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Comments: Please accept this letter as our support for the Basin Creek Watershed Project. Every day that passes without removing the fuel load in this basin, not only puts our major source of drinking water at risk, it jeopardizes thousands of homes in the region, and would severely degrade our air quality should a fire start.

After decades of mining activities in our community, our groundwater has been contaminated to the point where it cannot be used for drinking water. With this in mind, it is of the utmost importance that the Basin Creek Watershed project move forward. Our community relies on 60 percent of our drinking water from this basin and it is not replaceable by other sources.

The watershed can be categorized as set in rugged mountain terrain that is surrounded by beetle killed trees that are ripe for a catastrophic wildfire. Compounding this risk is the early start and late ending to the yearly fire season; that is driven by severe drought, hotter spring/summer seasons, and ever increasing high wind events. In short, these conditions would make it near impossible to control a fire in this region.

At NorthWestern Energy, we provide electric and natural gas service to over 700,000 customers across our service territory, and we are committed to our customers and the communities we serve. One of our top priorities is supporting our local communities, and with approximately 1200 employees working and living in the Butte community, we know first-hand the importance of clean drinking water and a healthy environment.

Thank you for your attention to this letter of support, and we strongly implore the Forest Service to utilize all its available resource to expedite this project.