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3160 NE 3rd Street
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Re: Mill Creek Dry Forest Restoration Project

To Whom It Concerns:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Mill Creek Dry Forest Restoration Project (“Project”). These comments respond to the Scoping Letter, Scoping Details, and Maps 1-7 (together, “Scoping Letter”) posted at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58081> on December 28, 2020.

Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is a conservation organization which has advocated for preservation of natural resources in Central Oregon for over 30 years. With over 200 members in Central Oregon, LandWatch has a long history of protecting the forests and streams in and around the Lookout Mountain Ranger District. LandWatch’s members and supporters live in Central Oregon, including on lands adjoining the Lookout Mountain Ranger District, and recreate in the District. They hunt, fish, take photographs, view wildlife, hike, drive, and engage in other recreational activities.

I. Introduction and general comments

The Mill Creek Project proposes treatments on 23,015 acres of forest in a project area that is 36,485 acres in size. This project area includes the 13,206 acre Mill Creek Wilderness. This wilderness area should not be included in the project area, as no project activities are proposed in the wilderness and its inclusion is arbitrary, serving only to dilute the environmental impacts of the Project. Discounting the wilderness area, the Project proposes treatments on 23,015 of 23,279 acres, or 98.9% of the Project area.

LandWatch is greatly concerned about a project of this scale. In particular, LandWatch is concerned about the significant reduction in big game security habitat caused by the commercial and non-commercial logging operations and fuels treatment activities; habitat fragmentation and soil disturbance caused by road opening and reconstruction (including for temporary roads); and degradation of riparian conditions caused by the logging operations that will not be fully mitigated by the Project’s restoration components. Given the degraded existing conditions in the Project Area, LandWatch does not believe that the Forest Service will be able to ensure full



compliance with all applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, including the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”), National Forest Management Act (“NFMA”), Clean Water Act (“CWA”), and Endangered Species Act (“ESA”).

LandWatch requests that the Forest Service dramatically reduce the scale of the logging and roadwork Project elements and significantly increase the riparian restoration and road decommissioning elements, or drop the Project altogether. We also request the agency prepare an EIS because of the significant effects on the human environment the Project would have.

I. Purpose and need

a. Historic Range of Variability; Historic and Current Conditions in Dry Forests

The Scoping Letter states that forest conditions in the Project area today are drastically different than they once were when “[d]ry forests had relative low tree densities, simple canopy layering, and an open ‘park-like’ nature.” Scoping Details at 1. We question the validity of this statement that sets a single, static desired forest condition. LandWatch requests that the agency provide sources for historic forest conditions in this specific Project area to substantiate its vision of a single, static desired forest condition.

Natural disturbance factors, like fire of varying severity and frequency, drought, disease, and insect infestation, have always occurred on the landscape, creating dynamic and heterogeneous forest conditions across space and time. Forest resiliency at the stand level is created through such a heterogeneity that includes variable tree densities and canopy layering, not an artificially created homogenous “park-like” structure.

We are also concerned that the role of historic fire suppression is overemphasized in the Scoping Letter’s discussion of current conditions, which states that “decades of fires suppression allowed many fire intolerant and small trees to thrive and develop into dense, multi-story stands.” While fire suppression is one factor affecting current conditions in the Project area, it is not the only, let alone the dominant factor. For one, fire is random, and there is no way to know how much fire would have affected the project area but for the efforts of fire suppression. Further, climate trends and related weather events over the historic period likely had a larger influence in affecting fire activity in the project area. The true HRV includes long periods without fire in dry forests, likely including the Project area. The extensive amount of proposed Project treatments across the entire Project, including logging and burning on almost every acre area, will introduce a never-before-seen severity of disturbance. This will result in a marked departure from the HRV, which relied on staggered and dynamic natural disturbances across space and time.

b. Baseline information.

