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Title:

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).

As a former seasonal river ranger for the BLM for almost two decades in Colorado and Utah, I would ask all Federal and State agencies to respect all designated Wilderness areas and WSA's as intended by Congress and the Wilderness Act. The slow erosion of this law is diluting those special original intentions which Congress codified into law in 1964. This is a disgraceful disregard for our laws by Congress and those people who occupy our seats in government. You can and must do better if respect for this institution by our citizens is to remain intact.

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.

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,

Skip Edwards

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