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Title:
Comments: Scoping states, "This proposed action would get ahead of those active wildfires, so that the Forest Service can take a more environmentally sound approach than is allowed during the emergency of an actual wildfire." How is using a Categorical Exclusion (CE) that offers no site-specific information or effects assessments, and giving the public only 14 days to comment, make this a more environmentally sound approach? Will you guarantee that this is the fuel break that will be used for wildfires in the area? Of course not. You will cut another one, preferably one with commercial logs as you have been doing with any fire. Your purpose and need is complete nonsense.
You have done no site specific, on the ground analysis, and, it appears, no other analysis either. Are extraordinary circumstances present, such as endangered or threatened species? Bull trout, whitebark pine, lynx, grizzlies, wolverine, etc? What about the 2000 fires and the natural recovery that has occurred since then. This project would negate that recovery. Extraordinary circumstances cannot be present in a CE.
In addition to doing no analysis, you have given the public only 14 days to comment, completely subverting the democratic process required by NEPA. BNF appears to be returning to the lawless days of the clearcut crisis in the 1960s. Is this the result of timber targets being increased by up to 4 times? The statement in scoping "Forest Service is establishing a strategy for working with partners to dramatically increase fuels and forest health treatments by up to four times current treatment levels in the West" appears to answer that question. We all know that fuels and forest health treatments are Forest Service-speak for logging.
Much of the area burned in 2000. This indicates that fuel treatments last, at most, about 20 years, confirmed by scientific study. The chances of a wildfire encountering your new fuel break in the next 20 years are less than 10% according to the scientific literature.
You leave the option open to harvest commercial timber if you encounter it. Why would you cut those mature trees that survived previous fires and provide the mosaic that is so important to forest ecology?
What about visual quality standards? Aesthetics are very important to the public owners of the national forests. Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF has already cut fuel breaks along many of their forest roads, turning them into an ugly, hot, miserable experience for motorized travelers, bicyclists, and wildlife. The road from Lost Trail Pass to Gibbons Pass is now one of those roads on BNF, and for what? It was an "emergency" cut during the Trail Creek fire, but was miles upwind from that fire. I guess it helped you get the cut out. Please don't do that to any more Bitterroot National Forest roads.
Have you analyzed your proposed activities' effect on the climate, the real driver of wildfires?
Please abandon this sloppy, hastily done proposal. It will only cause harm to the forest.