

November 6, 2023

Joe Rausch, District Ranger

Cle Elum Ranger District

803 W 2nd St,

Cle Elum, WA 98922

Dear Ranger Rausch,

Please accept these scoping comments from me on behalf of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Center for Biological Diversity, Council on Wildlife and Fish, and Native Ecosystems Council, collectively “Alliance”, on the Upper Swauk Restoration project project in response to the legal notice published on October 11, 2023. The legal notice states that the public has 30 days to comment from the date of publication of the legal notice in the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.

Please demonstrate that there is an emergency that requires this project.

Please demonstrate that this project qualifies for a CE.

The scoping notice does not adequately demonstrate that all Forest Plan standards and requirements will be met.

Please demonstrate that the project is meeting all of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Forest Plan's standards.

Public Law 117 - 58 - Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act states(f) Exclusions.--An eligible activity may not be carried out under the Program--

(1) in a wilderness area or designated wilderness study area;

(2) in an inventoried roadless area;

(3) on any Federal land on which, by Act of Congress or Presidential proclamation, the removal of vegetation is restricted or prohibited; or

(4) in an area in which the eligible activity would be inconsistent with the applicable land and resource management plan.

The scoping notice does not demonstrate that the project follows of the requirements of Public Law 117-58 and the Forest Plan requirements.

Please provide a map of the WUI showing that it complies with the definition of a WUI in the Healthy Forest Act.

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(A) that has been approved for an extension of funding by the Secretary of Agriculture prior to the date of enactment of this Act; or

(B) that has been recommended for an extension of funding by the advisory panel established under section

4003(e) of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (16 U.S.C. 7303(e)) prior to the date of enactment of this Act that the Secretary of Agriculture subsequently approves; and
(3) select project proposals for funding under the Program in a manner that--
(A) gives priority to a project proposal that will treat acres that--
(i) have been identified as having very high wildfire hazard potential; and
(ii) are located in--
(I) the wildland-urban interface; or
(II) a public drinking water source area;

The term "wildland-urban interface" has the meaning given the term in section

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101 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6511).

The scoping notice does not adequately demonstrate that the project follows the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 definition of a wildland -urban interface which is 1 1/2 miles from a community.

Please demonstrate that the entire project area is a drinking water source area for the community.

We believe because of the size of the project and the cumulative effects of past current and future logging by the Forest Service and private logging in the area the Forest Service must complete a full environmental impact statement (EIS) for this Project. The scope of the Project will likely have a significant individual and cumulative impact on the environment. Alliance has reviewed the statutory and regulatory requirements governing National Forest Management projects, as well as the relevant case law, and compiled a checklist of issues that must be included in the EIS for the Project in order for the Forest Service's analysis to comply with the law. Following the list of necessary elements, Alliance has also included a general narrative discussion on possible impacts of the Project, with accompanying citations to the relevant scientific literature. These references should be disclosed and discussed in the EIS or for an EA for the Project.

I. NECESSARY ELEMENTS FOR

PROJECT EIS or EA:

A. Disclose all Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) For-

est Plan requirements for logging/burning projects and explain how the Project complies with them;

B. Will this project comply with forest plan big game hiding cover standards and the eastside assessment?

C. Disclose the acreages of past, current, and reasonably foreseeable logging, grazing, mining, and road building activities within the Project area;

D. Solicit and disclose comments from the Washing Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding the impact of the Project on wildlife habitat;

E. Solicit and disclose comments from the Washington Department of Environmental Quality regarding the impact of the Project on water quality;

F. Disclose the biological assessment for the candidate, threatened, or endangered species with potential and/or actual habitat in the Project area;

G. Disclose the biological evaluation for the sensitive and management indicator species with potential and/or actual habitat in the Project area;

H. Disclose the snag densities in the Project area, and the method used to determine those densities;

I. Disclose the current, during-project, and post-project road densities in the Project area;

J. Disclose the OWNF's record of compliance with state best management practices regarding stream sedimentation from ground-disturbing management activities;

K. Disclose the OWNF's record of compliance with its monitoring requirements as set forth in its Forest Plan;

L. Disclose the OWNF's record of compliance with the additional monitoring requirements set forth in previous DN/FONSI and RODs on the OWNF;

M. Disclose the results of the field surveys for threatened, endangered, sensitive, and rare plants in each of the proposed units;

N. Please formally consult with the US FWS on the impacts of this project on candidate, threatened, or endangered species and plants;

O. Please consult with the US FWS on the impacts of this project on lynx critical habitat and potential lynx critical habitat;

P. Will this Project exacerbate existing noxious weed infestations and start new infestations?

Q. Do unlogged old growth forest store more carbon than the wood products that would be removed from the same forest in a logging operation?

R. What is the cumulative effect of National Forest logging on U.S. carbon stores? How many acres of National Forest lands are logged every year? How much carbon is lost by that logging?

S. Is this Project consistent with “research recommendations (Krankina and Harmon 2006) for protecting carbon gains against the poten-

tial impacts of future climate change? That study recommends “[i]ncreasing or maintaining the forest area by avoiding deforestation,” and states that “protecting forest from logging or clearing offer immediate benefits via prevented emissions.” That study also states that “[w]hen the initial condition of land is a productive old-growth forest, the conversion to forest plantations with a short harvest rotation can have the opposite effect lasting for many decades” The study does state that thinning may have a beneficial effect to stabilize the forest and avoid stand-replacing wildfire, but the study never defines thinning.

T. Please list each visual quality standard that applies to each unit and disclose whether each unit meets its respective visual quality standard. A failure to comply with visual quality Forest Plan standards violates NFMA.

U. For the visual quality standard analysis please define “ground vegetation,” i.e. what age are the trees, “reestablishes,” “short term,” “longer term,” and “revegetate.”

V. Please disclose whether you have conducted surveys in the Project area for this Project for wolverines, whitebark pine, northern spotted owls, grizzly bears, pine martins, northern goshawk and lynx as required by the Forest Plan.

W. Please disclose how often the Project area has been surveyed for wolverines, pine martins, northern goshawks, northern spotted owl, whitebark pine, monarch butterflies, grizzly bears, whitebark pine and lynx.

X. Is it impossible for a wolverines, pine martins, monarch butterflies, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, northern spotted owls, whitebark pine and lynx to inhabit the Project area?

Y. Would the habitat be better for wolverines, monarch butterflies, pine martins, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, northern spotted owls, whitebark pine and lynx if roads were removed in the Project area?

Z. What is the U.S. FWS position on the impacts of this Project on wolverines, pine martins, monarch butterflies, northern goshawks,

grizzly bears, northern spotted owls, whitebark pine and lynx? Have you conducted ESA consultation?

AA. Please provide us with the full BA for the wolverines, northern spotted owls, monarch butterflies, pine martins, northern goshawks, grizzly bears, whitebark pine and lynx.

BB. What is wrong with uniform forest conditions?

CC. Has the beetle kill contributed to a diverse landscape?

DD. Why are you trying to exclude stand replacement fires when these fires help aspen and whitebark pine?

EE. Please disclose what is the best available science for restoration of whitebark pine.

FF. Disclose the level of current noxious weed infestations in the Project area and the cause of those infestations;

GG. Disclose the impact of the Project on noxious weed infestations and native plant communities;

HH. Disclose the amount of detrimental soil disturbance that currently exists in each proposed unit from previous logging and grazing activities;

II. Disclose the expected amount of detrimental soil disturbance in each unit after ground disturbance and prior to any proposed mitigation/remediation;

JJ. Disclose the expected amount of detrimental soil disturbance in each unit after proposed mitigation/remediation;

KK. Disclose the analytical data that supports proposed soil mitigation/ remediation measures;

LL. Disclose the timeline for implementation;

MM. Disclose the funding source for non- commercial activities proposed;

NN. Disclose the current level of old growth forest in each third order drainage in the Project area;

OO. Disclose the method used to quantify old growth forest acreages and its rate of error based upon field review of its predictions;

PP. Disclose the historic levels of mature and old growth forest in the Project area;

QQ. Disclose the level of mature and old growth forest necessary to sustain viable populations of dependent wildlife species in the area;

RR. Disclose the amount of mature and old growth forest that will remain after implementation;

SS. Disclose the amount of current habitat for old growth and mature forest dependent species in the Project area;

TT. Disclose the amount of habitat for old growth and mature forest dependent species that will remain after Project implementation;

UU. Disclose the method used to model old growth and mature forest dependent wildlife habitat acreages and its rate of error based upon field review of its predictions;

VV. Disclose the amount of big game (moose and elk) hiding cover, winter range, and security currently available in the area;

WW. Disclose the amount of big game (moose and elk) hiding cover, winter range, and security during Project implementation;

XX. Disclose the amount of big game (moose and elk) hiding cover, winter range, and security after implementation;

YY. Disclose the method used to determine big game hiding cover, winter range, and security, and its rate of error as determined by field review;

ZZ. Disclose and address the concerns expressed by the ID Team in the draft Five-Year Review of the Forest Plan regarding the failure to monitor population trends of MIS, the inadequacy of the Forest Plan old growth standard, and the failure to compile data to establish a reliable inventory of sensitive species on the Forest;

AAA. Disclose the actions being taken to reduce fuels on private lands adjacent to the Project area and how those activities/or lack

thereof will impact the efficacy of the activities proposed for this Project;

