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First name: Sean

Last name: Steinebach

Organization: Sun Mountain Lumber

Title: Outreach Forester

Comments: Dear Tim,

This letter is on behalf of Sun Mountain Lumber. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments for the Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project Draft Environmental Assessment. We are very happy with the work you have done so far. You have been transparent and diligent throughout project planning. Thank you for the good work.

Sun Mountain Lumber is a family-owned sawmill that provides direct employment for approximately 200 mill and logging jobs in Deer Lodge, MT. In addition to the potential of this Basin Creek-Butte Watershed Project providing raw material for our operations, we view these projects as creating a relationship in which our operations assist the Butte Ranger District, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in achieving their goals and objectives on the ground. We applaud the collaborative effort and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group that provided input on project activities and desired outcomes.

We are specifically endorsing the use of mechanical treatments within the inventoried roadless area. As advocates for sustainable forest management, we believe that the implementation of well-planned silvicultural treatments, particularly targeting the dominant lodgepole pine forest type in the project area, is vital for the long-term health and resiliency of our local ecosystems and watersheds. Supporting local industries and the utilization of renewable resources are crucial for fostering economic growth, creating job opportunities, and promoting sustainable development within our community. By strategically harvesting and utilizing timber from the project area, we can contribute to the local economy while simultaneously managing our forests responsibly.

The primary objective of this project is to address the hazards threatening health and safety in the Basin Creek Municipal Watershed, which supplies up to 60% of the water for the city of Butte, Montana. Recognizing the critical importance of this water source, it is imperative that we take immediate action to mitigate the risks posed by wildfire and ensure the ongoing provision of clean and reliable water for the community. Mechanical treatment is the most cost effective and expedient method to reduce surface and ladder fuels within the project area. Reduction of these fuels will in turn reduce the severity of wildfire from moderate-high severity to low-moderate. This treatment will significantly reduce fuel loads, minimizing the potential for catastrophic wildfires that could jeopardize the integrity of our municipal water supply.

We would like to draw attention to the potential benefit of an Emergency Situation Determination. Your team has done a great job of maintaining transparency and engaging the public throughout the project and it is understood that the final environmental assessment would not be circulated for further review and comment. If approved by the Chief or Associate Chief of the Forest Service, ESD could exempt the project from the pre-decisional objection process. Given the urgent nature of the hazards facing the Basin Creek Municipal Watershed, it is crucial to streamline the decision-making process and expedite the implementation of necessary forest treatments. By bypassing the pre-decisional objection process, the project can proceed swiftly, allowing immediate action to safeguard our watershed and protect the community from the risk of devastating wildfires.

In conclusion, we strongly support the Basin Creek Butte Watershed Project and the incorporation of mechanical treatments within the inventoried roadless area. The risks posed by wildfire to our municipal water supply cannot be underestimated, and it is our responsibility to take swift and decisive action to protect our community and preserve our natural resources. By approving this project, you will not only ensure the safety and well-being of our residents but also contribute to the long-term sustainability and resilience of our forests and watersheds.

Thank you for considering our input and for your dedication to responsible forest management. We trust that your decision will prioritize the health and safety of our community and the preservation of our vital water resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and we look forward to more projects on the Butte Ranger District.

Respectfully yours,

Sean Steinebach, Outreach Forester

Sun Mountain Lumber