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June 8, 2020

To: Objection Reviewing Officer
USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

**RE: OBJECTION AGAINST THE SALISH GOOD RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT PLAN ON THE TALLY LAKE RANGER
DISTRICT OF THE FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST.**

1. Objectors Names and Addresses

Lead Objector Sara Johnson, Director, Native Ecosystems Council,
PO Box 125, Willow Creek, MT 59760; phone 406-579-3286

Mike Garrity, Director, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, PO Box 505,
Helena, MT 59624; phone 406-459-3659

2. Name of the Project Being Objected to:

Salish Good Resource Management Project

3. Name and Title of the Responsible Official:

Kurtis, Steele, Forest Supervisor, Flathead National Forest

**4. Name of the National Forest and Ranger District on which the Project
Will be Implemented:**

Tally Lake Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest

5. Attachments to this Objection

Attachments include Appendix A of referenced reports and or literature; Appendix B includes a copy of the Environmental Assessment (EA) comments submitted in regards to the Salish Good Resource Management Project by Native Ecosystems Council (NEC) and the Alliance

for the Wild Rockies (AWR) on April 20, 2020. The EA comments are being provided as the Decision Notice stated that all documents reference in the objection must be included in the objection.

6. Statement that Demonstrates the Connection between Prior Specific Written Comments:

On April 20, 2020, NEC and submitted comments on the environmental assessment (EA) for the Salish Good Resource Management Project. By in large, these comments are being carried forward as presented in the EA comments as the format for this objection, in order to avoid repetition. In some cases, the EA comments are being expanded upon in this objection with references provided to support objection claims. Also, we are providing comments on the agency responses to our EA comments as we go through the various in order to provide consistency between our EA comments and the Forest Service responses.

1. Lynx Management

We contended that the proposed project will violate the Endangered Species Act (ESA) due to a failure to use the current best science in ensuring the conservation of the lynx as is required by this act. The agency acknowledged that the lynx management was not a priority for the project, even though this is lynx critical habitat, and lynx have been documented in the project area in recent times.

2. Snowshoe Hare Management

We noted that the proposed project will cause a significant reduction in snowshoe hare habitat through direct habitat removal and/or degradation, increased predation rates, as well as habitat fragmentation for a species that has a home range average size of only 25 acres; these fragmentation impacts are due to the large openings that will be created, as well as forest thinning and forest burning. The estimated impact of the project will be the loss of 456 hare home ranges. This severe impact on snowshoe hares is a violation of the ESA.

3. The agency has failed to demonstrate that the Forest Plan direction for lynx, or the Northern Rockies Lynx Conservation Strategy, or

“Lynx Amendment,” is conserving lynx due to a lack of population monitoring.

The agency did not provide any information to demonstrate that the Lynx Amendment is promoting conservation of the lynx. This amendment was done in 2007, and has not been modified to incorporate the new science on lynx. It is a violation of both the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as well as the ESA to manage a threatened species without a valid conservation strategy. To date, there is no data available to indicate the Lynx Amendment is a valid conservation strategy for the lynx, including within critical habitat.

There is new research out on the lynx population in Washington (King et al. 2020) where lynx population trends were actually monitored, is titled “Will lynx lose their edge? Canada lynx occupancy in Washington.” Their abstract concluded that “our results paint an alarming picture for lynx persistence in Washington that is relevant to current deliberations regarding lynx delisting from the Endangered Species Act.” They also noted that they used a simple camera design as an effective methods for surveying lynx across broad spatial scales, and could be a key monitoring tool for lynx that is easy to be implemented by researchers and government agencies.

This article was also discussed by Weintraub (2020) in a news report where it was noted that “while the federal government weighs taking the Canada lynx off the list of threatened species, a new study points to reduced populations in Washing State, Colorado and Montana. The lead author of the lynx research study, Dr. Thornton, noted that the same factors reducing habitats in Washington are likely at lay in Montana and Colorado, which also have lynx populations as far south as the animals can survive; the long-term trajectory is going to be a challenging one for the lynx across their southern range, Dr. Thornton said. One of the factors is habitat loss from forest fires, where usable lynx habitat is not re-established for 20-40 years. This problem is also created by logging, such as is planned in the Salish Good Project. The Lynx Amendment requires that no more than 30% of a landscape be clearcuts at any given time, in order to control the amount of unsuitable lynx habitat. Although this 30% amount is arbitrary, and not based on any current science, it does demonstrate that even the Forest Service recognizes that logging can be detrimental to lynx.