BBB. Disclose the efficacy of the proposed activities at reducing wildfire risk and severity in the Project area in the future, including a two-year, five-year, ten-year, and 20-year projection;

CCC. Disclose when and how the OWNF made the decision to suppress natural wildfire in the Project area and replace natural fire with logging and prescribed burning;

DDD. Disclose the cumulative impacts on the Forest-wide level of the OWNF's policy decision to replace natural fire with logging and prescribed burning;

EEE. Disclose how Project complies with the Roadless Rule and if there are any inventoried roadless areas in the project area;

FFF. Disclose the impact of climate change on the efficacy of the proposed treatments;

GGG. Disclose the impact of the proposed project on the carbon storage potential of the area;

HHH. Disclose the baseline condition, and expected sedimentation during and after activities, for all streams in the area;

III. Disclose maps of the area that show the following elements:

1. Past, current, and reasonably foreseeable logging units in the Project area;

2. Past, current, and reasonably foreseeable grazing allotments in the Project area;

3. Density of human residences within 1.5 miles from the Project unit boundaries;

4. Hiding cover in the Project area according to the Forest Plan definition;

5. Old growth forest in the Project area; 6. Big game security areas;

7. Moose winter range;

The best available science, Christensen et al (1993), recommends elk habitat effectiveness of 70% in summer range and at least 50% in all other areas where elk are one of the primary resource considerations. According to Figure 1 in Christensen et al (1993), this equates to a maximum road density of approximately 0.7 mi/sq mi. in summer range and approximately 1.7 mi/sq mi. in all other areas.

Do any of the 6th Code watersheds in the Project area meet either of these road density thresholds? It appears the Project area as a whole also far exceeds these thresholds. Please disclose this type of Project level or watershed analysis on road density.

Christensen et al (1993) state that if an area is not meeting the 50% effectiveness threshold of 1.7 mi/sq mi, the agency should admit that the area is not being managed for elk: "Areas where habitat effectiveness is retained at lower than 50 percent must be recognized as making only minor contributions to elk management goals. If habitat effectiveness is not important, don't fake it. Just admit up front that elk are not a consideration." The Project EIS does not make this admission.

The Forest Service should provide an analysis of how much of the Project area, Project area watersheds, affected landscape areas, or affected Hunting Districts provide “elk security area[s]” as defined by the best available science, Christensen et al (1993) and Hillis et al (1991), to be comprised of contiguous 250 acre blocks of forested habitat 0.5 miles or more from open roads with these blocks encompassing 30% or more of the area.

Please provide a rational justification for the deviation from the Hillis security definition and numeric threshold that represent the best available science on elk security areas.

We believe that best available science shows that Commercial Logging does not reduce the threat of Forest Fires. What best available science supports the action alternatives?

The project does not demonstrate that it will meet the purpose and need of the project.

Please see the attached paper by Della-Sala 2022.

Please see the attached paper by Baker et al 2023.

Please see the column below by Dr. Chad Hanson.

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/590415-logging-makes-forests-and-homes-more-vulnerable-to>

Logging makes forests and homes more vulnerable to wildfires

The West has seen some really big forest fires recently, particularly in California's Sierra Nevada and the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. Naturally, everyone is concerned and elected officials are eager to be seen as advancing solutions. The U.S. Senate is negotiating over the Build Back Better bill, which currently contains nearly \$20 billion in logging subsidies for "hazardous fuel reduction" in forests. This term contains no clear definition but is typically employed as a euphemism for "thinning", which usually includes commercial logging of mature and old-growth trees on public lands. It often includes clearcut logging that harms forests and streams and intensifies wildfires.

Logging interests stand poised to profit, as they tell the public and Congress that our forests are overgrown from years of neglect. Chainsaws and bulldozers are their remedy. Among these interests are agencies like the U.S. Forest Service that financially benefits from selling public timber to private logging companies.

In this fraught context, filled with a swirling admixture of panic, confusion, and opportunism, the truth and scientific evidence are all too often casualties. This, unfortunately, can lead to regressive

policies that will only exacerbate the climate crisis and increase threats to communities from wildfire. We can no longer afford either outcome.

*Many of the nation's top climate scientists and ecologists recently urged Congress to **remove the logging subsidies** from the Build Back Better bill. Scientists noted that logging now emits about as much carbon dioxide each year as does burning coal. They also noted that logging conducted under the guise of "forest thinning" does not stop large wildfires that are driven mainly by extreme fire-weather caused primarily by climate change. In fact, it can often make fires burn faster and more intensely toward vulnerable homes. Unprepared towns like Paradise and Grizzly Flats, Calif., unfortunately burned to the ground as fires raced through heavily logged surroundings.*

*Nature prepares older forests and large trees for wildfires. As trees age, they develop thick impenetrable bark and drop their lower limbs, making it difficult for fire to climb into the tree crowns. Older, dense forests used by the imperiled spotted owl burn in **mixed intensities** that is good for the owl and hundreds of species that depend on these forests for survival. Our national parks and wilderness areas also burn in **lower** fire intensities compared to heavily logged areas.*

*Occasionally even some of the largest trees will succumb to a severe fire but their progeny are born again to rapidly colonize the largest and most **severe burn patches**. Dozens of cavity-nesting birds and small mammals make their homes in the fire-killed trees. Soon after fire in these forests, nature regenerates, reminiscent of the mythical phoenix, aided by scores of pollinating insects and seed carrying birds and mammals.*

Wildfires are highly variable, often depending on what a gust of wind does at a given moment, and even the biggest fires are primarily comprised of lightly and moderately-burned areas where most mature trees survive. By chance, in any large fire there will always be some areas that were thinned by loggers that burned less intense compared to unthinned areas. Before the smoke fully clears, logging interests find those locations and take journalists and politicians to promote their agenda. What they fail to disclose are the many examples where managed forests burned hotter while older, unmanaged forests did the opposite.

This sort of self-serving show boating occurred after the 2020 Creek Fire in the Sierra National Forest in California, as news stories echoed the logging industry's "overgrown forests" narrative based on a single low-intensity burn area. When all of the data across the entire fire were [analyzed](#), it turned out that logged forests, including commercial "thinning" areas, actually burned the most intensely.

In Oregon, The Nature Conservancy has been conducting intensive commercial thinning on its Sycan Marsh Preserve. Based on satellite imagery, the northern portion of the 414,000-acre Bootleg Fire of 2021 swept through these lands. Within days, TNC began promoting its logging program, focusing on a single location around Coyote Creek, where a "thinned" unit burned lightly. They failed to mention that nearly all of the dense, unmanaged forests burned lightly too in that area. Well-intentioned environmental reporters were misled by a carefully picked example.

Billions of dollars are being wasted to further this false logging industry narrative—funds that instead should be used to prepare communities for more climate-driven wildfires. Congress can in-

stead redirect much needed support to damaged communities so they can build back better and adopt proven fire safety measures that harden homes and clear flammable vegetation nearest structures.

*The path forward is simple, with two proven remedies that work. Protect forests from logging so they can absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and moderate fire behavior, and **adapt** communities to the new climate-driven wildfire era.*

Please take a hard look at how the project effect the carbon storage of the project area and how the project effects climate change. The federal district court of Montana recently ruled against the Kootenai National Forest on the same boiler plate analysis,

writing: *Ultimately, greenhouse gas reduction must happen quickly, and removing carbon from forests in the form of logging, even if trees are going to grow back, will take decades to centuries to re-sequester. Put more simply, logging causes immediate carbon losses, while re-sequestration happens slowly over time, time that the planet may not have.*

Please find the court's order attached.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (PL 117-58) requires:

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``(aa) documentation of an effective reforestation project plan;

``(bb) the ability to measure the progress and success of the project; and

“(cc) the ability of a project to provide benefits relating to forest function and health, soil health and productivity, wildlife habitat, improved air and water quality, carbon sequestration potential, resilience, job creation, and enhanced recreational opportunities.”

The project does not adequately demonstrate that it is improving the carbon sequestration potential and resilience of the project area.

How will the [roject make the forest more resilient?

Please follow NEPA and take a hard look at the impact of the project on climate change.

Please

- Disclose the biological assessment for the candidate, threatened, or endangered species with potential and/or actual habitat in the Project area;
- Disclose the biological evaluation for the sensitive and management indicator species with potential and/or actual habitat in the Project area;
- Disclose the snag densities in the Project area, and the method used to determine those densities;

- Disclose the current, during-project, and post-project road densities in the Project area;
- Disclose the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest's record of compliance with state best management practices regarding stream sedimentation from ground-disturbing management activities;
- Disclose the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest's record of compliance with its monitoring requirements as set forth in its Forest Plan;
- Disclose the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest's record of compliance with the additional monitoring requirements set forth in previous DN/FONSI and RODs on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest;
- Disclose the results of the field surveys for threatened, endangered, sensitive, and rare plants in each of the proposed units;
- Disclose the level of current noxious weed infestations in the Project area and the cause of those infestations;
- Disclose the impact of the Project on noxious weed infestations and native plant communities;

- Disclose the timeline for implementation;

- . Disclose the amount of big game (moose and elk) hiding cover, winter range, and security currently available in the area;

- . Disclose the amount of big game (moose and elk) hiding cover, winter range, and security during Project implementation;

- . Disclose the amount of big game (moose and elk) hiding cover, winter range, and security after implementation;

- . Disclose the method used to determine big game hiding cover, winter range, and security, and its rate of error as determined by field review; de-

- . Disclose and address the concerns expressed by the ID Team in the draft Five-Year Review of the Forest Plan regarding the failure to monitor population trends of MIS and the failure to compile data to establish a reliable inventory of sensitive species on the Forest; able

- . Disclose how Project complies with the Roadless Rule;

Are there any inventoried roadless areas in the project area?

