



Sent via email to: scnf_plan_rev@fs.fed.us

Salmon-Challis National Forest
Attn: Forest Plan Revision
1206 S. Challis Street
Salmon, ID 83467

RE: Species of Conservation Concern

Dear SCNF Planning Team,

Please accept the following comments on behalf of Trout Unlimited (TU) for the Salmon-Challis National Forest proposed Species of Conservation Concern as it pertains to the upcoming forest planning process. The Salmon-Challis Forest is very important for wild and native fish, plant species and aquatic invertebrates. It's high altitude peaks and clean water provide excellent habitat and defend against impacts from climate change. We appreciate the inventory efforts the forest has completed thus far that provide the public with a comprehensive proposal.

Trout Unlimited is a private non-profit national conservation organization that has more than 300,000 members and supporters nationwide dedicated to conserving, protecting and restoring North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. Since 1959, TU has dedicated staff and volunteers working toward the protection of sensitive ecological systems necessary to support robust native and wild trout populations in their respective ranges. We recognize the high value of public lands and the role public lands play in providing habitat to coldwater fisheries, drinking water and wildlife habitat.

In Idaho, TU has over 2,000 members and 9 state chapters whose members actively participate and enjoy the many resources offered across the forest landscape. Many of our members directly benefit from the natural public resources within the forest boundary. There are few places of more importance for fishing, hunting and general recreation for our membership than our public lands. There are also few issues as critical to the conservation of our wildlife, their habitats, and maintaining our outdoor traditions as forest planning on our public lands. Thus, we offer our comments as a continued and concerned participant in the overall forest planning process.

We were happy to see the inclusion of the Big Lost River Mountain Whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*) on the forest's Potential Aquatic Species of Conservation Concern. This species is an important member of the native fish assemblage in the Big Lost drainage and has experienced significant declines in distribution throughout the watershed. Challenges to its persistence have been recognized by Idaho Fish and Game, the Salmon-Challis National Forest, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and having it listed as a Species of Conservation Concern

will continue to help enhance efforts to improve its habitat on the forest and elsewhere in the Big Lost River Watershed.

Conversely, we question the Forest's decision to leave Westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) off the list. While gains have been made in shoring up populations of genetically pure Westslope cutthroat in the Upper Salmon River Basin, many challenges still remain. Habitat degradation, climate change and genetic introgression still challenge the fish's persistence over time. Having the fish remain on the Species of Conservation Concern helps organizations like Trout Unlimited assist Federal and State agencies recover and conserve Westslope cutthroat trout through actions such as securing funding for habitat projects that will help secure healthy populations into the future. We ask that the forest reconsider its decision not to list the fish as a Species of Conservation Concern.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael T. Gibson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Gibson" clearly legible.

Michael Gibson
Trout Unlimited
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Boise, ID 83702
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