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Comments: I am providing comments on the Deschutes National Forest (DNF), Sisters Ranger District (SRD) proposed Akawa Butte Fire Recovery Project. I am a retired USDA Forest Service resource planner and wildland firefighter. I have lived within one mile of the south end of the Akawa Fire for more than 30 years. I have worked in and recreated in the Akawa Butte Fire area for over 40 years. I have fought fire in this area and planned and implemented prescribed fires in the area since the 1980's.

Let me begin by saying that the project has worthy goals and is well designed within the confines of the current planning model used by the USFS. But it could be better. The planning process derived, I assume, from the national Post Fire Recovery EA is new and confusingly full of jargon (Activity Cards?) and needs more explanation to be effective.

The public notice and comment process is woefully lacking and missing opportunity to improve the project and generate public support for fire recovery efforts in general. The first notice of the September 14, 2026 public meeting began to trickle out into the community in the middle of the week prior with a short mention in a larger article in the Nugget newspaper. No mention was made of the short, one week, comment period until the morning of Monday, September 14. This missed the deadlines for the Nugget to publish any notice until too late for comment. The Nugget is, or should be, the paper of record for public notices of this sort. The community relies on the Nugget to keep it informed of local news. I understand the need for haste here, but one more week of comment period would not materially affect the success of the project going forward, would have bought you a lot of good will, and maybe even some good ideas.

The Akawa Fire, combined with last year's Flat Fire and earlier fires to the north and east, have resulted in devastating impacts to over 50,000 acres of critical mule deer winter range. Deer populations are already in trouble for many reasons. One of the primary stated goals of this project is recovery of habitat and forage conditions. Given the difficulty of bitterbrush reproduction and the lack of proven success from seeding and planting in this landscape, more consideration should be given to avoiding further soil disturbance via logging and mechanical fuels treatments. Your best chance of recovery for forage is the seed source already in the ground. First, do no more harm. Areas not adjacent to values at risk, i.e. homes, should be left alone. Removing burned trees under the concept that future fire intensities will be reduced is not valid in my opinion. Future fires in this area will be carried by fine fuels and brush, not large down wood. Fire suppression will not be hindered significantly on flat ground by small dead second growth trees. Harvest and fuels treatment will likely leave behind a more flammable landscape comprised of cheatgrass and ceanothus. And more roads mean more fire starts, not less. At least consider and include planning for treatments that you'll need to mitigate fire hazard in the future.

The adverse impacts to mule deer winter range require whatever mitigation you can do. The roadside hazard treatments and road improvement that will occur to support harvest and fuels treatments will increase disturbance and habitat fragmentation pressures on mule deer. Already, the local neighborhoods are seeing increased visitation from deer and even black bears. Adverse wildlife and human interactions will increase, and those complaints will land at your door and those of your partner agencies like ODFW. The Akawa Butte Fire area certainly has open road densities that exceed LRMP goals for winter range. If I had more comment time, I would do the math for you. Consider not opening every Level 2 road in the area. You can reduce the risk to the public by limiting access much easier than by reducing the hazard. Consider temporary closures for a few years to allow recovery and reduced pressure in the winter range. Your Travel Management planning allows for road management to be modified under changed conditions on the landscape. You will certainly be temporarily closing roads and areas to the public for safety reasons during harvest operations. Please consider doing the same to benefit wildlife.

Finally, given the USFS low record of success in getting salvage projects to the market, I hope you have a Plan B for the necessary fuel treatment and restoration proposed. I know this is not because of a lack of intention or effort on your part. Statewide and national market conditions will drive the final outcomes regardless of your

good work. Given the many thousands of acres in central and eastern Oregon that burned this year, where are the mills, the log trucks, the forest crews, that can do all this work in the time required? Salvage sales rarely, if ever, generate enough trust funds like KV to accomplish planned mitigation and post-harvest work. Please prioritize the work based on what is truly recoverable and what fuels treatment will most benefit the local urban interface.