Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/30/2025 5:35:42 AM
First name: Patti
Last name: Steinmuller
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Amanda Williams
P.O. Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59771

I oppose the Hyalite Cottonwood Fuels Reduction in this heavily used recreation area in summer and winter. I oppose the project because its assumptions lack scientific merit. The project will be ineffective in reducing the risk of wildfires and will have negative effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat, stream beds, forest vegetation, and other aspects of the forest ecosystem. Because of the potential detriment to the functioning of this forest, I support the development of an Environmental Impact Analysis prior to decision making.

Research on devastating wildfires reveal that large, high severity blazes are caused by severe drought, high temperatures, low humidity, and especially high winds. These factors are not manageable by humans. When conditions are cool with ample moisture, fewer ignitions occur, and most fires self-extinguish or can relatively easily be controlled. Extreme weather conditions lead to large, severe wildfires as indicated by recent large wildfires in Montana, Colorado, New Mexico, and other western states. Check the scientific articles, some published by the University of Montana. Since the presence of fuels was not a determining factor in these large fires, fuel reduction on its own would be ineffective in reducing risk of large fires in the Hyalite Cottonwood Forest area.

Lodgepole pine are the dominant tree species in the Hyalite Cottonwood Forest, along with minor amounts of Engelman spruce, Douglas Fir, aspen, and subalpine fir. These species tend to have long fire rotations, typically hundreds of years between major blazes. Large trees contain large biomasses which effectively store carbon. By removing trees, carbon storage and shade is reduced which opens the canopy to dryness of the sun's rays and reduces soil moisture content. Open lodgepole forests will become more, rather than less, prone to fires. Tree removal and road building will disturb wildlife and wildlife habitat, destroy vegetation, create sediment in streams, and cause weeds to spread. All the proposed management techniques will degrade forest ecosystems and decrease health of the forest.

The history of South Cottonwood Canyon is especially relevant and important. Purchased by the federal government from the Plum Creek Timber Company, the intended goal was for consideration of South Cottonwood Canyon for federal wilderness. Thus, active management of South Cottonwood Canyon by the US Forest Service is inappropriate and should be eliminated from this project. For many seasons, I have enjoyed hiking on the trails and crossing South Cottonwood Creek's clear, cold, aquifer-sourced water. Damaging this canyon by active management would have devastating consequences.

Allowing the Hyalite Cottonwood Forest to maintain as a natural, functioning forest is its best use. Standing mature trees are some of the most effective natural carbon sinks. Commercial timber harvest pales in comparison to a natural, functioning forest ecosystem so close to our community. To protect homes and communities, focus on funding methods of home hardening instead of commercial timber harvesting and active forest management.