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Comments: Greetings,

Thanks for the invitation comment on this project. I generally support the goals and outline of the project, with a few caveats:

--Given that our understanding of likely impacts on resources of the area due to climate change will continue to evolve, it is important the USFS maintain a certain flexibility in creating and executing this plan, allowing for new information to inform adjustments in the project.

--I strongly favor prescribed burning over non-commercial thinning, although I realize there are a number of variables in play. The acreage devoted to a combination of RX fire and non-commercial thinning seems in the current project outline seems high. I would encourage a closer look at that number with a view to increasing the acreage designated for RX fire.

--I appreciate the recognition of the impact of road access on wildlife populations, and I know a balance has to be struck between limiting access for wildlife conservation, and preserving access for fire suppression in some areas. However, if USFS is confident that the project will achieve desired outcomes, I think we can afford to err on the side of less roads rather than more.

--Another critical road issue is that even when roads are decommissioned, or closed intermittently, the barriers created to enforce the closure are sometimes insufficient to preclude traffic over time. The dirt berms often degrade, and do little to prevent OHV access. Barriers need to be of large stones and or steel gates, or at least need to be checked on an annual basis for reinforcement.

--It would be good if the project could include some consideration of designated remote backpacking opportunities of a wilderness character, with priority still given to protecting wildlife populations and their habitat, especially riparian areas.

--I generally support carefully monitored grazing on suitable public lands. If there currently is grazing in the project area, ongoing consultation with local ranchers/grazing permit holders would be appropriate. It could well be that one of the overarching strategies for boosting forest resilience to climate change is reducing the level of grazing on the Ochocho NF. This might mean a reduction of animals, a change in certain aspects of issuing grazing leases or other changes in the current approach. Whatever the case, it makes sense to give ranchers depending on the forest a chance to support changes through a clear understanding of the science and the stakes for forest health.

--I strongly support those aspects of this project intended to deal with invasive plant species, and to deal with endangered species.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Richardson