4. The agency did not provide a determination in the EA as to how the project would impact lynx, in violation of the NEPA; this resulted in a failure of the agency to include an action alternative that would not adversely impact lynx, so there was an inadequate range of alternatives, in violation of the NEPA.

The agency did not inform the public in the EA that they determined that the project would adversely impact lynx, and that consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be required.

5. The definition of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) for the Project is invalid, and as a result, the agency is violating the ESA, the NMFA, and the NEPA.

Almost the entire project includes the WUI, including critical lynx habitat. The required density of humans was never defined for the WUI, as is required in the definition for the WUI in lynx habitat. The agency responded that they are not required to adhere to the Lynx Amendment definition of the WUI, although it was noted that the Lynx Amendment was incorporated into the Revised Forest Plan. The applications of the exceptions and exemptions in the Lynx Amendment for the WUI are being applied incorrectly, which means that the estimated 6% habitat loss for lynx in the WUI as per the Lynx Amendment is incorrect for this project.

6. The Lynx Amendment is invalid as it is outdated and does not include the current best science, and needs to be amended to avoid violations of the ESA and the NFMA, as well as the NEPA.

It has been 13 years since the Lynx Amendment was implemented, and there has been extensive new science since that time that demonstrates that this Amendment is severely flawed for lynx conservation. It should not be applied to conserve lynx or lynx critical habitat. In addition, research on lynx in Washington reported that lynx there are in decline (King et al. 2020; Weintraub 2020). One of the reasons believed to be creating this decline is fire, which creates unsuitable lynx habitat for 20-40 years. This is the same impact of clearcut logging (Lynx Amendment 2007), which is why the amount of unsuitable lynx habitat is one of the only actual standards in this conservation strategy. Even the 30% limit of unsuitable lynx habitat in this strategy is arbitrary, as it is not based on any actual science, but instead, on a 1989 management recommendation. As it stands, this Lynx Amendment

threatens the conservation of the lynx, and is a violation of the ESA due to a failure to use the current best science to modify management direction in the strategy.

7. The agency has not developed any data on female lynx home ranges in the project area in order to preserve the quality of these home ranges for successful reproduction, in violation of the ESA.

The current best science demonstrates (e.g., Kosterman et al. (2018) that a key to maintaining lynx populations is to identify female lynx home ranges in a landscape to ensure that the required habitat conditions of 50% or more older, dense forest habitat, and at least 65% habitat connectivity, will be maintained over time. These home ranges average 13,400 acres (Holbrook et al. 2017, page 5 and 9). There could be at least 4 female lynx home ranges in the project area. Degradation of these 4 home ranges would clearly be a significant habitat change for this threatened species in lynx critical habitat. The project is simply random habitat removal, and the impact on individual female lynx home ranges is unknown, as this management is not required by the Lynx Amendment or the BiOp for this Amendment. This is a violation of the NEPA, since the agency claims the project will have no significant impacts. It is also a violation of the NFMA requirement to maintain a diversity of wildlife species, and a violation of the ESA to conserve the threatened lynx.

The only way that lynx can be effectively conserved in the Northern Rockies is that active female lynx home ranges are identified and managed to promote high quality habitat, as was identified by Kosterman et al. 2018. As was noted by Weintraub 2020, there are relatively easy methods to monitor and locate lynx on the landscape with cameras, as was done in the study by King et al. (2020). Unless this type of method is used to manage lynx, any vegetation treatments within lynx habitat, especially lynx critical habitat, is nothing more than “random habitat removal” which cannot be claimed to be an effective conservation strategy for lynx. Until this is done for the Sallish Good project area, any vegetation and road management in the project area is a violation of the ESA.

8. The agency is violating the ESA and NEPA by failing to identify and measure the impact of roads on lynx within critical habitat.

