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Comments: Comment to USDA Forest Service Regarding Tyler Kitchen Project

My name is James Roach and I am writing to express my thoughts about the proposed Tyler's Kitchen Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project in Missoula and Granite counties in Montana. From what I understand, the overall project area involves 33,000 acres, 4,000 of which is slated for commercial logging. One third of that area (roughly 1,330 acres) is slated for clear cutting, while the other two thirds is supposed to be "intermediate harvest".

I have been hunting in Western Montana for over 50 years, the last 25 or so primarily in the area this project will impact. Obviously I have a very large stake in the welfare of this beautiful and productive piece of Montana. There are places within this project area that could benefit from thinning and prescribed burning, but I feel like there is no part of this project area that should be logged and certainly not clearcut. I feel like the days for any type of clear cutting in Western Montana are over. The road building, the soil disruption, the loss of windbreak, the introduction of invasive species, the loss of thermal cover and security for wildlife are just a few of the negative impacts brought about by industrial logging.

From years of experience hunting this country, I know that the project area encompasses a critical migration route for elk that summer in the ranches and foothills above the Flint Cr Valley and travel to wintering grounds on Babcock Mtn, Burnt Mtn, and Kitchen Ridge. This project will certainly impact this population negatively. Because it borders roadless terrain on the other side of Rock Cr, it will disrupt possible migration of other critical species such as grizzly bears moving southward.

While the wood products industry used to be a vital piece of the local economy, that is no longer the case here in Western Montana. It's really a very minor part of the economy. I believe the closest mill that can handle the larger timber that would come from this project is in Columbia Falls some 150 miles away. The mill at Deer Lodge is a stud mill that wouldn't efficiently handle any of the bigger timber coming out of this project. Far more important to the Missoula economy, and for that matter the rest of Montana, are the dollars generated by the outdoor recreation sector. This project threatens a popular hunting and camping area. Sedimentation from road construction threatens the water quality of Rock Cr, a blue ribbon trout fishery that attracts a lot of people to the area. Maintaining the wild quality of this terrain is far more valuable than the profits generated by logging its hillsides.

I hope this project is modified to eliminate the majority of the logging that is proposed. The area is close to Missoula and is important to a lot of folks. There's been wildfires in this region in the past, and no structures were threatened or lives lost. Thinning could be helpful, prescribed burning as well. But intensive logging does far more harm than good. Please respect the values and needs of the people that live and recreate on this landscape and forgo any heavy logging in the Tyler Kitchen Project. Thank you.