



**IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

SOUTHWEST REGION

MCCALL OFFICE

555 Deinhard Lane

McCall, Idaho 83638

Brad Little / Governor

Ed Schriever / Director

September 17, 2020

Erin Phelps  
District Ranger, New Meadows Ranger District  
Payette National Forest  
3674 Hwy 95 PO Box J  
New Meadows, ID 83654

**RE: Idaho Department of Fish and Game Scoping Comments for Rapid River Travel Management Project**

Dear District Ranger Phelps,

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has reviewed the New Meadows Ranger District of the Payette National Forest's (PNF) August 2020 request for scoping comments for the proposed Rapid River Travel Management Project and offers the following technical comments and recommendations to assist the PNF identify potentially affected resources, analyze the Proposed Action, and develop alternatives to the Proposed Action.

IDFG recognizes the need and challenges for the PNF to resolve conflicting management direction for trail designations within and adjacent to the Rapid River Wild and Scenic River Corridor ("Corridor"). The PNF proposes to review the designated use of sections of National Forest System trails within and adjacent to the Corridor, and to update the PNF's summer motor vehicle use map. In particular, the Proposed Action includes changing the designated use for sections of trails 183, 184, 187, 188 that are outside but adjacent to the Corridor from non-motorized to mechanized and motorized to align with the 2009 snow free travel plan. The Proposed Action would maintain trails 177 and 362 as non-motorized. Based on a PNF settlement agreement in 2010 (IDFG was not a party) trails 183, 184, 187, 188 and 362 adjacent to the Corridor were designated as non-motorized, essentially making much of the Rapid River watershed surrounding the Corridor a non-motorized access area.

**Hunting Pressure**

Since 2010, IDFG has anecdotally observed that trails 183, 184, 187, 188 and 362 have become popular with horse packer and backpack hunters. Re-designating sections of these trails to allow motorized travel might increase hunting pressure. Also, hunters currently using these non-motorized trails could have a less desirable experience from increased hunter numbers using motorized travel. Increased hunting pressure may then lead to heightened elk and mule deer vulnerability.

Proposed Action Analysis Recommendation-Hunting Pressure: To help guide creating possible alternatives for the Rapid River Travel Management Project, IDFG recommends the PNF analyze

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potential effects of the Proposed Action on existing hunter experience, hunting pressure, and big game populations.

### **Trail Management**

Designated Use Management – Trails 183, 188 and 187 converge very closely at a narrow section of the Corridor where a bridge is located over the Rapid River. Preventing motorized users from crossing the non-motorized Corridor may become an enforcement challenge due to the relative ease of crossing the Corridor at that bridge.

Proposed Action Analysis Recommendation-Trail Management: IDFG recommends analyzing management and enforcement prevention actions, outlined in the scoping document, such as installing signage and gates to help with designated use compliance. We also recommend the PNF consider locating motorized closures and turnarounds for motorized users short of the Corridor boundary similar to the designated use on Trail 279. This could increase effectiveness of closures, based on slope and terrain features, and maintain some access for non-motorized users into the lower portions of the Corridor.

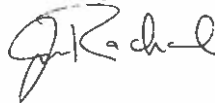
### **Water Quality**

Rapid River Water Quality – Rapid River is the source of water for the Rapid River Fish Hatchery (RRFH), which was constructed in 1964 by Idaho Power Company to mitigate for impacts of the Hells Canyon Hydroelectric Complex. RRFH is the largest spring Chinook Salmon production facility (3 million annually) in Idaho and is a critical production facility within the Columbia River Basin for state and tribal fisheries. Rapid River also supports three Endangered Species Act listed fish species (i.e., Bull Trout, spring/summer Chinook Salmon, and Steelhead) and resident inland Redband Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, and Mountain Whitefish. Based on a resource assessment by the Forest Service, both Fisheries and Water Quality were identified as Outstanding Remarkable Values within the Corridor. Maintaining and protecting water quality in Rapid River is essential for the RRFH, and the anadromous and resident fisheries.

Proposed Action Analysis Recommendation-Water Quality: Analysis of the Proposed Action should include an assessment of potential water quality and fishery impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments. Please contact Regan Berkley in the Southwest Region office at (208) 634-8137 [regan.berkley@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:regan.berkley@idfg.idaho.gov) or Tom Bassista in Headquarters at (208) 287-2773 [thomas.bassista@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:thomas.bassista@idfg.idaho.gov) if you have any questions or to request site-specific data.

Sincerely,



Jon Rachael  
Southwest Regional Supervisor