The agency claims that roads required for the project, and associated activities, including logging, will not disturb lynx. No citations were provided. Squires et al. (2010) at page 1657 reported that they found little evidence of lynx avoidance of roads that received “low vehicular traffic.” Low vehicle traffic was defined as 8 vehicles or less per day. The level of moderate vehicle traffic was defined as less than 20 vehicle trips per day; high volume traffic was defined as over 55 vehicle trips per day. This report also noted that the amount of cover adjacent to low traffic roads likely mitigated disturbance to lynx. The Salish Good project did not provide any measures of expected traffic volume on existing and the 38 miles of new roads that will be used for logging. At a minimum, the road traffic on these roads during logging operations needs to be measured to determine if they will meet the threshold to lynx disturbance (over 8 vehicle trips per day, which is defined as low use).

9. The EA did not provide an analysis of how openings will affect lynx home ranges as well as habitat connectivity; openings include forests with less than a 40% canopy (Table 1 in Holbrook et al. 2017; Table 2 in Holbrook et al. 2018); instead, these openings were stated to have no significant detrimental impact on lynx or connectivity, without providing any analysis, in violation of the ESA and the NEPA as well as the NFMA since maintaining connectivity is a Forest Plan standard.

The literature cited in the project EA included a number of recent research papers that identify the barrier impacts of clearcuts as well as thinned forests (Holbrook et al. 2016; Holbrook et al. 2017; Holbrook et al. 2018; Kosterman et al. 2018). This current science was not used in the EA to assess impacts of forest clearcutting and thinning on lynx habitat use. It is clear that movement barriers will increase the amount of energy a female lynx will have to travel in order to access other areas of her territory, which means that kitten productivity will decrease. The current best science indicates that a female lynx home range must have at least 65% connectivity, which is 50% mature forest and 15% older regeneration areas with a relatively dense canopy (Kosterman et al. 2018). The project EA did not define that these required levels of habitat connectivity will be maintained in the project area.

10. The plan to reduce lodgepole pine forests in this area, and instead promote western larch in crucial habitat, is a clear violation of the ESA,

as well as a violation of the NEPA and the NFMA because the impact on lynx was never identified.

The current best science (e.g., Holbrook et al. 2017) has identified that lodgepole pine forests have a very high value to both lynx and snowshoe hares, in part because lodgepole pine needles have the highest nutritional value to lynx of all conifers. Squires et al. (2010) also noted that lynx avoid larch. On the other hand, larch is deciduous so it loses its leaves in the winter, and cannot provide winter hare or winter lynx habitat. There is no logic to promoting larch over lodgepole pine, and this a permanent impact on lynx critical habitat, in violation of the ESA. The agency is also violating the NEPA by failing to address this adverse management strategy on lynx and hares.

11. The project requires a site-specific biological assessment of lynx.

The draft Decision Notice indicates that a biological assessment has included an analysis of lynx.

12. All project reports on lynx should be available on the agency's web site, so that these are readily available to the public; instead the public is required to make a special request for these documents.

We believe that to meet the intent of the NEPA, the Forest Service should provide the project reports on lynx on the web page, so that these reports are readily available to the public without additional requests being required. Although these projects are noted to be available to the public upon request, it is not clear why these project reports could not simply be kept on the web page. This promotes the requirements of the NEPA for public access to agency documents and public involvement.

13. Wildlife Surveys were not done for the nongame species in the project area, so that the Forest Plan direction to protect their nesting sites cannot be implemented, in violation of the NFMA.

Species to be protected from vegetation management activities as per the Revised Forest Plan include the goshawk, flammulated owl, and black-backed woodpecker. NEC did a FOIA for surveys of these species, and the agency could not provide a single survey. The carnivore surveys included in the Crown of the Continent collaborative monitoring program did identify

lynx, grizzly bears and wolverine. The agency's claim that no significant impacts will result from the massive logging and burning program is clearly invalid, as the impact on nesting sites of these species is unknown. So this project is not only a violation of the Revised Forest Plan, for not protecting these species as is claimed will be done, but it is a violation of the NEPA because the impact on these key species is unknown, but clearly may impact many breeding pairs.

14. The size of the analysis area and proposal is a violation of the NEPA, because it is too large for the public to review, and it is too large for the agency to do valid wildlife surveys; the timeline is also too long for site-specific projects, since it shields the agency from future information and changes, including potential listing of threatened or endangered species; the time period for Forest Plan monitoring is also inconsistent with a 10-year project period, since problems identified with monitoring cannot be addressed, in violation of the NFMA; for example, it is possible that with what appears to be ongoing declines of the lynx, it may be up-listed to an endangered species, which would change the project.

