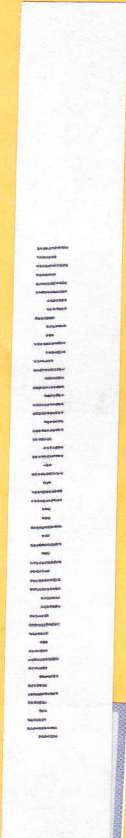


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COMMITTEE FOR IDAHO'S HIGH DESERT

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Zach Peterson, Forest Planner
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Supervisor's Office
903 3rd Street
Kamiah, Idaho 83536

April 19, 2020

Subject: Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Plan Revision DEIS Comments

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Committee for Idaho's High Desert (CIHD), we thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Plan Revision DEIS, dated December 20, 2019. Incorporated in the State of Idaho on July 15, 1981, CIHD is an Idaho-based all volunteer, grassroots organization dedicated to the proper use and management of our public lands. CIHD represents hundreds of members living in Idaho and throughout the United States who care about the proper management of our public lands and that these lands are managed in accordance with applicable Federal law, regulations and guidelines.

Introduction

- Collectively, CIHD is extremely concerned about the present and future use and management of Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest lands. Much of this landscape and the diverse, natural habitats it supports, provide environmentally critical ecosystem functions and benefits some of which include:
 - those essential to federally listed threatened and endangered species;
 - wilderness and wild and scenic river values;
 - watershed and water quality protection;
 - important habitats for a wide and diverse range of fauna and flora;
 - among other resource values.

At nearly 4 million acres, the forest lands under your management purview are not 'ordinary' forest lands as they are ecologically and geographically situated where they serve as one of the most important and biologically diverse wildlife corridors in North America! The area's tremendous biodiversity makes it one of the most important areas in the Northern U.S. Rockies and Southern Canadian Rockies for large forest carnivores and other iconic species (i.e. Canada lynx, fisher, wolverine, wolves, black bear, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, bald eagle) and contains some of the least developed and ecologically significant landscapes in the lower 48 states. Consequently, our comments are broad in scope as they focus on the DEIS' major short-

comings in its review and assessment of potential forest plan revisions and associated environmental effects.

- Library closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic have severely impacted the public's ability to comment during the DEIS review period ending on April 20, 2020. Were paper versions of the DEIS and Forest Plan Revision documents even distributed to the Boise City and Treasure Valley's library system for public review? Boise, being the State capital of Idaho, and the surrounding Treasure Valley represents about 40 percent of the state's total population.

The Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) stress that environmental information and documents must be readily available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made and actions taken; and public scrutiny is essential. Unfortunately, the current Covid-19 "pandemic" lockdown we all face has greatly hampered the public's ability to review the DEIS and associated documents. The early March closure of local libraries, supposedly a repository for paper copies of the subject DEIS and related documents, negated an essential public opportunity to review either the paper or the online version of these documents via library Wifi and/or computer networks.

Any online review is also hampered for those who do not have computers or internet access at home or at another convenient location. Also, any online review of such large, complex documents is fundamentally cumbersome and not review 'friendly' as it is not easy to navigate within and between two large documents - an important task when trying to fully understand and compare the specific differences and tradeoffs between the alternatives under study. If Forest Service offices were not closed due to the pandemic, CIHD would have requested a hard copy of the DEIS in early March to facilitate our review.

With Forest Service offices closed, in addition to the conditions noted above, our ability to provide a detailed review of the DEIS was severely compromised.

- Relevant to our specific comments, we wish to remind you of the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (herein referred to as NEPA or the Act) which include: "... promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and the biosphere; and enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation."

Under Section 101 of the Act, Congress recognized the profound influences of population growth, high-density urbanization, industrial expansion, resource exploitation, and new and expanding technological advances influencing **the critical importance of restoring and maintaining environmental quality** to the overall welfare of man. This section further states that it is the responsibility of the Federal Government to coordinate Federal plans, functions, programs and resources to the end that the Nation may (1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; (2) **attain the widest range of uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other**

undesirable and unintended consequences; (3) preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, whenever possible, an environment which supports diversity; and (4) enhance the quality of renewable resources (emphasis added). Lastly, Section 102 directs Federal agencies to utilize a systematic, interdisciplinary approach which will insure the integrated use of the natural and social sciences and the environmental design arts in planning and decision-making which may have an impact on man's environment.

It is also imperative to remember that "the NEPA process is intended to help public officials make decisions that are based on understanding environmental consequences, and **take actions that protect, restore and enhance the environment**" (see 40 CFR Section 1500.1(c), emphasis added). The Revised Forest Plan and DEIS must clearly meet these Congressional and regulatory directives.

