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August 19, 2021

Ms. Erin Phelps  
New Meadows District Ranger  
Payette National Forest  
P.O. Box J  
3674 Highway 95  
New Meadows, ID 83654  
(208) 347-0300

Submitted Electronically via Project Webpage:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=60552>

**RE: Idaho Conservation League's Scoping Comments for the Proposed Aquatic Organism Passage Management Project**

Dear Ms. Phelps:

Please accept the Idaho Conservation League's scoping comments for the proposed Aquatic Organism Passage Management Project, located in the New Meadows District of the Payette National Forest. Since 1973, the Idaho Conservation League (ICL) has had a long history of involvement with public lands issues. As Idaho's largest state-based conservation organization, we represent over 40,000 supporters who have a deep personal interest in restoring watershed health by reducing sediment delivery to streams and improving fish and other aquatic organism habitats.

ICL appreciates the Payette National Forest demonstrating a deep commitment to improving aquatic habitats in areas affected by the vacated Lost Creek/Boulder (LC/BC) Creek Record of Decision. We concur that this project, consisting of replacing inadequate culverts with aquatic organism passage (AOP) culverts at 18 locations, should move forward as a categorically excluded project based on the definition found in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(18). ICL is a member of the Payette Forest Coalition (PFC) and we have retained our "good standing" within the collaborative. In letters from the PFC dated June 9, 2021, and August 11, 2021 regarding the Cold July Environmental Assessment the PFC encouraged the Payette National Forest (PNF) to look for opportunities to include watershed restoration and recreation improvements in either the Cold July proposed actions (June 9 letter) and to highlight the PNF's intent to follow the Cold July Restoration project and its vegetation management focus with projects that return the focus

of watershed restoration and recreation improvements back towards the former LC/BC and current Cold July landscape. ICL submitted separate comments on the Cold July proposal (dated June 10, 2021) that echoed many of the PFC comments.

ICL supports the proposed Aquatic Organism Passage Management Project and agrees with the comments and recommendations made by the collaborative, specifically:

- Both the Lost Creek and dUpper West Fork river subwatersheds are listed as impaired in the Lost Creek/Boulder Creek Restoration Project FEIS (2014). Removal of AOP barriers throughout the drainage will move both streams towards desired future conditions in the Forest Plan.
- While the Boulder Creek subwatershed will see a nominal improvement in functioning condition class from concurrent recreation and trail improvements in the Lost Ant Recreation Management Project, we recommend the PNF prioritize future restoration and watershed improvements in the Boulder Creek subwatershed. Data shows the presence of native Bull trout and westslope cutthroat, as well as imperiled anadromous Chinook salmon and steelhead in this subwatershed.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments for the proposed Aquatic Organism Passage Management Project. Should you have any questions regarding these comments and recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact me. We look forward to working with the New Meadows Ranger District on this and future projects.

Respectfully submitted,



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