Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/15/2024 4:48:59 PM
First name: Raechel
Last name: Youngberg
Organization:
Title:
Comments: I am writing to express my thoughts on the Midnight Forest Restoration Project, specifically regarding its impact on the Twisp River and surrounding watersheds. As a resident of the Methow Valley, I have a deep appreciation for the unique and invaluable ecosystems in this area. I commend the Methow Valley Ranger District for undertaking such an extensive and necessary restoration project and would like to provide my input based on my personal experiences and observations.

Support for the Project's Positive Aspects:

Prescribed Fire Use:
I strongly support the use of prescribed fire as a means to rejuvenate the forest and reduce the risk of high-severity wildfires. Scientific studies consistently show that prescribed burning, when done correctly, enhances forest resiliency and promotes a healthy understory. This practice is essential for maintaining ecological balance and should be prioritized.

Thinning of Smaller Diameter Trees:
The noncommercial thinning of smaller trees is crucial for creating a healthy forest structure. This practice opens up the canopy, promotes a diverse plant community, and, when paired with fire, increases the forest's resilience to future fires. I appreciate the Forest Service's efforts in this regard.

Thinning During Winter Months:
I also commend the decision to treat Riparian Reserves during the winter months to minimize soil disturbance and erosion. This approach is vital for preserving soil quality and should be expanded to more areas.

Concerns and Recommendations for Improvement:

Logging of Large Trees:
The proposal to allow logging of trees up to 25" in diameter is concerning, especially given the Methow Valley Ranger District's own evaluations that large trees are deficient in this landscape. These trees play a critical role in storing carbon, withstanding fire and drought, and providing habitat. I urge the Forest Service to drop all exceptions for cutting large trees, particularly in the Late-Successional Reserves, and to only remove true safety hazard trees with proper documentation.

Impact on Lynx and Spotted Owl Habitats:
The habitats for lynx and spotted owls are limited within the project area. These habitats should be treated with utmost care, prioritizing the retention of dense cover for lynx and the preservation of complex, multi-story forests for spotted owls. The threat of wildfire should not broadly justify degrading these habitats.

Road Decommissioning and Sedimentation:
While I support the decommissioning of 52 miles of roads, I believe all currently closed roads should be decommissioned post-project. This action will help reduce forest fragmentation, sedimentation in water bodies, and unauthorized road use. Dedicated funding should also be allocated for the removal of temporary roads after project completion.

Shaded Fuel Breaks:
The proposal for new shaded fuel breaks raises concerns about habitat fragmentation. It is essential to evaluate the necessity of these breaks in the context of overall landscape treatments. Properly thinning and burning the

landscape should negate the need for extensive linear fuel breaks, which often disrupt the natural forest structure.

The Midnight Forest Restoration Project presents a significant opportunity to enhance the resilience and health of our forest ecosystems. By prioritizing practices that promote ecological balance and by addressing the concerns outlined above, we can ensure that the project meets its restorative goals without compromising the integrity of critical habitats.

Thank you for considering my comments.