Specific Comments

CIHD recognizes the complexity of the planning task at hand. We are not opposed to "multiple use". We support "sustainable" logging practices, motorized recreation, developed and dispersed recreation opportunities, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, fish and wildlife protection, clean air, clean water, etc. What is of equal importance is "there's a time and place" for our actions. An appropriate balance and doing what's best is crucial if we are to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainability of the natural and ecological values that support the natural world and the benefits that we all depend upon.

To develop a new Forest Plan that protects and sustains the outstanding natural resource values and inherent benefits these forest lands provide, it is imperative that the DEIS be prepared in a comprehensive and sensitive way so as to insure the area's current outstanding values will continue to provide 'sustainable' ecological, biological, recreational and economic benefits for future generations to come. This is a goal all of us can embrace.

The intent of our specific comments is to identify the short-comings of the existing DEIS and to offer potential solutions. Our goal is to improve the DEIS in a way that will result in better decisions affecting the future use and management of these critically important forest lands.

To begin, our specific comments focus on some of the legal and regulatory requirements of NEPA that are particularly noteworthy and applicable to the current DEIS.

- No Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative Is Identified in DEIS

Sections 102(2)(C)(i) and (iii) of the Act clearly indicate that "the environmental impacts of the proposed action" and "alternatives to the proposed action" must be evaluated in environmental documents prepared under the Act.

This point is further emphasized in Section 1502.14 of the Regulations entitled "Alternatives Including the Proposed Action". The section title in itself makes it obvious that a "Proposed Action" needs to be identified and evaluated in the DEIS.

Section 1502.14 states "... the environmental impacts of the proposal and the alternatives be presented in comparative form, thus sharply defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decisionmaker and the public".

Some other references in the Regulations that clearly indicate the need to include a Proposed Action in the DEIS are:

- Section 1502.14(b): "Devote substantial treatment to each alternative considered in detail including the **proposed action** so that reviewers may evaluate their comparative merits",
- Section 1502.14(e): "Identify the agency's **preferred alternative** or alternatives. . . unless another law prohibits the expression of such a preference",
- Section 1502.14(f): "Include appropriate mitigation measures not already included in the **proposed action** and alternatives, and
- Section 1502.16, Environmental Consequences: "... The discussion will include the environmental impacts of the alternatives including the **proposed action . . .**" (emphasis added)

Based on the Regulations referenced above, the DEIS' failure to identify and evaluate a 'Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative' clearly fails to meet the legal requirements for EIS document preparation.

The Forest Service acknowledges this failure. "A proposed action or preferred alternative is not identified in the DEIS. Any individual component of any alternative analyzed in the DEIS may be combined into a preferred alternative. A preferred alternative will be identified with the release of the FEIS and Draft ROD in 2021."

To not identify the 'Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative' until publishing the Final EIS is also problematic. Considering that the public typically is not afforded an opportunity to comment on a FEIS, the whole spirit and intent of the Act will be violated. NEPA requires and encourages public involvement throughout the DEIS review process. For the public not to have the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative before the Record of Decision is issued, clearly violates the whole spirit and intent of the Act!

Considering this flaw in the current DEIS and the reasons described below, it appears that a revised DEIS needs to be prepared and issued for public review and comment prior to issuing

the FEIS and Draft ROD. Most importantly, the revised DEIS must identify a Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative and evaluate a 'reasonable' range of alternatives.

As noted in Section 1502.9(a) of the Regulations, "... The draft statement must fulfill and satisfy to the fullest extent possible the requirements established for final statements in section 102(2)(C) of the Act. If a draft statement is so inadequate as to preclude meaningful analysis, the agency shall prepare and circulate a revised draft of the appropriate portion."

- Range of "Reasonable" Alternatives Evaluated in DEIS

Section 1502.14 of the Regulations entitled, "Alternatives Including the Proposed Action", begins by stating "This section is the heart of the Environmental Impact Statement" and directs Federal agencies to "Rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives, and for alternatives which were eliminated from detailed study, briefly discuss the reasons for their having been eliminated."

Our review has led us to question whether the alternatives considered in the DEIS are "reasonable" as defined under the Regulations. Considering the environmental issues and concerns identified during scoping for the DEIS, the range of action alternatives evaluated in the DEIS has been significantly narrowed and fail to adequately and appropriately represent the public's concerns. An additional concern is that the DEIS' description of the alternatives, and of their associated environmental impacts, is minimal and incomplete. For example, where is the comparative summary of the **environmental impacts** of the alternatives, as required under Section 1502.14 of the Regulations, and not just a "bare bones" summary of the plan components/elements proposed?

