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Comments: I served as the Hell Canyon District Ranger from 2009-2013. The mountain pine beetle epidemic was at its peak during these years, which resulted in accelerated timber harvest on the HCRD. One area of great concern was this project area along the Wyoming border since Weston County did not have significant beetle mortality and much of its forested lands were privately held. As a result we had numerous timber sales at that time to address the epidemic and stem its spread.

Timber sale costs were another factor at this time and in 2013, the year that I retired, Neiman timber company stated that they would not purchase a timber sale that was prepared south of U.S. Highway 16A due to high operating costs and low timber values. In response, much of the HCRD timber program shifted to this project area.

I received a cow elk tag in 2015 and this project area used to be the most desirable hunting area on the district. I hunted this area for 2 weeks and was shocked at all the active timber harvest that fall and was displaced to hunt another area. In the last 10 years there have been more timber sales. How can the district continue to mine the timber resource in this area? Aren't we still constrained by the National Forest Management Act? I request a map that shows all the timber sales in the project area in the past 15 years.

What emergency exists in this project area? I assume fire hazard, but the greatest fire hazard is all the unburned machine piles from past timber sales. Now future timber sales will create more? The year I retired we had the Danby Park fire which "hopscotched" from slash pile to slash pile in a 40 mph wind. Then Custer State Park had the Legion Lake fire which did the same thing. The existing activity fuels that have not been addressed are the most significant fire hazard. I need more information because the proposed timber harvest in this project does not appear to be sound resource management.