Clearwater Basin Collaborative
finding solutions

August 23, 2021

Via Email: appeals-northern-regional-office@usda.gov

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

Re: Clear Creek Integrated Restoration Project Objection Support Letter

Dear Reviewing Officer:

On behalf of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative (CBC) and its members, thank you for the opportunity to provide an Objection Support Letter for the Clear Creek Integrated Restoration Project (IFRP) on the Moose Creek Ranger District, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. Since 2008, the CBC has worked to enhance and protect the ecological and economic health of our forests, rivers and communities within the Clearwater Basin by working collaboratively across a diversity of interests. The CBC currently represents 23 separate organizations, individuals, and agencies.

In 2011, the CBC submitted the Selway-Middle Fork Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) proposal in partnership with the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. While that project's 10-year timeline has recently expired, the Clear Creek IFRP is the keystone of the Forests' CFLRP restoration strategy at a meaningful scale. This project was initiated as a direct response to CBC and others to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration and pro-active forest management. There was also an emphasis on the potential negative ecological, economic, and social ramifications of doing nothing in the roaded front country. The CBC supports landscape-scale restoration, with an emphasis on retention and trending the landscape towards desired conditions, appropriate patch sizes, and functioning watersheds. The CBC also supports the level of timber harvest proposed in Clear Creek and recognizes the role forest products and restoration service contracts play in achieving local economic restoration goals including increased employment opportunities.

The CBC has participated in the scoping and public review process at every juncture along the way. We submitted scoping comments in February 2012, DEIS comments in June 2013, and SEIS comments in November 2018. We participated in the first objection hearing for the project in May 2015 and organized a multitude of field trips including one in 2013 that highlighted the project for Regional and Washington office CFLRP staff.

While we are writing today to express CBC support for the Project again during the Objection period, we would like to emphasize the importance of full implementation of the project to meet the stated Purpose and Need of "manage forest vegetation to restore natural disturbance patterns; improve watershed conditions; improve elk habitat effectiveness; improve habitat for early seral species; and maintain habitat structure, function, and diversity."

We appreciate the adaptive management approach and continued monitoring outlined in the Final SEIS and we hope this not only helps protect sensitive areas and species, but also limits the need for additional removal of treatment acres during layout or implementation.

As we have stated on multiple occasions, the CBC believes that the benefits of the Clear Creek Integrated Restoration Project far outweigh the cost of doing nothing. This project was important to the ecological, economic, and social health of the Forests and surrounding communities in 2012 when it was first proposed. The Basin has experienced two "above average" fire seasons where this project area, including its wildlife habitat, fisheries, timber resources, viewsheds, and other important resources have been directly threatened. Now, almost 10 years later, its time to move forward and begin implementing restoration activities as quickly as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and support for the Clear Creek IFRP during the Objection Period. Should other parties object to the Clear Creek IFRP and a Resolution meeting scheduled, CBC would like to participate and support the Forests.

Sincerely,

Tera King, Co-Chair
Clearwater Basin Collaborative

Bill Warren, Co-Chair
Clearwater Basin Collaborative