Our conclusion that the action alternatives evaluated are 'unreasonable' stems from the illogical mix of plan components included in each alternative as none of the action alternatives logically balance the pertinent environmental issues and concerns (i.e. wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, timber harvest, motorized access, etc.) identified during scoping.

What constitutes a 'reasonable' range of alternatives? It would seem 'reasonable' alternatives would include those that clearly meet the spirit and intent of the Act and the Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the Act; are practical or feasible in terms of land and resource capability/suitability and ecological sustainability; meet Forest natural resource goals/objectives; address public issues/concerns; economic considerations; and common sense.

As noted below, the Act and Regulations state the following purposes and policies to guide the NEPA planning process and the development of 'reasonable' alternatives:

- The NEPA process is intended to help public officials **take actions that protect, restore and enhance the environment** [see Section 1500.1(c)];

- Use the NEPA process to **identify and assess the reasonable alternatives to proposed actions that will avoid or minimize adverse impacts of these actions** upon the quality of the human environment [see Section 1500.2(e)];
- **Use all practicable means, consistent with the requirements of the Act and other essential considerations of national policy, to restore and enhance the quality of the human environment and avoid or minimize any possible adverse effects of their actions** upon the quality of the human environment [see Section 1500.2(f)].
(emphasis added)

Based on the above, we offer the following specific comments relative to the alternatives developed and evaluated in detail in the DEIS.

1) Alternative X is clearly not a “reasonable” alternative and should be discussed under “Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study”.

Considering Alternative X

- quadruples the timber output/harvest (241-261 mmbf) compared to the No Action/present condition (50-60 mmbf) and exceeds the forests’ sustained yield limit by 20 million board-feet per year;
- includes no recommended wilderness or wild and scenic river designations, and would actually remove proposed wilderness designations that were identified in the existing 1987 Forest Plans;
- and has the greatest level of motorized recreation and access, etc.

Alternative X clearly fails the test of “reasonableness” as it grossly fails to restore and enhance the quality of the human environment and avoid or minimize any possible adverse effects. Under Alternative X, adverse impacts on wildlife, threatened and endangered species, soil erosion, water quality, fish and wildlife habitats, old growth and snag availability, etc., in essence all environmental components except logging revenues, would be significantly and adversely affected. The alternative is largely a plan to increase logging, prescribed burning and motorized access with little regard to other resource values and concerns important to the public as identified in scoping.

Alternative X clearly fails to meet the purposes of NEPA or meet the Regulations noted above as the adverse environmental effects of this alternative are totally unreasonable and unacceptable.

2) Alternative W is not a “reasonable” alternative as proposed.

The four-fold increase in annual timber output proposed under Alternative W from 50-60 mmbf (the present ‘No Action’ condition) to 221-241 mmbf - the maximum sustained yield identified for the Forests, fails the test of ‘reasonableness’. What justifies a four-fold increase from

current harvest levels and the adverse environmental impacts that would occur from this level of timber harvest? A doubling of harvest is more reasonable in the foreseeable future provided adequate criteria, standards and guidelines that protect the environment direct the harvest. We cannot predict what future resource conditions will be with climate change, fire, insect infestations, etc. But wilderness/roadless protection and minimal human management and interference on ecosystems overall provides the highest level of environmental and ecological benefit and protection than any other comprehensive resource management strategy. Nature, and the multiple natural resource benefits it provides, has been shown to do best when just allowed to do what millennium of evolution and ecosystem resilience naturally provides.

Also, to include the largest “Wilderness Recommendation” (856,932 acres) with a four-fold increase in the annual timber harvest limit (221-241 mmbf) just polarizes the issues trying to be resolved through the forest planning process rather than coming up with an acceptable, more ‘reasonable’ course of action. We believe this combination of plan elements is illogical and impractical considering the volatility of the issues relevant to this planning effort.

Of the ‘action’ alternatives in the current DEIS, Alternative Z is the most ‘reasonable’ of the four evaluated. Changes are needed, however, to eliminate non-conforming motorized/mechanized uses which violate the Wilderness Act of 1964 from the wilderness proposal and ideally would add Bighorn-Weitas (260,000 acres) – the largest wildland/undeveloped area on the forests, to the wilderness recommendation list. Together, this revised level of wilderness protection (about 27% of the forests’ land base) balanced with the more moderate timber output of 60-80 mmbf annually would be ‘reasonable’ as it provides some level of balance between the two opposing factions (wilderness and timber harvest) and insures a moderate level of protection for the forests’ important ecosystems that provide natural and human benefits. This is supposedly the ‘environmental friendly’ alternative in the current mix of DEIS action alternatives, so let’s make it so.