LandWatch requests that the Project EIS provide baseline information on historic and current forest conditions in the project area be provided at the subwatershed scale. Especially for a project of this size, more detailed information is needed about purported deviations from HRV at the subwatershed scale. To comply with NEPA’s “hard look” mandate, the agency must



maintain inventories or otherwise collect and disclose information about the resources it manages so that an adequate baseline exists to evaluate the environmental impacts of a proposed action. *See Neighbors of Cuddy Mtn. v. U.S. Forest Serv.*, 137 F.3d 1372, 1379–80 (9th Cir. 1998).

Where and when did past logging occur in different parts of the Project area? Where and when did fire occur, and where and when was fire suppressed? Where and when has livestock grazing occurred? And for all of these data, how has the activity (logging, fire, grazing) affected current conditions at the subwatershed scale? Only with an accurate and complete picture of baseline conditions can the agency accurately assess the full scope Project’s environmental impacts.

II. Proposed Action

a. Commercial and noncommercial logging

The Project proposes 7,282 acres of commercial logging and 5,033 acres of noncommercial logging outside of RHCAs, plus 606 acres of commercial logging and 604 acres of noncommercial logging inside RHCAs.

The Scoping Letter does not state whether trees larger than 21” dbh will be logged as part of this Project. While the Wildlife Standard of the Eastside Screens was recently amended, the legality of that amendment is questionable. Further, the amendment is fraught with scientific uncertainty. The amendment ignores the continuing need to increase the number of large trees on the landscape in Eastern Oregon national forests, including in the Ochoco National Forest. LandWatch urges the Forest to address its objectives related to fuel reduction, species composition, and resilience by focusing on removal of only small trees, and not removal of large trees of any species. These large trees provide invaluable habitat for a range of species, they store carbon at exponentially higher levels than smaller trees, and they provide shade, moisture, and soil stability that supports a resilient forest ecosystem.

The Eastside Screens amendment focuses on only one restoration need in dry and mixed-moist conifer forests – tree species composition – but ignores many other pressing restoration needs on Eastern Oregon national forests. These include riparian restoration, mitigating the impacts of livestock grazing, decommissioning roads and reducing excessive road densities, storing carbon pollution, and improving and connecting wildlife habitat, including security and cover habitat for big game species. Under NEPA, the Eastside Screens amendment required an EIS because of its massive geographic extent and its likelihood to have significant effects on wildlife, carbon, and other resources. The amendment also failed to consider viable alternatives that would address the purpose and need, such as retaining old trees regardless of size and making snags from large young trees within the dripline of legacy trees. The amendment also mischaracterized the efficacy of the no action alternative which provides ample authority to remove small trees and meet goals related to fuel reduction, species composition, and resilience. The amendment also failed to include adequate analysis of its effects on many wildlife species, including threatened and endangered species, species of conservation concern, and management indicator species.



Many of the 33 species described by Wisdom et. al. (2000)¹ that rely on habitat provided by trees >21" dbh will be impacted by the Eastside Screens amendment but the amendment's effects on these species were not adequately analyzed or disclosed:

Whiteheaded woodpecker
 White-breasted nuthatch
 Pygmy nuthatch
 Migratory population of Lewis' woodpecker
 Western gray squirrel
 Blue grouse (winter)
 Northern goshawk (summer)
 Flammulated owl
 American marten
 Fisher
 Vaux's swift
 Williamson's sapsucker
 Pileated woodpecker
 Hammond's flycatcher
 Chestnut-backed chickadee
 Brown creeper
 Winter wren
 Golden-crowned kinglet
 Varied thrush
 Silver-haired bat
 Hoary bat
 Boreal owl
 Great gray owl
 Black-backed woodpecker
 Olive-sided flycatcher
 Three-toed woodpecker
 White-winged crossbill
 Woodland caribou
 Northern flying squirrel
 Pallid bat
 Long-eared myotis
 Fringed myotis

¹ Wisdom, Michael J.; Holthausen, Richard S.; Wales, Barbara C.; Hargis, Christina D.; Saab, Victoria A.; Lee, Danny C.; Hann, Wendel J.; Rich, Terrell D.; Rowland, Mary M.; Murphy, Wally J.; Eames, Michelle R. 2000. Source habitats for terrestrial vertebrates of focus in the interior Columbia basin: broadscale trends and management implications. Volume 1—Overview. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-485. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 3 vol. (Quigley, Thomas M., tech. ed.; Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project: scientific assessment).



