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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear District Ranger Rob Davies and Forest Service Team,

I am writing to provide comments on the proposed logging and forest restoration project near the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. First, I want to thank you, Ranger Davies, for seeking public input on this project even though it's no longer legally required. This commitment to transparency and community engagement is deeply appreciated.

While I understand that forest management work is necessary, I have serious concerns about protecting our roadless areas, recommended wilderness, and the Wild and Scenic River corridor. Done right, this project could achieve restoration goals while safeguarding these irreplaceable values. Done poorly, it could cause lasting damage.

My most critical concern: NO NEW ROADS IN ROADLESS AREAS. I cannot emphasize this strongly enough. Even roads later made "inaccessible" cause long-term sedimentation, degrade water quality, harm aquatic habitats, and facilitate both legal and illegal access that destroys secure wildlife habitat. Our inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) must remain roadless.

I respectfully request the following be addressed in the Environmental Assessment:

Public Engagement: Please hold public meetings and site tours when the draft EA is released, and provide photos showing examples of the proposed treatment types so the community can understand what's actually being proposed.

Roadless Area Protections: The EA must provide clear, detailed justification for ANY commercial treatments in IRAs. It must explain specifically how every treatment will maintain or improve, not degrade, roadless characteristics. Vague assurances are not enough.

Wilderness Standards: Whitebark pine restoration in recommended wilderness must use hand tools only, with foot and stock access exclusively. No helicopters. This is what the Flathead National Forest Plan requires, and these standards exist for good reasons.

Wild and Scenic River Values: The EA must thoroughly analyze how this project will impact the outstanding remarkable values of the affected Middle Fork stretch: fisheries, geology, water quality, wildlife, recreation, scenery, history, and ethnography. The watershed must be protected from unnecessary pollutants and sediment. Please detail specific protective measures that will be implemented.

Wildlife Connectivity: Treatment design and location must consider impacts on wildlife connectivity, particularly along the Highway 2 corridor.

The Middle Fork watershed and surrounding roadless areas are treasures that belong to all of us and to future generations. Once roadless areas are roaded, once water quality is degraded, once wildlife security is lost these things cannot be undone. Forest restoration is important, but not at the cost of the very wilderness values that make this landscape extraordinary.

Thank you for considering these comments. I trust the Forest Service will design this project to truly protect what makes the Flathead National Forest irreplaceable.