



**IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

SOUTHWEST REGION

15950 N. Gate Blvd.

Nampa, Idaho 83687

Brad Little / Governor

Ed Schriever / Director

August 27, 2021

New Meadows Ranger District  
Attn: Aquatic Organism Passage Management Project  
P.O. Box J  
New Meadows, ID 83645

**RE:** Aquatic Organism Passage Management Project

Dear District Ranger Erin Phelps,

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has reviewed the Scoping Categorical Exclusion, for the Aquatic Organism Passage Management Project (Project). The Project aims to replace 18 existing culverts in multiple tributaries of the Lost Creek and Upper West Fork Weiser River subwatersheds. Culvert replacement will improve fish and aquatic organism passage at road-stream crossings, and improve in-stream habitat.

The purpose of these comments is to assist the Payette National Forest (Forest) and the New Meadows Ranger District by providing technical information addressing potential effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat and how any adverse effects might be mitigated. Resident species of fish and wildlife are property of all Idaho citizens, and IDFG and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission are expressly charged with statutory responsibility to preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage all fish and wildlife in Idaho (Idaho Code § 36-103(a)). In fulfillment of our statutory charge and direction as provided by the Idaho Legislature, we offer the following comments and suggestions.

As stated in the Project scoping materials, the proposed culvert replacements will not occur in waters that contain Endangered Species Act- listed fish, nor that are designated as critical habitat. Streams within the Project area subwatersheds do contain both native and non-native species, many of which are popular game fish. Road-stream crossing culverts can act as a barrier to fish, particularly when undersized or in disrepair. The proposal to replace existing culverts with open-bottomed structures will provide improved fish passage, greater habitat suitability, and improved capacity to handle high flows.

IDFG appreciates the intent to follow USFS BMPs during Project implementation. There is potential for negative impacts during replacement, and care should be taken to minimize impacts to fish and water quality. As proposed, water will be diverted around each project site either by a

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pump or a channel. This should be done during periods of low flow, and appropriate measures should be taken to limit the amount of sedimentation and erosion that may occur. If a pump is to be used to divert the stream channel, it should be fitted with a 3/32" mesh screen to avoid fish entrainment. Additionally, we recommend a design features that will salvage any stranded fish that will occur when the primary channel is dewatered. Finally, we recommend that the Forest develop a post construction restoration plan to re-vegetate any riparian habitat that may have been disturbed during project implementation.

IDFG appreciates the opportunity to provide information pertinent to the proposed Project. Please contact Casey Pozzanghera in the Southwest Region office at (208)854-8947 if you have any additional questions concerning this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Rachael". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jon" and last name "Rachael" clearly distinguishable.

Jon Rachael  
Southwest Regional Supervisor

JR/CBP