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Please accept these comments on the Hyalite-Cottonwood Fuels Reduction Project.

Having studied forestry and wildlife management in graduate courses at Colorado State University, and served as a resource manager and interpreter in several national parks, including 17 years at Yellowstone from 1980 to 1997, since 1888 I have continued to read the science behind large wildfires.

Assertions by the Forest Service that fire suppression for 100 years has created a "fuel build-up," that fuel reductions are effective and efficient means of protecting communities, and that forests need "active forest management" to be "healthy" are all without scientific support, and should be discarded.

As a Bozeman resident since 1997, I have skied the local ski trails in Hyalite, South Cottonwood, West Yellowstone, and Bogart Ranch/Crosscut. The quality of skiing in those areas has been diminished by forest manipulation, opening the trails to sun and wind, where mature trees formerly provided shelter. At Crosscut, logging above the Loggers trail has caused heavy drifting of snow on the trail, which has greatly increased the difficulty of grooming it for skiers. I expect that tree removal long the Cottonwood trail will cause similar changes.

There is no justification for fighting fires in communities of trees that have long fire intervals, often of hundreds of years. Drought, multiple lightning strikes from dry thunderstorms,, hurricane-force winds combined in 1988 to create an unstoppable firestorm. The only effective fire break was Yellowstone Lake. Reforestation occurred naturally, with a million lodgepole seeds counted per meter squared. We learned that elk, whose only large loss was to being trapped by a backfire created by firefighters, actually found charred lodgepole bark quite nourishing. Burns provided habitat for a number of species that flourish in them. Trout streams cleared soon after the blazes, and fish survived.

Climate change caused by burning fossil fuels exacerbates drought,, high winds, and lightning storms, producing blazes that are unstoppable, but we continue to apply band-aids to the situation, when prevention is the key to their reduction. Mature forests are essential storers of carbon, and must be conserved, not converted to commodities.

Killing trees to save them is simply the wrong thing to do. Stop.