

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/14/2025 9:26:56 PM

First name: Deborah

Last name: Huskins

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Fernberg Corridor Management Plan Draft Environmental Assessment.

I want to start by thanking the Forest Service for listening to and responding to the comments submitted at the Scoping stage of this project. I recognize some of my comments and appreciate receiving your responses. I also see and acknowledge that some adjustments have been made in Alternatives 2 and 3 that respond to some of my concerns. Thank you!

Very specifically, I am pleased to see that, if I am reading the maps of both Alternatives 2 and 3 correctly, understory fuel reduction is planned along Endless Waters Road (just off Spruce Road), underburn would occur not far to the northeast, and road fire breaks are planned along the Forest Service-owned parts of Endless Waters Road. This should greatly reduce the fire hazard that currently exists, and also would improve ingress and egress both for local landowners and for emergency personnel in the event of a fire. I look forward to learning how soon the fuel reduction can occur, and additional details about the specifics in that area.

I would assume that private property owners in other parts of the Fernberg Corridor similarly would appreciate the attention to fuel reduction efforts planned adjacent to their property.

On the larger scale, I wish to register my support for Alternative 2. Re-introducing fire into the Boundary Waters Wilderness will allow fire to play its historic, natural role within the wilderness. The ecosystems in this wilderness area are fire-dependent, and our policy and practice in recent decades has prevented this natural occurrence from playing out—we humans have made the wilderness's vulnerability greater. We now have essentially a man-made, unnatural condition of increased high fire risk. And, if we do not begin to utilize prescribed burns and other methods to reduce fuel accumulation and enhance forest resilience, the condition will only get worse. With climate change, we are seeing hotter, larger fires in many areas across the globe. By not addressing this problem, we artificially INCREASE the risk of massive, catastrophic fires in the Wilderness. This isn't protecting the Wilderness. Let's face it. What we've been doing ("hands off the Wilderness") isn't protecting it, it's risking it further. Therefore, I support allowing controlled/managed burns within the wilderness to correct the current imbalance and restore the forest to what it otherwise naturally would have been.

Wildfire WILL occur within the wilderness. If the No Action alternative or Alternative 3 were to be adopted, suppression to protect people within the wilderness and values adjacent to the wilderness will have to be more drastic and therefore more damaging. The suppression tactics needed, such as motorized access, use of heavy mechanical tools, etc., will cause trammeling and more long-lasting damage. Conditions will be more dangerous for firefighters and other emergency personnel. Over time, the likelihood of larger, even catastrophic wildfire will only grow greater. I recognize that some of the management actions envisioned in Alternative 2 (such as mechanical treatment, temporary roads, and low intensity prescribed burns) will cause short-term adverse effects to the wilderness, but these are less severe than the trammeling resulting from full-on fire suppression. The short-term effects are outweighed in my opinion by the long-term benefits.

I appreciate the careful approach the Forest Service lays out in Alternative 2. The step-by-step approach to reducing fuels outside the wilderness first, and conducting prescribed burns in units that use natural features as fire breaks, should accomplish the desired results while minimizing the potential for fires to spread beyond the planned areas. And, planning for additional acres to be included-only if needed-for containment purposes seems prudent to me. In addition, using a "flexible tool box" that allows adaptation to changing conditions makes sense, even though it means I won't know ahead of time what changes are made and why.

There are several large swaths of forest that would be untouched under the No Action alternative and Alternative 3, that could easily be consumed in wildfire, and that worries me. For example, much of Snowbank Lake (NW, N, and NE of the lake) could experience a massive wildfire. Similarly, Gabbro and Hudson are large areas of substantial risk. The danger to people and the decades-lasting damage to the forest ecosystems is too high.

I am pleased to read about the proposals to increase forest health, and balancing out the ages and species of trees through a variety of methods. Especially with climate change resulting in further alterations to the

wilderness we love, helping the forest be more resilient will help it withstand or adapt in healthy ways to those changes. While I do not fully understand the approaches proposed, I support the goals and look forward to learning more. I also hope to use some of the resources mentioned in the comments that are available to private landowners, to enhance my own property with resilient and desirable species.

I am pleased to see that the Forest Service has been in ongoing dialogue with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Boise Forte Band of Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and the 1854 Treaty Authority. I hope that this dialogue will continue throughout the planning and implementation process, not only with regard to the Fernberg Corridor but also for the BWCAW and Superior National Forest more broadly.

Again, thank you for inviting comment, and for listening.