Long-legged myotis²

Any proposal to remove large trees must disclose whether and how the needs of these and other species will be met over time. If the Forest proposes to remove large trees (>21”) in reliance on the Eastside Screens amendment as part of this Project, the Forest must prepare an EIS and conduct a thorough NEPA analysis of the site-specific and cumulative effects of that amendment.

b. Fuels treatment

The Project also proposes prescribed burning of 12,315 acres of activity generated fuels and 7,876 acres of naturally occurring fuels outside of RHCAs, plus prescribed burning of 1,212 acres of activity generated fuels and 1,614 acres of naturally occurring fuels within RHCAs. Scoping Letter at 4. LandWatch would like to see the DEIS more explicitly set forth the various acreages for each of the fuels treatment activities—lop and scatter, hand piling, grapple piling, post-treatment underburning, and underburning only. From the maps included with the Scoping Letter, it appears that fuels treatments are planned over the entire Project area, including areas where logging activities are planned. These widespread fuels treatment activities on top of other Project treatments seem to be more of a solution in search of a problem than a true proposal for moving the Project Area toward desired conditions. How will this widespread prescribed burning affect forage and over habitat for big game species? LandWatch expects that a specific fuels treatment plan will be developed for the Project, and requests that this plan be made available with the DEIS for public input.

c. Riparian logging

The Project proposes 1,210 acres of logging activities in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs), including 606 acres of commercial logging. INFISH generally precludes commercial logging in RHCAs. RHCA widths are generally 300 feet or 150 feet on either side of a stream, ephemeral stream, wetland, spring, or seep or other riparian feature designated as an RHCA. INFISH allows commercial logging in RHCAs only in a narrow circumstance when treatments are needed to attain Resource Management Objectives (RMOs).

The Scoping Letter presents a dubious distinction between a “upper/outer vegetation zone” upland and a “lowland/inner vegetation zone” in RHCAs. Scoping Letter at 3. That distinction is not made by INFISH and its limitations on treatment activities in RHCAs. Commercial logging planned for upland areas is proposed “to maintain and restore the historic distribution,

² Wisdom, Michael J.; Holthausen, Richard S.; Wales, Barbara C.; Hargis, Christina D.; Saab, Victoria A.; Lee, Danny C.; Hann, Wendel J.; Rich, Terrell D.; Rowland, Mary M.; Murphy, Wally J.; Eames, Michelle R. 2000. Source habitats for terrestrial vertebrates of focus in the interior Columbia basin: broadscale trends and management implications. Volume 1—Overview. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-485. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 3 vol. (Quigley, Thomas M., tech. ed.; Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project: scientific assessment).



diversity, and complexity of vegetation within RHCAs to protect their function and resiliency.” Scoping Letter at 3. It is not clear how this proposal would help attain riparian RMOs.

Ground disturbing activities in RHCAs are also likely to affect water quality, including from sedimentation, turbidity, and stream shading, in Project area streams. The Forest must fully account, analyze, and disclose these impacts in a DEIS and ensure that applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines are met. This would include disclosure of baseline data for all of these water quality parameters at the stream-specific level of specificity, along with projected impacts to these water quality parameters resulting from each project alternative analyzed in the DEIS.

d. Roadwork

The Project includes a significant amount of roadwork, including 1.06 miles of road opening, 5.9 miles of new temporary roads, 36.9 miles of other new temporary roads on “existing disturbance[s]”, 16 miles of road reconstruction, and 89 miles of road maintenance. Scoping Letter at 5. LandWatch opposes the construction of any new roads—including temporary—in the Project Area. Whether a new road is permanent or temporary, its adverse effects on water quality, security habitat fragmentation, and direct disturbance and displacement to wildlife are the same. This is especially true over the multi-year period of project implementation, and potentially much longer depending on when temporary roads obliterated and restored. Temporary roads are often irremediable when soils are fragile and could take many decades to restore.