Please include a complete cost benefit analysis for the project.

Please consult with the Washington State Historic Preservation Office to ensure the project complies with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Please formally consult with the FWS on the impact of this project on wolverines, lynx, lynx critical habitat, monarch butterfly, white-bark pine, grizzly bears, MCR Summer Steelhead, MCR Summer Steelhead critical habitat, bull trout, bull trout critical habitat, Upper Columbia River steelhead DPS, Upper Columbia River Spring-Run Chinook ESU, Upper Columbia River Spring-Run Chinook and Upper Columbia River Steelhead Designated Critical Habitat.

Please fully address all relevant habitat standards for Columbia River Bull Trout, Upper Columbia River steelhead DPS, Upper Columbia River Spring-Run Chinook ESU, Columbia River Bull Trout Designated Critical Habitat, Upper Columbia River Spring-Run Chinook, MCR Summer Steelhead, MCR Summer Steelhead critical habitat, and Upper Columbia River Steelhead Designated Critical

Habitat

How many openings over 40 acres are proposed?

There have been two groundbreaking articles about lynx. “Correlates of Canada Lynx Reproductive Success in Northwestern Montana” by Megan K. Kosterman.

And “Understanding and predicting habitat for wildlife conservation: the case of Canada lynx at the range periphery” by HOLBROOK et al that confirms Kosterman’s findings.

Does the action alternative comply with Kosterman and Holbrook’s recommendations?

How any lynx analysis units been eliminated in the project area?

1) USFS needs to take a hard look at impacts to lynx under NEPA, apply the lynx conservation measures and standard, and consult on lynx via section 7 of the ESA b/c the best available science -- including recent tracking surveys conducted by WTU -- confirm lynx's presence and use of the area;

(3) USFS has failed to survey for lynx as required by the ESA, NEPA, and NFMA.

In order to meet the requirements of the FS/USFWS Conservation Agreement, the FS agreed to insure that all project activities are consistent with the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS).

LCAS requirements include:

Project planning—standards.

1. Within each LAU, map lynx habitat. Identify potential denning habitat and foraging habitat (primarily snowshoe hare habitat, but also habitat for important alternate prey such as red squirrels), and topographic features that may be important for lynx movement (major ridge systems, prominent saddles, and riparian corridors). Also identify non-forest vegetation (meadows), shrub-grassland communities, etc.) adjacent to and intermixed with forested lynx habitat that may provide habitat for alternate lynx prey species.
2. Within a LAU, maintain denning habitat in patches generally larger than 5 acres, comprising at least 10 percent of lynx habitat. Where less than 10 percent denning habitat is currently present within a LAU, defer any management actions that would delay development of denning habitat structure.
3. Maintain habitat connectivity within and between LAUs.

Programmatic planning-standards.

1. Conservation measures will generally apply only to lynx habitat on federal lands within LAUs.
2. Lynx habitat will be mapped using criteria specific to each geographic area to identify appropriate vegetation and environmental conditions. Primary vegetation includes those types necessary to support lynx reproduction and survival. It is recognized that other vegetation types that are intermixed with the primary vegetation will

be used by lynx, but are considered to contribute to lynx habitat only where associated with the primary vegetation. Refer to glossary and description for each geographic area.

3. To facilitate project planning, delineate LAUs. To allow for assessment of the potential effects on an individual lynx, LAUs should be at least the size of area used by a resident lynx and contain sufficient year-round habitat.
4. To be effective for the intended purposes of planning and monitoring, LAU boundaries will not be adjusted for individual projects, but must remain constant.
5. Prepare a broad-scale assessment of landscape patterns that compares historical and current ecological processes and vegetation patterns, such as age-class distributions and patch size characteristics. In the absence of guidance developed from such an assessment, limit disturbance within each as follows: if more than 30 percent of lynx habitat within an LAU is currently in unsuitable condition, no further reduction of suitable conditions shall occur as a result of vegetation management activities by federal agencies.

Project planning-standards.

1. Management actions (e.g., timber sales, salvage sales) shall not change more than 15 percent of lynx habitat within a LAU to an unsuitable condition within a 10- year period.

Programmatic planning-standards.

1. Identify key linkage areas that may be important in providing landscape connectivity within and between geographic areas, across all ownerships.
2. Develop and implement a plan to protect key linkage areas on federal lands from activities that would create barriers to movement. Barriers could result from an accumulation of incremental projects, as opposed to any one project.

Please demonstrate that project activities are consistent with above and all other applicable programmatic and project requirements.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit hold that “[o]nce an agency is aware that an endangered species may be present in the area of its proposed action, the ESA requires it to prepare a biological assessment” *Thomas v. Peterson*, 753 F. 2d 754, 763 (9thCir. 1985). If the biological assessment concludes that the proposed action “may affect” but will “not adversely affect” a threatened or endangered species, the action agency must consult informally with the appropriate expert agency. 50 C.F.R. §§ 402.14 (b)(1), 402.12(k)(1).

Canada lynx are listed under the ESA.

Canada lynx may be present in the project area and the proposed project may affect lynx by temporarily increasing road density, removing vegetative cover, and engaging in mechanized activities that could displace lynx.

Please complete a biological assessment for lynx and formally consult with USFWS regarding the project’s potential impacts on lynx.

Grizzly Bears

In May 2019, the United Nations released a report finding that the current rate of species extinction “is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it has averaged over the past 10 million years.”¹ The mountain caribou in the lower 48 states went extinct just a few months ago. Like the Selkirk grizzly bear, the mountain caribou lived primarily on National Forest land, had a population of less than 50 individuals, and was threatened by logging and roads.

Alliance reiterates this point here because the agencies issued similar assurances regarding the mountain caribou that they now issue for the Selkirk grizzly bear. For example, in litigation to protect the mountain caribou in this Court, the agencies represented that they would “meet caribou needs” by using the best available science and applying forest plan protections, and not approving logging projects unless they concluded that the project was “not likely to adversely affect” the mountain caribou. *Jayne v. Sherman*, 706 F.3d 994, 1001 (9th Cir.2013)(quoting FWS Biological Opinion).

In *Jayne*, these statements were accepted as adequate protections for the mountain caribou. Now the mountain caribou is extinct. It is not too late to avoid the same fate for the Selkirk grizzly bear. As members of Congress stated when

¹https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/spm_unedited_advance_for_posting_htn.pdf

they passed the ESA: “The agencies of Government can no longer plead that they can do nothing about [the grizzly bear]. They can, and they must. The law is clear.” *Tennessee Valley Auth. v. Hill*, 437 U.S. 153, 184 (1978) (quoting Congressional Record).

The preservation of endangered species takes “priority over the ‘primary missions’ of federal agencies.” Accordingly, courts must “afford[] endangered species the highest of priorities,” and act with “institutionalized caution” when reviewing ESA cases. *Cottonwood Env'tl. Law Ctr. v. USFS*, 789 F.3d 1075, 1091 (9th Cir.2015). This Court holds that the “fundamental principle [of institutionalized caution] remains intact and will continue to guide district courts when confronted with requests for injunctive relief in ESA cases.” *Id.* Although the district court did not apply this fundamental principle in

this case, this Court may now remedy that error by issuing a temporary injunction pending appeal to preserve the status quo until a final decision is issued on the merits.

The project will not maintaining and enhancing grizzly habitat and will increase the potential for grizzly-human conflicts in violation of NFMA, NEPA, the APA and the ESA.

The Forest does not have a good track record of keeping closed roads closed. The Forest Service does not disclose the road mileage behind these ineffective closures; therefore it is unclear how many miles of additional open and total roads must be added to the existing condition calculations as a result of these ineffective closures.

How many road closure violations have occurred in the Wenatchee River Ranger District in the last 5 years?

Chronic recurring road closure breaches cannot reasonably be construed as “temporary.”

Because of the serious impacts to grizzly bears, please demonstrate compliance with Forest Plan standards relevant to grizzly bears, and analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to grizzly bears.

The Forest Service must comply with National Forest Management Act (“NFMA”) and its implementing regulations. NFMA requires the Forest Service to ensure that site-specific management projects are consistent with the applicable forest plan. 16 U.S.C. § 1604(i). Thus, the Forest Service must ensure that all aspects of the proposed action comply with the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Land Management Plan.

1. Will the Forest Service be considering binding legal standards for noxious weeds in its Land Management Plan?
2. Has the State Historic Preservation Office signed off that this project complies with the Historic Preservation Act? The project is in violation of the National Historic Preservation Act if this is not done.
5. How effective has the Forest Service been at stopping (i.e. preventing) new weed infestations from starting during logging and road building operations?
6. Is it true that new roads are the main cause of new noxious weed infestations?
7. Is it true that noxious weeds are one of the top threats to biodiversity on public lands?
8. How can the Forest Service be complying with NFMA's requirement to maintain biodiversity if it has no legal standards that address noxious weeds?
9. How will the decreased elk security affect wolverines and have you formally consulted with the FWS on the effects of this project

on wolverines? The wolverine was recently determined to be warranted for listing under the ESA. 75 Fed.

