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Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Austin Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement. I am writing out of deep concern for how the proposed project will affect public access, local community use, and the day-to-day lives of rural residents like myself. My family and I regularly recreate in the project area using motorized vehicles, and these experiences are a vital part of our time together. The prospect of losing access to roads we have used for years, or having them reclassified as "stored" or "closed" despite being open and accessible now, is troubling and needs much clearer explanation in the DEIS.

The Draft EIS appears to limit motorized access only to designated routes, with other roads being labeled as closed or stored. This approach does not reflect the current reality on the ground, where many of these roads are open and used by the public for recreation, firewood gathering, and household needs. The maps and definitions in the DEIS do not align with what is actually happening, nor with statements made by Forest Service staff that no road closures are planned. These inconsistencies are significant, and the analysis does not demonstrate why restricting access in this way is truly necessary to meet the project's stated Purpose and Need. In fact, limiting access could undermine the project's goals by restricting emergency response options and reducing the ability of local residents to use the forest for their livelihoods and well-being.

I am also concerned that the DEIS may be overstating timber production numbers to justify the project, possibly presenting production targets that are not realistic and using them to pit supporters of motorized access against those who rely on timber jobs. This approach is divisive and does not serve the best interests of the community. If the agency is making assumptions about timber yields or future access, those assumptions should be disclosed clearly and analyzed for their accuracy and impact.

As vice president of FAFA, I am aware of commitments made by the Regional Forester that no roads would be closed as part of this project. The current proposal does not uphold these commitments, and the only way to address this issue is to remove all stored and closed designations from project maps and keep the roads open as they function today. Closing or storing roads is not required to achieve the project's objectives, and such actions could actually run counter to the stated Purpose and Need by limiting fire response and public use.

I urge the Forest Service to provide transparent, specific maps and tables that accurately show current and proposed road statuses, and to explain in detail how the proposed changes are necessary to meet the project's stated goals. The DEIS should also analyze the real-world impacts of these actions so the public can give informed feedback. Maintaining access is essential for rural families, emergency services, and the broader community, and the decision should reflect that reality.