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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,

My understanding is that Idaho Fish and Game want the Forest Service to approve of the use of helicopters (!) to catch twenty Bighorn Sheep in two designated wilderness areas (Gospel Hump, and Frank Church-River of No Return), and fifteen more elsewhere, for the purpose of putting collars on them.

The Forest Service should reject this request. Our first responsibility should be to the well-being and peaceful thriving of wild animals who live in the lands we manage, and that responsibility would be flouted by this disruptive effort. Chasing and catching the sheep is sure to cause them awful fear and stress. And bringing helicopters into wilderness areas is sure to be similarly disturbing to other animals as well.

There is another responsibility: to keep those areas that have legally been designated as wildernesses as truly wild and undisturbed as possible. With regard to that, we should note that 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 untrammelled 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 before proposing to go into Wilderness.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

Mark Caponigro

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