



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

PANHANDLE REGION
2885 West Kathleen Avenue
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815

Brad Little / Governor
Ed Schriever / Director

December 10, 2021

Coeur d'Alene Ranger District
2502 East Sherman Avenue
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814
Attn: Dan Scaife

REFERENCE: CHARACTER FIRE SALVAGE PROJECT

Dear Dan:

Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has reviewed the above project, which involves, timber salvage harvest in a 12,400 acre area of USFS land within the burned portion of the 2021 Character Fire Complex. This project in the Coeur d'Alene Ranger District is intended to reduce fuel loads and hazards and increase forest resiliency by improving the establishment of larch and white pine seedlings. The purpose of these comments is to assist the decision-making authority by providing technical information addressing potential effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat and how any adverse effects might be mitigated.

Burned forests have value to many wildlife species. Burned trees and downed woody debris provide food and shelter to a variety of bird and mammal species. The project will salvage timber from 3,200 acres or 26% of the area burned within the Character Fire Complex. This should provide a reasonable mosaic of forest types remaining on the landscape. Replanting the project area with white pine and western larch should help make the forest more resilient to future threats such as insect outbreaks and tree diseases and help to restore the historic forest community. Larch and white pine seedlings will likely have less competition from natural fir and hemlock regeneration in salvage logged areas. We appreciate the proposed use of western red cedar and hardwoods in moist habitats.

Clearcuts with leave trees, seed tree, and shelterwood account for all of the salvage unit prescriptions. Openings larger than 40 acres will likely improve the establishment of non-shade tolerant species, but should retain clumps of trees as wildlife habitat. While there are harvest units of various sizes, many units are adjacent to one another especially between Character Ridge and Scott Gulch. It would be beneficial to many wildlife species if forested corridors are left within large units and between small adjacent units. We also encourage the use of clumped leave trees, reserves, and peninsulas (of at least one acre) in large openings to provide islands of wildlife habitat and visually smaller opening sizes, even if the trees are dead/dying.

Keeping Idaho's Wildlife Heritage

The Coeur d'Alene River (CDA) is designated as critical habitat for bull trout by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Westslope cutthroat trout, a species of concern in Idaho, can be found year round throughout the system. The nationally famous Coeur d'Alene River provides a popular recreational trout fishery that is enjoyed by anglers from throughout Idaho and across the country. The sport fishery is of significant aesthetic, recreational and economic value to Idaho and especially local communities.

According to Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ 2018/2020) BURP data the Coeur d'Alene River below Prichard Creek is TMDL listed for temperature, sediment, flow regime modification and physical substrate habitat alterations. Currently this section of river is identified as not fully supporting cold water aquatic life and salmonid spawning designated uses due to these impairments. While it remains a quality fishery, additional sediment would result in a decline in the quality and availability of habitat.

Stream buffers of 300' and replanting riparian areas should help reduce the amount of time stream water temperatures are elevated. Leaving areas of high severity burns out of salvage units should help reduce erosion and stream sedimentation, which will help to ameliorate negative effects to the water quality of the Coeur d'Alene River and its tributaries.

While new road construction can be detrimental to wildlife habitat and, especially, wildlife security, we appreciate that the 10 miles of temporary roads will be decommissioned, recontoured, and seeded following this project. The closed roads to be opened during this project are stated to be closed with a gate, berm, or front-end obliteration. We recommend using front-end obliteration wherever possible to reduce the likelihood of unwanted motorized use, which has a negative effect on wildlife and their habitat.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Chares E. Corsi
Regional Supervisor

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