

Aaron Stockton
District Ranger
Naches Ranger District
10237 Hwy 12
Naches, WA 98937

Little Naches Working Group Steering Committee Input on the Little Naches Upland Restoration Project

Dear Ranger Stockton,

I write to you on behalf of the Little Naches Working Group (LNWG) to express our gratitude at seeing our earlier comments incorporated into the Little Naches Upland Restoration Project. In September 2020, the LNWG commented with concerns on the Little Naches Upland Restoration Project. Many of the group's comments were received and integrated into this Draft EA. The group commented on expanding the footprint of planned vegetation management to both additional USFS lands and soon-to-be acquired lands—and that has been incorporated. We are also glad to see additional restoration activities incorporated into the proposal (e.g., decommissioning approximately 8 miles of road from the Inventoried Roadless Area and removing 11 undersized culverts associated with these roads). The LNWG also commented on the use of stewardship sales, and stewardship sales have been integrated into this project.

The LNWG strongly supports the project goals of a) restoring the ecological health and resilience of mixed-conifer forest and b) harvesting timber that produces economic value and jobs. The proposed vegetation treatment work will improve fish and wildlife habitat (e.g. restoring ESA-listed fish access to .75 miles of suitable stream habitat, and 2.2 miles of restored access for westslope cutthroat trout) and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire by changing species composition, reducing stand densities, and promoting conditions in moist and mixed conifer stands that will be within the future range of variation. We appreciate the District acknowledging the importance of providing jobs and associated economic benefits to the community, including supporting mill infrastructure and continued operability, along with the generation of additional restoration funding, as one of the project's objectives. We look forward to engaging on the TAP process and collaborating on the implementation of these proposed activities.

Individuals of the working group may have separate specific comments and concerns and will be working individually to submit letters on their behalf of individuals and organizations. We also note that while this project is an important step forward, it is not the end of restoration work in the Little Naches watershed. We look forward to working closely with the Naches Ranger District on the current Transportation Analysis Process (TAP) and future road, recreation and terrestrial and aquatic restoration projects in the watershed.

As a group, the LNWG expresses immense gratitude to the Naches Ranger District and staff and the effort made to integrate the collaborative's feedback in this process and project. Thank you for the chance to provide these comments. Please do contact our coordinator, Rose Shriner (rose@washingtonrcd.org) if you would like to follow up with us as you refine the proposed project.

Sincerely,

Lloyd McGee
Chair, Little Naches Working Group