Reg.78030 (Dec. 14, 2010). It is currently a candidate species, proposed for listing.. The USFWS found that “[s]ources of human disturbance to wolverines include . . . road corridors, and extractive industry such as logging . . .” . The Forest Service must go through ESA formal consultation for the wolverine for this project.

Please prepare a Biological Assessment and formally consult with the USFWS as required by law.

THE AGENCIES MUST COMPLETE A BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT, BIOLOGICAL OPINION, INCIDENTAL TAKE STATEMENT, AND MANAGEMENT DIRECTION AMENDMENT FOR THE RMP FOR THE WOLVERINE.

The agencies do not have in place any forest plan biological assessment, biological opinion, incidental take statement, and management direction amendment for wolverines.

THE AGENCIES MUST CONDUCT ESA CONSULTATION FOR THE WOLVERINE.

Wolverines may be present in the Project area. The Forest Service concedes that the Project “may affect” wolverines. The agencies’ failure to conduct ESA consultation for a species that may be present and may be affected by the Project violates the ESA. Wolverines are currently warranted for listing under the ESA. As the agencies are well aware, the scheduled, court ordered listing date for the wolverine is this year. In fact, FWS has recently filed the a document in federal court committing to a listing date for the wolverine. Accord-

ingly, the wolverine will be listed under the ESA before the final decision is made to authorize and implement this Project, and long before any project activities commence. Regardless, even candidate species must be included in a biological assessment.

Did the Forest Service survey for wolverines in the project area? Fish and wildlife habitat shall be managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area. For planning purposes, a viable population shall be regarded as one which has the estimated numbers and distribution of reproductive individuals to insure its continued existence is well distributed in the planning area. In order to insure that viable populations will be maintained, habitat must be provided to support, at least, a minimum number of reproductive individuals and that habitat must be well distributed so that those individuals can interact with others in the planning area. Ruggiero et al 2000;

Wolverines generally scavenge for ungulates along valley bottoms and forage and den in remote, high-elevation areas (Hornocker and Hash 1981; Morgan and Copeland 1998). Thus if managers wished to provide habitat for wolverines, they could pay particular attention in the planning process to ungulates winter range and other aspects of habitat quality for ungulates to provide a consistent supply of carcasses for wolverine to scavenge. In addition, wolverines generally avoid areas of human activity. To limit the threat of human-caused disturbance or mortality, managers could restrict access to portions of the landscape where wolverines are most likely to occur.

In order to meet this viability mandate, the 1982 NFMA planning regulations require that the Forest Service select “management indicator species” whose “population changes are believed to indicate

the effects of management activities.” 36 C.F.R. § 219.19 (1) (2000). 253.

The 1982 NFMA planning regulations require the Forest Service to monitor the population trends of these species and to state and evaluate land management alternatives

“in terms of both amount and quality of habitat and of animal population trends of the management indicator species.” 36 C.F.R. § 219.19 (2),(6) (2000).

The wolverine was recently determined to be warranted for listing under the ESA. 75 Fed. Reg.78030 (Dec. 14, 2010). It is currently a proposed species, waiting for work to be completed on other species before it is officially listed. The USFWS found that “[s]ources of human disturbance to wolverines include . . . road corridors, and extractive industry such as logging . . .” .The Forest Service admits that the wolverine and/or its habitat are present within the project area and would be impacted by the project. The Forest Service must go through ESA consultation for the wolverine for this project.

Would native species such as grizzly bears, lynx, wolverine, elk, bull trout and bull trout critical habitat be better off if you instead spent this money removing roads in the project area?

Why did you not analyze a restoration only alternative that did not include logging?

Has the money already been appropriated to do restoration work called for in the EA?

Do the action alternatives comply with PACFISH-INFISH?

Are you meeting the INFISH Riparian Management Objectives for temperature, pool frequency, and sediment?

With all of the bull trout spawning streams and designated as critical habitat in the project area we would expect robust road decommissioning and culvert removals, and no logging in riparian areas of streams. Instead the project is a robust logging and roading project that will degrade, not improve aquatic ecosystems.

The best available science shows that roads are detrimental to aquatic habitat and logging in riparian areas is not restoration.

Fish evolved with fire, they did not evolve with roads and logging.

What are the redd counts in bull trout critical habitat in the project area? Please also provide the all the historical bull counts that you have in the project area?

The EIS must fully and completely analyze the impacts to bull trout critical habitat and westslope cutthroat trout habitat. What is the standard for sediment in the Forest Plan? Sediment is one of the key factors impacting water quality and fish habitat. [See USFWS 2010]

The introduction of sediment in excess of natural amounts can have multiple adverse effects on bull trout and their habitat (Rhodes et al. 1994, pp. 16-21; Berry, Rubinstein, Melzian, and Hill 2003, p. 7). The effect of sediment beyond natural background conditions can be fatal at high levels. Embryo survival and subsequent fry emergence success have been highly correlated to percentage of fine material within the stream-bed (Shepard et al. 1984, pp. 146, 152). Low levels of sediment may result in sublethal and behavioral effects such as increased activity, stress, and emigration rates; loss or reduction of

foraging capability; reduced growth and resistance to disease; physical abrasion; clogging of gills; and interference with orientation in homing and migration (McLeay et al. 1987a, p. 671; Newcombe and MacDonald 1991, pp. 72, 76, 77; Barrett, Grossman, and Rosenfeld 1992, p. 437; Lake and Hinch 1999, p. 865; Bash et al. 2001n, p. 9; Watts et al. 2003, p. 551; Vondracek et al. 2003, p. 1005; Berry, Rubinstein, Melzian, and Hill 2003, p. 33). The effects of increased suspended sediments can cause changes in the abundance and/or type of food organisms, alterations in fish habitat, and long-term impacts to fish populations (Anderson et al. 1996, pp. 1, 9, 12, 14, 15; Reid and Anderson 1999, pp. 1, 7-15). No threshold has been determined in which fine sediment addition to a stream is harmless (Suttle et al. 2004, p. 973). Even at low concentrations, fine-sediment deposition can decrease growth and survival of juvenile salmonids.

Aquatic systems are complex interactive systems, and isolating the effects of sediment to fish is difficult (Castro and Reckendorf 1995d, pp. 2-3). The effects of sediment on receiving water ecosystems are complex and multi-dimensional, and further compounded by the fact that sediment flux is a natural and vital process for aquatic systems (Berry, Rubinstein, Melzian, and Hill 2003, p. 4). Environmental factors that affect the magnitude of sediment impacts on salmonids include duration of exposure, frequency of exposure, toxicity, temperature, life stage of fish, angularity and size of particle, severity/magnitude of pulse, time of occurrence, general condition of biota, and availability of and access to refugia (Bash et al. 2001m, p. 11). Potential impacts caused by excessive suspended sediments are varied and complex and are often masked by other concurrent activities (Newcombe 2003, p. 530). The difficulty in determining which

environmental variables act as limiting factors has made it difficult to establish the specific effects of sediment impacts on fish (Chapman 1988, p. 2). For example, excess fines in spawning gravels may not lead to smaller populations of adults if the amount of juvenile winter habitat limits the number of juveniles that reach adulthood. Often there are multiple independent variables with complex interrelationships that can influence population size.

The ecological dominance of a given species is often determined by environmental variables. A chronic input of sediment could tip the ecological balance in favor of one species in mixed salmonid populations or in species communities composed of salmonids and non-salmonids (Everest et al. 1987, p. 120). Bull trout have more spatially restrictive biological requirements at the individual and population levels than other salmonids (USFWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) 1998, p. 5). Therefore, they are especially vulnerable to environmental changes such as sediment deposition.

Aquatic Impacts

- Classify and analyze the level of impacts to bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in streams, rivers and lakes from sediment and other habitat alterations:

Lethal: Direct mortality to any life stage, reduction in egg-to-fry survival, and loss of spawning or rearing habitat. These effects damage the capacity of the bull trout to produce fish and sustain populations.

Sublethal: Reduction in feeding and growth rates, decrease in habitat quality, reduced tolerance to disease and toxicants, respiratory im-

pairment, and physiological stress. While not leading to immediate death, may produce mortalities and population decline over time. Behavioral: Avoidance and distribution, homing and migration, and foraging and predation. Behavioral effects change the activity patterns or alter the kinds of activity usually associated with an unperturbed environment. Behavior effects may lead to immediate death or population decline or mortality over time.

Direct effects:

Gill Trauma - High levels of suspended sediment and turbidity can result in direct mortality of fish by damaging and clogging gills (Curry and MacNeill 2004, p. 140).

Spawning, redds, eggs - The effects of suspended sediment, deposited in a redd and potentially reducing water flow and smothering eggs or alevins or impeding fry emergence, are related to sediment particle sizes of the spawning habitat (Bjornn and Reiser 1991, p. 98).

Indirect effects:

Macroinvertebrates - Sedimentation can have an effect on bull trout and fish populations through impacts or alterations to the macroinvertebrate communities or populations (Anderson, Taylor, and Balch 1996, pp. 14-15).

