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First name: Chris

Last name: Edgington

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Montana Trout Unlimited

PO Box 7186

Missoula, MT. 59807

Butte Ranger District

Attn: Michelle Peterson

1820 Meadowlark

Butte, MT. 59701

RE: Basin Creek - Butte Watershed Project

Montana Trout Unlimited (MTU) would like to provide the following comments on the Basin Creek - Butte Watershed Project. Founded in 1964, MTU is the only statewide grassroots organization dedicated solely to conserving, protecting, and restoring Montana's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

The Basin Creek Watershed contains high-value coldwater resources and provides nearly 60% of Butte's municipal water supply. While we understand the need to mitigate wildfire risk to sustain a reliable source of drinking water, other important attributes of the watershed must be considered. The basin is inhabited by Montana's state fish, the Westslope cutthroat trout. Forest Service lands overlap with most of the remaining habitat where cutthroat reside, just as they do in Basin Creek. Therefore, it is critical that riparian areas in the project area receive stringent safeguards to maintain habitat complexity if the USFS moves ahead with this project. Any building of roads, temporary or otherwise, must not contribute excess sediment to Basin Creek or its tributaries.

While cutthroat trout evolved with fire, a century of fire-suppression and climate-change and have led to an unprecedented scope and scale of wildfires in recent decades. The need to improve fire resiliency in headwater streams by creating a mosaic of vegetation on the landscape through various treatments to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire is needed in Basin Creek and across Montana.

We believe the short-term impacts of the project to the Inventoried Roadless Area for long-term resiliency to wildfire by reducing beetle-kill can be done safely and effectively. We understand, that if the Basin Creek water treatment plant were to go offline due to a catastrophic wildfire, Butte-Silver Bow may have to increase the use of their Big Hole River water right. This could negatively affect the Big Hole fishery and all down-stream water users.

Please contact me with any questions you may have about our comments.

Chris Edgington

Jefferson Watershed Project Manager

Montana Trout Unlimited

chris@montanatu.org