Note: In the Alternatives chapter, the timber outputs identified in Table 4 for Alternatives Y and Z differ from those in the text. Under Alternative Y, the text identifies a timber output of 130-150 mmbf and Table 4 identifies a timber output of 120-140 mmbf. Under Alternative Z, the text identifies a timber output of 80-100 mmbf and Table 4 identifies a timber output of 60-80 mmbf. Which timber output is proposed? This discrepancy needs to be corrected.

Similarly, in Table 3 under Item 2(b) ‘Recommended Wilderness’, the text under ‘No Action’ identifies 198,200 acres and Table 3 identifies 197,695 acres. Under Alternative Z, the text identifies 475,000 acres and Table 3 identifies 569,755 acres. This discrepancy needs to be corrected.

3) Include and evaluate the “Citizen-Science Alternative” submitted by Friends of the Clearwater (FOC) in the DEIS.

Section 1501.2(c) of the Regulations states “Study, develop and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action in any proposal which involves unresolved

conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources as provided by Section 102(2)(E) of the Act.”

CIHD supports the inclusion and detailed evaluation of the “Citizen-Science Alternative” submitted by Friends of the Clearwater (FOC) in the DEIS. Considering that the “Citizen-Science Alternative” would (1) protect 100 percent of the 1.5 million-acre roadless base as designated wilderness without motorized/mechanized use, and (2) uses the best available science to advocate for measurable, quantifiable standards for other resource values and uses (i.e. fisheries, watershed protection, wildlife habitat, logging, etc.), this environmentally-focused alternative would clearly meet the purposes of the Act and Regulations. As wilderness, it would protect, restore and enhance the environment [see Section 1500.1(c)]; avoid or minimize adverse impacts upon the quality of the human environment [see Section 1500.2(e)]; and use all practicable means, consistent with the requirements of the Act and other essential considerations of national policy, to restore and enhance the quality of the human environment and avoid or minimize any possible adverse effects upon the same [see Section 1500.2(f)].

The inclusion of the “Citizen-Science Alternative” and the discussion of its environmental consequences and impacts in the EIS will allow decision makers and the public to better understand and compare the merits of this alternative against the other action alternatives evaluated. CIHD is of the opinion that it is possible to designate all Idaho Roadless Rule areas as wilderness and still have a high sustainable level of timber outputs from remaining forest lands. Through designated ‘wilderness’ protection, positive impacts on wildlife, fisheries, watershed, soils, old growth, primitive recreation, and water quality would be high, and positive economic benefits to local communities, outfitters and guides, etc. would be realized due to the primitive and dispersed recreation opportunities these protected lands and waters will offer. Economic prosperity and tourism in areas such as Stanley, Ketchum, Riggins, etc. greatly benefit from nearby designated wilderness and wild and scenic rivers.

4) What criteria, guidelines and/or rationale was used to determine the plan elements including the specific wilderness, wild and scenic river, access, and timber outputs included in Alternatives W, Y and Z?

In the ‘Purpose and Need’ chapter of the DEIS, Section 1.2.1 entitled ‘Forest Plan Revision’ identifies eight primary decisions to be made in forest plans:

1. Forest-wide components to provide for integrated social, economic, and ecological sustainability and ecosystem integrity and diversity while providing for ecosystem services and multiple uses. Components must be within Forest Service authority and consistent with the inherent capability of the plan area (36 CFR 219.7 and CFR 219.8–219.10).
2. Recommendations to Congress (if any) for lands suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and/or rivers suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (36 CFR 219.7(2)(v) and (vi)).

3. Identification or recommendation (if any) of other designated areas (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(vii).
4. Identification of suitability of areas for the appropriate integration of resource management and uses, including lands suited and not suited for timber production (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(vii) and 219.11).
5. Identification of the maximum quantity of timber that may be removed from the plan area (36 CFR 219.7 and 219.11 (d)(6)).
6. Identification of geographic or management area specific components (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(3)(d).
7. Identification of watersheds that are a priority for maintenance or restoration (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(3)(e)(3)(f).
8. Plan monitoring program (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(x) and 219.12).

Considering that these are the primary decisions to be made through the forest plan revision process, it would seem appropriate to use these eight decision factors as a starting point or template to identify the specific plan components included in the “Alternatives Including the Proposed Action” chapter of the EIS. Also, it would be very helpful to include in this chapter a subsection such as “Plan Elements Common to the Action Alternatives”, which identifies those plan elements which are the same under each action alternative. This approach would make it easier for public officials and the public to better understand the specific differences between the action alternatives and the environmental impacts and merits of the actions being evaluated.

For example, under Item 1 – Forest Wide Components, it would seem appropriate to identify those plan elements and management actions, including the standards and guidelines that would apply to all the action alternatives, before presenting and discussing those plan elements and management actions which differ by alternative.