Feeding behavior - Increased turbidity and suspended sediment can affect a number of factors related to feeding for salmonids, including feeding rates, reaction distance, prey selection, and prey abundance (Barrett, Grossman, and Rosenfeld 1992, pp. 437, 440; Henley, Patterson, Neves, and Lemly 2000, p. 133; Bash et al. 2001d, p. 21).

Habitat effects - All life history stages are associated with complex forms of cover including large woody debris, undercut banks, boulders, and pools. Other habitat characteristics important to bull trout include channel and hydrologic stability, substrate composition, temperature, and the presence of migration corridors (Rieman and McIntyre 1993, p. 5).

Physiological effects - Sublethal levels of suspended sediment may cause undue physiological stress on fish, which may reduce the ability of the fish to perform vital functions (Cederholm and Reid 1987, p. 388, 390).

Behavioral effects - These behavioral changes include avoidance of habitat, reduction in feeding, increased activity, redistribution and migration to other habitats and locations, disruption of territoriality, and altered homing (Anderson, Taylor, and Balch 1996, p. 6; Bash et al. 2001, pp. 19-25; Suttle, Power, Levine, and McNeely 2004, p. 971).

- How will this project affect native fish? What is the current condition in the riparian areas?

How will this project protect rather than adversely impact fish habitat and water quality? No logging or road building should be done in riparian areas. There should not be any stream crossings. Roads should be decommissioned and removed, not upgraded and rebuilt.

- Hauer, et al. (1999) found that bull trout streams in wilderness habitats had consistent ratios of large to small and attached to unattached large woody debris. However, bull trout streams in

watersheds with logging activity had substantial variation in these ratios. They identified logging as creating the most substantive change in stream habitats.

“The implications of this study for forest managers are twofold: (i) with riparian logging comes increased unpredictability in the frequency of size, attachment, and stability of the LWD and (ii) maintaining the appropriate ratios of size frequency, orientation, and bank attachment, as well as rate of delivery, storage, and transport of LWD to streams, is essential to maintaining historic LWD characteristics and dynamics. Our data suggest that exclusion of logging from riparian zones may be necessary to maintain natural stream morphology and habitat features. Likewise, careful upland management is also necessary to prevent cumulative effects that result in altered water flow regimes and sediment delivery regimes. While not specifically evaluated in this study, in general, it appears that patterns of upland logging space and time may have cumulative effects that could additionally alter the balance of LWD delivery, storage, and transport in fluvial systems.

These issues will be critical for forest managers attempting to prevent future detrimental environmental change or setting restoration goals for degraded bull trout spawning streams.”

Muhlfeld, et al. (2009) evaluated the association of local habitat features (width, gradient, and elevation), watershed characteristics (mean and maximum summer water temperatures, the number of road crossings, and road density), and biotic factors (the distance to the source of hybridization and trout density) with the spread of hy-

bridization between native westslope cutthroat trout *Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi* and introduced rainbow trout *O. mykiss* in the upper Flathead River system in Montana and British Columbia.

They found that hybridization was positively associated with mean summer water temperature and the number of upstream road crossings and negatively associated with the distance to the main source of hybridization. Their results suggest that hybridization is more likely to occur and spread in streams with warm water temperatures, increased land use disturbance, and proximity to the main source of hybridization.

The EIS or what ever analysis you do must use the best available science to analyze how logging riparian habitat will impact native fish and water quality.

Please see the following article from the 9/25/15 Missoulian disagrees with the Forest Service and says it is habitat destruction causing bull trout declines.

http://missoulian.com/news/local/montana-fwp-biologist-despite-successes-bull-trout-populations-still-in/article_2798e4c6-0658-522f-be4c-4274f903129e.html

Montana FWP biologist: Despite successes, bull trout populations still in peril

Ladd Knotek is disturbed by the lack of attention being paid to the many western Montana streams where bull trout populations are struggling to survive.

The fisheries biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks knows people love to latch on to the success stories from streams like Fish Creek and several Blackfoot tributaries, where bull trout populations are viable.

“But what nobody talks about is all these other populations that, 50 years ago, these were all viable populations,” he said Tuesday as part of a presentation on bull trout in Rattlesnake Creek. “You know, Gold Creek, Belmont Creek, Trout Creek, there’s a whole list of them. There’s a whole bunch of them that are just basically on the verge of disappearing. And what we like to talk about are the ones that are doing OK. But in places like Lolo Creek and some Bitterroot tributaries, bull trout there are just barely hanging on.”

Bull trout have faced a long, slow decline over the past century, to the point where they are now listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Success is a relative term even in the places where they are doing well.

“They’re nowhere near what they were historically,” Knotek said of the tributaries where the populations are relatively healthy. “But they have a fair number of adult spawners coming in. People see them in the fishery. But we need to start looking at all these other tributaries that used to be bull trout spawning tributaries and recognize what’s

going on in the bigger picture. We're just looking at a very thin slice instead of looking at the whole thing. A lot of this stuff is just symptoms of what's going on at the larger scale. Bull trout are the canary. They're very susceptible to environmental change, whether it's temperature, whether it's physical, whether it's sediment. There's something going on in these drainages and the symptoms we're seeing are the bull trout distribution is shrinking, we're losing populations and we're seeing expansion of nonnatives."

Bull trout – which are native to the Columbia River Basin and are only found west of the Continental Divide in Montana – need clear, cold mountain waters to spawn and require clean gravel beds, deep pools, complex cover, good in-stream flows in the fall and large systems of interconnected waterways for their migrations. Rising temperatures and falling water levels trigger their migration to spawning tributaries in June, and they hang out until they spawn in the fall. They are much more susceptible to warming temperatures and habitat change than nonnative species such as brown and rainbow trout.

Knotek was the featured presenter Friday for a discussion on restoration efforts and the importance of Rattlesnake Creek as a bull trout habitat. The event was organized by the Clark Fork Coalition, a nonprofit in Missoula that aims to protect water quality for the 22,000-square-mile Clark Fork River Basin.

Knotek explained that because Rattlesnake Creek is south-facing and doesn't have much groundwater recharging, it has much less of a buffer against a warming climate than other streams.

"The water temperatures are significantly higher than they were 10 years ago," he said. "The types of temperatures we're seeing in late summer and early fall, we never saw those 10 to 15 years ago. Water temperature is driving a lot of what we're talking about. It's definitely stressful on fish. It doesn't spell good news for bull trout."

Knotek said it's a common misconception that brown trout and rainbows are driving out bull trout, and he explained that those nonnative species are simply moving in because the native species is dying off.

"It's replacement rather than displacement," he said.

In Rattlesnake Creek, biologists have conducted redd counts of the migratory population in the lower reaches since 1999. There is a healthy resident population in the upper reaches, but researchers are more interested in the fish that actually migrate to the Clark Fork River.

The results have been disturbing.

They found a high of 36 in 2006 and 24 in 2008, before

Milltown Dam was removed. There was an expected drop to just four redds – spawning beds – after the dam was removed in 2009, because of the massive disturbance. However, the number of redds has not bounced back since, and researchers found just six last year.

“That tells us that it wasn’t just the dam removal that caused it, because they should be recovering by now,” Knotek said. “And there are lots of populations like this stream that are not doing well but need more attention. We’ve got a problem here, but it’s not inconsistent with other tributaries. There’s something bigger going on.”

Knotek said that Rattlesnake Creek was historically braided before the area was developed, and that eliminated a lot of the back channels the juvenile fish need to grow.

“You need complexity,” he said. “When you have a straight ditch in a system that used to be braided, it ain’t good.”

He’s also seen much more algae growth in the upper sections, something that is obviously related to higher temperatures and added nutrients.

“We have browns and rainbows progressing upstream, and we attribute that to water temperature,” he said. “That’s consistent with other streams, too. It’s very obvious

something is going on here.”

Knoteck believes that a “ramping up” of current conservation work is the only thing that can save bull trout populations. Fish screens, the removal of dams, awareness of anglers and water conservation – especially by people using stream irrigation to water their lawns – is crucial.

“Bull trout are the canary,” he said. “But there are a lot of other species that we could be looking at as indicators as well. A lot of research needs to be done. There’s a lot of species being affected.”

As Knoteck pointed out, bull trout need clear, cold mountain waters to spawn and require clean gravel beds, deep pools, complex cover, good in-stream flows in the fall and large systems of interconnected waterways for their migrations.

How many bull trout will be killed during the implementation of the project?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project make the waters clearer in the short term?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project make the waters colder in the short term?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project make the gravel beds of the streams in the project area cleaner in the short and long term?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project make the affect deep pools in streams in the project area in the short and long term?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project make the affect complex cover over the streams in the project area in the short and long term?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project make the affect the in-stream flows in the fall in the short and long term?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project make the affect large systems of interconnected waterways for bull trout migrations?

Critical habitat receives protection under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act through the prohibition against destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat with regard to actions carried out, funded, or authorized by a Federal agency. There is no exception for the short run? How long is the project scheduled to last?

Will this project adversely modify bull trout critical habitat in the short run?

How will the Upper Swauk Restoration project project affect the temperature of the streams in the project area including bull trout critical habitat?

Will all of the proposed logging increase the temperature of the streams in the project area?

Will all of the proposed road building and road use by log truck, clearcutting, and other logging put more sediment into streams in the project area?

How will this affect bull trout and bull trout critical habitat?

