

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/23/2022 6:03:00 PM

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

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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 exhort 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.

Helicopter pursuit and capture would cause undue stress on the bighorn sheep. In addition, the use of such helicopters in Wilderness is clearly prohibited by the Wilderness Act and the Forest Service's own Wilderness implementing regulations.

As such, this project stands must be seen as fundamentally antithetical to protecting the Wilderness in its natural 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 at all to do with managing Wilderness. That is why it must be rejected.

Federal judges have admonished the FS and IDFG for their pattern of 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 is blatantly wrong for the agency to entertain authorizing another such project following decisive legal opinions on previous helicopter use for similar wildlife collaring projects.

The Forest Service must uphold the law and be seen to do so! It must 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 elsewhere if at all: OUTSIDE of Wilderness.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rosi Meza-Steel

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