Similarly, for Item 2, Recommendations to Congress (if any) for lands suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and/or rivers suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, the plan elements presented in Table 4, ‘Overview of Alternatives’, could better illustrate the differences between Alternatives W, Y, and Z by including the plan elements common to the action alternatives in the “Plan Elements Common to the Action Alternatives’ subsection so that Table 4 can focus on those plan elements that differ and are specific to each action alternative.

For example, “Recommended Wilderness” under Alternatives W, Y, and Z all include Hoodoo, Mallard-Larkins, East Meadow Creek and Rapid River. For “Wild and Scenic Suitable Rivers” Alternatives W, Y, and Z all recommend Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, Johns Creek, Kelly Creek, Little North Fork, Meadow Creek, Middle Fork Kelly, North Fork Kelly, Salmon River, South Fork Kelly, and Weitas Creek as suitable. By including this information under “Plan Elements Common to the Action Alternatives” and modifying Table 4 accordingly, the specific differences between the alternatives would be more transparent to the reviewer and easier to compare and evaluate.

In addition to the “Recommended Wilderness” additions common to Alternatives W, Y, and Z (Hoodoo, Mallard-Larkins, East Meadow Creek and Rapid River), CIHD supports that this list also include Bighorn-Weitas (260,000) acres – the largest wildland/undeveloped area on the forests; the Selway-Bitterroot wilderness additions including West Meadow Creek (116,000 acres), Rackliff-Gedney (90,000 acres), Lochsa Slope (75,000 acres), North Fork Spruce (36,000 acres) and Sneakfoot Meadows (23,000 acres); Pot Mountain (51,000 acres); Fish and Hungry Creeks (118,000 acres); Upper North Fork; and the Frank Church River of No Return and Gospel-Hump wilderness additions.

The value of wilderness designation cannot be overemphasized as the diverse vegetative communities on the Nez Perce-Clearwater provide terrestrial habitats that support regionally unique native wildlife populations. This includes native lineages of fisher and bighorn sheep, as well as mountain quail, white-headed woodpecker, and Harlequin duck. More importantly, the extensive acreage of undeveloped lands both on the Nez Perce-Clearwater and interconnected neighboring public lands and designated wilderness areas provide critical habitat security and linkage for wide-ranging species, such as grizzly bear, Canada lynx (federally listed as threatened), wolverine, and other carnivores. Historic large herds of elk benefit as well. Wolverines, for example, need wilderness and the Clearwater has the second largest population in the lower 48 states. Fisher, a sensitive species, is adversely affected by heavy logging.

We can’t overstate the critical importance of these undeveloped ‘wilderness’ worthy lands. The ecosystem and natural resource functions these lands provide uniquely support the diverse habitats and connectivity that is so essential for threatened and endangered (T&E) and sensitive species restoration and protection efforts as well as the future of many fish and wildlife populations and botanical resources that occupy these critical landscapes. We owe it to the American public, the Nez Perce Tribe, and future generations to preserve and protect the outstanding natural resource values that these lands provide. The extinction of chinook salmon, steelhead, bull trout, wolverine, fisher, lynx, grey wolf, grizzly bear, etc. cannot be reversed and for the benefit of future generations must be avoided at all costs. What kind of world and environment do you want your grandchildren to inherit due to the lack of foresight during this forest planning effort? The decisions made during this planning effort will dictate how the 4 million acres of forest lands under review are used and managed over the next 15-30 years.

Timber is a renewable resource. When properly managed in the right place, in the right way and at the right time, timber harvest and forest utilization can coexist with wilderness while providing timber harvest jobs for local communities and needed wood products in a long-term, sustainable way. Future natural and ecological resource conditions, and future generations will be affected by the decisions made during this planning effort.

With respect to “Wild and Scenic Suitable Rivers”, in addition to the recommended additions common to Alternatives W, Y, and Z (Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, Johns Creek, Kelly Creek, Little

North Fork, Meadow Creek, Middle Fork Kelly, North Fork Kelly, Salmon River, South Fork Kelly, and Weitas Creek), CIHD supports the addition of Johns Creek, Lake Creek, Cayuse Creek, and the South Fork and North Fork Clearwater. CIHD also supports the designation of Meadow Creek, Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, and Weitas Creek, as “wild” rather than “scenic or recreational.”

Rivers should not be thought of only as individual rivers or river segments but rather as river systems. Connectivity of high-quality aquatic systems is important for fisheries, wildlife, and recreation. The Nez Perce-Clearwater has some of the best aquatic habitat and rivers in the country. The Proposed Action therefore needs to include many, or most, of the rivers suitable, with a preference on the rivers with the greatest contribution to their sub-basin.

