

COUNTY OF RAVALLI



RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
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Hamilton, MT. 59840
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commissioners@rc.mt.gov

February 10, 2023

Daniel Pliley
West Fork Ranger District
6735 West Fork Road
Darby, MT 59829

RE: Ravalli County Comments on the Thunder Mountain Project

Dear District Ranger Pliley,

The Board of Ravalli County Commissioners (BCC) would like to thank you, the Forest Service project team, and Forest Supervisor Matt Anderson for considering our comments on the Thunder Mountain Project. We look forward to working with you on the development and implementation of this project.

The Ravalli County Commissioners fully support the project purpose and need:

- 1) Reduce the likelihood of crown fires within the WUI by altering fuels in both the amount available to burn and arrangement..
- 2) Provide for firefighter and public safety in the event of a wildfire by reducing potential fire behavior.
- 3) Promote insect and disease resiliency and increase the health and vigor of early seral species (ponderosa pine).

Ravalli County agrees with and supports the use of a categorical exclusion for implementation of the Thunder Mountain Project. We believe there are opportunities to expand the scope and scale of this project to further support the purpose and need and to provide benefits to the forest, watershed and animal habitat.

We support expanding the treatment area North of Hughes Creek Road to the East and North to further accomplish the project purpose and need. This could be accomplished without the building of additional road systems and would reduce wildfire risk to adjacent private and highly recreated public grounds.

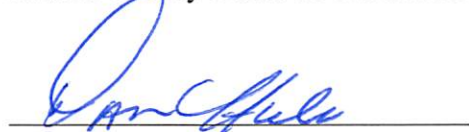
We also support expanding the treatment units South of Hughes Creek Road to the East to further accomplish the project purpose and need. There is an existing road next to the base of Thunder Mountain that could be utilized to expand the Southern unit to the East almost a half mile. The Hughes Creek drainage is heavily used for diverse recreation, especially dispersed camping and OHV and treating the adjacent fuel loads is critical to prevent the risk of wildfire.

Hughes Creek, the West Fork and Painted Rocks waterways would all be significantly affected if this area were to catastrophically burn like areas in the West Fork have in the past. We support protecting water quality and fish habitat by treating the proposed acres and the requested additional acres.

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

Sincerely,


Ravalli County Board of Commissioners



Dan Huls, Chairman

ABSENT

Greg Chilcott, Vice-Chair



Jeff Burrows, Member