**Draft Forest Plan**

**Goals for Wildlife**

FW-GL-WL-01. Through cooperation and collaboration with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, other federal agencies, state agencies, and tribes on conservation strategies, recovery plans, and habitat management, ecological conditions on National Forest System lands contribute towards recovery of federally listed threatened or endangered species, candidate, and proposed species are conserved and future listings are prevented.

**Desired Conditions for Wildlife**

FW-DC-WL-01. The Nez Perce-Clearwater provides habitat conditions for federally listed threatened, endangered, and candidate plant and animal species that contribute to their recovery to the point at which listing is no longer appropriate. Habitat used by federally listed species provide conditions to meet their life history needs.

FW-DC-WL-02. Ecological conditions in the Nez Perce-Clearwater planning area provide for, or contribute, to the persistence of populations of **species of conservation concern** over the long-term with sufficient distribution to be resilient and adaptable to stressors and likely future environments.

FW-DC-WL-03. The arrangement of vegetation patches ranges widely in size, shape, and structure to provide connectivity for wildlife. Patches are juxtaposed across the landscape, forming a landscape pattern consistent with natural range of variation. These patterns vary by habitat type group, slope, aspect, and topographic position. Species are able to move freely across and between habitats, allowing for dispersal, migration genetic interaction, and species recruitment.

FW-DC-WL-04. The Nez Perce-Clearwater provides the ecological conditions for the long-term persistence of **fisher**, whose habitat generally follows the distribution of the warm moist potential vegetation type, although fishers sometimes use other potential vegetation types. Fisher habitat is composed of large patches of tall forest with trees greater than or equal to 25 meters tall arranged in complex, highly connected patterns at the 20-40 square mile landscape scale. Patches of tall forest cover an extent of approximately 50 percent across the warm moist potential vegetation type group forestwide consistent with the desired conditions found in Table 6 in the warm moist potential vegetation type section. At the eight square mile home range scale, fishers benefit from variety in successional stages resulting from a patchy mosaic of stand heights that occur in patterns that reflects natural disturbance (see Warm Moist Potential Vegetation Type). The shapes, sizes, distribution, density, and height of forest patches vary by topography, slope, aspect, and topographic position, such as ridge, mid-slope, toe slope, and valley bottom to provide variety in seasonal habitats, denning, and foraging fisher habitat. Some stands of tall forests, distributed across the warm moist potential vegetation type, provide a high prevalence of large trees and snags of 20 or greater inches diameter at breast height, abundant coarse woody debris, and multiple denning and resting habitat canopy layers (Sauder, 2014; Sauder & Rachlow, 2014).

FW-DC-WL-05. **Bighorn sheep** habitats provide grass and forbs with high protein content, which is maintained by natural disturbance juxtaposed near rugged escape cover. Bighorn sheep habitat reflects its historic distribution and connectivity. Habitat is composed of native vegetation, including upland shrublands, upland grasslands, riparian shrublands, and riparian woodlands. **Support the comments submitted by Wild Sheep Foundation groups.**

**Standards for Wildlife**

FW-STD-WL-01. **Canada lynx habitat** shall be managed in accordance with the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007b) and Record of Decision (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007a) and any amendments, updates, or new direction forthcoming. **The documentation that Idaho ever had a viable, self-sustaining Canada lynx populations is weak, at best. Beginning in 1970, I have spent thousands of hours conducting aerial and ground wildlife field work, predominately on the Nez Perce-Clearwater and Payette National Forests. I have seen two Canada lynx, both together, near Sherman Saddle on the 500 road, in early November, 1976. Extensive bait/hair sample surveys have failed to document a significant presence of Canada lynx anywhere in Idaho. The sporadic, verified Canada lynx reports in Idaho normally occur shortly after the high cycle of snowshoe populations across central and south boarding Canadian provinces. The Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest represents the extreme southern boundary of Canada lynx distribution. Again, with no documentation of historic viable populations, plus no documentation reports of Canada lynx on the forest on recent years, what is the justification for managing for lynx habitat?**

