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First name: Michael

Last name: Beaty

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thursday, March 19, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Austin Project DEIS.

My name is Mike Beaty, a land owner and resident of 44 years near Halfway in Baker County.

I am a frequent user of National Forest lands, hiking daily with my dogs on forest lands adjacent to my house, performing trail maintenance with the Wallowa Mountain Hells Canyon Trail Association, collecting water quality samples for the Powder Basin Watershed Council, and regularly hiking on the Blue Mountains Trail, which passes through the Austin Project area on Forest Service trails.

I also serve as Vice-President of the Five Point Ditch Company here, with a diversion on East Pine Creek located on Forest Service lands, our irrigation water supplies wholly dependent on the watershed forest cover and hydrology, with no storage.

I write as a citizen science geographer, with 32 years of U.S. Civil Service, providing technical support to the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation, with extensive work experience in hydrology, endangered species protection and recovery, and resource management planning.

I ask that Forest Service vacate its emergency determination for wildfire contingencies and instead address the larger emergencies posed by accelerating climate change (global warming) and the loss of biodiversity (mass extinction).

I ask managers to acknowledge that the premise that commercial logging and thinning reduces wildfire risk and intensity at a landscape (mega fire) scale is largely unsubstantiated by the scientific community and contradicted by Forest Service research itself.

The proposed Austin Project DEIS wholly ignores the most recent climate science research that documents a 1.4C rise in global temperatures since pre-industrial times, an unprecedented high temperature following a cooling La Nina ENSO period, with a predicted 1.7C and higher global temperature to occur with an El Nino warming period beginning June 2026.

Long range model predictions exceed 2.0 - 2.4C, with acceleration rates doubling in recent years, bringing adverse impacts even sooner than recently anticipated. Severe drought, extreme hydrologic events, mega fires, and forced migrations affecting the forest are concomitant with these increased temperatures.

Locally, in the immediate present, the Powder Basin Watershed Council 2025 Water Quality Report yesterday demonstrated a 1.4C average air temperature increase since 1977, while today's (March 19, 2026) U.S. Drought Monitor Map, depicts Northeast Oregon in Severe Drought:

<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?west>

In sum, this project is addressing the wrong emergency and ignores a much more impactful emergency without evaluating proposed actions for their impacts that will contribute to loss of forest preserves, wildlife habitat, and hydrologic function.

I ask that Forest Service managers also consider the Austin Project's effects on the greater John Day Sub-basin and the extensive long term community and government investments in improving habitat and water flows for endangered salmon and distressed steelhead populations.

To meet the exigencies of global warming and mass extinction, I ask that Forest Service managers apply the precautionary principle in considering its actions.

To this end it is critical that the Forest Plan provide sufficient habitat connectivity between mature forest stands; avoid construction of 43 miles of roads and decommission existing roads to motorized vehicle use; and provide adequate elk habitat on the forest to reduce conflicts with private land owners.

Respectfully submitted,
Mike Beaty
Halfway, Oregon