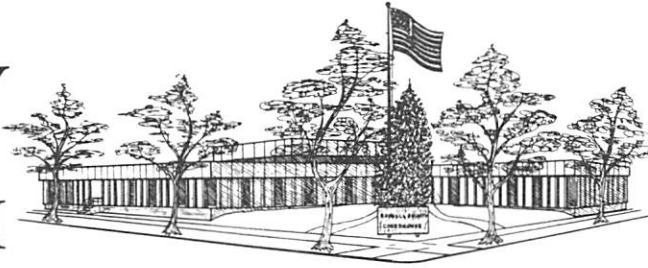


COUNTY OF RAVALLI



RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
215 S. 4th Street, Suite A
Hamilton, MT. 59840
406-375-6500
commissioners@rc.mt.gov

May 18, 2022

Steve Brown
Stevensville Ranger District
88 Main St
Stevensville, MT 59870

RE: Ravalli County Scoping Comments on the Bitterroot Front Project

Dear Steve,

The Board of Ravalli County Commissioners (BCC) would like to thank you, the Forest Service project team, and Forest Supervisor Matt Anderson for your collaborative efforts during the scoping phase of the Bitterroot Front Project. We look forward to working with you on the development and implementation of this project.

The Ravalli County Commissioners fully support the project objectives which are the following:

- 1) Reduce Fuels.
- 2) Improve landscape resilience to disturbances (such as insects, disease, and fire) by modifying forest structure and composition.
- 3) Seek wildlife habitat improvement opportunities.
- 4) Contribute to the local economy and forest products industry through fuels reduction activities and timber production.
- 5) Other natural resource objectives including: recreations improvements, heritage resource management, fish/rare plants, grazing management, watershed management, and road/transportation management.

Ravalli County supports the proposed project boundary and the proposed 144,000 acres. We support the landscape-scale proposal to address the immediate threat that wildfire poses to our

community. The Ravalli County Commissioners and an overwhelming majority of our citizens support the desired outcomes and conditions for a healthier forest, resilient to disease, insects and fire, a safer forest for our firefighters and emergency responders, more productive wildlife habitat, increased recreational opportunities and economic opportunities for our community in the forest products sector. Ravalli County does not believe these outcomes and conditions are mutually exclusive. This project is an opportunity to achieve these conditions.

We support an adaptive management approach that gives our local forest experts the suite of actions that allow them the flexibility to best achieve the projects desired conditions.

The Bitterroot Front Project area is a very high fire hazard area not only statewide, but recognized nationally. These high fire hazard areas are due to insects, disease, stand density, and/or understory fuels that result in catastrophic wildfires. These wildfires have resulted in devastating impacts to public lands, private property, wildlife habitat, water quantity and quality and the health and safety of our community.

Public lands - Routine fire at low to moderate intensity can be beneficial to our forests, but the high severity, catastrophic wildfires have devastated our public lands. These catastrophic fires have left our forest land scorched and/or littered with a tangled mess of dead fallen trees. These areas are unproductive wildlife habitat and can be potential fire hazard areas because of large amounts of fuel on the ground.

Private property – Wildfire on private property has destroyed homes and left many acres of private property devastated. It is essential for the Forest Service to mitigate fire potential on public lands, but we are also encouraging our private landowners to take action to mitigate fire potential on private lands. Public land treatments alone will not resolve the wildfire threat to our community and we look forward to working collaboratively with the agencies and our private landowners.

Emergency Response – The aftermath of the recent Roaring Lion fire should not be lost on our community. The fire destroyed a number of homes, devastated thousands of public and private acres and cost millions of dollars, but we were very fortunate that the fire did not claim any lives. The hazardous fire threat in our Bitterroot interface puts our citizens and emergency responder's lives in danger.

Wildlife habitat – Catastrophic wildfires have not only claimed the lives of millions of animals, but have left thousands of acres uninhabitable for many species, including ungulate populations that cannot maneuver or migrate the entangled mess of deadfall.

Water quantity and quality - Ravalli County water quality and quantity is vital to our community. Erosion and sediment in the wake of a wildfire has significant impacts to our pristine waterways. Loss of canopy cover from wildfires diminishes the ability for our forests to store snowpack reducing our late stream flows and increasing water temperatures.

Ravalli County wants to ensure that impacts to county road infrastructure are mitigated from significant traffic increases from project implementation. We also want to ensure that impacts to our communities with privately maintained roads are mitigated. The cultural, ecological, recreational and economic benefits of the Bitterroot Front project are supported broadly in our community. The Ravalli County Commissioners support the Bitterroot Front project proposal.

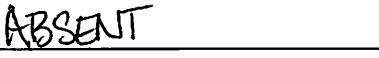
Please consider these comments as part of the official record for the Bitterroot Front project. We look forward to being actively involved with this project's development and analysis.

Sincerely,

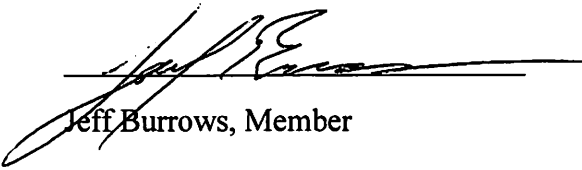
Ravalli County Board of Commissioners



Dan Huls, Chairman



Greg Chilcott, Vice-Chair



Jeff Burrows, Member