Erin Phelps

District Ranger, New Meadows Ranger District

Payette National Forest

3674 Hwy 95 PO Box J

New Meadows, ID 83654

April 01, 2021

**RE: Idaho Wildlife Federation Comments on Rapid River Travel Management Project Environmental Assessment**

Dear District Ranger Phelps,

Heaven’s Gate Outfitters thanks you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Rapid River Travel Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA) on the Payette National Forest (PNF, or Forest).

Heaven’s Gate Outfitters (HGO) is the only permitted outfitter in the proposed project area. HGO has offered hunts in the Rapid River drainage for over 30 years.

HGO supports the non-motorized use alternative for the Project, which would designate 25.7 miles of trail as *open to foot and horse traffic only*. We detail our reasons for support of the non-motorized use alternative below.

The non-motorized use alternative achieves hunter preference and desired experience that is unique to the Rapid River.Big game hunting is a culturally and economically significant recreational activity in Idaho. Hunting and fishing combined generates $6.3 billion per year and almost 80,000 jobs. Many small communities are reliant on this industry and the inextricable link between it and the wild landscapes that provide for these opportunities. The Rapid River Area is no exception. Most hunters choose to hunt this area because of the non-motorized designation. It this designation is changed this will directly affect our ability to book hunts and run our business.

Opening any of the trails referenced will have a safety impact for our employees and hunters. We run horses and pack strings in this area and sharing the trail with motorcycles will end up in issues on the trail.

There has been an issue with motorcycles in the drainage already even through the trails are closed. There has been an issue with enforcement even with just a small number of incursions. If the trails are open these incursions in to the drainage will increase and there is no way enforcement will be able to patrol the area effectively.

Trail maintenance has also been lacking in the last 5 years. If motorized vehicles are allowed on the trails the trail system will be degraded even further.

*Conclusion*

HGO supports the non-motorized use alternative to allow the Forest to clean up conflicting management decisions while preserving the status quo conditions on the ground. We believe the Rapid River area’s current conditions provide one of the most unique experiences for the majority of recreationists who seek a day-use, backcountry, non-motorized area. The non-motorized use alternative ensures that the Outstanding Remarkable Values of the Wild Rapid River are not compromised and provides the Forest with the strongest, most defensible decision that will uphold Congressional directives.

Best regards,

Karen Savage

Andrew Savage

Heaven’s Gate Outfitters

Riggins Idaho