Another suggestion for developing a ‘reasonable’ range of alternatives for evaluation in the DEIS could be based on a particular alternative ‘emphasis’. The “No Action” alternative would continue management under existing forest plans and related amendments.

An ‘Environmental Emphasis’ or ‘Conservation Emphasis’ Alternative would include the following.

- A wilderness recommendation for Hoodoo; Mallard-Larkins; East Meadow Creek; Rapid River; Bighorn-Weitas, the Selway-Bitterroot wilderness additions which include West Meadow Creek, Rackliff-Gedney, Lochsa Slope, North Fork Spruce, and Sneakfoot Meadows; Pot Mountain, Fish and Hungry Creeks; Upper North Fork; and the Frank Church River of No Return and Gospel-Hump wilderness additions. All area recommended for wilderness designation would be managed without motorized or mechanized uses in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964.
- Wild and scenic river designation for 16 suitable segments including Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, Johns Creek, Kelly Creek, Little North Fork, Meadow Creek, Middle Fork Kelly, North Fork Kelly, Salmon River, South Fork Kelly, Weitas Creek, Johns Creek, Lake Creek, Cayuse Creek, and the South Fork and North Fork Clearwater. In addition, Meadow Creek, Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, and Weitas Creek would be designated “wild” rather than “scenic or recreational”.
- Research Natural Area designation for Hemlock Creek and Bimerick Creek Meadows.
- Retain streamside riparian buffers of 300-feet on each side of streams and rivers and measurable, quantifiable standards on sediment limits to protect stream substrate, fish and water quality. Such standards must be met before, during and after logging or other developments, and to authorize activities such as motorized travel in areas that may result in soil erosion and water quality degradation from sediment due to unacceptable levels of soil disturbance.

- Develop and implement quantitative standards and guidelines to fully protect sensitive soils and steep slopes, and insure temporary road closure and restoration.
- Expand the list of 'Species of Conservation Concern' (SCC) on the Nez Perce-Clearwater Forests to include black-backed woodpecker, pine marten, goshawks, peregrine falcon, bald eagle, black swift, common loon, bog lemming, western toad, and ringneck snake.
- Update and expand the Forests' list of focal/indicator species which the regulations define as "species whose status and trends provide insights into the integrity of the larger ecological system to which it belongs." Develop and implement a science-based program to monitor 'focal' species populations and trends.
- Retain existing timber harvest levels of 50-60 million board feet, annually. Prohibit logging in roadless areas or old growth, on sensitive soils or steep slopes.
- Limit motorized travel to existing roads and trails, and implement seasonal restrictions that minimize adverse impacts on wildlife especially during the winter months when species are most vulnerable. No motorized use would be allowed in roadless areas recommended for wilderness designation.
- Permanently close 'vacant' grazing allotments which have not been used for years.

Similarly, other emphasis based 'action' alternatives could be formulated based on the following themes: Sustainable Forestry/Logging, Economic Emphasis, and/or a Recreation Emphasis. We assume you get the idea of how this approach could work.

5) The alternatives chapter in the DEIS needs to include a 'Proposed Action'

As we indicated in our comments above, the DEIS needs to include and evaluate a 'Proposed Action.' As a suggestion, the 'Proposed Action' identified in the DEIS could be formulated through a collaborative process involving representatives from county commissions; motorized recreation groups; environmental organizations including Friends of the Clearwater, CIHD, ICL, and Sierra Club; livestock permittees; and several members-at-large. To arrive at a Proposed Action that a majority of the public can embrace, it seems the absence of such a process makes it particularly difficult to arrive at a 'reasonable' alternative that can be supported by the public and carried out by the USFS without a barrage of protests and lawsuits.

6) Reduction of Riparian Buffer Zones

The three major river systems, comprised of the Salmon, Clearwater, and Snake Rivers, and their accompanying tributaries provide important aquatic and riparian habitats for many species, including federally listed threatened bull trout, steelhead trout, and Chinook salmon. Additionally, the Nez Perce-Clearwater's substantial spawning and rearing habitat for threatened steelhead and Chinook provides a large portion of the total returns of adult

North Fork, Meadow Creek, Middle Fork Kelly, North Fork Kelly, Salmon River, South Fork Kelly, and Weitas Creek), CIHD supports the addition of Johns Creek, Lake Creek, Cayuse Creek, and the South Fork and North Fork Clearwater. CIHD also supports the designation of Meadow Creek, Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, and Weitas Creek, as “wild” rather than “scenic or recreational.”