To the extent the Forest Service believes that roadwork is needed as part of this project, the DEIS must provide a full cost-benefit analysis, which apprises the public of the full scope of irreversible and irretrievable environmental impacts, evaluates alternative logging methods—including helicopter yarding—and balances the purported benefits of thinning versus the significant environmental impacts from road building (including soil damage, riparian disturbances, spread of invasive species, habitat fragmentation, increased probability of over-hunting, and increased off-road vehicles use, to name a few).

To the extent that the Project area includes administratively “closed” roads that are still functionally open on the ground, the Forest in its DEIS analysis must inventory the mileage and density of all roads in the Project area, including functionally open but administratively “closed” roads. Further, LandWatch would like to see the Forest Service inventory roads that are “administratively closed” (pursuant to the MVUM), but functionally open (i.e., actually receiving motorized use). LandWatch would like the Forest Service to identify these roads and focus on implementing closures that will prevent motorized use—including from ATVs, motorbikes, and other off-road vehicles.

As part of the planning process for the Project, the Forest Service must fully scrutinize the Project’s roadwork component in accordance with the Travel Management Rule, 36 C.F.R. part 212, and Executive Orders 11644, 11989. Specifically, the agency must demonstrate how the Project’s roadwork components are consistent with the 2015 Ochoco Travel Analysis Report and the identification of the “minimum road system.” The Scoping Letter states that “this analysis was used as a starting point to complete a project-level travel analysis for the Mill Creek project



area.” Scoping Letter at 7. The agency must apply the Analysis Report’s minimization criteria on a route-by-route basis, specifically explaining how the agency has minimized damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources.

Finally, the Forest Service must fully address the environmental impacts from motorized use on non-system roads to implement the Project, including restoration and fuels treatment. Disturbances from Project activities to the fragile soils of the Project area can have significant and long-lasting impacts, which the DEIS must fully address.

e. Restoration

The Project also proposes some restoration activities. For riparian restoration, the Scoping Letter proposes placement of large woody debris, pool creation, channel filling and manipulation, hardwood enhancement, and riparian planting in and around streams and floodplains. Scoping Letter at 3. LandWatch is tentatively supportive of these riparian restoration activities, and we are appreciative of their inclusion in this Project. LandWatch cautions against merely listing restoration activities without providing a fully developed restoration plan. For instance, the in-water work must be meticulously designed, phased, and scheduled in order to be successfully implemented. The DEIS must provide a robust and detailed description of the restoration plan that is spatially and temporally explicit, to ensure that the public has the opportunity to fully weigh in. As described above, LandWatch is opposed to logging, both commercial and noncommercial, in riparian areas. Existing riparian vegetation needs to be protected, not cut down. Project area streams suffer from high temperatures, which can be a consequence of a lack of stream shading.

LandWatch is supportive of the limited amount (3.26 miles) of road decommissioning planned as part of the Project. Scoping Letter at 5. We are disappointed that more road decommissioning is not part of this Project. We request that the DEIS must provide specific sideboards for implementation of decommissioning activities, including timetables and funding sources. The Forest Service frequently proposes road decommissioning as part of other projects, but the agency has a poor track record of actually following through. What are the specific measures the agency will take to ensure that road decommissioning actually gets implemented?

