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Comments: I am submitting this public comment regarding the proposed Feather Creek Project on the Palouse Ranger District of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. I am concerned about the scope and cumulative impacts of the proposed activities, including road construction and relocation, timber harvesting, vegetation removal, livestock grazing infrastructure, and extensive trail development.

Although the Forest Service identifies forest resilience, wildfire risk reduction, community protection, and improved recreational access as project objectives, these goals must be balanced with the need to protect intact forest ecosystems, wildlife habitat, watersheds, aquatic environments, meadows, and the ecological integrity of public lands.

The proposed project includes the construction of one mile of new permanent road, approximately 12 miles of temporary roads, and maintenance of approximately 12 miles of existing roads. It also proposes regeneration harvest on 637 acres, commercial thinning on 52 acres, and non-commercial thinning on 2,208 acres. Additional activities include mechanical and hand treatments across approximately 800 acres within the wildland-urban interface and the removal of accumulated dead and dying trees on up to 420 acres along nine miles of roads.

These extensive activities warrant careful scrutiny. Road construction and timber harvesting can fragment wildlife habitat, disturb soils, increase erosion and sedimentation, and affect water quality. Temporary roads can also leave lasting environmental impacts if they are not properly reclaimed and monitored. The Forest Service should demonstrate that the proposed activities are necessary, that less damaging alternatives have been fully considered, and that the long-term ecological costs will not outweigh the anticipated benefits.

I am particularly concerned about the proposal to relocate a segment of Forest Service Road 377 along the West Fork Potlatch River and to restore hydrologic connectivity between the river and approximately 46 acres of adjacent meadows. Any work in this area must prioritize the protection of aquatic habitat, natural stream processes, and the ecological functions of riparian areas and meadows. The Forest Service should clearly explain how road relocation, construction, and associated activities will avoid degrading these sensitive environments.

The proposal also includes the construction of three water developments for permitted cattle, approximately 21,000 feet of fencing, two new cattle guards, and maintenance of existing fencing. While the project proposes to exclude livestock from a meadow along the West Fork Potlatch River, the Forest Service should explain how these measures will protect meadow vegetation, prevent streambank degradation, maintain natural hydrology, and reduce the cumulative effects of grazing throughout the allotment. Livestock management should be designed around the long-term health of the ecosystem rather than simply facilitating continued grazing access.

The proposed recreation improvements also deserve careful evaluation. The project includes approximately 20 miles of trail construction, a new trailhead and parking area, additional loop opportunities for mechanized recreation, and a day-use area at Feather Creek with parking, an information kiosk, a vault toilet, hitching rails, picnic tables, fire rings, and other facilities. Although public access and recreation are important, expanded infrastructure and trail networks can increase habitat fragmentation, disturbance to wildlife, erosion, and human pressure on natural areas. The Forest Service should demonstrate that this level of development is appropriate for the area and that recreational improvements will not undermine the project's stated goals for forest and watershed resilience.

I urge the Forest Service to provide a transparent assessment of the cumulative impacts of all proposed

activities, including their combined effects on wildlife, vegetation, soils, streams, meadows, and surrounding roadless or relatively undisturbed areas. The environmental assessment should include meaningful consideration of alternatives that would accomplish legitimate forest health and community protection objectives while minimizing permanent road construction, timber removal, habitat disturbance, and unnecessary infrastructure. Any proposed treatments should be supported by site-specific evidence, clear objectives, and measurable standards for evaluating their effectiveness.

The Forest Service should also explain how temporary roads will be decommissioned and rehabilitated, how disturbed areas will be monitored, and what enforceable measures will be used to prevent erosion, invasive species spread, and degradation of aquatic and terrestrial habitats. Post-project monitoring and corrective action should be integral to the project, not left as optional measures.

Finally, I recognize that the Forest Service has identified the Feather Creek Project under an emergency action determination and has stated that the environmental assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact will not be subject to the pre-decisional objection process under 36 CFR 218. Because this public comment period is the final opportunity for public input before the FONSI is issued, it is especially important that the agency carefully consider and substantively address the concerns raised by the public.