

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/3/2026 7:00:00 AM

First name: Tom

Last name: Biltonen

Organization: Bennett Lumber Products Inc

Title: Timber Resource Manager

Comments: Please accept and consider the following comments from Bennett Lumber Products Inc. in support of the proposed Wepah Salvage Project currently being considered on the Palouse Ranger District. As regular purchasers of UUSFS timber sales on the Palouse District, Bennett Lumber Products is dependent upon a sustained supply of timber from this area to maintain its long term viability. A steady timber base is also required to supply jobs that are vital to the long term economic health of the local economy where the Palouse District is located.

Bennett is intimately familiar with salvage sales off this District as it has harvested the last two fire salvage sales offered, Sand Mountain Salvage and Johnson Salvage. In both cases the timber has experienced degradation due to the time frame required to start logging and complete the sale. It has already been close to one year since the White Pine Fire started, Bennett Lumber strongly encourages the USFS to complete its required work to allow harvesting activities to commence as soon as possible to capture as much value from this resource as possible.

Bennett Lumber also encourages the USFS to model the contract in such a manner that protects the resource but also allows for efficient and safe harvesting operations. In a past contract a large surfacing requirement prohibited harvest operations until completion, further delaying harvest and allowing for further timber degradation. Bennett Lumber also encourages the USFS to consider the use of tether assisted falling and grapple yarding on line skidding units. Hand sawing and hooking logs on a line unit is inherently dangerous on a green unit, the added danger of working on burned timber places workers in a dangerous and unnecessary position. Modern harvesting methods have worked to get workers off the ground and into the safety of a cab, contract requirements need to protect the resource but also allow for the safety of operators. The USFS needs to adapt their contracts allowing for this new safer technology.

The USFS is also encouraged to seriously look at their requirements for slash work completed after harvest. Bennett recognizes that fire lines and fuel breaks may be necessary in certain cases but the added cost of any unnecessary fuels work greatly adds to the overall costs and makes an already tight economic margin even tighter or cost prohibitive. Safety of the workers and protection of the resource comes first but economic considerations must also be weighed especially in a case of degraded timber of low value coupled with increased harvesting costs.

In conclusion Bennett Lumber supports the USFS in its work to salvage this resource and rehabilitate the area effected by this fire. While Bennett recognizes the policy work required of the USFS to allow work to commence, it also has experienced firsthand the economic hardship of harvesting, processing and marketing a low value product. Bennett Lumber recognizes the USFS's responsibility to protect the resource it is entrusted, but also urges them to implement a Timber SALE contract recognizing the safety, efficiency and economic side of the equation as well

Bennett Lumber greatly supports and appreciates the efforts of the Palouse District Timber Crew and Staff in completing this project and also appreciates the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Tom Biltonen