

January 19, 2018

Ms. Tami Paulsen
Team Leader
Rice Ridge Fire Salvage Project
24 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Dear Ms. Paulsen:

After deliberations over the past month the members of the Southwest Crown Collaborative (SWCC) would like to comment on the Rice Ridge Fire Salvage Project. Although we wish to see the project move forward to support the economic interests of the communities within the Southwest Crown landscape, we ask the following:

- Consider the structural attributes of residual forest stands within harvest units. We are particularly concerned with the maintenance of large trees for their many ecological contributions. We believe several tools are available to ensure large trees remain; for example, diameter limits and/or thresholds for the distribution of large snags per acre should be applied. We are confident Forest Service field staff can build these parameters into sale prescriptions.
- Consider the wildlife habitat components of post-harvest stands and the linkages of vegetative cover types across the project area to offer the highest quality and diversity of habitat.
- Ensure the protection of water quality and aquatic habitats through designs that avoid sensitive soils and reduce erosion from roads into streams. Provide adequate protections of residual vegetation and long-term productivity by identifying appropriate seasonal restrictions on logging operations, and where necessary, confining some operations to the winter season so skidding will occur over snow.
- Minimize road construction and new road prisms. Consider opportunities to improve this landscape's transportation system via timely road decommissioning and drainage improvement on roads that will remain on the landscape. The Center Horse Project's transportation analysis, which identified significant road decommissioning, focused on many of the locations of the proposed Rice Ridge Salvage Sale. Take advantage of

available equipment and expertise to mitigate future erosion from the extensive legacy road network in the area.

- Minimize the introduction of weed species via vigilant sale administration and appropriate weed treatments during and after sale operations.
- Take advantage of existing monitoring data, such as GRAIP, carnivore monitoring, and aquatic habitat monitoring, to better understand the impacts of the Rice Ridge Fire, fire suppression efforts, and proposed salvage activities.

Thank you for your openness with the SWCC over the course of the development of this project. We look forward to working with you as project planning continues.

Sincerely,

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