**FW-STD-WL-02. In order to prevent disease transmission between wild and domestic sheep, domestic sheep or goat grazing shall not be authorized in or within 16 miles of bighorn sheep occupied core herd home ranges. Support the comments submitted by Wild Sheep Foundation groups.**

**Guidelines**

FW-GDL-WL-01. In order to provide connectivity between watershed basins (HUC 10), corridors of mature and mid-seral forest with canopy closure greater than 40 percent should be retained and should connect to patches of mature and mid-seral forest in adjacent watershed basins. Considerations for location and width should include topography, elevation, and configuration of riparian areas.

FW-GDL-WL-02. Infrastructure, such as communication towers and energy developments, should not be located such that they adversely affect dispersal, migration, crucial winter habitat, or movement of wildlife.

FW-GDL-WL-03. When closing mines, actions should be taken to avoid loss of bat maternity, hibernation habitat, or bat entombment.

FW-GDL-WL-04. New and reconstructed livestock water developments should be equipped with wildlife escape ramps.

FW-GDL-WL-05. New authorizations and permit reauthorizations for domestic goat packing should include provisions to prevent disease transmission between domestic goats and bighorn sheep. **Support the comments submitted by Wild Sheep Foundation groups.**

**2.3.1Multiple Uses Wildlife**

This section applies to wildlife, such as big game, fur bearers, and upland game, which provide non-consumptive uses and wildlife used by the Nez Perce Tribe for ceremonial, spiritual, or cultural uses. The plan area supports native populations of mountain goat, moose, mule deer, whitetail deer, black bear, wolf, cougar, and bighorn sheep. Prominent in the area are herds of elk, which at one time were among the largest in the nation but have since greatly declined. There is a strong desire by the public, local and state governments, tribes, outfitter and guides, sportsman’s groups, and other interest groups to recover and grow elk populations.

**The current wolf population is not ‘native’, although there was a remnant population in the North Fork prior to the translocation in 1995-96.**

**The major decline of the elk herds on the Forest occurred during the winter of 1996-97. The “strong desire to recover and grow elk populations’ has been ongoing for the past 50 years, and more so during the past 22! EVERY forest plan developed for the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests, beginning with the Multiple Use plans in the 1960’s, has identified advancing plant succession as the cause limiting elk populations. With exception of wild fire, and logging, neither forest has adequately provided habitat conditions to reverse the downward trend in Clearwater Basin elk populations.**

**In addition to depressed elk populations, local economies that profit from elk hunting have lost over $10.5 million dollars every year during the past 22 years; the Forest concern regarding providing for local economies doesn’t seem very transparent.**

**The iconic Clearwater elk populations are those in the Lochsa, North Fork and South Fork Clearwater, the Selway and the breaks of the Salmon River upstream from Riggins.**

**The accompanying table compares hunter and harvest data for the 13 IDFG game management units in their Clearwater administrative region. Actually, there are 16 game management units in the region, however, three offer permit/draw elk hunting, whereas the other 13 provide general, over-the-counter elk hunting opportunity. The comparison represents the 5-year period prior to the devastating 1996-97 winter, to the last 5-year harvest period, 2015-19. Also, this comparison includes areas off-forest.**

**If the Palouse Zone is excluded from the original 1992-96 vs 2015-19 comparison, and just addresses the game management with predominate USFS lands, the declines are as follows: hunter numbers, -51%; harvest, -50%; days hunted, -54%; bulls harvested, -59% and cow, +299%. In this scenario, the economic loss from fewer hunter days is $9.9 million dollars.**

**Goals**

FW-GL-WLMU-01. Habitat contributes to wildlife populations at levels meeting Idaho Department of Fish and Game species management plan objectives. **The Forest is way behind the power curve in this, especially in the Lolo and Elk City Zones.**

**Desired Conditions**

FW-DC-WLMU-01. Habitat supports opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, observing, photography, subsistence, cultural interactions, and the exercise of treaty reserved rights. Wildlife are distributed in habitats within their respective seasonal ranges.

