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USDA Forest Service, Northern Region

Objection Reviewing Officer

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Missoula, MT 59804

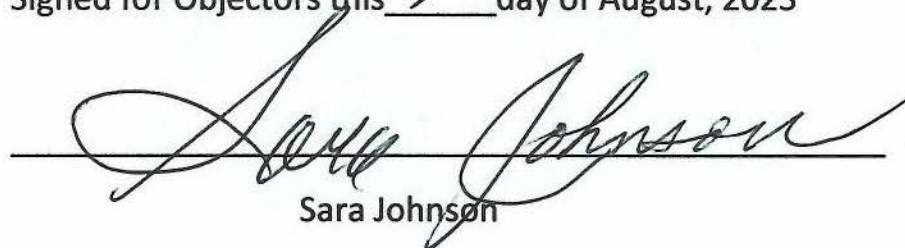
OBJECTION AGAINST THE SELWAY SAGINAW VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT

1. Name of Objectors

Sara Johnson, Lead Objector, Director, Native Ecosystems Council, PO Box 125, Willow Creek, MT 59760; phone 406-579-3286; sjohnsonkoa@yahoo.com.

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Signed for Objectors this 7th day of August, 2023


Sara Johnson

2. Name and Location of Project

Selway Saginaw Vegetation Management Project on the Wisdom and Dillon Ranger Districts of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

3. Name of Responsible Official(s)

Jamie Trip, Dillon District Ranger, Kristen Thompson, Wisdom District Ranger

4. Attachments

This Objection includes 3 appendices. Appendix A includes a list of literature cited, along with hard copies of relevant portions of cited documents and/or reports. Appendix B contains a summary of wildlife values, including for birds, for the Project Area. Appendix C contains a summary of how large openings impact various wildlife species.

5. Questions about receipt of all public involvement notifications.

The draft Decision Notice for the Selway Saginaw Vegetation Management Project noted that additional public comments were requested on November 6, 2020, including a 30-day period to address openings over 40 acres. NEC has no record of receiving this notification, and was unable to submit additional comments for this project. AWR also did not receive any notification of this additional comment period. NEC and AWR were not able, in addition, to provide any comments on the analysis of impacts to wildlife, as there was no draft Environmental Assessment (EA) released for public comment.

6. Failure to evaluate a range of action alternatives.

The agency noted in the draft Decision Notice (DN) that the proposed action was changed, with a deletion of logging of lodgepole pine old growth. This is essentially a new alternative, as compared to the previous proposed action. There is no analysis in the draft EA as to how these 2 different alternatives impact wildlife, including those associated with old growth habitat. It appears that the issue of logging old growth raised by NEC and AWR affected the development of action alternatives, but did so “post decision.” This clearly demonstrates that the agency failed to develop a range of action alternatives that addressed public issues, in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Since there are 2 different action alternatives, each alternative is required to be evaluated in the project NEPA analysis. This requires a new draft EA to be released for public comment, so that the public can see how these 2 different potential actions will impact wildlife.

7. Connection between prior written comments and the submitted Objection:

On October 19, 2020, NEC and AWR submitted scoping comments for the proposed Selway Saginaw Vegetation Management Project (Project). This was announced as “pre-scoping” on the agency’s web page. There was no public comment period allowed for a draft Environmental Assessment (EA). As such, NEC and AWR were unable to provide any comments on any assessed environmental impacts that the proposed project would have on wildlife, as defined within a draft EA. The failure of the agency to allow comments on a draft EA meant that public comments were very limited in regards to wildlife effects of the proposed action. It is unclear why a draft EA was never provided to the public so that information other than project design criteria were provided. Design criteria do not identify the environmental impacts of the project on wildlife. We believe the agency needs to provide a 30-day comment period on the draft EA, so that the

public is provided enough information to provide meaningful involvement, as is required by the NEPA.

The comments that NEC and AWR did provide on this project are summarized below, including whether or not these issues and concerns were carried forward into this Objection.

