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Title:

Comments: Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Goose Creek Fuels Break proposal. I am a long time resident of Bozeman and have been visiting Goose Creek, Chestnut Mountain and Bear Canyon since the 1980s. I have skied, hiked, camped, mountain biked, hiked and rock climbed in this area.

The proposed fuel break project is a bad idea. Just like the Bozeman Creek Watershed Project and the South Plateau Project this proposal ignores the fact that a) living trees absorb and store carbon and help offset climate change and b) Removing these trees and vegetation from an area and burning the slash contributes to climate change thus exacerbating the very problems this project is meant to alleviate.

I have walked the trails above Kirk Hill where the forest was recently thinned and noted two problems: a) Some of the "leave trees" (those not cut down) have blown over (see attached photo) and resulted in more dead wood thus more fire fuel and b) the ground is covered with tall grasses, plants and weeds which have dried and created what is probably a very flammable matrix. What will prevent the same conditions from occurring at Goose Creek? How will fuel breaks be maintained? How often?

I also do not see anything in the scoping document about the loss of aesthetic enjoyment for users of trails in Goose Creek and Bear Canyon. Part of the allure of these trails is the feeling of being in deep woods with attendant peace and quiet and verdure. Thinning all along these trails will diminish that experience, in the near term via all the noise of cutting, staging and hauling, and in the long term due to loss of trees and other vegetation.

What are the impacts to wildlife of this project? Chestnut Mountain and Goose Creek area is identified in the Forest Plan as part of the Gallatin Key Linkage Area for wildlife migration and dispersal, and is surely one of the least-cost migration routes north and south for grizzly bear, lynx, wolf, wolverine, elk, moose, mule deer and other important wildlife species found on the Custer Gallatin. I have seen quite a few moose in this area and they are invariably found in thick woods.

Many studies for experts such as Delasalla and Wuerthner have questioned the assumption that thinning and fuel breaks have any positive impact on slowing wildlife spread. In fact as I stated in my objections to the Bozeman Watershed Project, thinning the forest can increase wind speed and cause more rapid spread of fire. Removing overstory trees also dries out the forest and can cause more intensive burning.

This project's very minimal (nonexistent) environmental analysis also ignores the growing scientific recognition of the "wood wide web" wherein trees rely on other trees for survival and success. New trees depend on adult trees to nurture them. Indiscriminately hacking down hundreds of trees may severely limit the survival of the remaining trees and limit the success of new trees by removing part of their community and support network.

I urge you to drop this project and start to recognize the reality that a bit of thinning here and there is not going to prevent major wildfires. The vast majority of high-intensity burning in wildfires occurs in conditions of extreme drought, wind and heat leaving little chance that any sort of fuel break or fire fighting is going to slow the fire.