FW-DC-WLMU-02. Habitats in each potential vegetation type function within desired range of variation to contribute to multiple use wildlife needs.

FW-DC-WLMU-03. At the forest scale, habitat for wild ungulates provides conditions to meet life history requirements year-round. Vegetation in these habitats are primarily composed of native plants.

FW-DC-WLMU-04. Pacific yew plant communities and timbered areas with mature and old yew-wood thickets provide moose winter habitat. **Pacific yew is susceptible to sun-scolding. Many past over-story removal timber harvest projects have removed too much over-story and the Pacific yew stands were lost.**

FW-DC-WLMU-05. Natural processes contribute to the mosaic of habitats needed by ungulates. **This concept applies to the non-commercial portions of the forest. However, in the commercial timber components, timber management must be used to create and maintain mosaic habitats needed by ungulates.**

**Guidelines**

FW-GDL-WLMU-01. When implementing projects, consider taking action to improve effectiveness of road closures and other travel plan decisions to reduce unauthorized motorized use. **Enforcement of closures also needs to be emphasized, and a priority.**

FW-GDL-WLMU-02. New fencing installation or reconstruction should be designed to reduce barriers to wildlife movement.

FW-GDL-WLMU-03. In order to reduce disturbance to wintering big game, management activities should be reduced or minimized in big game winter range between December 1st and March 15th**. Does this also include recreational use? I support timber management during this time period. Protection of elk calving need to be addressed from May 1 and June 15.**

**2.3.2Multiple Uses Wildlife-Elk**

**Desired Conditions Forestwide**

FW-DC-ELK-01. Habitat conditions maintain or improve elk habitat use and provide nutritional resources sufficient to support productive elk populations. The amount and distribution of early seral nutritional resources are consistent with the desired conditions in the Forestlands and Meadows, Grasslands, and Shrublands sections. **Elk habitat quality is not degraded by invasive species. Given the wide spread distribution of noxious weeds in the forest, how will this be accomplished, especially in non-roaded and designated wilderness areas?**

FW-DC-ELK-02. Elk populations are distributed throughout the planning area in suitable habitats. Motorized access does not preclude use of high or moderate quality nutritional resources. **According to the Cook, et al. report to the CBC, much of the forest is deficient in high and moderate quality nutritional resources.**

**Desired Conditions Management Area 1**

MA1-DC-ELK-01. Elk habitats in Management Area 1 provide nutritional resources primarily through natural processes and are consistent with the natural range of variation. Vegetation is composed of native plants. **Several larges contagious areas in Management Area 1 are outside designated wilderness, plus these areas support the “iconic” elk herds. Active habitat management needs to occur in these areas in order to support ungulate populations. Obviously, ‘natural processes’ are the only option in designated wilderness.**

**Desired Conditions Management Area 2**

MA2-DC-ELK-01. **High-quality elk nutrition increases so that between 10-20 percent of each Hydrologic Unit Code 12 in Management Area 2** produces at least 2.6kcal/gram of dietary digestible energy while remaining consistent with desired conditions for vegetation described in the Forestlands section. **What management techniques will be used to assure at least 2.6kcal/gram of dietary digestible energy will be produced? How long will this value persist, once created? How is this value measured across large landscapes, how frequently will it be monitored and who is responsible for monitoring? What DDE level is deemed unsatisfactory as per ‘high-quality’ elk nutrition, and is there a management plan in place to respond then DDE drop below desired conditions?**

MA2-DC-ELK-02. Areas at least 5000 acres in size exist without motorized access open to the public to maintain habitat use by elk. Areas of high and moderate nutrition potential remain unfragmented by new motorized trails. **There need to be enforcement and monitoring to accomplish this condition. Unfortunately, past experience has documented unauthorized creation of trails in many parts of the forest, especially during hunting seasons, which in turn, causes others to violate.**