We raised a concern that the agency is violating the NEPA by failing to provide important resource conditions (e.g., baseline conditions for wildlife) to the public before a decision is made. We have carried this issue forward into this Objection.

We raised a concern that the scoping notice did not define how the proposed project would implement various requirements of the BDNF Revised Forest Plan (RFP). Yet adherence to this RFP is required for projects. Goals and standards/guidelines of the RFP, including wildlife surveys, maintaining habitat conditions for elk security, managing sage grouse and pygmy rabbit habitat, and meeting the connectivity requirement for lynx, for example, were not discussed as to how compliance would be achieved by the proposed project.

We raised an issue that the rationale for the proposed logging was not supported by science. The information provided was one-sided, without any opposing views, even though such exist. This project could have the opposite effect, of increasing fire potentials in this landscape, especially an abundance of young clearcuts which are defined as "fire bombs." The NEPA requires the agency to address all potential impacts of logging on fire, not just the ones the agency is using to justify logging. This issue is carried forward into this Objection.

We raised the issue that the agency is falsely claiming that fire suppression is responsible for conifer encroachment, without providing supporting documentation. Conifer encroachment is a natural process of succession, and

does not require management intervention. We have addressed the effects of conifer treatments on wildlife in this Objection, effects that were not identified in the scoping notice.

We raised the issue of the agency's failure to evaluate impacts on elk based on the current best science in regards to both vulnerability and roading impacts. This is essential in order for the agency to measure the level of project impacts on elk, as to whether they are significant not. We noted that the RFP direction for elk management cannot measure actual impacts of vegetation management projects. We have raised this issue in our objection, that the current best science indicates the project will have significant adverse impacts on elk.

We raised the issue of the agency's failure to monitor the impacts of vegetation treatments on wildlife. NEC subsequently submitted a FOIA on this issue. The agency was not able to provide any monitoring results on the effects of vegetation management on any forest wildlife species. This concern was carried forward into this Objection.

We raised the issue that the agency has no habitat criteria for big game winter range, including winter range that will be impacted by the project. Any vegetation treatments, including burning of sagebrush, is claimed as habitat improvement on elk winter range. We believe this is a misrepresentation of actual impacts, and have carried this issue forward into this Objection. We have also carried forward into this Objection the issue of burning sagebrush in occupied sage grouse habitat. This is clearly an adverse impact on this species, as well as an adverse impact on many neotropical migratory birds. We have carried this issue forward into this Objection regarding adverse impacts to wildlife from slashing and burning ecotones and sagebrush.

We raised the issue as to how the project would impact climate change. This was not adequately addressed in the draft EA, and this issue was carried forward into this Objection.

We raised the issue of logging and burning impacts on population trends of North American landbirds, both of forests and woodlands and wooded-shrublands, as well as shrublands. Impacts to these birds, including many identified as Montana Species of Concern, will likely be severe, in part because the BDNF RFP has no actual management direction or requirements for birds, in violation of both the NEPA and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). We have carried this issue forward into this Objection, while also expanding the specific topics on various bird habitats, including snag forests and old growth. We also noted that the snag management direction for the RFP is invalid, and that the RFP also does not require valid management of old growth forests, including the allowance of old growth logging.

The many failures of this project to address bird populations is clearly a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). This is in part a failure of the BDNF RFP to have any management requirements for this large suite of forest wildlife as well as neotropical migratory birds associated with ecotones, including wooded-shrublands and shrublands. We have carried this issue forward into this Objection.

We raised a concern about the importance of the project landscape as a connectivity corridor for the grizzly bear between populations in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The proposed project will clearly have significant adverse impacts on population connectivity, as well as local individual bears occupying this landscape, in violation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The project requires a take statement from the USFWS to address the increased mortality risks to bears that will result from this project.

We raised the issue that the agency has failed to address how management of big game winter range affects the wolverine. Management of big game winter range is part of wolverine management, a factor not recognized by the agency. To date there has apparently been no RFP monitoring of how management of big game winter ranges on the BDNF is affecting wolverine populations and distribution. We have carried this issue forward into this Objection.

