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Organization: Panhandle Forest Collaborative
Title: Facilitator
Comments: I am submitting this comment on behalf of the Panhandle Forest Collaborative. Please see the attached document.

Dear Mr. Noyes:The vision of the Panhandle Forest Collaborative (PFC) is to assist agencies by bringing balanced approaches to timber, wild ecosystems, and recreation and to contribute to the sustainable social, environmental and economic viability of our region. The PFC focuses on issues on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF), primarily within the Sandpoint and Priest Lake Ranger Districts and a portion of the Coeur d[rsquo]Alene Ranger District. Our goals include reducing litigation, promoting sustainable operations, enhancing travel and recreation opportunities, reducing wildfire risk, maintaining infrastructure for timber, ranching and recreation, and conserving native ecosystems. The PFC works to build consensus recommendations for projects and forest plans that address these goals.The purpose of the Sandpoint South Project is to reduce the threat of wildfire to local residents, improve forest health, restore underrepresented tree species, decrease sources of stream sediment, improve recreation opportunities, and benefit the local economy. In order to achieve these objectives, the Forest Service proposes approximately 4,285 acres of timber harvest, 1,980 acres of fuels treatments, 1,540 acres of prescribed fire, 530 acres of precommercial thinning, 7 miles of new road construction, and 20 miles of motorized and non-motorized trail work.Fuel ReductionThe Sandpoint South Project area is in need of fuel reduction to reduce wildfire risk due to the extensive amount of wildland-urban interface. The impact to private landowners should be an active part of the public process, educating them about defensible space, water and wildlife habitat quality, and about the goals and outcomes to which this project aspires.RecreationThe PFC appreciates that the Forest Service added a recreation component to this project. The Sandpoint South project area is popular for recreation, both motorized and non-motorized, due to its proximity to both Coeur d[rsquo]Alene and Sandpoint. Motorized, mountain bike, and hiking users worked together to come up with the following suggestions for Sandpoint South Project area trails.The Forest Service proposes reconstructing Trails 231 and 232 and changing the designation from OHV<50[rdquo] to motorcycle. The PFC is supportive of this change with additional changes listed below:The Forest Service proposes that Trail 117 remain a motorcycle designated trail with reconstruction. Trail 117, from the end of Road 2235, was historically open to OHV<50[rdquo] past the end of the old roadbed through the Talache Creek drainage up to onto the ridge and saddle north of Butler Mountain in Section 1. From that point, the trail is single track headed south and headed north is an OHV<50[rdquo] trail onto a scenic overlook. The trail heads down onto State of Idaho Department of Lands property with an OHV<50[rdquo] designation and then to a road down to an access adjacent to Mirror Lake. It makes a good loop OHV<50s[rdquo]. The Motorcycle designation is not appropriate for the loop portion of Trail 117 described above. The PFC recommends designating OHV<50[rdquo] for the portion of Trail 117 from Road 2235 to the IDL property boundary and designating motorcycle for the part of Trail 117 headed south from the head of Talache Creek over Butler Mountain. It may be advisable to install signage or barriers where the trail changes from an OHV trail to a motorcycle trail on the saddle.The Forest Service proposes that Trail 64, Evans Landing, remains a motorcycle designated trail with reconstruction. This is a steep, short 1.13-mile trail to Lake Pend Oreille that is disconnected with other motorized trails in the area. The PFC recommends converting this to a non-motorized trail, which would eliminate the need for reconstruction.The PFC suggests that the Forest Service consider designating Grouse Mountain Road 1051 and 1051A as OHV<50[rdquo] Trails. Additionally, we recommend that the motorized connector trails from Gold Hill Trail #02 and from Road 2642 to the IDL motorized trail system to the west be identified as motorized trails.We suggest that the Forest Service clarify Table 6: Summary of Trail Proposed Actions. It is unclear why some trails are listed as hiker and others as bicycle. Trails 80, 81, and 82 are listed as hiker/pedestrian trails, but are currently used by mountain bikers. If non-motorized bicycles are allowed, we encourage the Forest Service to reconstruct Trails 80, 81, and 82 with mountain bikes in mind. Also, Trail 230 (6.2 miles) is listed in Table 6 as a motorcycle trail but appears to be an open road.The PFC

recommends the Forest Service use stewardship contracting in order to reinvest timber receipts into recreation projects. Stewardship contracts can be used to benefit the local community, economy, and recreationists.WildlifeThe PFC is supportive of the focus on restoring aspen stands as they are located in the project area. Aspen habitat is important to a variety of wildlife species ranging from pollinators to birds to ungulates.Regeneration harvest and prescribed burns will help create early seral habitat with high quality forage. Because large harvest units can reduce security cover, we encourage the use of clumped leave trees, reserves, and peninsulas in large openings to provide islands of wildlife habitat and visually smaller opening sizes.Due to the proximity of the project area to the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains, we encourage the Forest Service to conduct an analysis for grizzly bear effects.ConclusionWe are writing to provide comments on the Sandpoint South Project on behalf of the PFC. As you know, the PFC has been involved in the planning process through discussions and a field trip. We agree that there is a need to improve forest conditions, reduce the threat of fire to local residents, and improve recreational trails.In summary, the PFC supports the overall objectives of the project. We appreciate the opportunity to be involved in the planning process for the Sandpoint South Project. We look forward to continuing being involved in project development and seeing the project through to completion.