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Sent via email - September 6, 2019

RE: Bear Country Project Scoping

We are writing in regards to the proposed Bear Country Project. We attended the public meeting in Forks of Salmon and have followed updates online. Beginning back with that public meeting, the USFS has put up a very opaque wall around this project with these vague explanations and maps that have no details of what treatment might be planned for where, just that something was to happen all over the mid-mountain between the North & South Forks. It could have been so much more educational to the public to have USFS representatives tell us what was proposed, show us where, then answer our questions. You choose to divide us up so we can’t talk in a group leaving individuals to leave with less of an understanding.

The Purposes and Need for action sounds fantastic! I agree with reducing wildfires and its danger to firefighters and communities. I’m all for actions which protect and enhance diversity while promoting forest health. And please restore fire adapted ecosystems! The Salmon River can use all the help it can get on these important objectives so we can get our salmon populations back in good numbers. But I don’t trust that your objective is protecting water quality, wildlife, late seral forests and the river community or is it to cut timber to justify this project? Why did WUIs warrant only one paragraph then no further mention? Why is the term “sensitive species” also only seen once in passing?

How the Project is moving forward is explained thinly in this Scoping letter. Salmon River residents who may or may not have attended the first public meeting and who may or may not have read the lines of this thickly worded letter, all say they don’t know what exactly is planned in the Bear Country Project. Is this a deliberate tactic? I don’t apologize for our lack of trust in the USFS KNF. We have lived here since the 1970’s.

I can’t figure out from the map and Project Scoping letter, where miles of road will be built in this watershed or be reopened in sections that were closed for good reason. I do know that the anadromous fisheries and rare amphibians can’t take too many more road failures. The mud which filled the rivers in summer of 2015 - that was directly connected to a logging spur road in steep terrane washing out. So I am concerned about where the unmapped new landings you want to build are. From the map it looks like there are already Legacy sediment sites within and next to sites you want to promote forest health.

Will you be taking any big trees? I would have to guess – yes, but it’s hidden in the details of the treatment in LSRs. I strongly disagree with cutting of late-successional or old-growth forest stands or any roads built to get to them. Is a FRZ in NSO and LSR areas another name for cutting timber in these areas but under the guise of FRZs? It gives FRZs a bad name. This “forest health” treatment which could include cutting fire resilient trees within LSRs for timber goes contrary to the Northwest Forest Plan. I would think you could instead NOT log in nesting, foraging and roosting habitat of NSOs and leave mature natural stands within the project area alone. Also remember spotted owls are just one indicator species in a range of animals needing this habitat. Have you considered the effects of your treatments on the dwindling populations of Pacific fishers? Martens? Chinook salmon? Pileated woodpeckers? Salamanders? They are already impacted by the stress of our long term drought here.

How many NSO areas will you be cutting in and on? Your map doesn’t show that clearly, it only shows a dot at the site, not a circle of land used for foraging and roosting. You mention three NSO sites but I believe there are more sites than that within the project. Sites KL1013 & KL1014 look like they have heli logging, skyline and extensive logging activity planned all around them. Doesn’t heli logging leave a lot of fuels on the ground thus endangering these key indicator species?

Hand cut & pile as long as you do it in a timely manner so piles don’t become traps for creatures who move in over the years (amphibians, small mammals, snakes, etc) only to be burned up. And cover the piles with waxed or oiled paper – not toxic plastic sheets spread all over the mountain to eventually burn emitting smelly, toxic clouds. Would you do that in your backyard?

Plantations encourage hotter fires. Where’s the diversity in an even age stand? Nearly 6,000 acres of new plantations planned for forest resilience doesn’t sound logical. Cut your plantations for timber! That’s what you planted them for.

The largest chunks of treatment areas seem to be the LSR (the big $ timber) + Partial Retention VQO (I honestly have no idea what that means.) In these places, how do you plan to “provide an attractive, forested landscape where management activities remain visually subordinate to the character of the landscape and manage human activities so they are subordinate to the character of the landscape” at the same time as you “manage for a sustained yield of wood products in areas capable, available, and suitable for timber production.” It doesn’t say in the scoping letter.

How will it affect the Wild & Scenic River to have this much area along the river logged? How many logging trucks daily running on our narrow and dangerous road and for how long?

I would hope to see you identify the treatments you are proposing, showing us WHAT you are going to actually do and WHERE. Then consider the actual impacts on the forest soil, water, air, habitats and wildlife in this very important watershed.

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