We raised a concern about how the proposed project will impact red squirrel, and particularly snowshoe hare populations, species that are key to various forest carnivores, including the Canada lynx. The agency needs to address what constitutes a significant decline in snowshoe hare populations in the project area, and how this would impact lynx habitat use and population trends. If snowshoe hare populations decline significantly from this project, why wouldn't this also trigger a significant decline in the potential for this habitat to support lynx? We have carried this issue forward into this Objection, as application of the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD) does not address this issue.

8. Remedy

Due to the many legal violations of the proposed project, and the complete failure of the BDNF RFP to meet the requirements of the NFMA for maintaining wildlife diversity, and to prevent significant adverse impacts to almost all wildlife species on the BDNF, including the threatened grizzly bear and lynx, we request that this proposal be withdrawn. In order to meet the requirements of the NFMA and the NEPA, the BDNF RFP requires a number of essential amendments to include valid management strategies for forest birds associated with old growth and snag forests, and for many bird species associated with wooded shrublands and shrublands, including Greater Sage-Grouse. A Forest Plan amendment is required to allow for the lack of wildlife surveys for several forest raptors and the Black-backed Woodpecker DURING project planning; the agency has no basis for claiming that post-implementation wildlife surveys will be done, since they have

not yet been done. These are “hypothetical surveys” where results are not being provided to the public, as is required by the NEPA.

The project also requires a Forest Plan amendment to allow for the failure to inventory lodgepole pine old growth in the Selway Saginaw Project Area. The RFP requires 10% old growth for lodgepole pine. Region 1 defines well distributed old growth as occurring every 10,000 acres. Thus the RFP requires that 1000 acres of lodgepole pine old growth occur within the roughly 6 areas of the 66,289 acres project area.

The RFP also needs to be amended to address the failure of the associated FEIS to address impacts of large openings on wildlife, and to establish “side boards” on large openings to prevent significant direct and cumulative impacts to wildlife across the BDNF. The RFP direction for the lynx needs to be updated based on the current best science, so that snowshoe hare habitat is adequate as well as available to lynx. Currently, the NRLMD does not define what is an adequate level of snowshoe hare habitat/populations in lynx habitat, so it does not measure project impacts on hares or lynx. In addition, the remapping of lynx habitat that recently occurred on the BDNF removed extensive areas of the landscape from management of snowshoe hares as per reducing habitat fragmentation. This impact has never been evaluated on snowshoe hares. As well, the remapping changes made to lynx habitat on the Forest need to be revisited to provide public comment, given the magnitude of the changes made to habitat management for this threatened species and its key prey species. Finally, the proposed project needs to be redesigned to meet the Forest Plan direction for maintaining habitat connectivity for the lynx, or else a Forest Plan amendment is required for this violation.

If the project is moved forward as planned, clearly an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required for all the significant adverse impacts that will be triggered on wildlife, from nongame to game to threatened species, based on past as well as planned vegetation treatments.

9. Legal Violations that will be triggered if the Selway Saginaw Project is implemented.

The following is a summary of the various legal violations that will be triggered if the Selway Saginaw Vegetation Management Project is implemented as defined in the draft DN. The supporting documentation for this summary is provided in Appendices B and C attached to this Objection.

a. The Forest Service (FS) will violate the BDNF RFP for management of old growth habitat.

There is no old growth inventory for the project area. The RFP requires the FS to maintain 10% old growth (Alternative 6, FEIS 471). Region 1 of the FS (USDA 1990) as well as the current best science (Suring et al. 1993) define well distributed old growth as occurring every 10,000 acres. This would require lodgepole pine old growth to have roughly 1,000 acres of old growth within each of the 6 areas of the 66,289 acre project area. The agency cannot demonstrate that this RFP direction for lodgepole pine old growth is being met in this project area.

