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Organization: Wyoming State Forestry Division

Title:

Comments: U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service Wind River Ranger District, Shoshone National Forest
ATTN: Tanner Shuler, Silviculturist 1403 West Ramshorn, PO Box 18 Dubois, WY, 82513
RE: Green Union Project
Dear Mr. Shuler, On behalf of the Office of State Lands and Investments-Wyoming State Forestry Division (WSFD), we would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Green Union Project in the Wind River Ranger District on the Shoshone National Forest. The objectives outlined align closely with our own goals of promoting forest health, mitigating wildfire risks, and enhancing ecosystem resilience. We are encouraged by the emphasis on reducing the accumulation of hazardous fuels and decreasing the potential for crown fires within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). As we know, proactive measures in fuel management are crucial for safeguarding both human communities and natural habitats from the devastating impacts of wildfires. Furthermore, the initiative to increase the amount of forested areas restored or maintained in conditions less susceptible to damage from insects and disease is fully supported by WSFD. This approach not only enhances biodiversity but also strengthens the overall resilience of forest ecosystems against future threats. Ensuring the right balance of forest cover, stocking levels, and growth rates is crucial for maximizing the benefits of sustainable forest management. This comprehensive approach to land stewardship involves both conservation and utilization efforts. By carefully managing our forests, we can guarantee their long-term sustainability. Moreover, we acknowledge the importance of actively managing areas without roads and fully endorse the project's initiative in this regard. We are proud to highlight the collaborative efforts already underway in adjacent areas by various stakeholders, including the Wyoming State Forestry Division, the National Forest Foundation, Wyoming Game and Fish, Mule Deer Foundation, and Fremont County, supported by WUI grants. Through these partnerships, significant progress has been made in enhancing wildfire preparedness, habitat restoration, and community resilience. In particular, our division is actively involved in the initial stages of developing a fuel break on private lands adjacent to the proposed Green Union footprint. This strategic intervention will not only serve as a vital protective buffer but also complement the broader objectives of the project by reducing fire risks and enhancing landscape connectivity. We suggest coordinating with partnering agencies and private landowners adjacent to the project boundaries, encouraging cross-boundary work and additional connectivity of proposed management blocks. Particularly, we recommend utilizing the Good Neighbor Authority to engage in cross-boundary management with the WSFD. This holistic approach will provide the opportunity to be proactive with fuels reduction, timber harvesting, and forest health, all while treating this project at a landscape scale rather than following jurisdictional boundaries. We recommend a thorough examination of prescribed fire operations. Before proceeding with any prescribed fire activities, WSFD advises completing mechanical or hand thinning to enhance the survival rate of remaining trees within the forested stand. In conclusion, we fully endorse the Green Union Project and commend the USDA Forest Service for its proactive approach to forest management. By working together, we can effectively address the challenges posed by wildfire, promote ecosystem health, and ensure the long-term vitality of our forests and communities. We would like to thank the Wind River Ranger District, Shoshone National Forest for allowing the WSFD to participate in the project as a cooperator and look forward to continuing discussion and collaboration. Sincerely, Kelly Norris Wyoming State Forester Wyoming