**Desired Conditions Management Area 3**

MA3-DC-ELK-01. **At least 15 percent of the landscape at the Hydrologic Unit Code 12 scale is composed of high-quality nutritional resources** located at distances from open motorized access that promotes habitat use by elk. Open motorized access does not preclude elk use of newly created nutritional resources at the HUC 12 scale. **How will this condition be delineated and what is the monitoring and management schedule to maintain this condition over time?**

**Objectives Management Area 1**

**MA1-OBJ-ELK-01.** Treat 500 acres of invasive weeds in elk habitat every 5 years. **IMO, at best, this is tokenism, the numbers of acres invaded per year will exceed the acres treated.**

**Objectives Management Area 2**

**MA2-OBJ-ELK-01.** At least 50 percent of the treatments to accomplish desired conditions for vegetation in early seral habitats over a rolling 5-year time window will be targeted in areas with moderate or preferably high nutritional capacity. Treatments should be designed and implemented to promote and sustain high nutritional capacity for at least ten years. **How are areas of ‘preferred high nutritional capacity’ identified and does this capacity change over time?**

**MA2-OBJ-ELK-02.** In Management Area 2, allow vegetation desired conditions to be achieved through wildland fire on 10,000 to 15,000 acres annually, preferably in areas with high nutritional capacity, to contribute to high quality nutritional resources for elk. **What is the plan when conditions, for what every reason(s), prevent accomplishing this objective for continuous years? I realize the best habitat for ungulates occurs with late summer/early fall burns, however, resent past experience has shown this will not likely happen every year. Spring burns also provide enhanced nutrition, admittedly not as great as fall burns, however, the opportunity for annual treatments is almost assured, the cost is significantly less, plus done under the proper conditions, will treat both winter and summer habitats. PLEASE, don’t lock into only fall burns! Also, IMO, the proposed acreage is too low, considering the entire forest.**

**Objectives Management Area 3**

**MA3-OBJ-ELK-01.** In order to create a landscape that produces between 10 to 15 percent high nutritional resources for elk away from open motorized access, 20 percent of the treatments to restore the natural range of variation for early seral habitats in Management Area 3 will be targeted to produce high-quality nutritional resources and be located farther than half a mile from open motorized access. These treatments should be accomplished with methods designed to result in high nutritional response. **Why would other treatments be recommended? How were 10-15% and 20% values derived? Again, is there a monitoring system and a plan if areas fall below the objectives?**

**MA3-OBJ-ELK-02.** Improve habitat use for elk on 15 percent of Management Area 3 that has high quality or high potential for nutritional resources within 15 years. **Does this mean 85% that high quality or high potential habitats will not be treated for 15 years?**

**Guidelines Management Area 2**

**MA2-GDL-ELK-01.** To maximize elk habitat, use and avoid fragmenting large areas of elk habitat that is currently not accessible by motorized access. New motorized trails open to the public should not be authorized unless adjacent areas of 5000 acres or larger can be maintained without motorized access. The location of new motorized trails should avoid areas of high or moderate nutrition potential when

possible. **Is there a map that delineates this information, i.e. areas with over 5,000 acres in Area 2, plus proposed new public trails open to motorized use? As with roads, not all trails have equal impacts.**

**MA2-GDL-ELK-02.** To increase available habitat for elk, elk habitat improvement projects should be designed to increase available summer forage in areas of moderate or high nutrition potential. **Are there maps that display summer habitat areas with moderate or high nutrition potential for treatment?**

**Guidelines Management Area 3**

**MA3-GDL-ELK-01.** When conducting management activities that adversely affect elk habitat use, projects should be designed to maintain or improve predicted percent body fat of cow elk. Factors that maintain or improve predicted percent body fat include one or more of the following: the amount of high-quality nutritional resources usable by elk, increased distances from open motorized routes during spring through fall, improve habitat use on slopes less than 40%, or improved vegetation interspersion. These should be applied at the HUC 12 scale. **How will it be determined when management activities will result in adverse impacts to elk habitat use, and who and how predict percent body fat of cow elk? Also, who will determine which mitigation factors will be used ?**