As noted in the agency's response to NEC's FOIA for wildlife surveys, no such surveys have been done for the goshawk, flammulated owl, or black-backed woodpecker. So the Revised Forest Plan requirement that breeding areas of these species be protected cannot be met, in violation of this Plan. Implementing such a huge project that means that Revised Forest Plan direction cannot be implemented is a violation of both the NEPA and the NFMA. The reason for such a large program was never actually provided in regard to alternative development. Although NEC and AWR opposed such a large project, there was no alternative ever developed to create small areas for projects where complete wildlife surveys could be done, and the public could actually review these areas on the ground in several days, instead of weeks or months. Given that one important function of the NEPA to is involve the public, these massive projects do not meet the intent of this law.

New research indicates that the lynx populations in Washington are in decline, and that similar problems are likely occurring for lynx in Montana and Colorado (King et al. 2020, Weintraub 2020). A 10-year time line for a project cannot be responsive to either increased urgency in lynx management, a possible revision of the Lynx Amendment to require effective conservation of the lynx, or upgrading its listing status to endangered.

15. The Revised Forest Plan cannot meet the diversity requirement of the NFMA because there are almost no wildlife standards that would require conservation of habitat for any wildlife species; it also cannot meet the requirements of the NEPA because without a habitat standard, there is no actual means to measure impacts to wildlife based on Revised Forest Plan direction, even though ensuring wildlife is maintained on the landscape is a function of a forest plan.

There were only 2 standards/guidelines we could find for wildlife in the project EA, several for grizzly bears in the identified Salish Good connectivity area of Zone 1, and snag habitat. Without any habitat requirements, the agency cannot ensure that wildlife will persist within project areas where massive logging and burning, as well as road construction, occurs. The Revised Forest Plan cannot meet the diversity requirement as a result, and is an invalid plan.

16. The snag habitat direction in the Revised Forest Plan, which is being applied to the Salish Good Project, never demonstrates why it will maintain populations of snag-associated wildlife, either based on past Forest Plan direction, or during the current planning period.

The snag management strategy used in the Revised Forest Plan is outdated by almost 40 years. In 1997, a Forest Service research paper noted this (Bull et al. 1997, pages 28, 29 and 31). This paper noted that snag habitat “within forests” is essential for almost all cavity nesting wildlife species (Table 1 at 30). The Flathead National Forest has identified 89 wildlife species that use snags (USDA 2019, Table 3-89). All of these species will experience severe habitat loss with the proposed Salish Good project, because the only snag management that is planned will be within harvest units, which will generally be completely or largely unsuitable for snag-associated wildlife. The Revised Forest Plan snag direction is almost completely meaningless for conserving wildlife, and should not be used as a measure of whether or not significant impacts will result from this project.

We also note that this landscape has been heavily logged in the past. The EA at 38-52 notes that 23,371 acres in the project area have already been logged. This equates to 46% of the landscape that will not have snags at least 10 inches in diameter, which is the minimum size of snag required by wildlife (Bull et al. 1997). The availability of forested snag-habitat is never identified as an impact on wildlife, since snag habitat will be generally or completely

lacking in past harvest units that are less than 100 years old. The existing situation is likely highly significant for snag-associated wildlife, and will be exacerbated with the massive logging project planned. There is no basis for the agency to claim no significant impacts will result from this project.

17. The old growth management program in the Revised Forest Plan, and as applied to the Salish Good Project, does not meet the requirements of the NFMA to ensure a diversity of wildlife will be maintained on the Forest, in violation of the NFMA.

The Flathead National Forest identified 31 old growth-associated wildlife species on the Forest (USFA 2018, Table 3-87). The old growth habitat requirement in the Revised Forest Plan was not addressed in the Salish Good EA. Based on fire cycles, the historical levels of old growth in the Rocky Mountains ranges from 20-50% (Lesica 1996). Using this same method on fire cycles, the USDA research branch published a similar estimate of what historical older forest habitat likely existed for the lynx. This work estimated that historically, lynx habitat consisted of 36% up to 71% mature and old growth forests (McKelvey et al. 1999). This is consistent with the newest science on lynx habitat use by Kosterman et al. (2018) where female lynx that successfully raise kittens use a landscape dominated by mature, older dense forest (over 50%).