The basis for 10% old growth lodgepole pine forest for the BDNF has never been defined in the associated FEIS. This is an arbitrary number that is not supported by the current best science of 20-25% old growth. The effect of maintaining only 10% lodgepole pine old growth was never evaluated in the RFP FEIS. This is a violation of the NEPA and the NFMA, and needs to be corrected with a Forest Plan Amendment before any further logging, including lodgepole pine, occurs.

b. The FS will violate the NEPA if the Selway Saginaw Project is implemented due to a failure to define the "environmental baseline" for wildlife to the public.

There is no information provided by the current habitat conditions for wildlife in the project area, including old growth. There have been no surveys for forest sensitive species, such as the Black-backed Woodpecker, Flammulated Owl, Northern Goshawk and Great Gray Owl. This survey information would define to the public has these species are using habitat based on past logging, which has been noted to be “extensive” (Project Wildlife Report at 16).

- c. **The FS will violate the NEPA by failing to clearly define the mitigation measures that will be applied around woodpecker and forest raptor nests that occur in the project area.**

The mitigation measures for protected wildlife nesting areas were not defined. In addition, their effectiveness was not addressed as well. This would be based on past monitoring of mitigation measures, which does not appear to have occurred. The agency appears to have no actual basis for implementing any nest protective measures for forest woodpeckers and raptors. Thus the impacts of the project on these species is potentially highly detrimental, as well as significant.

- d. **The FS is violating the NEPA and the NFMA by continuing to use an invalid snag management strategy for wildlife, a strategy that is meaningless in maintaining viable populations of these species.**

The current snag management strategy on the BDNF is a meaningless procedural process that has no relevance to maintaining 23 species of birds associated with snags within forests. Even if this RFP direction was applied, it would be meaningless because snags are not actually required to be retained in harvest units. Existing snags elsewhere on the landscape, outside of harvest units, are counted for snag retention. This is using existing snag habitat as mitigation for the planned loss of snags in harvest units, with is an invalid mitigation measure. If by chance snags are actually retained in harvest units, which is not a requirement, these snags are likely to blow over rather quickly. Also, the suitability of any given

snag for cavity construction is very limited, down to 4%. So a standing snag in a harvest unit is unlikely to provide nesting cavities for birds.

As noted in Appendix B of this Objection, at least 11 of the snag-associated wildlife species are associated with old growth, and thus depend upon old growth management. As well, all cavity-nesting birds are dependent upon woodpeckers to create nesting cavities. Thus the key to management of snag habitat for wildlife is to ensure robust populations of woodpeckers occur to create nesting sites for secondary cavity nesters. The BDNF RFP does not have a conservation strategy for forest woodpeckers, and thus, for the other bird species that use cavities for nesting. The RFP clearly fails to meet the requirements of the NFMA in maintaining bird species diversity. And the RFP also violates the NEPA by suggesting to the public that a few snags left in harvest units is all 23 species of birds associated with snags require. A Forest Plan amendment for the management of forest woodpeckers, and thus secondary cavity nesters, is required before any further logging occur on the BDNF.

e. The FS is violating the NEPA and the NFMA by the program to slash and burn ecotone areas as well as pure sagebrush stands.

The proposed project is just another continuation of a RFP plan to increase forage for cows by burning sagebrush. This project will burn several thousand acres of sagebrush, with only a small percentage of these sagebrush areas actually containing conifers. The RFP has an objective to slash/burn 74,000 acres of woodlands, wooded-shrublands, and shrublands. At the same time, there is no analysis in the associated FEIS as to how this will impact associated wildlife, including neotropical migratory birds associated with these habitats, which include many Montana SOC (Objection Appendix B). There is no basis for determining that this program will maintain local viable populations of various birds, as well as the Pygmy Rabbit. The RFP and associated FEIS need to be amended to evaluate how this slashing/burning program will impact wildlife and maintain these species on the landscape without any sideboards to habitat loss.

f. The FS is violating the NEPA by claiming that burning sagebrush improves habitat for elk and the Greater Sage-Grouse, including in the Selway-Saginaw project area.