When was the last time the project area was surveyed for bull trout?

What was the results of these surveys?

The Notice of proposed action does not characterize or evaluate the project area watersheds based on the Watershed Condition Framework or the baseline condition developed for bull trout. We do not know what the current condition of streams are in the project area, i.e., are they functioning acceptably, at risk or at unacceptable risk? And for what ecosystem parameters? How will this project affect stream function, i.e., degrade, maintain, restore?

- The project relies on BMPs to protect water quality and fish habitat. First, there is no evidence that application of BMPs actually protects fish habitat and water quality.

- Second, BMPs are only maintained on a small percentage of roads or when there is a logging project.

BMPs fail to protect and improve water quality because of the allowance for “naturally occurring degradation.” In Montana, “naturally-occurring degradation” is defined in ARM 16.20.603(11) as that which occurs after application of “all reasonable land, soil and water conservation practices have been applied.” In other words, damage caused directly by sediment (and other pollution) is acceptable as long as BMPs are applied. The result is a never-ending, downward spiral for water quality and native fish.

Here’s how it works:

- Timber sale #1 generates sediment damage to a bull trout stream, which is “acceptable” as long as BMPs are applied to project activities.
- “Natural” is then redefined as the stream condition after sediment damage caused by Timber Sale #1.
- Timber sale #2 – in the same watershed – sediment damage would be acceptable if BMPs are applied again – same as was done before.
- “Natural” is again redefined as the stream condition after sediment damage caused by Timber Sale#2.

The downward spiral continues with disastrous cumulative effects on bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout and most aquatic life. BMPs are not “reasonable.” Clearly, beneficial uses are not being protected. Please demonstrate that the project is following Washington state water quality policy.

- The Notice of proposed action does not include an analysis of climate change and how that will impact the project.
- The Purpose and Need for this project is solely to prop up the timber industry at the expense of wildlife, fish and water quality. This project is a money-loser, the logging portion should be dropped and the road decommissioning in Alternative 4 should be implemented.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that bull trout are exceptionally sensitive to the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of roads. Dunham and Rieman demonstrated that disturbance from roads was associated with reduced bull trout occurrence. They concluded that conservation of bull trout should involve protection of larger, less fragmented, and less disturbed (lower road density) habitats to maintain important strongholds and sources for naturally recolonizing areas where populations have been lost. (USFS 2000, page 3-82.

Hitt and Frissell showed that over 65% of waters that were rated as having high aquatic biological integrity were found within wilderness-containing subwatersheds.

Trombulak and Frissell concluded that the presence of roads in an area is associated with negative effects for both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems including changes in species composition and population size. (USFS 2000, pages 3-80-81).

"High integrity [forests] contain the greatest proportion of high forest, aquatic, and hydrologic integrity of all are dominated by wilderness and roadless areas [and] are the least altered by management. Low integrity [forests have] likely been altered by past management are extensively roaded and have little wilderness." (USFS 1996a, pages 108, 115 and 116).

"Much of this [overly dense forest] condition occurs in areas of high road density where the large, shade-intolerant, insect-, disease- and fire-resistant species have been harvested over the past 20 to 30 years. Fires in unroaded areas are not as severe as in the roaded areas because of less surface fuel, and after fires at least some of the large trees survive to produce seed that regenerates the area. Many of the fires in the unroaded areas produce a forest structure that is consistent with the fire regime, while the fires in the roaded areas commonly produce a forest structure that is not in sync with the fire regime. In general, the effects of wildfires in these areas are much lower and do not result in the chronic sediment delivery hazards ex-

hibited in areas that have been roaded." (USFS 1997a, pages 281-282).

"Increasing road density is correlated with declining aquatic habitat conditions and aquatic integrity An intensive review of the literature concludes that increases in sedimentation [of streams] are unavoidable even using the most cautious roading methods." (USFS 1996b, page 105).

"This study suggests the general trend for the entire Columbia River basin is toward a loss in pool habitat on managed lands and stable or improving conditions on unmanaged lands." (McIntosh et al 1994).

"The data suggest that unmanaged systems may be more structurally intact (i.e., coarse woody debris, habitat diversity, riparian vegetation), allowing a positive interaction with the stream processes (i.e., peak flows, sediment routing) that shape and maintain high-quality fish habitat over time." (McIntosh et al 1994).

"Although precise, quantifiable relationships between long-term trends in fish abundance and land-use practices are difficult to obtain (Bisson et al. 1992), the body of literature concludes that land-use practices cause the simplification of fish habitat." (McIntosh et al 1994).

"Land management activities that contributed to the forest health problem (i.e., selective harvest and fire suppression) have had an equal or greater effect on aquatic ecosystems.

If we are to restore and maintain high quality fish habitat, then protecting and restoring aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems is essential." (McIntosh et al 1994).

"Native fishes are most typically extirpated from waters that have been heavily modified by human activity, where native fish assemblages have already been depleted, disrupted, or stressed []." (Moyle et al 1996).

"Restoration should be focused where minimal investment can maintain the greatest area of high-quality habitat and diverse aquatic biota. Few completely roadless, large watersheds remain in the Pacific Northwest, but those that continue relatively undisturbed are critical in sustaining sensitive native species and important ecosystem processes (Sedell, et. al 1990; Moyle and Sato 1991; Williams 1991; McIntosh et al. 1994;

Frissell and Bayles 1996). With few exceptions, even the least disturbed basins have a road network and history of logging or other human disturbance that greatly magnifies the risk of deteriorating riverine habitats in the watershed." (Frissell undated).

"[A]llocate all unroaded areas greater than 1,000 acres as Strongholds for the production of clean water, aquatic and riparian-dependent species. Many unroaded areas are isolated, relatively small, and most are not protected from road construction and subsequent timber harvest, even in steep areas. Thus, immediate protection through allocation of the unroaded areas to the production of clean water, aquatic and riparian-dependent resources is necessary to prevent degradation of this high quality habitat and should not be postponed." (USFWS et al 1995).

"Because of fire suppression, timber harvest, roads, and white pine blister rust, the moist forest PVG has experienced great changes since settlement of the project area by Euroamericans. Vast amounts of old forest have converted to mid seral stages."(USFS/BLM 2000, page 4-58).

"Old forests have declined substantially in the dry forest PVG []. In general, forests showing the most change are those that have been roaded and harvested. Large trees, snags, and coarse woody debris are all below historical levels in these areas."

(USFS/BLM 2000, page 4-65).

"High road densities and their locations within watersheds are typically correlated with areas of higher watershed sensitivity to erosion and sediment transport to streams. Road density also is correlated

with the distribution and spread of exotic annual grasses, noxious weeds, and other exotic plants. Furthermore, high road densities are correlated with areas that have few large snags and few large trees that are resistant to both fire and infestation of insects and disease. Lastly, high road densities are correlated with areas that have relatively high risk of fire occurrence (from human caused fires), high hazard ground fuels, and high tree mortality." (USFS 1996b, page 85, parenthesis in original).

In simpler terms, the Forest Service has found that there is no way to build an environmentally benign road and that roads and logging have caused greater damage to forest ecosystems than has the suppression of wildfire alone. These findings indicate that roadless areas in general will take adequate care of themselves if left alone and unmanaged, and that concerted reductions in road densities in already roaded areas are absolutely necessary.

Indeed, other studies conducted by the Forest Service indicate that efforts to "manage" our way out of the problem are likely to make things worse. By "expanding our efforts in timber harvests to minimize the risks of large fire, we risk expanding what are well established negative effects on streams and native salmonids. The perpetuation or expansion of existing road networks and other activities might well erode the ability of [fish] populations to respond to the

effects of large scale storms and other disturbances that we clearly cannot change." (Reiman et al 1997).

The following quotes demonstrate that trying to restore lower severity fire regimes and forests through logging and other management activities may make the situation worse, compared to allowing nature to reestablish its own equilibrium. These statements are found in "An Assessment of Ecosystem Components in the Interior Columbia Basin and Portions of the Klamath and Great Basins, Volume 3 (ICBEMP):

"Since past timber harvest activities have contributed to degradation in aquatic ecosystems, emphasis on timber harvest and thinning to restore more natural forests and fire regimes represent risks of extending the problems of the past." (ICBEMP page 1340).

"Proposed efforts to reduce fuel loads and stand densities often involve mechanical treatment and the use of prescribed fire. Such activities are not without their own drawbacks -- long-term negative effects of timber harvest activities on aquatic ecosystems are well documented (see this chapter; Henjum and others 1994; Meehan 1991; Salo and Cundy 1987)." (ICBEMP page 1340).

"Species like bull trout that are associated with cold, high elevation forests have probably persisted in landscapes that were strongly influenced by low frequency, high severity fire regimes. In an evolu-

tionary sense, many native fishes are likely well acquainted with large, stand-replacing fires.” (ICBEMP page 1341).

“Attempts to minimize the risk of large fires by expanding timber harvest risks expanding the well-established negative effects on aquatic systems as well. The perpetuation or expansion of existing road networks and other activities might well erode the ability of populations to respond to the effects of fire and large storms and other disturbances that we cannot predict or control (National Research Council 1996). (ICBEMP page 1342).

“Watersheds that support healthy populations may be at greater risk through disruption of watershed processes and degradation of habitats caused by intensive management than through the effects of fire.” (ICBMP page 1342).

