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Comments: Please see file attached.

Supporting the West Reservoir Project: A Commitment to Ecological Restoration and Sustainable Management

The West Reservoir Project is a pivotal initiative focused on restoring and enhancing a vast forest ecosystem, ensuring its resilience and sustainability for future generations. Rooted in the principles of ecological integrity, biodiversity conservation, and community involvement, this project addresses challenges posed by historical land use practices and natural disturbances across approximately 129,608 acres of diverse forest ecosystems shaped by fire, timber harvest, and natural succession.

Enhancing Forest Diversity and Resilience

The project strategically increases the presence of fire-resistant species like western larch, white pine, and whitebark pine, creating forests capable of withstanding natural disturbances. These species are vital for maintaining ecological balance and offer resilience to fire, insects, and diseases, which is crucial given the historical impact of fires and current vegetative susceptibility to diseases like root diseases and bark beetles. Targeted vegetation treatments reduce forest density, providing trees with more space and resources (light, water, nutrients) to thrive, improving tree health, disease, and wildfire resistance, fostering a robust and resilient forest ecosystem.

Supporting Wildlife Habitat and Forage

Enhancing forage availability for ungulate species such as deer and elk through prescribed burns and vegetation treatments is prioritized, crucial for maintaining healthy populations integral to ecosystems and appealing to hunting communities. By ensuring abundant prey, the project indirectly supports predator species like wolves and large carnivores, which thrive on robust prey populations. Addressing misconceptions that predators are the primary cause of declining ungulate populations, the project emphasizes habitat improvement, leading to more successful hunting outcomes and reducing misplaced blame on wolves and other predators.

The project prioritizes the enhancement of forage availability for ungulate species such as deer and elk through prescribed burns and other vegetation treatments. This is crucial for maintaining healthy ungulate populations, which are an integral part of the ecosystem and a significant draw for hunting communities. By ensuring abundant prey, the project indirectly supports predator species like wolves and large carnivores, which depend on robust prey populations to thrive. Protecting Endangered Species and Ecosystems

A critical component is the commitment to non-interference with species protected under the Endangered Species Act, such as lynx and grizzly bears. This is achieved by

maintaining existing road networks and enhancing natural habitats, allowing these species to move freely and thrive without human-induced stress, aligning with broader biodiversity conservation goals. Additionally, measures to improve fish passages and replace undersized culverts enhance water flow and preserve hydrologic processes, ensuring water bodies remain clean and cold, providing ideal conditions for aquatic life, including bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, essential for maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems.

Economic and Community Benefits

Sustainable timber production provides a mix of forest products, supporting local economies through job creation and aligning with forest plan goals of ecological and economic sustainability. Timber production contributes to achieving vegetation desired conditions and supports community resilience. Reducing fuel loads near infrastructure mitigates wildfire risks, protecting community assets and ensuring the safety of forest users, safeguarding communities and maintaining forest landscape integrity.

Addressing Potential Concerns

The project adheres to the principle of no new road construction, minimizing habitat disruption and maintaining landscape integrity, ensuring wildlife movement and ecosystem functionality without undue interference. Vegetation treatments in riparian management zones follow strict guidelines to preserve ecological functions and habitats, improving tree growth, species composition, and reducing fuel loads, contributing to ecosystem resilience.

Wolves of the Rockies, a Montana-based non-profit promoting proper management of Yellowstone and Montana wolves and large carnivores, stands in support of the West Reservoir Project, provided our concerns and thoughts are included and closely monitored.

Marc Cooke

President

Wolves of the Rockies

Stevensville, Mt.

Attachments:

West Reservoir Project Final WOTR.pdf