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Comments:
Comments on Proposed Piquett Crk. Project Oct.,2019

Ranger Seth Carbonari, et al

As a resident in the affected area I am basically in favor of treatments to mitigate possible wild fire damage to the area. Your list of goals is admirable, however I'm not sure if they are in order of importance or order of number of comments already received or how they are organized and ordered. Priorities bear explanation.

I think reducing fire hazards is paramount but so is the process. Obviously some logging is necessary, but the difference between a dozen or two and 500 truck loads is quite substantial. At what point will there be a clearer idea of what exact locations and estimated log loads be available? Included in this estimate should be possible road constructions. Any number of logging trucks will greatly increase the incidence of invasive weeds. What's the plan to mitigate that? Could a temporary/portable power washing station be set up to clean trucks tires and undercarriage before they go onto the forest?

Also of major importance, in my opinion, is who does the logging and the parameters for the work to be done. Recent work in adjacent areas has highlighted the difference between USFS crews and commercial contract crews. As I understand it, commercial crews have guidelines and requirements to be met, but experience has shown that they rarely meet them. While a USFS crew may have greater interest in the aesthetics of the finished work, to a commercial crew, "time is money" seems to be the overarching driving force. USFS personnel still live in the area and are neighbors. Commercial crews come in, do their work, make their money and are gone. The arrangement doesn't preclude commercial crews from doing just as good a job both in aesthetics and respect for the total environment, but it does make it more difficult. This disparity must be addressed. I think the aesthetics, the look of the finished project deserves major attention. And if it's done right the first time, USFS crews won't have to come back time and again to fix it.

Along those lines, I think the mind set going into the project is maximally important, especially as regards the goals, both near and long term, and recognition of and agreement on these goals by all parties involved. Logging is NOT the primary goal. It is a means to an end to preserve forest health and maintain recreation activities. In all of Montana and especially in Ravalli county, logging is no longer an economic driver. It is now the outdoor recreation industry. An easy example of the complexity of the issue is maintaining blue ribbon fishing streams and rivers. It takes much much much more than just keeping motor boats out of the water. Shade for water temps. and sedimentation control for breeding/hatching is paramount. Fire hazards, mitigating road impacts, access and traffic both on the water itself and the surrounding areas are but a few of the concerns.

Back to logging for a moment and I acknowledge my ignorance of the business end of it. There are multiple projects being planned for the East Fork, West Fork, Darby and Sula forest districts as well as Corvallis, Stevensville and Lolo areas. To that end, might some sort of public/private sawmill make sense? Not a full blown finished lumber mill but something that would make round logs squared off for transport? How many log trucks does it take to make one load of sawn lumber? Taking logs to Seeley/Swan or Superior or wherever is expensive. Mitigating some of these transport costs could go a long way toward making the projects more doable, more economically feasible. And the savings could go toward paying for the facility. Maybe help some locals who don't want or can't be part of the "gig economy" would have a better life? The site of the old lumber operation south of Darby is still vacant. And there are probably other areas available too. I think there could be multiple benefits all across the board.

I have chosen to speak mostly in broad or general terms since the specifics of the project are still being worked out. I greatly appreciate the outreach that Seth and his team have done and their willingness to go the extra mile to make sure as many voices as possible are heard and also to impart as much information as possible to those voices. I look forward to the next steps.

Sincerely,

Mark R Van Loon