The general claim made for the Selway-Saginaw Project proposed sagebrush burning of several thousand acres is that it will improve big game winter range and improve Greater Sage-grouse habitat. No monitoring information was cited, nor was provided to NEC in a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for monitoring information on the management of big game winter ranges on the BDNF. No current science was also cited to support claims that burning sagebrush improves habitat for elk winter range and Greater Sage-grouse. This requires that neither elk nor Greater Sage-grouse use sagebrush habitats, but the science to support these claims was not provided in the agency's NEPA analysis on burning impacts in occupied Greater Sage-grouse habitat, occupied Pygmy Rabbit habitat, or elk and mule deer winter range. The NEPA requires that the agency provide "high quality" information to support management claims. It is clear, based on the current best science, that burning sagebrush will have potentially significant adverse impacts on elk, mule deer, Greater Sage-grouse, and Pygmy Rabbits, impacts that require completion of an EIS.

g. The FS is violating the NFMA by failing to evaluate the impact of large openings in the RFP FEIS.

The BDNF RFP indicates that openings will be below 40 acres. There is no analysis of how larger openings would impact wildlife in this FEIS. There are also no sideboards provided in the RFP as to what limits need to be applied for the acreage and distribution of clearcutting within a given landscape, due to the severe adverse impacts clearcutting has on wildlife (Appendices B and C of this Objection). A Forest Plan amendment is required, with the appropriate public involvement, before the agency can move forward with creating large clearcuts that exceed 40 acres in size. This amendment needs to provide sideboards that limit the adverse impacts to wildlife from these large openings.

h. The FS is violating the NEPA by failing to identify the total size of each planned opening, including those adjacent to natural openings.

The Selway Saginaw landscape includes many natural openings. However, the EA does not explain how planned clearcuts are affected by these natural openings. The total size of openings is thus not being reported to the public if natural openings adjacent to these openings are not included in the total opening size. In addition, the agency does not identify the cumulative size of openings created by adjacent clearcuts. The public is required to figure this out on their own. In total, the agency is clearly concealing the total opening size effects on wildlife for this project.

i. The FS is violating the NFMA and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) by failing to manage for birds, including neotropical migratory birds on the BDNF.

The BDNF RFP does not include any management requirements for forest birds associated with old growth or snag forests, or birds associated with woodlands/wooded-shrublands/shrublands, including neotropical migratory birds, including those associated with old growth forests, snag forests, and woodlands/wooded-shrublands/shrublands. There are no habitat requirements for this large suite of birds. As such, the BDNF cannot demonstrate the RFP will meet the requirements of either the NFMA or the MBTA by maintaining well distributed persistence populations this large suite of bird species across the forest. A Forest Plan amendment is required so that the agency will define the conservation strategies for this large suite of birds on the BDNF, as well as demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies in maintaining these species. Until this is done, the BDNF cannot legally do any further logging and burning of ecotones.

- j. **The FS has failed to evaluate the impact of their snag management strategy of the RFP, and the impact of logging across the BDNF remains unknown, even though it is probably highly significant.**

The BDNF uses a count of snag numbers across an entire landscape as a “proxy” for populations of forest birds associated with snags. To date, the agency has not provided any scientific basis or monitoring to show that a landscape count of snags indicates population size and persistence of associated species. Using an invalid proxy for a large suite of forest birds is a violation of both the NEPA and the NFMA. The BDNF cannot complete any additional logging until a valid measure of viability and persistence of birds associated with snags is developed and implemented. This analysis needs to estimate the impact of past logging, including the objective of 74,000 acres of clearcutting lodgepole pine and thus eliminating forest bird snag habitat for 80-100 years. Unless this analysis is done, the continued erosion of habitat for these species will continue, with unknown population impacts. The failure of the BDNF to manage for birds associated with snag forest is increasingly critical, given the current plight of North American landbirds.

