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Comments: Ms. Peel, please consider this information with a open mind.

As you consider the information below please think how precious undeveloped public land will be for future kids when the population is America is 450 million in 40 years. Please have the courage to fight for these kids.

Having the opportunity to seek solitude and quietness where wildlife and intact wildlife habitat still exist will be priceless.

Thanks,

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Citizen Alternative Offered for Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Revision Plan

Friends of the Clearwater offers citizen alternative for Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Revision; Forest Service proposed action deeply flawed

link to article: <http://www.friendsoftheclearwater.org/newsletters/citizen-alternative-offered-for-nez-perce-clearwater-national-forests-revision/>

Moscow - Today, Friends of the Clearwater announced their outline of a Citizens Conservation Biology Alternative for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Plan Revision. The Clearwater River drainage encompasses nearly 5-million acres of public wildlands and is part of the largest intact ecosystem in the lower 48. Tremendous biodiversity is found throughout low and high elevations and conservation biologists consider the Clearwater drainage the most important habitat for large forest carnivores in the U.S and Canadian Rockies. Along with designated wilderness and wild and scenic waterways, the Clearwater drainage also has 1.5-million acres of unprotected roadless wildlands.

"We are excited to put forth a citizen alternative based on sound scientific principles that would protect the outstanding natural values of the Clearwater basin," said Brett Haverstick, Education & Outreach Director for Friends of the Clearwater. "This alternative is about protecting water, soils, habitat and biological connectivity."

A cornerstone to the group's citizen alternative for the forest plan revision is offering long-term protection for the vast roadless wildlands and waterways in the Clearwater drainage. This contrasts sharply with the Forest Service's initial proposal for revision, released today as well, which would promote motorization and development of wild country. The agency proposal betrays the 1993 Clearwater National Forest lawsuit settlement agreement. That agreement assigned about 560,000 acres to be managed under the recommended wilderness category. The agency's proposed action for wilderness recommendation, which is actually two proposals, ranges from 234,000 to 328,000 acres.

"We hope the agency takes bold steps towards protecting the entire roadless base of the drainage by recommending areas for Wilderness or creating administrative non-motorized and non-mechanized backcountry designations," said Gary Macfarlane, Ecosystem Defense Director for Friends of the Clearwater. "Places like

Weitas Creek and Pot Mountain offer some of the best habitat in the entire drainage for ungulates and carnivores and are in need of protection as Wilderness."

Furthermore, the group contends the Forest Service proposal does nothing to address changes necessary in order to preserve designated Wilderness. Haverstick stated, "On the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act, the Forest Service should have proposed meaningful measures to better protect places like the Selway-Bitterroot and Gospel-Hump Wildernesses.

Other components of the alternative center around increasing old-growth habitat, managing for a diversity of forest-types and habitats, and allowing fire, insects and disease to fulfill their ecological niche. This contrasts with the agency's proposed action, which would industrialize the national forests through massive increases in logging. The proposal would also damage watersheds by effectively rendering meaningless current streamside protection buffers.

"This alternative takes a scientific approach to forest management and allows natural processes like fire, beetle infestation and disease to do what they have been doing for millions of years-create diverse, healthy fish and wildlife habitats," said Haverstick. "A resilient forest has large extents of unmanaged old growth-habitat, and also contains a wide diversity of habitat components such as snags, down logs and patches of dead and dying trees leading to natural regeneration all across the forest," he added.

When it comes to agency accountability and restoring areas in the Clearwater River drainage, the group is very concerned with the potential for the agency to weaken or remove existing enforceable standards and monitoring efforts that prioritize protecting fragile soils, clean water and habitat. "The Forest Service's proposed action retreats from enforceable standards to protect watersheds or wildlife habitat. Instead, it offers flowery language with no substance," Haverstick said.

"Management of our national forests must include strong, enforceable standards that hold the agency accountable to ensure soils, waters and wildlife and fish habitat are not degraded by overemphasis on resource extraction," said Macfarlane. "If monitoring data reveals that current conditions are not being met, then proposed activities must not move forward until those standards are achieved. Unfortunately, by almost every measure, this initial proposal is far worse than the existing plans for the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests."

The release of the Forest Service's proposed action is supposed to be the initial stage of formal public involvement under the National Environmental Policy Act. At this stage, the process must be open to public input and suggested alternatives. Macfarlane concluded, "We will see if the Forest Service is really interested in public accountability and following the law when the formal draft environmental impact statement is released in several months."