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First name: john

Last name: McCarthy

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to comment on the draft management plan for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest.

I first went to work for the Nez Perce National Forest in 1977, in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. I have returned to the Selway and the roadless areas of both the Nez Perce NF and what was the Clearwater NF every year since. I have hiked and backpacked in Meadow Creek, Kelly Creek and the Great Burn, Mallard Larkins, Fish and Hungry Creeks, Lochsa Face, along with all the Wildernesses of these forests: Hells Canyon, Gospel Hump and the Frank Church-River of No Return.

A critical part of the ecological future of these forests and the economic future of the surrounding communities is wilderness and interconnected blocks of roadless areas, and free running creeks. Some of the purest water, best spawning streams, undeveloped wildlife habitat and beautiful wild lands in the nation are on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. The Forest Plan should be a long-term game-plan to protect, preserve and connect these wild lands.

The solid cooperative efforts of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative have resulted in an increase of products and work in the region. This cooperative effort indicates a willingness of caring citizens to work together for common good. The CBC recommendations for new wilderness should be incorporated and adapted into the Forest Plan proposal, or expanded if the science for long term sustainability of plant and animal species demonstrates it is more solid.

At a bare minimum, the Forest Plan should continue to require management of all Proposed Wilderness to be managed as wilderness, with all motorized vehicles --including snowmobiles, ATVs, motorcycles and electric mountain bikes -- excluded. Snowmobiles have no place in Great Burn and cause harm to Mountain Goats, Wolverines and other high elevation species.

I have lived in Grangeville, White Bird, Joseph Plains, and Hells Canyon. I have great respect for the people of these surrounding areas. There is room for all kinds of recreation and solid work in the National Forests. Key areas need to be off limits for motorized recreation and development, including current recommended wilderness and expanded wilderness.

The rest of this note is the canned comments from the Idaho Conservation League, where I have been a member for almost 40 years, and I agree with all of the statements. I also have a strong personal stake in this land and in these communities. For more than 40 years I have seen the best future for these lands is in wilderness protection where appropriate and where possible.

I am discouraged to learn that the Forest Service may open the proposed Great Burn Wilderness Area to snowmobiles. The Great Burn is vital to wildlife. The area provides crucial winter habitat for wolverines and mountain goats. Allowing snowmobiles in the Great Burn will displace these animals and potentially cause population declines.

I would also like to see the entire Meadow Creek watershed protected as wilderness. This significant tributary to the Selway River includes populations of steelhead, salmon, cutthroat trout, and bull trout. Furthermore, I am told that the native trout in Meadow Creek have a high level of genetic diversity than any other watershed in the Rocky Mountains. Wilderness designation will protect this valuable fishery.

The Mallard-Larkins Area is another important candidate for wilderness. This area is a favorite destination for primitive backcountry recreation. The trails are great for hiking and backpacking. There are fewer and fewer places to enjoy the quiet solitude of wilderness. The Mallard-Larkins is one such place.

Finally, I would like to see the North Fork and South Fork Clearwater Rivers protect as wild and scenic. Wild and scenic rivers designations would ensure that no one can build a dam or divert water from these rivers. I would hate to see that happen. The North Fork is a blue-ribbon cutthroat trout river. The South Fork has large steelhead. Please protect them.