- k. **The FS has not obtained a “take permit” from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the killing of neotropical migratory birds that will result from the proposed project.**

The proposed project will result in an unestimated number of bird deaths, first from logging, second from burning nesting habitat, and 3rd from smoke toxicity to all ages of birds from prescribed burning. The logging and burning are “optional” activities by the FS, activities that are not needed for the management of wildlife. Thus the agency is intentionally doing activities that kill neotropical migratory birds, and must both estimate the number to be killed per year, and request a take permit for this estimated number as is required by the MOU with the USFWS.

l. The BDNF RFP did not evaluate the impact of logging 74,000 acres of lodgepole pine on forest raptors.

There are at least 11 low-density forest raptors that will have nesting and foraging habitat destroyed with the planned clearcutting of 74,000 acres of lodgepole pine in the BDNF RFP. These include the Flammulated Owl, Great Horned Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Boreal Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, American Kestrel, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Northern Goshawk. All of these raptors will nest in lodgepole pine forests, and all have been impacted to an unknown degree by the BDNF RFP objective of clearcutting 74,000 acres of lodgepole pine. No surveys are required to 8 of these species, although it does not appear from monitoring results on the BDNF that surveys are even conducted for the Northern Goshawk, Great Gray Owl, and Flammulated Owls. The impact of the proposed clearcutting of 74,000 acres of lodgepole pine, an objective that is also being implemented in the Selway Saginaw Project Area, remains unknown. As such, the agency has no basis for claiming that any further clearcutting of lodgepole pine is both maintaining wildlife diversity and avoiding significant wildlife impacts.

m. The FS is violating the NEPA by failing to develop a range of alternatives that address public issues.

The draft DN for the project noted that the logging of old growth lodgepole pine stands was being "deferred" at this time. This is apparently due to the issues raised by NEC and AWR on logging old growth and thus destroying its value to wildlife. The dropping of these old growth logging units clearly demonstrates that the agency should have included this as an action alternative for this project, and included an analysis of all proposed action alternatives for wildlife. Instead, the agency simply stated that old growth logging was being "deferred," without providing any rationale as to this decision. This is a violation of the NEPA, as the public was not informed as to why these units were dropped.

- n. **The agency did not define specifically when the deferred logging of old growth can be expected to be implemented, or what the process will be for public involvement.**

It is unclear how the agency intends to move forward with the logging of lodgepole pine old growth. This is a significant issue for NEC and AWR, and we have a concern that this essentially clearcutting of lodgepole pine old growth will proceed in the near future without any public involvement. Please define to the public how the agency intends to proceed with these deferred units, and the public involvement that will occur. Since the notice to NEC and AWR regarding the Selway Saginaw Project was questionable regarding the second opportunity to comment, we are concerned that the deferment of logging old growth will be slipped by the public without any actual notice or analysis. Clearly, logging lodgepole pine old growth, including by leaving clumps of trees scattered across the unit to meet the few trees required by Green et al. (1991) old growth screening criteria, will not maintain old growth. This issue is a challenge to the BDNF RFP old growth direction, and requires full public involvement for any site-specific project.

- o. **The FS is violating the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by failing to use the current best science to provide prey habitat for the threatened Canada lynx.**

The FS is applying the Forest Plan direction of the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD) to assess project impacts on lynx persistence and recovery in the project area. This NRLMD, however, fails to use the current best science for the provision of hare habitat for lynx. Kosterman et al. (2018) and Holbrook et al. (2019) note that hare habitat should comprise no more than 5% of a complete landscape occupied by lynx, while the NRLMD allows 30% of lynx habitat to lack hare habitat. The lack of hare habitat in adjacent areas not mapped as hare habitat is not included, so total landscape percentage of non-hare habitat may easily exceed 30%. This NRLMD standard is being applied to the Selway

Saginaw Project Area, and demonstrates the massive impacts that this direction allows for hare habitat, and thus lynx. As shown in Table 5 of the Project Wildlife Report, the 3 Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs) present in the project area can each have 30% of the lynx habitat clearcut. Minus existing clearcuts, this allow 6657 clearcut acres in LAU BH-18, 4,264 new clearcuts could be created in LAU BH-19, and 4,769 new clearcuts could be created in LAU LT-01. This comes to 15,690 acres where snowshoe hare habitat can be removed for 15-20 years, until these areas regenerate taller trees. There are no logging projects that would ever even approach the quota of clearcuts allowed by the NRLMD. It is a useless document that promotes intensive logging, not maintenance of hare habitat for lynx.