III. Environmental effects

Pursuant to NEPA, the agency must “provide full and fair discussion of [the] significant environmental impacts” of the proposed action.” 50 C.F.R. § 1502.1.³ In particular, the agency

³ Although the the CEQ revised NEPA regulations in 2020, we cite to the former 1978 NEPA regulations. On January 20, 2021, while the scoping period for this Project was still open, President Biden issued an Executive Order that directs CEQ to review the 2020 NEPA regulation amendments: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-protecting-public-health-and-environment-and-restoring-science-to-tackle-climate-crisis/>. The July 16, 2020 CEQ NEPA revisions are specifically listed on President Biden’s List of Agency Actions for Review: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing->



must take a “hard look” at the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of a proposed project. The environmental consequences section of an EIS forms the “scientific and analytic basis” for comparisons of alternatives and the discussion of environmental impacts which cannot be avoided. The agency must consider direct and indirect effects and their significance. 40 C.F.R. § 1502.16(a), (b). The agency must also discuss in detail measures to mitigate adverse environmental consequences of the Project. *Id.* at 1502.16(h). Moreover, the agency must fully address and provide a meaningful evaluation of the combined and synergistic impacts of all past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects within and adjacent to the Project Area, including but not limited to the Lemon Gulch trails project, Black Mountain vegetation management project, Forest Management Direction for Large Diameter Trees in Eastern Oregon, livestock grazing activities, and unlawful off-road vehicle use. *See* 40 C.F.R. §§ 1508.7, .25(a)(2).

a. Fish, Wildlife, and Plants

The agency must take a hard look at the impacts of the Project on Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive (“TES”) Species, and ONF Management Indicator Species (“MIS”) and their habitats, including but not limited to Redband trout, Gray wolf, Western bumblebee, Oregon Spotted frog, Pronghorn, Rocky Mountain elk, Pileated woodpecker, North American wolverine, and Sensitive Plants. The Forest Service must prepare a Biological Assessment / Biological Evaluation that addresses the impacts of the Project on all TES species, and engage in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service / National Marine Fisheries Service where required or appropriate. In evaluating the environmental impacts of the Project, the Forest Service has a duty to explain how the Project is fully consistent with the Standards and Guidelines of the Ochoco Forest Plan and the Inland Native Fish Strategy, particularly with respect to impacts on TES species.

LandWatch emphasizes the importance of a properly determined geographic scope for the impacts analysis of fish, wildlife, and plants. The choice of analysis area must represent a reasoned decision, and the Forest Service must show that it considered the relevant factors, including the scope of the project, the features of the land, and the type of species in the area. The geographic areas occupied by species outside the project impact zone are a relevant and crucial factor for the Forest Service to consider. LandWatch requests that the Forest Service selects geography scopes for each species based on the unique attributes of those species, particularly range, habitat needs, and food availability, based on the best available science. This will likely lead to different analysis areas for cumulative impacts than the Project analysis area.

LandWatch fully expects that for species that the Project may reduce habitat effectiveness, the DEIS will address the (1) the habitat needs of each species; (2) the existing habitat conditions in the Project area; and (3) how the Project’s direct, indirect, and cumulative effects will affect each species, based on the best available science. For most species, use of the best available science includes the application of habitat models. LandWatch expects that the Forest Service will make use of all available models, specifically document the results in the DEIS, and provide the

[room/statements-releases/2021/01/20/fact-sheet-list-of-agency-actions-for-review/](#). The Forest should analyze this Project pursuant to the original 1978 CEQ NEPA regulations in anticipation of CEQ’s potential revision to the 2020 CEQ NEPA rules.



underlying data for public review. In addition, because many species are adversely affected by the Project Area's high road density, LandWatch requests that the DEIS provide a thorough and detailed road density analysis (including a distance banding analysis for big game species) that includes all routes functionally open to and/or currently receiving motorized use, regardless of the routes' designation on the MVUM.

