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Comments: [External Email]Comments on 2022 IDFG Sheep Collaring Project (Salmon and Red River Ranger Districts)

[External Email]

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Dear Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest,

Please accept my comments on the 2022 IDFG Sheep Collaring Project (Salmon and Red River Ranger Districts).

I urge the Forest Service (FS) to reject Idaho Fish and Game's (IDFG) request to use helicopters to pursue, capture, and collar up to 20 bighorn sheep in the Gospel Hump and Frank Church-River of No Return Wildernesses, including the Salmon Wild and Scenic River corridor.

Why are we, the American public, tax paying for 94% of conservation and wildlife "management" not being heard, let alone the judges and laws which state: use of helicopters in the Wild and Scenic River corridor is also prohibited by the Frank Church-River of No Return Management Plan.

The tides need to turn quickly. Collaring is uber stressful, and there is more and more data to support non invasive scat collecting as an effective way to track parasites and bacteria overgrowth in predators and ungulates.

After learning of Idaho and Montana's collar telemetry for Wolves actually leading trappers and bounty hunters to Wolf dens and locations of our keystone predators I will adamantly say that collaring creates a disadvantage for animals in this environment of "over managing" our remaining wildlife. Gather new research data on successful use of scat collecting, it's easy to collect and to train people to test or prep to send out to labs. I've done it myself when a student at the Teton Science School.

Helicopter pursuit and capture would cause undue stress on the bighorn sheep. Not only that, but the use of helicopters in Wilderness is prohibited by the Wilderness Act and the Forest Service's Wilderness implementing regulations, and this project is fundamentally antithetical to protecting Wilderness in its untrammled state. The use of helicopters in the Wild and Scenic River corridor is also prohibited by the Frank Church-River of No Return Management Plan. All told, this project has nothing to do with managing Wilderness and must be rejected.

Federal judges have admonished the FS and IDFG for their rushed implementation of unlawful helicopter projects in Wilderness in the past, with the courts warning the FS that it "must proceed very cautiously here because the law is not on their side if they intend to proceed with further helicopter projects in the [Wilderness]." It's wrong for the agency to entertain authorizing another such project following decisive legal opinions on past helicopter use for similar wildlife collaring projects.

The Forest Service needs to uphold the law and reject IDFG's latest proposal for motorized intrusion and intentional trammeling of the Gospel Hump and Frank Church-River of No Return Wildernesses in Idaho. IDFG needs to conduct this project outside of Wilderness.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
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