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First name: Representative Steve

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Ms. Runnels,

I am the past Montana House Representative of (the old) District 1 and am currently campaigning for the upcoming open Senate seat (SD1) that fully encompasses the KNF and the Upper Bunker project area. I would like to comment on the Upper Bunk Project for not only myself, but for many of the 20,000+ constituents I will be representing. I fully endorse and fully support this badly needed project will enhance forest resilience and health to an area of the KNF that has been neglected for many, many years due to obstruction by NGOs, such as the Yaak Valley Forest Council which represents a miniscule number of locals impacted by this project being stalled or stopped. The majority of people that YVFC represents do not live, work or play in the forests of Montana and are in no way affected by the management actions or the devastating results of no action. YVFC and other NGOs have been forcing a no management policy on the KNF due to Grizzly Bear recovery and other misused ESA species, misused EAJA actions, etc. for nearly a decade creating a public land debacle that will ultimately burn, destroying this public treasure.

I represent a populated area that will be substantially more protected in case of a catastrophic wildfire once this and other fuels reduction projects are implemented. KNF was once known as the "Teflon Forest" until federal protects for the ESA species in the area were "protected" by NGOs such as the YVFC. KNF historically grows 500 mbf of timber annually and there is almost none removed now leaving it as non-managed fuels that will one day fuels a wildfire akin to the 1910 fire that blew through the area. If this fuels reduction project is not completed, we will only have to wait a short time until a firestorm is initiated by Mother Nature that will devastate the region. This catastrophe will impact not only the forest but human lives and property as well. At that point ESA recovery and protections will be moot as the habitat for those species and the other many species that habituate there will be reduced to ashes.

The PNWT, that gives hikers a "wilderness" experience will no longer use the trail as it will become a moonscape. YVFC also had a hand in attempting to force a reroute of the trail through this same area. That reroute would have added over a hundred+ miles to the trail, forcing at times, hikers looking for a wilderness experience, into barrow pits and ditches alongside a 70 mph highway. So much for a "wilderness" experience. Hunting and all other recreational activities will be destroyed if this area burns.

I have read the proposed actions and fully concur with the implementation of this project in a timely manner. I applaud the use of the categorical exclusion to help allow a commonsense management project on this area. Haste in implementing this project is due to the horrendous buildup of fuels that this project proposes to reduce. The impacts to the project area have been well thought out and the returns to the habitat, recreational use, reductions in fuel loads and resilience of the forest are great.

The NGOs have long stopped or critically slowed all commonsense management on the KNF and need to sit this one out. Just the latest NGO obstruction are the Black Ram and Knotty Pine projects. Black Ram, Knotty Pine and Upper Bunker projects are critical to the badly needed fuels management that historically used to occur without NGO intervention, interference or hinderance. If the NGOs succeed in stopping the Upper Bunker project, there needs to be an action to hold them accountable for firefighting costs, monetary accountability of lost/destroyed resources and most importantly any loss of private property or human injuries/mortality caused by wildfire being fed by any fuels that cannot be removed due to their actions.

Thank You for the opportunity to comment on this Great and Commonsense fuels reduction project.

Regards,
Representative Steve Gunderson