If the Project results in reduced stream shading or increased sedimentation or turbidity, the Forest must address the impacts of the Project on fish and aquatic resources with quantitative data and accurate scientific information. Based on what the Forest Service states in the Scoping Letter, riparian areas and streams in the Project area exhibit uniformly poor conditions. Mill Creek is listed on the State of Oregon's 303(d) list of impaired waterbodies due to high temperatures. The Forest Service must demonstrate how the Project complies with the Clean Water Act, particularly in light of the proposal to remove riparian vegetation.

b. Climate change

Climate change is the fundamental issue of our time, and the relation of federal actions to it falls squarely within NEPA's focus. Previous ONF project planning documents have taken a uni-directional look at climate change, focusing on whether a specific project will accelerate global climate change. For this project, the Forest Service must closely examine the extent to which this Project will remove important carbon stores, such as large trees and forest biomass. But that is only one side of the coin. The DEIS must also address another critical aspect of the climate change problem: how will the Project affect Project Area resources—soils, watersheds, species—in light of changing climatic conditions?

c. Wilderness Areas

The DEIS must fully address the impacts of the Project on the Mill Creek Wilderness Area. At a minimum, LandWatch requests that any treatment units that border the Wilderness Area be removed from the Project as they will directly impact the Wilderness Area. We repeat our request that the Wilderness Area be removed from the Project area boundary. A true accounting of the Project's effects requires that the Mill Creek Wilderness Area be removed, as it only serves to dilute those impacts by artificially adding gross acreage to the Project.

d. Recreation

The ONF is a relatively small national forest that is cherished for its quiet recreational opportunities and relative solitude. With the proliferation of vegetation management projects over the last 10 years, along with profligate illegal road usage, quiet recreational opportunities are becoming harder and harder to find. The much-beloved Steins Pillar Recreation Area is located in the Project area. The Lemon Gulch project, a downhill-focused mountain bike trail system, is also proposed within this Project's boundaries. LandWatch request that the DEIS fully evaluate how the Project, combined with the impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, will impact all types of passive recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, wildlife and wildflower viewing, and horseback riding. Communities near the ONF are supported by recreation-related expenditures—especially



hunting—and the Forest Service must take a hard look at how the Project will limit recreational opportunities, create increased competition among user groups, and otherwise affect the recreational character of the ONF—thereby indirectly impacting the economies of local communities.

IV. Alternatives

NEPA requires the agency to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives. 40 C.F.R. § 1502.14(a). LandWatch requests that the Forest Service in the DEIS set forth and study in detail a reasonable range of alternatives, as required by NEPA, without putting its thumb on the scales of the proposed action. Specifically, LandWatch requests that the Forest Service evaluate an alternative that is not so heavily focused on commercial logging operations; an alternative that does not require roadwork; an alternative that does not include commercial logging, noncommercial logging, or fuels reduction treatments within RHCAs and an alternative with increased riparian restoration activities and more miles of road decommissioning.

LandWatch also expects that the DEIS will address in detail a no action alternative, a required component of the NEPA analysis. 40 C.F.R. § 1502.14(d). The no action alternative is critically important because provides a baseline against which the action alternatives are evaluated.

V. Use of Best Available Science and Acknowledgment of Scientific Uncertainty

Under NFMA, the Forest Service has an obligation to utilize the “best available science.” 36 C.F.R. § 219.3. Moreover, the agency must “explain the conclusions it has drawn from its chosen methodology, and the reasons it considers the underlying evidence to be reliable.” *Earth Island Inst. v. Carlton*, 626 F.3d 462, 470 (9th Cir. 2010). Under NEPA, the Forest Service must “insure the professional integrity, including scientific integrity, of the discussions and analysis.” 40 C.F.R. § 1502.24. “Accurate scientific information, expert agency comments, and public scrutiny are an essential component of NEPA.” 40 C.F.R. § 1500.1(b). Moreover, the Forest Service has a duty to address scientific controversy. *See* 40 C.F.R. §§ 1502.9(b), 1502.12. If there is incomplete or unavailable relevant data, the DEIS must disclose this fact. 40 C.F.R. § 1502.22.