- p. The FS needs to complete a Forest Plan amendment to allow the violation of Forest Plan standard ALL S1, which requires that connectivity in lynx habitat be maintained.**

The current best science shows that high quality lynx habitat has roughly 70% connectivity, including 50% mature undisturbed forest and 20% taller, older clearcuts with good cover and winter snowshoe hare habitat (Kosterman et al. 2018; Holbrook et al. 2019). Holbrook et al. (2018) also shows that lynx avoid movement through almost all types of logging units, not just clearcuts. It is impossible that the Selway Saginaw Project will not reduce lynx habitat connectivity on all treated acres. There was no analysis of how lynx habitat connectivity will be changed with this project, or if the 70% level found by the current best science will be maintained across the project area within all habitats of each LAU, not just mapped lynx habitat. It seems likely that given past logging and natural openings, that a 70% connectivity level will not be maintained with this project, which would require a Forest Plan amendment.

- q. The FS is violating the ESA by increasing the mortality risk of grizzly bears in this occupied landscape in a key connectivity area between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.**

The Selway-Saginaw project area is occupied by grizzly bears, and includes significant dispersal of bears into this area from the NCDE, as well as from the GYE. The increase in roading activities will clearly increase the mortality risk to bears using this landscape over a 10-year period the sales are active. In addition, the roads, both reconstructed and newly constructed, will increase grizzly bear mortality risk from foot traffic, especially hunters (Schwartz et al. 2010). As was noted by Schwartz et al. (2010), a key factor in management of mortality risk to grizzly bears is the active motorized route density outside of secure areas. Thus simply claiming that roadless lands prevent increased mortality risk to grizzly bears is an invalid claim. The agency needs to clearly define how this project will increase the long-term risk of mortality to the grizzly bear, which will impact recovery of the GYE as per genetic management. This proposal clearly requires completion, as well, of an EIS to address the significant increase the project will have on grizzly bear mortality risk.

There is clearly a considerable mileage of unauthorized routes in this project area that are having additional, likely significant potentials for increased mortality risk to grizzly bears. How the management of these unauthorized roads is being addressed was never identified. It was noted in the USDA/MFWP 2013 collaborative report that ATV use in southwestern Montana has increased exponentially in recent years. The overall impact of legal and illegal use of roads in this key linkage area for grizzly bears needs to be fully addressed for this project, and mitigation measures implemented to reduce this risk to levels that sustain grizzly bear use. Proctor et al. (2020) noted that active motorized route densities over 1 mile per section result in potentially adverse impacts on grizzly bear mortality that reduce the overall use within the affected landscape. As noted by Schwartz et al. (2010), the active motorized route density outside of grizzly bear security areas is an essential criteria for management. This information was never provided to the public in the Selway-Saginaw NEPA analysis, in violation of both the NEPA and the ESA.

- r. **The agency is violating the NEPA by failing to provide a valid assessment of project impacts on elk based on the current best science; it is unknown if impacts will be significant as a result.**

The analysis of project impacts on big game is based on measures of RFP direction, which do not define elk security correctly, or measure the impact of active motorized routes on elk summer use. Thus the impact of the project on elk vulnerability as well as displacement to adjacent private lands is unknown. It is not demonstrated if the project area will maintain 30% elk security, and if not, why elk displacement will not be increased significantly. In turn, the project analysis does not measure how active motorized route density, including at least 2 vehicle trips per 12 hours, will displace elk from the roaded portions of the project area. So again, the impact of the proposed project on elk summer habitat use is concealed, even though it may be significant (triggers less than 50% habitat effectiveness).

