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Organization:

Title:

Comments: As residents of Joseph, and concerned citizens, we submit this scoping comment on the Morgan Nesbit Forest Resiliency Project. We are now very senior citizens; we know that much of what is happening in terms of climate change will only get worse after we are gone, but we will leave between us 4 adult children and 5 adult grandchildren who will have to face and deal with the consequences of today's actions. Jan has had an almost life-long connection with the Eagle Cap wilderness. In her youth her extended family built an A-frame cabin on leased USFS land in what is now the wilderness, not far from what was then the Boulder Park Resort (long since demolished). We also spent time camping in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, which in her youth, and later her son's childhood, was not yet protected. Dan holds a degree in horticulture, with a specialty in trees.

The Nature Conservancy researched what they called "Migrations in Motion," modeling and mapping the average direction mammals, birds, and amphibians need to move to track hospitable climates as they shift across the landscape. This research revealed that "only 41 percent of the natural land area in the United States retains enough connectivity to facilitate species tracking their preferred climate conditions as the global climate changes." This research shows that the likely routes are our public forestlands, with the Morgan Nesbit project right in the heart of it, highlighted by scientists as being a connectivity corridor of global importance and worthy of protection. It's home to endangered fish, plants, and wildlife. In a time of climate change, increasing development, and a biodiversity crisis, these corridors have become even more important.

We urge your agency not to build 23-plus miles of new roads that fragment the landscape and harm environmental values. The Morgan Nesbit project envisions the most miles of temporary roads ever proposed. We understand that the Wallowa-Whitman is already one of the most roaded forests in the nation, and one of only two operating without a Travel Management Plan. Furthermore, the 23 miles doesn't include the re-opening of other old roads from previous projects.

This area is simply not appropriate for large-scale industrial logging. We urge your agency not to log in unroaded landscapes and places that have been proposed for protection, or on steep slopes, or in riparian areas; and not to log large trees or do aggressive thinning in forests that have never been logged before. Riparian areas give cover for calving and rearing of young, and are part of the connectivity corridor. Large trees and old growth represent strong climate values in a time of increasing climate change.

Some parts of this proposed restoration project deserve support. However, and with all due respect, we'd like to see your agency focus on more pressing and legitimate restoration needs, such as thinning near homes, communities and campgrounds, and addressing the continuing damage from grazing and fire suppression. There must be less focus on logging and extraction. Moreover, the agency needs to give attention to the interests of all parties, particularly Tribes and conservationists. You surely know that this locale has been part of the Nez Perce/Nimiipuu homeland since time immemorial, with deep cultural values.

Honor the diversity and complexity of this landscape; prioritize its strong climate values and connectivity corridor, with its habitat for fish, plants and wildlife, by doing a thorough analysis and creating an ecologically sound proposal. Taking time to do this right will never be a mistake. We thank you for giving our concerns and recommendations your most serious and thoughtful consideration.