

Sandpoint Ranger District
Attn: Michell Norton
1602 Ontario Street
Sandpoint, ID 83864

DATE: February 1, 2021

Subject: Scattered Lands Proposed Action

Dear Ms. Norton:

The vision of the Panhandle Forest Collaborative (PFC) is to assist agencies by bringing balanced approaches to timber, wild ecosystems and recreation and to contribute to the sustainable social, environmental and economic viability of our region. The PFC focuses on issues on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF), primarily within the Sandpoint and Priest Lake Ranger Districts and a portion of the Coeur d'Alene Ranger District. Our goals include reducing litigation, promoting sustainable operations, enhancing travel and recreation opportunities, maintaining infrastructure for timber, ranching and recreation, and conserving native ecosystems. The PFC works to build consensus recommendations for projects and forest plans that address these goals.

We are writing to provide comments on the Scattered Lands Project on behalf of the PFC. As you know, the PFC has been involved in the planning process for this project since its inception. We agree that there is a need to improve forest conditions and reduce the threat of fire to local residents.

Initially, the Forest Service considered treating only 3,000 acres of the 6,700 acres identified as in need of fuels reduction. The initial proposal was limited to 3,000 acres in order to fit within the limits of the Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion. However, in response to input from the PFC, the Forest Service has instead decided to address all of the acreage that was identified as in need of treatment and document the effects in an environmental assessment. The PFC would like to thank the Forest Service for being responsive to our earlier input.

The fuel reduction needs are great in the Scattered Lands area. The impact to private landowners should be an active part of the public process, educating them about defensible space and water and wildlife habitat quality and about the goals and outcomes to which this project aspires. It is important to continue to consider their opinions and concerns. The PFC is willing to participate in those discussions.

As the Forest Services recognized, The Good Neighbor Authority requires the Forest Service to retain large trees appropriate to the forest type, provided that the retention of appropriate species and size classes promotes resilient forest conditions. The PFC believes it would be helpful for the Forest Service to define its large tree retention criteria in the environmental assessment. We believe it should clearly describe what species and size classes are/will be considered for retention. The PFC appreciates that no old growth stands will be logged.

In summary, the PFC supports the overall objectives of the project. We appreciate the opportunity to be involved in the planning process for the Scattered lands Project, and we look forward to reviewing the final project proposal and seeing the project through to completion.

Sincerely,

Liz Johnson-Gebhardt
Co-Chair

Mike Petersen
Co-Chair