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Bonniers Ferry Ranger District

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Kootenai Tribe elders pass down the history of the beginning of time, which tells that the Kootenai people were created by Quilxka Nupika, the Supreme Being, and placed on earth to keep the Creator-Spirit's Covenant - to guard and keep the land forever. The Kootenai have never lost sight of their original purpose as guardians of the land.

Bands of the Kootenai or Ktunaxa Nation have inhabited Kootenai Territory, which includes portions of Idaho, Montana, Washington, British Columbia and Alberta, since time immemorial. The Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (hereinafter "Kootenai Tribe") is one of two bands in the United States. Headquartered near Bonniers Ferry, Idaho, the Kootenai Tribe possesses federally reserved fishing, hunting and gathering rights within Kootenai Territory, as reserved in the Treaty of Hellgate of 1855.

The Kootenai Tribe and the United States Forest Service enjoy a close working relationship and collaborate often on issues of common concern to protect the National Forest System lands within our Territory, including the Idaho Panhandle, Kootenai and Colville National Forests. Management of these National Forests within Kootenai Territory is important to fulfill our Covenant with the Creator to keep and guard the land forever.

Forest management over the last century through fire suppression, overharvest and other policies has led to forest conditions that deviate from the natural range of variability. Although passive management may be appropriate in some situations, forests need active management to resolve many of these man-made problems. Selection of areas for both active and passive management, however, must take into account the needs of Tribal

and non-Tribal communities on and near the Forests that depend on vital resources, such as drinking water, from these lands.

- [bull] The Tribe agrees with restoring the forests in Ktunaxa Territory to be more resilient and less prone to insect, disease and catastrophic wildfire

- [bull] The Environmental Assessment should focus on assessing the best methods for achieving restoration goals

- o Fuels are a primary issue - analysis of vegetative management, silvicultural prescriptions, fire history, and forest vegetation key indicators are critical

- o The 15 openings larger than 40 acres will need to be further analyzed and justified

- [bull] There is a great deal of attention to transportation and recreation in the scoping document, which should result in an elevated need to analyze compatibility of recreation associated with Forest Plan requirements (e.g. need to provide access, protect areas with cultural or archaeological resources and provide for wildlife and fisheries) o Analysis will need to assess environmental impact on grizzlies, management indicator species (MIS), sensitive species and maintain consistency with recent legal decisions

- o Travel Planning - analysis will need to review motorized and non-motorized uses, winter travel, and site-specific travel management for access and roads, while understanding interactions and timing issues

The Kootenai Tribe looks forward to working collaboratively with the Idaho Panhandle National Forest and through our government-to-government relationship to implement this important project.

Sincerely,

Gary Aitken, Jr.

Chairman