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First name: Kyle

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Organization: Idaho Wildlife Federation

Title: North Idaho Field Representative

Comments: Dear Forest Supervisor Petrick,

Idaho Wildlife Federation (IWF) thanks you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments on the for Kaniksu Over-snow Vehicle Use Designation Project (Project) on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF, or Forest).

The Idaho Wildlife Federation is Idaho's oldest statewide conservation organization, founded by sportsmen and women in 1936. Today, we represent a nonpartisan voice of 28 affiliate organizations with 45,000 affiliate members and individual supporters who desire to sustain and enhance Idaho's fish and wildlife, conserve their habitat, and maximize sporting opportunity for current and future generations. Our efforts advance "made in Idaho" solutions to the modern challenges of wildlife management.

IWF appreciates the effort of the IPNF to balance wildlife needs and both motorized and non-motorized recreation in this project. By taking the lead, this will help ensure there are future recreational opportunities on the forest for everyone while also protecting our wildlife populations.

The planning area's value to wildlife and sportsmen Game Management Unit (GMU) 1 is entirely within the boundaries of and covers nearly all of Idaho's portion of the planning area. GMU 1 is one of the most valued and heavily used areas by hunters in the state of Idaho. In 2021, when combining both elk and deer hunter statistics, GMU 1 had the second highest hunter numbers in the state at 11,542 and the highest number of hunter days at 83,170. Fall hunting seasons are a major economic driver for the area and there must be efforts made to ensure these big game populations are not negatively affected. IWF believes this is important to keep in mind when looking at over-snow vehicle use in the region and feels the areas closed due to big game winter range are key to this.

While some users may object to seasonal closures over much of the project area, we feel this is important, especially for protecting the growing grizzly bear populations in the area with the hope to eventually remove them from ESA listing.

We are, however, concerned with the effectiveness of these closures because of minimal evidence of enforcement measures on the ground. IWF also believes that these closures can be confusing to the public and require continual education. Because of this, IWF recommends implementing a clearly defined closure period.

Conclusion

IWF feels the proposed action for the Kaniksu Over-snow Vehicle Use Designation Project provides over-snow vehicle opportunities and contributes to the social and economic well-being of the areas communities while also meeting wildlife management objectives. Much of this is the result of the collaborative effort from participants on the North Idaho Working Group who helped move this process forward and we wanted to recognize and thank them for their time and effort.

Thank you,

Kyle Maki

North Idaho Field Representative

Idaho Wildlife Federation

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