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Ravalli County Commissioners

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Chairman Greg Chilcott  
Ravalli County Board of Commissioners  
215 S. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite A  
Hamilton, MT 59840

Dear Mr. Chilcott:

This letter is in response to your objection to the *Meadow Vapor Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact (DN/FONSI)* on the Bitterroot National Forest. The Responsible Official, Forest Supervisor Julie King, and I as the Objection Reviewing Officer have read your objections and have reviewed the EA and draft DN. This letter details my response to your objection based on my review of the project in accordance with 36 CFR 218, *Project Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process*.

The regulations allow for a meeting between objectors and the Reviewing Official. We met on May 2, 2017 to discuss your objection and any concerns surrounding the issues brought forth in it. I appreciated the discussion we had and the hard work the Commission put forth in reviewing this project. Specifically, the work Commissioner Jeff Burrows and you put into looking at each road and considering the proposed actions is especially valued.

As specified at 36 CFR 218.11(b), I must provide a written response to your objection; however, this response need not be point-by-point. I have reviewed the project in light of your objection issues and suggested remedies, and offer the following comments.

I have read and understand your concerns regarding road decommissioning in the project area. My review of the project shows that the District Ranger has worked to be responsive to your recommendations regarding road decommissioning activities. The draft DN reduces total road treatment miles from just over 7 miles down to 1.5 miles total. These remaining 1.5 miles of road segments scheduled for treatment and decommissioning are closed to motor vehicle travel. Our experience shows that recovery of roads is more successful following decompacting and recontouring activities, even though short-term effects of these activities may be visible. No maintenance funds will be used for these activities.

The Meadow Vapor project would decommission 18.5 miles of roads in the project area. The road system analysis completed for this area determined these road segments, most of which are naturally recovering and are often difficult to locate, are no longer needed for Forest management. Removing these roads from the system will not affect future fire management activities because these roads are not passable now. In our meeting, I heard your concern that you would like more information regarding the site-specific reason for decommissioning and storing roads in the project area. **I am instructing the Forest to clarify the site-specific actions being taken and the reasoning behind those actions in the Final Decision Notice, as well as to post the resource-specific roads analysis (Risk/Benefit Table) that was conducted to the project webpage.**



Road management activities in the Meadow Vapor project follow direction found in 36 CFR 212 (Travel Management Rule), the Forest Service handbook, and the Bitterroot Forest Plan. None of the actions under consideration in this decision have any bearing on any Ravalli County right-of-way claim.

In conclusion, I thank you for your comments and participation in this project, and I welcome *continued dialogue* regarding activities on National Forest System lands. Under 36 CFR 218, I find the project is in compliance with all applicable laws and the Forest Plan. This review constitutes the final administrative determination of the Department of Agriculture; no further review from any other Forest Service or Department of Agriculture official of my written response to your objection is available (36 CFR 218.11(b)(2)). The responsible official may sign the Decision Notice for this project.

Sincerely,



DAVID E. SCHMID  
Deputy Regional Forester

cc: Ray G. Smith, Julie King, Eric Winthers