The current best science for forest birds and the goshawk provide a recommended level of old growth which is similar to the minimum range identified by Lessica (1996), which is from 20-25% (Montana Partners in Flight 2000, Reynolds et al. 1992).

There is no map of old growth in the project EA. There is no information on the patch size of old growth. There is no plan to provide recruitment old growth. In response to comments at page 69, the agency noted there are 4,126 acres of old growth in the project area. This is 8% old growth. It is far below the minimum recommended for wildlife, and well below the historical level that would have been available to the lynx. Although the agency claims no old growth will be logged, this is not actually demonstrated because there is no map of existing old growth that can be compared to proposed harvest units. In addition, the fragmentation impact on old growth is not addressed, with many stands likely being impacted by edge creation and thus a function removal of old growth to interior old growth species.

The EA at 50 claims that forest thinning will not create adverse impacts to 66 species on the Forest. No science was provided to indicate this claim, including the 31 old growth-associated wildlife species.

It is clear that the project will exacerbate existing significant cumulative impacts on old growth due to a paucity of this habitat for 31 old growth species associated with old growth. There have been 23,371 acres of past logging in this project area, which equate to 46% of the Forest Service landscape (EA 39,52, 71). The project will exacerbate this severe impact by possibly removing more old growth, as well as making the recruitment of old growth even more unlikely for many years to attain minimum levels required for wildlife. This is a failure of the Revised Forest Plan to ensure a diversity of wildlife on this Forest, in violation of the NFMA. And this project is also a violation of the NEPA because first, the severe impacts to 31 old growth wildlife species is not disclosed, and second, the severe impacts on these 31 old growth associated species is dismissed by completion of an EA instead of an EIS.

18. The agency is violating the ESA and the NFMA in regards to the wolverine.

The draft DN for this project at 25 shows the determination for project impacts on the wolverine was “no jeopardy.” The draft DN also notes that the biological assessment was done for threatened and endangered species, but did not include proposed species, which would include the wolverine. So it appears that the BA did not address the wolverine in violation of the ESA, even though this project will clearly have adverse impacts on this species, in addition to the past extensive logging on 46% of this landscape. Apparently the agency is relying on the Revised Forest Plan consultation in regards to the wolverine, even though this consultation would not have identified the many site-specific past and planned conditions, from both vegetation treatments and roads, on the wolverine. This new science is quite extensive, and it clearly defines both roads and vegetation treatments, which also require roads, as adverse impacts on the wolverine (Fisher et al. 2013; Scrafford et al. 2019; Scrafford and Boyce 2019; Stewart et al. 2016). Wolverine are known to occur in the project area as per a FOIA response to NEC, based on collaborative monitoring for the Crown of the Continent monitoring work. This project will clearly degrade wolverine habitat, and impair habitat use in this large landscape of over 50,000 acres.

19. The agency failed to address how this project will impact a large suite of forest birds, including those dependent upon snags and older forest habitat.

As we previously noted, there are a large number of bird species on the Flathead National Forest that use snags and older forest habitat. The impact of the project on this large suite of over 100 species is never addressed, in violation of the NEPA. In addition, implementation of the Revised Forest Plan does not require any management of this large suite of forest birds, which is a violation of the NMFA diversity requirement.

20. The agency failed to address how reductions in snowshoe hares will impact a suite of forest- predators.

The creation of over 8,000 acres of unsuitable snowshoe hare habitat with this project will have indirect impacts on many forest predators, not only the threatened lynx and proposed wolverine, but forest raptors as the goshawk, great gray owl, along with other old growth species, as the pine marten. There are no requirements in the Revised Forest Plan to maintain prey species for various predators, in violation of the NFMA diversity requirement.

21. There is an inadequate range of alternatives for the project.

Conserving the threatened Canada lynx and threatened grizzly bear are certainly important issues with the public, including based on public comments on this project. However, there was no action alternative that promotes the conservation of either of these species, or as well, the proposed wolverine. For example, The agency notes a number of times in response to comments on the EA (e.g., 64, 65 that lynx was not a priority for management of this lynx critical habitat. For the grizzly bear, wolverine and lynx, the management of existing roads would be important for conservation, which would not be addressed with the no action alternative. The existing condition in this landscape was never evaluated as to how it is impacting these 3 species, which would have in turn lead to the development of a wildlife action alternative based on identified current problems. Simply provided a no action alternative, which is just a NEPA requirement, does not address the public concerns about management of threatened and proposed species. As well, the existing condition for snags and old growth forests is clearly severely depleted. This was not identified as a condition for the no

action alternative, which as well would have triggered the development of a wildlife alternative. This failure of the agency to take a “hard look” at existing conditions, and propose recovery for depleted conditions of snags and old growth forests, is a violation of the NEPA as well as the ESA.

