

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/15/2023 2:13:50 AM

First name: Jeffrey

Last name: Richardson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

The Mill Creek EA does an adequate job of explaining the need for the project. Its underlying principles and parameters are consistent with those established for similar projects on the Ochoco NF, and I generally support this approach to dry forest restoration.

The EA contains a lot of detailed analysis and information that, while difficult for a lay person to digest in a meaningful way, generally inspires confidence that the IDT has designed technically defensible alternatives, consistent with the restoration objectives and the myriad of laws, regulations and policies with which USFS must comply. However, with these thoughts in mind, I offer the following specific suggestions:

--The EA could benefit greatly from a competent executive summary, one that relates from a higher altitude the key differences between the alternatives.

--Put another way, as a non-scientist, it is difficult to see how the IDT views the alternatives and what makes them distinct from one another, and therefore worthy of distinction in the EA. To a lay person, the difference between the alternatives as measured in acreage of various treatments can seem relatively insignificant. I assume those differences have meaning, but the EA does not describe them in a way that they can be readily comprehended. Is a 2,000-acre difference between RX fire acreage between Alternatives 2 and 3 important? If so, how?

--A recent OSU research paper enumerated the benefits of mechanical thinning. Based on my experiences as a wildland firefighter, I have tended to favor the use of prescribed fire as a restoration tool, but am now more open to mechanical thinning. This again underscores the need for a clearer presentation of the pros and cons of each in the context of the project's goals.

--Another issue that needs more treatment is the fact that the Mill Creek Wilderness is included within the project boundaries. From the standpoint that the wilderness and project area together comprise a unified drainage, this makes sense. And, the EA makes clear that fire has occurred over the majority of the wilderness acreage. Still, it begs the question: How will intense treatment of half of the project area, and no treatment of the other half, affect overall outcomes? At a minimum, the EA should address how treatment vs no treatment are likely to affect the health and resilience of both parts, and of the whole project unit.

Finally, my preferred alternative . . .

--I was confused by some acreage figures. The project area, including wilderness, is given as 36, 430 acres, with an "action footprint" of 23,015 acres, suggest that the action footprint acreage, added to the 17,400 wilderness acres, should match the total project area, but it does not.

--Although in my scoping comments I expressed concern about the size of the project area, I am comfortable with the action footprint area as described in the EA. For now, absent any other guidance, I am persuaded that Alternative 2 should be the preferred alternative.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Richardson