

April 5, 1973

Mr. Steve Yurich
Regional Forester
Forest Service, Region One
Federal Building
Missoula, Montana 59801

Dear Mr. Yurich:

The Forest Service proposal to burn 300,000 acres of public lands to enhance game animal carrying capacity seems to me to raise several fundamental problems. There can be no question that this decision is as much deserving of a very thorough environmental impact evaluation as are others upon which the Forest Service has agreed to file impact statements under the provisions of the National Environmental Protection Act. Even a cursory glance at the Final Environmental Statement on Big Game Habitat Improvement, Burning of Seral Brushfields in the Spokane, St. Joe, Clearwater and Salmon River Drainages of Idaho reveals that it is superficial and grossly inadequate.

Beyond this inadequacy, however, loom some fundamental considerations which demand attention. Harvest of timber by clear-cutting has been roundly condemned by many groups and individuals on a number of grounds. It has been defended, of course, by the Forest Service and the timber industry. The Public Lands Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs last year, after holding hearings, promulgated guidelines for clear cutting on public lands. The Committee recognized that the practice was necessary although it was not possible to answer all the criticisms which had been voiced. An area which has been clear-cut is unsightly immediately after logging. Is a prescribed burn of several hundred or several thousand acres less so? The effect of a clear-cut on soil character has been questioned. Can we answer any more precisely (or at all) as to the results of a burned area? Watershed characteristics and stability are affected by logging operations. Does a burning practice affect an area less?

Clear-cut timber operations were recognized as necessary and having no satisfactory alternative in some instances. Can the same be said for the proposed burning? What regrowth of brush occurs as the result of a clear-cut and prescribed burn? What is accomplished in the proposed burning program which differs from the industry-proposed program for mitigation of game winter range loss caused by construction of Dworshak Dam? How can we justify burning for

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creation of game range when we prohibit the burning of grass fields which is necessary for seed production?

If this proposal is supported by game managers as preferable to logging, is that preference based on comparative hunter access to the area? If so, are there other alternatives?

What is the specific effect, by forest, of the allowable cut in keeping the area involved completely and permanently out of timber production?

What will be the specific effect on soil quality in this mone-brush culture?

Cannot the same winter range effect be achieved through normal timber harvest at appropriate elevations, thus developing a rest-rotation of plant succession?

I think these questions are substantial, legitimate, and unanswered. Neither the justification for the program nor the environmental impact statement adequacy cover these points. In addition to specific answers to each of these questions, will you please furnish me a detailed map showing locations and area of each proposed unit.

Sincerely yours,

James A. McClure
United States Senator

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