22. The agency will be increasing weed problems, which will trigger significant impacts that require an EIS.

The agency notes that most current weeds occur along existing roads. This is acknowledgement that weeds along roads are not being eliminated. So it is not clear why the addition of another 34 miles of new, permanent roads, and 3 miles of temporary roads, will not create a significant increase the weed infestations that also will not be controlled. The proposed mitigation is that weeds will be treated along roads. This is not the same as a mitigation measure that will “prevent” any new weed infestations along roads. Since the proposed mitigation is not actually demonstrated to be effective, it does not qualify as a mitigation requirement as per the NEPA. It is clear that weed infestations will be vastly increased with this project, and that the lack of effective, ongoing control means that these increases will be significant, requiring an EIS.

23. The agency failed to provide any measure of project impacts on elk, which is identified as a “key species” in the Revised Forest Plan; the analysis on big game impacts as per the NEPA is therefore invalid; there is also a violation of the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) since the agency is providing false definitions of big game security.

The analysis of project impacts on elk is wholly deficient, as well as misleading to the public, even though the agency notes that the Revised Forest Plan identifies elk as a key wildlife species on the Forest (Salish Good EA at 63). The Hillis Paradigm is the standard accepted definition of big game security, which is at least 250 acres of “contiguous forest cover” that are at least 0.25 miles from an open road (Hillis et al. 1991). This is also the accepted definition of big game security employed by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP). In the published paper in the Journal of Wildlife Management by Profitt et al. (2031), where big game security was assessed in the Gravelly Mountains of Montana, the definition of big game security was consistent with Hillis at page 515. Given that the Hillis definition of security was defined by the Forest Service, and is evaluated by this same definition, the basis for applying a different definition of elk

security was never verified in the Revised Forest Plan or in the Salish Good project analysis. In an interview with MFWP personnel in 2017, Byron reported that elk seeking refuge from hunters in heavily-forested terrain, or on private property that offers safety. Due to elk displacement to private lands in the hunting season, the elk population in 2017 exceeded the MFWP's objectives by about 29,000 animals (Byron 2017). This issue has also been addressed in MFWP's publication, *Montana Outdoors*. In the November-December issue of 2015, Dickson reported that 58% of Montana's elk hunting districts have exceeded population objectives. Mobile animals take refuge on properties with little or no public hunting, which means hunter harvest cannot control populations. Problems associated with these high elk population numbers include the spread of brucellosis to cattle, and high game damage to private property. Id.

This "revised" definition of elk security by the Flathead National Forest is not only a violation of the NEPA for misrepresenting science, but is also a violation of the APA as there is no logical reason for the agency to exclude hiding cover as one of the only 2 criteria for big game security. This deletion leads to a severe misrepresentation of vegetation treatments on elk security, as the loss of hiding cover is left out of the measures. The Revised Forest Plan clearly needs to be amended so that the correct definition of big game security is used in the FEIS, as well as in project evaluations, as Salish Good.

The fact that the agency fails to apply the correct definition for elk security in the Revised Forest Plan or in site-specific projects, such as the Salish Good project, means that concerns of the public, but as well, the concerns of MFWP are not being addressed. In response to comments on this project, the EA at 63 notes that MFWP is concerned about project impacts on elk security, not only from hunting, but from predators. They also expressed a concern about all the new roads. Roads with any motorized vehicle traffic disturb elk (Christensen et al. 1993). A more recent set of recommendations developed by the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest along with MFWP (USDA-MFWP 2013, pages 15, 18) cited research that elk avoided roads that had 2-4 vehicles per 12 hours or higher. This remains relatively consistent with Christensen et al. (1993) that any motorized vehicle use on roads impacts elk, unless it is extremely light use. The 2013 recommendations concluded at page 18 that "low intensity, occasional administrative travel and management activity on routes closed to the public could be reasonably excluded in habitat effectiveness analysis; however,

consistent, frequently-used non-public routes or temporary roads would detract from habitat effectiveness if such roads are used during the summer.”