For this Project, LandWatch expects that the Forest Service will apply the most recent and available scientific models, including the Blue Mountains Elk Model. In recent ONF project planning documents, LandWatch has seen the agency rely on outdated studies applicable to forest-types quite different than those of the Project Area. To comply with NMFA and NEPA, the Forest Service must commit to utilizing the most current scientific information that is the most applicable to the Project Area. For example, for big game species, much of the best available science relevant to the Project Area comes from research and studies from the Starkey Experimental Forest.



Large logging and fuels treatment projects as a means of forest “restoration” such as the proposed project are fraught with scientific uncertainty. The Forest Service must be up-front about areas of controversy, ensuring that the public and decisionmaker are fully apprised of the issues at stake. As a general point, LandWatch observes that many leading scientists are skeptical of whether mechanical fuels treatment projects contribute benefits that outweigh their known environmental consequences. In particular, the significant amount of roadwork proposed by the Forest Service is certain to cause short- and long term soil damage, habitat fragmentation, and riparian degradation, whereas the benefits of large-scale, commercial “thinning” operations are speculative at best.

Finally, while one of the specific purposes of the Project is to “to restore characteristic (i.e. historic) dry forest vegetative conditions in the Mill Creek project area, thereby increasing resilience to insects, disease, fire, and drought; reducing the risk of uncharacteristic high severity fires,” all of these are elements of the natural disturbance regime. As discussed above, the DEIS must be much more explicit about historical conditions, including species compositions and stand densities—taking into account natural disturbances and a wide degrees of fluctuation. The agency must provide a sound scientific basis for its proposal, while acknowledging scientific viewpoints calling into question the alleged “need” for the Project.

VI. Project Record

LandWatch requests that the entire project record be made available immediately upon release of the DEIS. A complete project record will include, but is not limited to specialist reports, unit and road cards, meeting notes, project area maps, email exchanges, data underlying tables and modeling calculations, and GIS data. Only with a complete project record will LandWatch and other interested members of the public be able to meaningfully participate in the decisionmaking process, as required by NEPA.

LandWatch specifically requests that draft unit cards are released concurrently with the DEIS. The Scoping Package provides extremely minimal information about harvest prescriptions. Along with the DEIS, the agency must provide the public much more detail, on a unit-specific level, on the existing conditions of each stand slated for treatment, and the projected conditions after implementation of the proposed alternative.

LandWatch also specifically requests that project maps be updated to depict key resource considerations. In particular, LandWatch would like to see a map illustrating Class I–IV streams and RHCAs, and identifying each and every stream crossing for all system roads (including temporary, closed, and decommissioned). LandWatch would also like to see a map showing Forest Plan Management Areas / RHCAs juxtaposed with logging/fuels treatment units and system roads (including temporary, closed, and decommissioned). It appears as though some proposed units overlap with critical Management Areas, such as Old Growth, General Forest Winter Range, and the Summit Historic Trail, Steins Pillar Recreation Area, and Visual Management Corridor, but it is impossible to verify this with any precision. LandWatch is opposed to any logging/fuels treatment/roadwork outside of the General Forest allocation. Finally, LandWatch would like to see a map that includes all of the units, treatments, and roads



data for all past, present (within the last 10 years), and reasonably foreseeable future projects in the Project area.

Finally, LandWatch specifically requests that all specialist reports are released in their entirety *concurrently* with the release of the DEIS (either as incorporated into the text of the DEIS, or as appendices). LandWatch has noticed a trend with recent projects on the ONF whereby specialist reports are released at the very late stages of public comment periods, if at all. This practice is unlawful and contrary to NEPA. *See* 40 C.F.R. §§ 1502.18, 1502.21.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Project. Please add LandWatch's contact information to the project mailing list, and provide any notices related to the Project to the following email address: rory@colw.org.

Sincerely,



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