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- Wild and scenic river designation for 16 suitable segments including Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, Johns Creek, Kelly Creek, Little North Fork, Meadow Creek, Middle Fork Kelly, North Fork Kelly, Salmon River, South Fork Kelly, Weitas Creek, Johns Creek, Lake Creek, Cayuse Creek, and the South Fork and North Fork Clearwater. In addition, Meadow Creek, Fish Creek, Hungry Creek, and Weitas Creek would be designated “wild” rather than “scenic or recreational”.
- Research Natural Area designation for Hemlock Creek and Bimerick Creek Meadows.
- Retain streamside riparian buffers of 300-feet on each side of streams and rivers and measurable, quantifiable standards on sediment limits to protect stream substrate, fish and water quality. Such standards must be met before, during and after logging or other developments, and to authorize activities such as motorized travel in areas that may result in soil erosion and water quality degradation from sediment due to unacceptable levels of soil disturbance.

- Develop and implement quantitative standards and guidelines to fully protect sensitive soils and steep slopes, and insure temporary road closure and restoration.
- Expand the list of 'Species of Conservation Concern' (SCC) on the Nez Perce-Clearwater Forests to include black-backed woodpecker, pine marten, goshawks, peregrine falcon, bald eagle, black swift, common loon, bog lemming, western toad, and ringneck snake.
- Update and expand the Forests' list of focal/indicator species which the regulations define as "species whose status and trends provide insights into the integrity of the larger ecological system to which it belongs." Develop and implement a science-based program to monitor 'focal' species populations and trends.
- Retain existing timber harvest levels of 50-60 million board feet, annually. Prohibit logging in roadless areas or old growth, on sensitive soils or steep slopes.
- Limit motorized travel to existing roads and trails, and implement seasonal restrictions that minimize adverse impacts on wildlife especially during the winter months when species are most vulnerable. No motorized use would be allowed in roadless areas recommended for wilderness designation.
- Permanently close 'vacant' grazing allotments which have not been used for years.

Similarly, other emphasis based 'action' alternatives could be formulated based on the following themes: Sustainable Forestry/Logging, Economic Emphasis, and/or a Recreation Emphasis. We assume you get the idea of how this approach could work.

5) The alternatives chapter in the DEIS needs to include a 'Proposed Action'

As we indicated in our comments above, the DEIS needs to include and evaluate a 'Proposed Action.' As a suggestion, the 'Proposed Action' identified in the DEIS could be formulated through a collaborative process involving representatives from county commissions; motorized recreation groups; environmental organizations including Friends of the Clearwater, CIHD, ICL, and Sierra Club; livestock permittees; and several members-at-large. To arrive at a Proposed Action that a majority of the public can embrace, it seems the absence of such a process makes it particularly difficult to arrive at a 'reasonable' alternative that can be supported by the public and carried out by the USFS without a barrage of protests and lawsuits.

6) Reduction of Riparian Buffer Zones

The three major river systems, comprised of the Salmon, Clearwater, and Snake Rivers, and their accompanying tributaries provide important aquatic and riparian habitats for many species, including federally listed threatened bull trout, steelhead trout, and Chinook salmon. Additionally, the Nez Perce-Clearwater's substantial spawning and rearing habitat for threatened steelhead and Chinook provides a large portion of the total returns of adult

anadromous salmonids in the Snake and Columbia River basins. Following the listing of steelhead trout and Chinook salmon as threatened species, allotment management has emphasized protection and enhancement of riparian areas, with a focus on streams used by steelhead and salmon (Section 1.1.1.4 Ecological Diversity). The sheer number of endemic aquatic species within the planning area, including a large number of endemic gastropods in the forests' major river systems, particularly the Salmon River, is notable and exemplary within the western United States.

Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Forest Service is obligated to aid in recovery of listed species. Reducing the current 300-foot buffer required on each side of rivers and streams to 150 feet is totally inappropriate and irresponsible. Considering steelhead, Chinook salmon and bull trout all federally listed as threatened under the ESA, and severe downward population trends have occurred in recent years, such an action is totally unjustified and irresponsible. The only reason for such a change would be to allow logging in riparian areas, which is currently prohibited.

CIHD is adamantly opposed to this change in riparian protection. It clearly violates the purposes of NEPA to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts, particularly on federally listed threatened species under the ESA. Nothing has been shown to prevent extinctions so well as simply protecting habitats by preventing destructive human activities and development. It's hard to believe that at this critical time you are even proposing such a negative, adverse and totally irresponsible change in riparian corridor protection!

7) Climate Change

Climate change is a real and extremely important issue and concern to the vast majority of Americans. The U.S. Forest Service, being a resource and science-based public entity has a moral obligation to properly address this paramount environmental concern in any environmental impact assessment they prepare. Any rejection to conduct a meaningful impact evaluation on climate change at this juncture in human history and our future existence on earth, breaks the spirit and intent of NEPA!