"Timber harvest, through its effects on forest structure, local microclimate, and fuels accumulation, has increased fire severity more than any other recent human activity. If not accompanied by adequate reduction of fuels, logging (including salvage of dead and dying trees) increases fire hazard by increasing surface dead fuels and changing the local microclimate. Fire intensity and expected fire spread rates thus increase locally and in areas adjacent to harvest". (USFS 1996c, pages 4-61-72).

"Logged areas generally showed a strong association with increased rate of spread and flame length, thereby suggesting that tree harvesting could affect the potential fire behavior within landscapes...As a by-product of clearcutting, thinning, and other tree-removal activities, activity fuels create both short- and long-term fire hazards to ecosystems. Even though these hazards diminish over time, their influence on fire behavior can linger for up to 30 years in dry forest ecosystems of eastern Oregon and Washington". (Huff et al 1995).

The answer, therefore, is not to try managing our way out of this situation with more roads and timber harvest/management. In summary:

- Roads have adverse effects on aquatic ecosystems. They facilitate timber sales which can reduce riparian cover, increase water temperatures, decrease recruitment of coarse woody debris, and disrupt the hydrologic regime of watersheds by changing the timing and quantity of runoff. Roads themselves disrupt hydrologic processes by intercepting and diverting flow and contributing fine sediment into the stream channels which clogs spawning gravels. High water temperatures and fine sediment degrade native fish spawning habitat.

According to the U.S. Forest Service 82% of all bull trout populations and stream segments range-wide are threatened by degraded habitat conditions. Roads and forest management are a major factor

in the decline of native fish species on public lands in the Northern Rockies and Pacific Northwest.

- An open road density (ORD) of one mile per square mile of land reduces elk habitat effectiveness to only 60% of potential. When ORD increases to six miles per square mile, habitat effectiveness for elk decreases to less than 20%. (Lyon 1984).

Northern Spotted Owl

- 1) Is there designated critical habitat for Northern Spotted Owls in the project area? If so, which units and how are they currently functioning?
- 2) Is the Forest Service meeting RA-10 and RA-32 in the Revised Recovery Plan (RRP)?
- 3) Were 2012 protocol surveys conducted in the project area and what were the results (requires two years of surveys with multiple visits). Please survey the entire project area, not just Activity Centers (AC). Owls are shifting around a lot and establishing new ACs due to loss of habitat from logging and fires. If the Forest Service is only surveying ACs they aren't finding all the owls. The Forest Service should not be logging core areas. This is where the nest stand is. Will the project log or burn in the home range? The RRP states all ACs should be protected even if unoccupied for future recolonization of those areas. Logging spotted owl habitat that is not occupied is a violation of the RRP.
- 4) How many Activity Centers (AC) are in the project area or overlap with the project area? How much nesting, roosting, foraging (N/R/F) habitat is in each AC pre project and post project?

- 5) Are there any Late-Successional Reserves (LSRs) in the project area? What is the purpose of each LSR per the NWFP (Northwest Forest Plan). Is the purpose being met?
- 6) Are barred owls in the project area? (They kill NSO and take over their ACs so more habitat is needed for NSO).
- 7) Is the FWS writing a BiOp for the project? The BiOp should be released BEFORE the FS makes a final determination.
- 8) Are private timber lands in or around the project area? If so they do not provide any owl habitat and can't be relied upon for Forest Service determinations.
- 9) Please provide maps of ACs, owl detections (often outside of ACs requiring protection), unit placement in CHU/LSR.

The Notice of proposed action did not include an Environmental Baseline as required under the ESA, so we assume the FS is relying on the USFWS for that analysis. That analysis is not available for review. The Environmental Baseline is defined as: “past and present impacts of all Federal, State, or private actions and other human activities in an action area, the anticipated impacts of all proposed Federal projects in an action area that have already undergone formal or early section 7 consultation, and the impact of State or private actions which are contemporaneous with the consultation in process” (50 CFR 402.02). The key purpose of the environmental baseline is to describe the natural and anthropogenic factors influencing the status and condition of ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat in the action area.

- Please make the Biological Opinions are complete and available for review to give the public an entirely clear view of impacts to all listed species including northern spotted owl (NSO) and their habitat.

We emphasize news about the plight of the northern spotted owl in the incorporated article, “A Slide Toward Extinction.” Although the article focuses on issues from a state of Oregon perspective, the problems causing this crisis of extinction for the northern spotted owl (NSO) persist on the OOWNF, across northern California, and throughout the species’ entire current and former range. The article reports on results of a study by Dugger et al., 2015 which is discussed below.

Please demonstrate that the project is following the Northwest Forest Plan requirements.

The Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) expresses an assumption about the NWFP itself:

(A) spatially-explicit model was run to simulate owl population dynamics for a sample of three of the SEIS alternatives, plus a no-harvest scenario, in order to explore possible northern spotted owl population response under a variety of demographic assumptions. The results are consistent with and generally lend support to the hypothesis that the owl reasonably may be expected to achieve population stability across its range notwithstanding additional loss of its habitat at a conservative rate such as that projected to occur under our decision. (Emphasis added.)

Dugger et al., 2015 found that northern spotted owl populations are declining in all parts of their range in the Pacific Northwest. Based on 11 study areas across Washington, Oregon and Northern California, a rangewide decline of nearly 4% per year was estimated from 1985 to 2013. This research indicated that since monitoring began spotted owl populations declined 55-77% in Washington, 31-68% in Oregon, and 32-55% percent in California. So the hypothesis of ex-

pected population stability forming the basis of the NWFP is disproved. The Upper Swauk notice does not address this recent population trend information for the northern spotted owl (NSO).

In addition, more recent data documents continued decline. The Northwest Forest Plan requires annual monitoring of NSO by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS or FWS) in established study areas. (These results are posted online at <https://re0.gov/monitoring/reports/northern-spotted-owl-reports-publications.shtml>.) The March 31, 2017 Annual Progress Report admits the NSO population is in significant decline: “The estimate of λ [lambda] from 1985 through the interval 2014-2015 (the interval 2015-2016 was not estimable using random effects models) was 0.977 (95% CI = 0.960, 0.993) on the WCSA, suggesting a declining population because the 95% confidence interval for the estimate of λ did not include $\lambda = 1$ (a stationary population).”

These monitoring results—which constitute the best available scientific evidence concerning NSO demographic trends—document a statistically significant decline in NSO populations over the last 5 years. While part of this population decline could be attributable to barred owl colonization, the likelihood is that the FS’s timber practices in NSO habitat is largely to blame. Indeed, the FS has acknowledged that the sparse scientific evidence on cause-and-effect relationships between habitat management and NSO vital rates shows a negative correlation between FS “landscape restoration” projects and NSO occupancy. And, correspondingly, the FS does not have any evidence supporting its claim that its projects are beneficial to the NSO. If the FS were to consider the downward trend of NSO populations in the areas where it has implemented timber sales and other land management projects in the context of an adaptive man-

agement model, it would certainly change its management approach.

The most recent 3 of the annual NSO monitoring reports all state the NSO population is in a decline that is statistically significant for the past 5+ years. This is clear evidence that current and recent forest management practices are failing unequivocally to recover the NSO, and require drastic changes.

The specific cause(s) of this significant decline is somewhat obscured in the reports because the only factors they examine are good vs. bad years (weather) and barred owls: habitat is neither mentioned nor measured in analyses or discussion. Forsman et al. 2011 looked at percent cover of suitable nesting habitat within 2.4 km circle and found evidence habitat was important. Dugger et al. 2005 and 2016 found both survival and reproduction were positively affected by the proportion of old-growth forest near the owl territory center. It would be much more informative, given that the study area is supposed to inform forest management, that forest management practices and effects be explicitly analyzed, including how changes in habitat due to logging affects reproduction, survival, and lambda, and not only point to weather and barred owls as the “multiple stressors” causing of owl declines.

Ultimately it does not matter—the species is in grave trouble, and creating more habitat havoc is arbitrary and capricious.

This is strong evidence that the suite of government actions to preserve the NSO—including the NWFP, the NSO Revised Recovery Plan (RRP), state and private land conservation measures, the efforts to control barred owls, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s conservation measures and terms and conditions in consultation docu-

ments—are failing to halt this slide towards extinction. Yet as shown by this Upper Swauk project, the FS arbitrarily and capriciously still subscribes to the disproven “hypothesis that the owl reasonably may be expected to achieve population stability across its range notwithstanding additional loss of its habitat” and continues to take risks and facilitate further degradation and destruction of NSO habitat, in the irrational belief that there is enough room for error and management flexibility to commercially log more NSO habitat.

The Notice of proposed action failed to consider the basis for and implications of the fact that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has determined that uplisting the NSO to Endangered may be warranted. In 2015 the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service stated: “Based on our review of the petition and sources cited in the petition, we find that the petition presents substantial information that the petitioned action may be warranted for the northern spotted owl

So a foundational hypothesis of the NWFP—expected NSO population stability—is disproved. It’s time for the FS to reinitiate consultation on the Forest Plan.

The logging of NSO habitat the FS unsustainably and illegally promoted for several decades took all the flexibility out of the situation. There’s no more room for error. It’s time for the FS to restrain itself, leave the owl’s habitat alone, and finally admit that active management is the problem—not the solution.

