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Organization:

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Comments: I reside in White Sulphur Springs (Meagher County) Montana and I am also a member of the White Sulphur Springs City Council.

In 2021, I watched with horror as over 60,000 acres of forest burned in the lightening-caused Woods Creek Fire in the Big Belt Mountains west of town. During the same summer, our area experienced significant fires in Deep Creek Canyon, and in the Little Belt Mountains north of town. As a result of these fires, City and County residents were ordered to evacuate, thousands of acres of cropland was burned, essential travel was difficult or impossible, and the air was filled with smoke, and unhealthy for many groups for months.

My front window looks out over the Castle Mountain range east of town, which is part of the Proposed Prescribed Forestwide Project # 63783. The Willow Creek drainage, which is 1 of the City's (only) 2 sources of public water, is in the Castle Mountains.

To put it kindly, the forest in the Castle Mountains is extremely unhealthy. From my window, it's obvious that most of the trees are dead. When you visit the forest, you encounter dead standing trees and deadfall which is, in places, is over 5' deep. This is exactly the situation that resulted in the 2021 fires but, now, the forest is 3 years sicker than it was in 2021.

Everytime a storm passes over the Little Belt Mountains, I cringe as I picture a single lightning bolt hitting a tree, and starting a fire that envelopes the entire mountainside, including our essential watershed. The fires of 2021 demonstrate that it's not if this will happen, but when. When the watershed burns, the City will risk not having adequate water for its residents. This is not an option. It's critical for our residents' public safety and health that the forest is remediated... not 5 years from now, not 2 years from now, but now!

Recently, I was requesting quotes for fire insurance on some grazing land. One insurance agent told me that fire premiums have skyrocketed for all of us because of the fires in Lahaina and other places. It is up to all Landowners, including the Forest Service, to mitigate the risk of fire on their properties so these costs can be contained.

I have reviewed the documents related to Proposed Prescribed Forestwide Project # 63783. The information in those documents seem accurate to this layperson and, for the reasons above, I fully support this project.