surround all of Wild Bill Lake, a popular recreation site in Red Lodge with a rich history. Logging operations surrounding the lake can potentially be detrimental to the water's quality and the ecosystem that thrives within. Reducing trees surrounding the lake can potentially cause more sunlight to hit the lake surface, raising the water temperature and harming the fish. Fishing is a large part of the draw of people to Wild Bill Lake, and the Forest Service should not take actions that could potentially harm the well-being of the lake.

Moreover, the proposed cutting of up to 70% of trees surrounding the lake would be detrimental to the wildlife living in the forest. The short trail surrounding the lake is popular amongst those with young children as they can look at the fish in the lake and the wildlife in the forest surrounding it. The lake does not have an associated entrance fee, nor does it have the same effect on the economy that the Ski Area does. Therefore, the provided reasoning for this project does not fit with the proposed actions at Wild Bill Lake. It is concerning that the Forest Service has slid logging in this area into a project dedicated to reducing the fire risk of the Ski Area with absolutely no justification. In sum, the Forest Service should not go forward with logging around Wild Bill Lake due to their lack of justification and the likely harm to the ecosystem.

2. Address Concerns Regarding Recent Flooding

Additionally, recent flooding conditions in the project area (Including the West Fork of Rock Creek) have potentially substantially changed the surface fuel conditions in ways that the Forest Service has not come to understand. It is upsetting that the Forest Service released this project on the day after historic flooding devastated the town of Red Lodge and surrounding areas, including so much of The Forest that The Forest was forced to close temporarily. The Forest Service should alter this plan in light of changed conditions.

3. Address Impacts on Human and Wildlife Health

Moreover, some of the proposed burning areas are close to residential areas and flowing water. Smoke and ash from fires can have harmful effects on waterways and the communities which breathe it in. Only the expected positive impacts of this project are discussed, the Forest Service should clearly, and comprehensively explain the negative impacts of this project to the public before continuing.

4. Reduce Impacts on the Ski Area's Scenery

Moreover, the wild scenery of the forest draws people to the Ski Area. It is important to protect the Ski Area from fires and, in turn, protect the local economy. However, this does not have to happen by clearcutting the views from the mountain.

5. Ensuring Temporary Roads Are In Fact Temporary

However, it is encouraging to see that the Forest Service has a plan to reclaim the land within three years of the completion of this proposed project. As roadways can be harmful to wildlife in the area, I am happy to see the commitment to restoring the forest to its natural state so quickly.

6. Provide Evidence Supporting Claims

The Forest Service fails to provide supporting evidence for its claim that these actions would reduce the fire risk, nor do they estimate how much of a fire risk reduction would result from the proposed actions. The Forest Service should remedy this by clearly, and comprehensively justifying its proposed actions.

7. Ensure Compliance with the Endangered Species Act

Additionally, due to the potential presence of endangered species in the project area, namely the Grizzly Bear, the Forest Service should consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that no endangered or otherwise protected species will be harmed by this project.