This 2013 set of recommendations (USDA/MFWP) also identified the problem of a lack of elk security with displacement of elk onto private lands during the hunting season (e.g., page 5, 6, 14). This displacement issue is not addressed in the Salish Good project analysis, even though it is well recognized as a management issue with timber harvest.

The Salish Good NEPA analysis not only failed to provide a valid measure of existing and project impacts on elk security and the displacement issue, but this analysis also failed to evaluate the impact of roads closed to public travel on elk habitat use during the summer. As noted previously, Christensen et al. (1993) defines any motorized use on roads as a disturbance to elk. And the USDA/MFWP 2013 recommendations also defined motorized use above 2-4 vehicle trips per day as displacement to elk. As such, the agency’s failure to measure the road impacts on elk, a key species for the forest, is a clear NEPA and NFMA violation. It is also a violation of the APA, as there is no existing science that indicates that road use does not impact elk. The habitat effectiveness level at present, and what it would be for each alternative, needed to be provided in the analysis in order for the agency to support their claim that these habitat effectiveness impacts will not significantly change elk use of this landscape. The failure to evaluate habitat effectiveness levels before, during and after are a clear violation of the NEPA.

Also not noted in the Salish Good analysis is that forest opening reduces forage for elk in the late summer and fall due to the removal of shade, which causes earlier drying out of forage (USDA/MFWP 2013). Page 19 of this document notes that the function of cover during spring, summer and fall may include thermal regulation, lengthening the season of succulence and palatability where adequate understory forage exists and the overstory provides shades, seclusion, and buffering of special features such as licks and moist areas. The vast acreage of treatment will significantly reduce the availability of succulent forage for elk in the late summer and fall as a result.

24. The project will have site-specific adverse impacts, due to implementation of the Revised Forest Plan for grizzly management, and is a violation of the ESA; it is a violation of the NEPA because there was no

action alternative developed that would promote rather than degrade grizzly bear habitat.

As we previously noted, the Salish Good NEPA analysis does not evaluate for impact of 37 miles of new roads, 34 of which will be permanent, on grizzly bear displacement and mortality. The science on the adverse impact of roads on grizzly bear is vast. These include Apps et al. 2004, Boulanger et al. 2014; Lamb et al. 2017; Mace and Manley 1993; Mace et al. 1996; Mattson 1993; Schwartz et al. 2010; and Wiegand et al. 2002). A recent published research paper did an extensive review of the science on road impacts on grizzly bears, and results are consistent that roads can be a severe, adverse impact on grizzly bears (Proctor et al. 2020). While the Salish Good analysis identifies the project will have an adverse impact on grizzly bears, the level of taking of grizzly bears as per the ESA is never addressed, or considered in alternative development. This Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (1998) recommendations thus remain relevant to grizzly bear management, where both open and total roads need to be managed for grizzly bear recovery.

The rationale provided in the Salish Good EA for failure to measure the impact of new roads on grizzly bear displacement in this area was because they claim these roads will not be open to the public. This is an invalid NEPA claim, as the determining factor in displacement of grizzly bears from roads is the level of motorized use, not whether this use is by public or administrative use, including logging traffic. This level of motorized use was not addressed in the agency's analysis for this project. As far back as 1996, Mace et al. (1996) reported that roads receiving over 10 vehicles per day were avoided by grizzly bears. The NCDE Protocol Paper for grizzly bear management (2002) also identified the importance of traffic levels on grizzly bear impacts. This paper at 3 notes that a restricted road (not open to the public) can have low intensity motorized use which is defined as less than an average of one vehicle count per day for a season. Thus the agency's claim that only public use on roads during project implementation would impact grizzly bears is invalid, as it is the traffic level that determines these displacement impacts.

In addition to a failure of the agency to evaluate the displacement impacts of existing and new roads on grizzly bear, the agency also failed to address how cover levels along all these existing and 37 miles of new roads will affect grizzly bear use. Mattson (1993) clearly defined hiding cover along

roads as a key factor in impact on grizzly bear, with roads with and without adjacent cover being defined with different displacement impacts.