The Notice of proposed action does not disclose how many acres of the Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) in the project area are proposed for treatment, or demonstrate these treatments are consistent with the NWFP, the forest plan, and the RRP. Any treatments within these LSRs must be limited to stands 80 years old or younger and be

beneficial to the creation and maintenance of late successional forest conditions (NW Forest Plan ROD, page 8). The NEPA document must clearly demonstrate how any treatment meets this requirement.

The overall management emphasis of the Upper Swauk Restoration project conflicts with the following direction in the RRP:

It is not our intent, nor do we believe it would be consistent with the above objectives, to do landscape wide treatments for the purpose of excluding disturbance events such as fires, including high-severity fires. On the contrary, we are looking to support the disturbance regimes inherent to these systems and believe our management should be consistent with the counsel of Hessburg et al. (2007:21):

“Restoring resilient forest ecosystems will necessitate managing for more natural patterns and patch size distributions of forest structure, composition, fuels, and fire regime area, not simply a reduction of fuels and thinning of trees to favor low severity fires.”

The Notice of proposed does not provide a sufficient cumulative effects analysis to address the question of whether past management has extirpated the NSO from the project area. The Notice of proposed also does not consider the effect of barred owls on the NSO.

Is there any forest plan or other programmatic direction limiting roads in northern spotted owl nesting, roosting, foraging (NRF) habitat?

The Revised Recovery Plan (RRP) states, “There are four Recovery Criteria in this Revised Recovery Plan. Recovery Criteria are measurable, achievable goals...” Recovery Criterion 1 is “Stable Popu-

lation Trend: The overall population trend of spotted owls throughout the range is stable or increasing over 10 years, as measured by a statistically reliable monitoring effort.” The recovery effort is clearly moving away from this goal. Recovery Criterion 2 is “Adequate Population Distribution: Spotted owl subpopulations within each province (i.e., recovery unit) (excluding the Willamette Valley Province) achieve viability, as informed by the HexSim population model or some other appropriate quantitative measure.” The recovery effort is also clearly moving away from this goal. Recovery Criterion 3 is “Continued Maintenance and Recruitment of Spotted Owl Habitat: The future range-wide trend in spotted owl nesting/roosting and foraging habitat is stable or increasing throughout the range, from the date of Revised Recovery Plan approval, as measured by effectiveness monitoring efforts or other reliable habitat monitoring programs.” Again, the recovery effort is failing this goal also. Recovery Criterion 4 deals with Post-delisting Monitoring and is therefore inapplicable here.

The RRP at II-9 raises “Questions that may (sic) for consideration under adaptive management” which include:

What vegetation management treatments best accelerate the development of forest structure associated with spotted owl habitat functions while maintaining or restoring natural disturbance and provide greater ecosystem resiliency? What are the effects of these vegetation management treatments on spotted owl occupancy, demography, and habitat use immediately following treatment and at specified time periods after treatment? What are the effects of these treatments on spotted owl prey abundance and availability immediately following treatments and at specified time periods after treatment? What are the effects of the above vegetation management treatments on the habitat components that spotted owls and their prey use? How effective

are these vegetation management treatments in developing desired forest structure and how long does this development take?

The RRP at III-38 states:

There are some questions under adaptive management that may be answered within the next several years, the results of which can be applied to future management decisions (e.g., how do spotted owls use areas treated with specific vegetation management prescriptions intended to promote structural features conducive to spotted owl habitat?).

The FS proceeds as if they have already answered those questions, proposing to aggressively log and otherwise degrade owl habitat. The EA indicates 1,054 acres of nesting, roosting, foraging habitat (NRF) would be degraded and 556 acres of dispersal habitat would be degraded.

The RRP states at p. I-9:

In order to reduce or not increase this potential competitive pressure while the threat from barred owls is being addressed, this Revised Recovery Plan now recommends conserving and restoring older, multi-layered forests across the range of the spotted owl. ... In addition to addressing the barred owl threat, the Service agrees with scientific experts that it is necessary to conserve the highest value spotted owl habitat to address the key threats. (Emphases added.)

The RRP states, “Restoration activities conducted near spotted owl sites should first focus on areas of younger forest less likely to be used by spotted owls and less likely to develop late-successional forest characteristics without vegetation management.” Obviously, the

amount of mature forest being targeted demonstrates that the Upper Swauk timber sale is not consistent with this RRP direction.

The RRP states at p. II-7, 8: “Testing clearly formed hypotheses in a systematic manner under identifiable, bounded settings and monitoring the outcomes will go far in improving future management and developing more resilient policies while minimizing risk to resources.” The RRP continues:

The knowledge gained from testing hypotheses must be documented and applied to future actions if learning is to happen and if the policy or decisionmaking process is to be informed and improved. Thus, it is vital that the question asked as part of the experiment is relevant to managers. To speed the pace of learning, Williams et al. (2009) recommend that alternative management options be applied and tested, and that these options are sufficiently different to produce observable responses that can be detected by monitoring. (Emphases added.)

The RRP states, “There are risks associated with these treatments in their potential to disturb soils, affect long-term productivity, and increase the risk of exotic plant invasions. Managers need to account for and minimize these risks as they plan and implement restoration treatments.”

Additionally, in response to comments on the RRP, the USFWS stated:

The Service acknowledges the risks to treating spotted owl habitat and potential effects on spotted owls. We stress that treatments need to be strategic and focus on restoring and maintaining ecosystem structure, composition and processes... Given the uncertainties, ...the Service has proposed using adaptive

management ...to help us learn the effects of current management decisions and inform future decisions.

...(W)e note in the recovery plan the concern with the effectiveness of a widespread treatment of fuels solely for the purpose of reducing fire occurrence, size or amount of burned area; we further note that such treatments should be implemented only where they increase the acceptability of wildfire through reducing fire behavior and severity in specific areas, such as where it is desirable to meet public safety needs or to save valuable ecosystem elements necessary for resiliency. (Emphasis added.)

And yet the FS proposes to manage in disregard to the cautions expressed by the USFWS and in the RRP, thus contradicting the RRP.

RRP Recovery Action 10 requires the agencies to “Conserve spotted owl sites and high value spotted owl habitat to provide additional demographic support to the spotted owl population.” It goes on:

Where the modeling output and/or examination on the ground indicate that forest stands could and should be enhanced or developed through vegetation management activities to improve long-term habitat conditions, or to create improved habitat for spotted owls, larger habitat patches, or increased connectivity between patches, they should generally be encouraged even if they result in short-term impacts to existing spotted owls. However, such a process should occur where a determination is made that these longer term goals outweigh short-term impacts. (Emphasis added.)

Clearly, with the continuing downward trend in spotted owl populations, all nesting, roosting, foraging habitat—and especially critical

habitat—must be considered “high value.” The short-term impacts that the project would undertake by degrading northern spotted owl habitat cannot possibly be outweighed by speculative “long term goals.” The Upper Swauk timber sale violates Recovery Action 10.

RRP Recovery Action 11 requires:

When vegetation management treatments are proposed to restore or enhance habitat for spotted owls (e.g., thinnings, restoration projects, prescribed fire, etc.), consider designing and conducting experiments to better understand how these different actions influence the development of spotted owl habitat, spotted owl prey abundance and distribution, and spotted owl demographic performance at local and regional scales.

Regarding spotted owl prey, the RRP at III-8 states:

Mixed conifer stands in the eastern Cascades, which include pine species, provide den sites and food resources for bushy-tailed woodrats, an important prey species of spotted owls (Lehmkuhl et al. 2006a).

Northern flying squirrels...forage primarily on ectomycorrhizal fungi (truffles), many of which grow better under mesic, or moist, conditions (Lehmkuhl et al. 2004).

The Notice of proposed does not present an adequate analysis of the potential for increased predation on NSOs due to the impacts of the proposed logging. The EA does not demonstrate consistency with RA-10 in the RRP.

The RRP at II-9 also ask questions related to prey species, such as:

- What are the effects of these vegetation management treatments on spotted owl occupancy, demography, and habitat use

immediately following treatment and at specified time periods after treatment?

- What are the effects of these treatments on spotted owl prey abundance and availability immediately following treatments and at specified time periods after treatment?
- What are the effects of the above vegetation management treatments on the habitat components that spotted owls and their prey use?
- How effective are these vegetation management treatments in developing desired forest structure and how long does this development take?

Again, the FS proceeds as if the FS already has answered those questions, when in fact they have not, inconsistent with Recovery Action 11.

The RRP states:

We also stress this cannot be done successfully without an aggressive adaptive management framework to learn from treatments. Land managers should use pilot projects and active management to test or demonstrate techniques and principles (Noon and Blakesley 2006). In the near term, to reduce conflict and potential inconsistencies with existing Federal land management plans, we recommend locating such projects wherever possible in Matrix and Adaptive Management Areas.

The Notice of proposed failed to consider the basis for and implications of the fact that the USFWS has determined that uplisting the northern spotted owl to Endangered may be warranted. The USFWS stated: “Based on our review of the petition and sources cited in the petition, we find that the petition presents substantial information

that the petitioned action may be warranted for the northern spotted owl.”

The Notice of proposed doesn't analyze or disclose the extent of snowmobiling across the project area. It merely mentions groomed trails. Effects of cross-country travel are not considered. These effects must be considered in the NEPA document.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,
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