



File Code: 1570

Date: December 19, 2023

Dear Objector,

This letter is in response to objections filed on the proposed Kootenai Forest Plan Amendment, Bears Outside the Recovery Zone, and Draft Decision Memo released by Chad Benson, Forest Supervisor, on the Kootenai National Forest. I have read your objections and reviewed the project record. My review of your objection was conducted in accordance with the administrative review procedures found at 36 CFR 219, Subparts A and B.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCESS

The regulations at 36 CFR §§ 219.50–219.62 provide for a pre-decisional administrative review process in which the objector provides sufficient narrative description of the project, specific issues related to the project, and suggested remedies that would resolve the objections.

In my review I considered a variety of issues related to the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Endangered Species Act, and how all those laws, associated regulations and policies affect how we go about identifying additional National Forest System lands as Bears Outside the Recovery Zone areas.

OBJECTION RESOLUTION MEETING

I hosted an objection resolution meeting on Friday, December 8, 2023, to permit objectors to discuss the issues they raised in their objections and propose potential remedies. The meeting was attended by the following lead objectors and interested parties:

- Lead Objectors
 - Chris Bachman, Yaak Valley Forest Council
 - Tom Partin, American Forest Resource Council
- Interested Persons/Parties Under 36 CFR 219.57
 - Brent Teske, Lincoln County
 - Greg Poncin, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
 - Jeff Whitlock, F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co.

Forest Supervisor Chad Benson, Deputy Forest Supervisor Heidi McRoberts and I appreciated the time and engagement from all who were able to attend.

RESPONSE TO OBJECTIONS AS REQUIRED BY 36 CFR 219.57(b)

After my review of the proposed plan amendment and draft Decision Memo, I find the responsible official provided an adequate analysis of the issues raised by objectors and provided acceptable documentation showing compliance with applicable law, regulation, and policy. Even so, your objections identified some areas within the draft Decision Memo that could be clarified or updated with clearer connections and references to existing data and completed analyses to help the public we serve better understand the rationale and decision to delineate additional National Forest System lands as Bears Outside the Recovery Zone areas; thank you.



CONCLUSION

My review constitutes the final administrative determination of the Department of Agriculture; no further review from any other Forest Service or Department of Agriculture official of my written response to your objection is available [36 CFR 219.57(b)(3)].

Sincerely,

DANIEL W MCKEAGUE
Deputy Regional Forester

cc: Chad Benson, Heidi McRoberts, Janis Bouma, Sarah Canepa, Kristopher Cahoon, Emma Reinemann