Although excluding the public from the 37 miles of new roads proposed for this project would certainly help reduce the direct mortality risk to grizzly bears, the long-term benefit to mortality risk is unknown, given that motorized use by the agency and logging activity will still increase grizzly bear habituation to human activity and thus reduce avoidance (Mattson 1993). Then there is the increased direct mortality risk to grizzly bears from long-term hunter use of these roads that are closed to public motorized activity. Schwartz et al. (2010) rated closed roads as a considerable mortality risk to grizzly bears because they provide access to hunters and thus increase the risk for grizzly bear/hunter conflicts, or accidental hunting mortality due to mistaken identify as a black bear.

Although the agency claims that the public will be excluded from the 37 miles of new roads, the illegal motorized use that will occur on these new roads was not addressed. Instead, the agency claims in the EA at 70 that road closures have been monitored sporadically and generally found to be effective. Given that roads are the highest indicator of grizzly bear mortality (Schwartz et al. 2010; Proctor et al. 2020), the agency should not be adding new roads and claiming that these new roads will not have illegal motorized use that could increase grizzly bear mortality risk unless past monitoring has shown that illegal road violations are not occurring in occupied grizzly bear habitat. The Salish Good analysis did not provide any such information. Thus the impact of the 37 miles of new roads from illegal motorized use is unknown, but may be significant. The likely increase in “take” of grizzly bears due to these 37 miles of new roads remains unknown and is thus a violation of the ESA, the NEPA and the NFMA for maintaining diversity.

There is no analysis if the Salish Good NEPA analysis as to existing or planned levels of grizzly bear security. Just because this is not a Forest Plan standard does not mean that an analysis is not required. The assumption appears to be that since the Salish Good area is defined as a connectivity corridor for grizzly bears, that security is not important. However, the amount of security will directly impact the displacement and mortality risk to grizzly bears from roads. Schwartz et al. (2010) noted that roads were the most significant factor impacting grizzly bear mortality, but the availability of secure habitat was the second leading factor affecting mortality. Bears

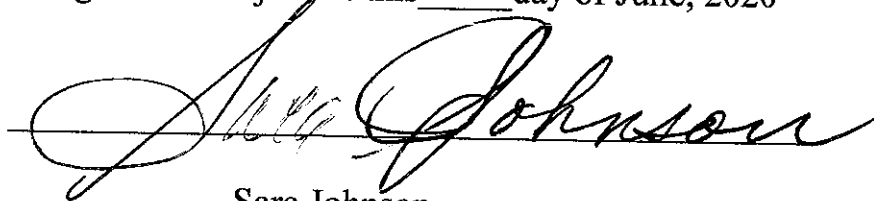
have to cross areas with roads to access security areas, which makes them vulnerable to roading impacts.

Mace et al. 1996) reported that 56% of the grizzly bear composite home ranges were roadless, while other areas had very low road densities; their findings supported that unroaded lands are important to grizzly bear management. High levels of security have consistently been recommended for grizzly bear conservation, including areas 2500 acres on 68% of the landscape in the NCDE protocol paper (2002), and over 7,000 acres covering 57% of the landscape by Mattson (1993). This essential factor in grizzly bear habitat and recovery was never addressed in the Salish Good EA, in violation of the NEPA and the ESA, as well as the APA. Without this type of analysis, the agency could not have taken a "hard look" at project impacts on the grizzly bear and designed an action alternative that would not have adverse impact to this threatened species.

7. Relief Requested

Due to the violations of the ESA, the NEPA, the NFMA, and the APA, NEC and AWR request that this project be withdrawn. Any vegetation management programs designed for this landscape occupied by grizzly bears, lynx and wolverine need to prioritize these species in the management, including motorized access levels that promote continued use by these species based on traffic levels. This would likely include few to no vegetation treatments, along with an active program to remove many existing roads to develop valid security areas for not only these species, but for elk as well. This would directly benefit grizzly bears, lynx and wolverine by reducing displacement and mortality risk, including illegal motorized use on roads closed to public travel, and hunter use on closed roads, And it would indirectly benefit these species by increasing elk numbers on public lands in both the summer and fall. These elk can provide important sources of prey and carrion for all these species.

Signed for Objectors this 5th day of June, 2020

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sara Johnson", written over a horizontal line.

Sara Johnson