

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/6/2020 9:27:46 PM

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Organization:

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Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

As frequent yearly visitors to the Nez Perce/Clearwater National Forests for the past 45+ years, we are writing today to comment on the proposed revisions to the Nez Perce/Clearwater National Forests Plans. We consider this combined forest to be vital to our lives and essential to the continued health of this region. The forest supplies the clean water we drink, cleanses the very air we breathe, protects vital species diversity, and provides numerous recreational opportunities for us, our children and our grandchildren. We have worked as volunteers for months at Moose Creek Ranger Station in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, have fished every major stream within the forest, have rafted/kayaked its rivers, camped within it several times each year for decades, hiked its trails, climbed to the top of many of its mountains, etc. Nowhere on this planet is as important to us as the Nez Perce/Clearwater N.F. Therefore, we make the following recommendations to any proposed changes to the forest plans with heartfelt regard for what is best for the forest itself.

1. The current revisions to the forest plan suggested by the Forest Service are not based on "quantifiable standards." Often the revisions ask us to simply trust the USFS to do the right thing. This is not good enough. We understand the pressure the USFS is under from the current administration in Washington, D.C., from national and local resource extractors, etc., but these groups frequently only take into consideration their own self-interest and dismiss the what is best for the forest itself. To prevent selfish motives from impacting the decision-making process in favor of any group, the USFS must implement specific standards based upon scientific research in order to prevent the degradation of the forest's ability to maintain a healthy ecosystem (things such as cobble embeddedness/sediment measurements to provide for ample fish habitat). No one should feel comfortable relying simply on vague standards.
2. The USFS must also recognize that climate change is a real phenomenon and that it has not only the potential, but the high probability, of severely impacting the Nez Perce/Clearwater National Forest in the near and distant future. When we increase the number of trees we cut in the forest we reduce the forest's ability to absorb carbon dioxide. This is not the time to increase the amount of logs we bring out of the Nez Perce/Clearwater N.F. If anything, we should be reducing board feet logged. In conjunction with this, we should immediately initiate a moratorium on the logging of old growth throughout the Nez Perce/Clearwater N.F. It is time to take global warming seriously and to plan accordingly, not kick the can down the road until it is too late to act.
3. Several species need added protection in the forest plan. Grizzly bears have begun to appear in the forest in the past few years (migration corridors are essential here as well as the removal of old roads and the elimination of plans for new roads). Steelhead are in serious danger of extinction (the forest plan should expand not reduce buffer zones, should increase cobble embeddedness, etc.). Fisher, wolverine, salmon, lynx, bull trout, etc. (protection of forest habitat by reducing, not increasing, logging is essential here) and numerous other species need better protection than we have provided them in the past. The USFS should provide these species and their habitat with special protections so that they will be able to maintain viable populations in the future. To insure this protection, we should set aside the remaining 1.5 million acres of unprotected roadless areas on the Nez Perce/Clearwater N.F. for wilderness protection. By doing this we will have done our best to insure that fragile species will have a viable future.

It is incumbent upon the forest service to do all that it can to insure the health of the Nez Perce/Clearwater N.F. as an ecosystem and to protect everything that makes up that ecosystem. That should be the USFS's most important mission. Once we log old growth, once Steelhead become extinct, once water quality is negatively impacted, etc., we will be unable rectify our mistakes. If the forest is healthy, everything that depends upon it

(recreation, jobs reliant on resource extraction, fresh air, clean water, etc.) will still be possible. Please do all that you can to insure that the Nez Perce/Clearwater N.F. is healthy for us today and also for generations yet to be born.

Sincerely, Lynn and Vince Murray