

**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION**
Northwestern Land Office



STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

STATE OF MONTANA

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June 15, 2020

Objection Reviewing Officer
USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Re: Notice of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Objection to the Salish Good Resource Management Project, Flathead National Forest.

Dear Reviewing Officer:

Pursuant to 36 CFR [sect] 218 Subparts (A) and (B), Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) hereby submits this objection to the Salish Good project on the Flathead National Forest. DNRC's objection is submitted as support for moving the actions in the draft decision's selected alternative forward to a final decision and implementation.

Connection to Prior Specific Comments: DNRC submitted comments on the Proposed Action for the Salish Project on July 28, 2015 and on the Environmental Assessment on April 19, 2020. DNRC's comments highlighted the need to reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest conditions in this landscape. The project is not only important for the national forest system lands, but also for the neighboring private landowners and DNRC, which manages Trust Lands in the area. This project will improve forest stand conditions, provide commercial and personal use wood products for the local economy, reduce hazardous fuels to enhance fire control efforts and firefighter safety, and reduce sediment and improve water quality, aquatic habitat, and fisheries.

This project is vital for our shared stewardship of this area. DNRC has a signed Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreement with the Flathead National Forest to increase the pace and scale of restoration across boundaries. The signed agreement sets the stage for the DNRC to administer portions of the work identified with the Salish Good project. DNRC also has programs to assist private landowners in the area with treatments on their lands. With the GNA agreement and assistance programs we are working together towards an "all lands" approach to restoring forest and watershed conditions and protecting communities and firefighters in this landscape.

Reasons for Objection: DNRC strongly supports the Selected Alternative (Alternative B Modified). The treatments identified are critical to the forest health, resiliency, and community protection of this area. We are concerned that the balance of treatments in this alternative may be modified prior to the final decision and project implementation. If changes are requested by another party, and if the final decision differs substantively from the selected alternative, the outcome may not adequately reduce wildfire risk and balance multiple benefits. In addition, if the current analysis is not enough to support these changes, the project may not be implemented in a timely manner. As such, we intend to use the

objection process to support the treatments identified in the selected alternative in the draft decision, help address any remaining issues of uncertainty, strengthen the project record, and participate in any objection resolution discussions with other objectors.

The DNRC formally requests to be included as an interested party in objection resolution for this project. DNRC has been a partner in the development of this project and has strong interest in the final decision and implementation. This project, along with treatments on state and private lands, is crucial to meeting our mutual goals of improving forest conditions across ownerships in this landscape.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Poncin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Greg" and last name "Poncin" clearly distinguishable.

Greg Poncin, Area Manager, Northwestern Land Office
MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

CC: Dave Ring, Unit Manager, Stillwater Unit; Stephen Kimball- Local Government Forest Advisor