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Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Austin Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement. As someone who was raised in the project area, with deep family roots and a lifetime of experience using these forests, I am directly affected by the decisions made here. My family and I rely on this landscape for firewood, hunting, and camping, and these activities are not just recreational-they are essential parts of our lives and local tradition.

I am concerned that the Draft EIS does not adequately consider the impacts that restricting motorized access-by moving to designated routes, storing roads, or closing roads-will have on local residents, elderly people, and those with limited mobility. For many of us, the ability to drive into places like Sixteen Gulch, Dry Fork, Clear Creek, Twin Ponds, and Taylor Siding is not a luxury; it is the only way we can continue to use and enjoy these areas. The proposal to store or close roads appears to go beyond what is needed to meet the stated Purpose and Need of the project, and the analysis does not clearly show why such a sweeping change is necessary. If the goal is to improve forest health and manage vegetation, it is not clear how limiting access for firewood collection, hunting, and emergency response supports that purpose.

Another point of concern is the lack of clear and enforceable plan direction to maintain reasonable public motorized access. The maps in the Draft EIS are inconsistent with project definitions and with statements made by staff that no road closures are happening. This makes it difficult for the public to understand what is actually proposed and to evaluate the real-world impacts. Without clear disclosure and accurate mapping, the decision does not appear to be based on a full or transparent analysis.

I also question the projected timber production numbers, which seem to be presented in a way that pits supporters of motorized access against those concerned with jobs at local mills. If the agency is overstating production targets to justify road closures, this should be disclosed and discussed openly, especially given the economic importance of timber to Grant County. The analysis should show the assumptions behind these numbers, including species mix, market feasibility, and any uncertainty or sensitivity in projections.

Finally, I am concerned about the proposal to place large woody debris in streams for restoration purposes. Past projects in areas like Camp Creek and the Middle Fork have resulted in giant eyesores, blocked access, and impeded water flow-sometimes affecting water rights and other uses. These impacts should be fully analyzed, with clear explanation of why this specific approach is needed to meet the project's goals, and why less disruptive options would not suffice.

In summary, I ask the Forest Service to reconsider the stored roads concept and provide a reasonable alternative that maintains public access as it currently exists. Please provide clear maps and specific analysis, show how the proposed actions are necessary to meet the stated Purpose and Need, and ensure that the impacts to rural communities and traditional uses are fully disclosed. Right now, the analysis doesn't show that the agency has fully worked through the on-the-ground impacts before landing on this outcome, and I hope to see a more balanced and transparent approach moving forward.