The absence of evaluating alternative impacts, both positive and negative, independent and **cumulative** on climate change is unconscionable. NEPA requires an objective and science-based evaluation of environmental impacts, including those related to what has been clearly documented by climate scientists throughout the world over several decades, not a political philosophy of denial that has no rational or scientific basis for its omittance or cursory review. (Note: I studied climate change, global warming, the "greenhouse" effect, whatever you want to call it back in graduate school in 1976-1977, it was even in the textbooks at that time!!)

The DEIS states that "all of the plan alternatives are projected to contribute **negligibly** to overall emissions. Furthermore, it is difficult and highly uncertain to ascertain the indirect effects of emission from multiple, generally small projects that make up these alternatives on global climate." CIHD questions how can a four-fold increase in timber harvest from 50-60 mmbf to

221-261 mmbf as proposed under Alternatives W and X be considered “a very small percentage of the total forest land on the Nez Perce- Clearwater?” The statement “Because the potential direct and indirect effects of alternatives would be negligible, the contribution of the plan’s proposed actions to cumulative effects on global atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations and climate change would also be **negligible**.”

It is this attitude and viewpoint that has brought us to the climate crisis on hand and the future of life on earth. It is the cumulative impact of all these individual human activities that has brought us to where we are in the climate crisis. Oh, it’s just one more fossil fuel powerplant, one more airplane trip to the other side of the world, one more gas guzzling vehicle, one more conversion of tropical rainforest to pasture for livestock grazing - you get the point. When you add up all these independent activities, it is the cumulative impact that has brought us the climate crisis – a crisis that is very real and projected to have tremendous repercussions on life on earth. It’s not a pretty future.

The stakes are high. All species will go extinct eventually, even our own – it is one of nature’s few imperatives. As of today, however, that train has not quite left the station. We still have some control over our demise – namely, how long it will take and how much our children and grandchildren will suffer. If we want to take action, we need to get started while it still matters what we do.

8) Quantifiable Standards

Water quality, wildlife habitat and fish habitat standards must be quantitative, enforceable and non-discretionary, without loopholes. Similarly, monitoring programs must be science-based and quantitative so as to meaningfully track trends and existing conditions.

Under every action alternative, logging levels increase although current harvest levels are such that water quality standards in the existing plans can’t be met. Overall, the direction of the Draft Forest Plan encourages more commercial use, development, and other land disturbance activities.

The current forest plans for the Nez Perce and Clearwater forests have measurable, quantitative standards. For example, streams have fishery habitat potential percentages based on cobble embeddedness (sediment), minimum percentages of old-growth must be preserved drainage-wide, and in some areas there are elk habitat effectiveness calculations. However, the Draft Forest Plan moves away from measurable standards to subjective rather than objective and quantifiable criteria. CIHD is adamantly opposed to such a change. Why are such changes being proposed? Environmental rape and pillage for short-term economic gain at the expense of long-term, sustainable natural resource protection and the benefits these resources provide is not the future we should be moving toward. By this point in our comments it should be clear that doing what’s right, not being driven by short-sightedness and misdirected political influence is not what is needed at this critical juncture in planning future forest use and management. What we decide to do here will determine future conditions on these forest

lands well into the future; a future that is a big unknown considering the changes expected on ecological systems and forest resources due to climate change.

Closing Remarks

Our time has run out to provide comments on the subject document. Unfortunately, we did not have the subject documents readily available to us during our review. A 'hard' copy of the DEIS to review would have been ideal. Consequently, our ability to provide additional detailed and hopefully meaningful comments on the DEIS was greatly hindered by our inability to view a 'hard' copy in a local library, request a 'hard' copy from 'closed' Forest Services offices, or have convenient access via the internet (recognizing an online DEIS review is very cumbersome and inefficient).

We hope that our comments are helpful and constructive as you move forward in the forest planning and environmental impact evaluation process. Although Covid-19 circumstances were not ideal to fully comment and participate, we thank you for the opportunity to comment and look forward to staying involved in all future activities related to the subject EIS and Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Plan Revision process.

CIHD hereby requests being added to your mailing list for all future notices and documents related to the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest Plan Revision and EIS process. Also, we request that we receive 'hard' copies of all future documents pertaining to the DEIS/ Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest Plan Revision process.

We are available to discuss with you our concerns and offer our assistance as you move forward with this highly important forest planning effort. We end our comments with a final reminder of what this whole NEPA/EIS process is about - to take actions that protect, restore and enhance the environment; promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and the biosphere; and enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation. All of us involved in this forest planning process need to live up to these expectations!

Respectfully submitted,



Steve Jakubowics

Chair - Committee for Idaho's High Desert

P.S. Our comments have been sent by U.S. Mail on April 20 and electronically to the NezClearFPRC website.