- s. **The agency failed to evaluate the impacts of the project-triggered increases of global warming on birds.**

The project will clearly increase the effects of climate change on all of the local bird populations, including neotropical migratory birds. As was noted in a recent article in Montana Outdoors in the 2023 March-April issue, state climatologists predict even warmer temperatures in the future; by 2069, some areas of Montana can expect up to 5 more weeks of above 90-degree days each year; during the past 65 years, the state's temperature has increased 0.42 degrees per decade while the national average was 0.26 degrees per decade; the greater rate of change is due to Montana's higher altitude, making it more sensitive to temperature fluctuation. Logging, including clearcutting, removes the shade from formerly forested areas, and results in increased summer temperatures for birds. The rationale for clearcutting, which also reduces carbon sequestration in the forest landscape, is clearly an adverse management practice for birds. The agency claims that clearcutting is needed to control dwarf mistletoe!

The impacts of climate change on bird life on public lands has also been demonstrated by increases in severe weather events, such as the one that occur in the southwestern US several years ago that resulted in the estimated death of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of migrating songbirds. The Selway Saginaw Project NEPA analysis failed to address the many impacts that climate change will have on native birds, or how the project will exacerbate these impacts. The NEPA analysis is thus flawed and invalid on climate change.,

The article below was published in the July 28, 2023 issue of the Week. This book review demonstrates the ongoing crisis of climate change, a crisis that is somehow being ignored by the Forest Service.

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ARTS

THE WEEK July 28, 2023

Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

The Heat Will Kill You First: Life and Death on a Scorched Planet

by Jeff Goodell (Little, Brown, \$29)

"More than any other effect of climate change, heat destroys life with an excruciating immediacy," said Peter Holley in *Texas Monthly*. In his best-selling new book, climate journalist Jeff Goodell delivers "a bracing examination of climate change in its most essential form," showing how the planet's rising temperature is unleashing spells of deadly extreme heat and reminding us how vulnerable we are to temperatures like those that have gripped much of the southernmost U.S. in the past week.

"Goodell is at his most effective when he describes how heat affects the human body," said Shannon Osaka in *The Washington Post*. He recounts in detail how a California couple and their 1-year-old all died on a trail in 2021 when a morning hike ended less than 2 miles from safety during a sunbaked climb back to their truck through 100-degree heat. Like the



A traffic warden braves last week's heat wave.

15,000 people who perished in Paris during a 2003 heat wave or the 600 killed in British Columbia in 2021 by a fluke weeklong temperature spike, the California family were victims of the body's surprising vulnerability to internal temperatures above 98.6 degrees. When those internal temperatures hit 102 or 103, a victim can pass out, as the body's attempt to cool off sends blood to the skin, abandoning internal organs, including the brain. Above 107 degrees, "things start to break down at

a cellular level." Cell membranes melt away, unleashing systemic hemorrhaging and fatal heatstroke.

Predictably, the old, sick, and poor are more vulnerable to extreme heat, said Jennifer Szalai in *The New York Times*. But "people who have faith that their resources will spare them are kidding themselves." Heat imperils food supplies because of the hazards it poses to plant and animal life. It also causes forest fires and rising sea levels, and contributes to many deadly storms. And when regions like British Columbia can be hit with triple-digit temperatures, few places on the planet are invulnerable to heat waves and failures of the electric grid that can result in widespread death. *The Heat Will Kill You First* covers all those threats as it surveys much of the planet, and "Goodell's stripped-down style suits his subject. This is a propulsive book, one to be raced through." As it strings together troubling scenes and links the crisis to the burning of fossil fuels, it packs in enough data to terrify "even the most casual reader," said Bethanne Patrick in the *Los Angeles Times*. It reads like "a wake-up call with no snooze button."