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First name: Austin
Last name: Barnard
Organization:
Title:
Comments: As someone who spends a great deal of time in our national forests-hiking, hunting, and exploring-I care deeply about the long-term health and resilience of these landscapes. I also recognize that the conditions shaping these forests today are very different from the historical norm. Extended drought, insect mortality, dense stands, and fuel accumulation have created a situation where the risk of high-intensity wildfire is not theoretical; it is an expected outcome if proactive management does not occur.

The Draft Environmental Assessment clearly explains that while the 2025 Bivens Creek Fire burned part of the project area, none of the proposed treatment units have burned in decades. These unburned stands remain vulnerable to the kind of high-intensity wildfire that threatens wildlife habitat, watersheds, recreation access, and nearby communities. Without thinning, prescribed burning, and strategic fuel reduction, these forests will continue accumulating hazardous fuels at a rate that exceeds what natural processes can safely manage in a more dense WUI.

I appreciate that the project includes robust design criteria to prevent the spread of invasive plants, protect soils, maintain wildlife habitat, and ensure that treatments are implemented responsibly. No project is perfect and I am still concerned about invasive species taking hold down the road. My hope is that the Forest Service follows through on close monitoring in order to maintain a healthy habitat for wildlife.

In short, I support this project because it is proactive, science-based, and necessary. Choosing not to act increases the likelihood of a severe wildfire that would cause far greater ecological and social harm than the proposed treatments. Moving forward with this project is an investment in the long-term health, safety, and resilience of this part of the South Tobacco Roots.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.