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Comments:

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
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ADMINISTRATOR'S

DIVISION

April 24, 2023

Jennie Fischer, NEPA Team Leader
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
104 Airport Road
Grangeville, Idaho 83530

Dear Jennie Fischer:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed U.S. Forest Service's March 2023 Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Hungry Ridge Restoration Project (CEQ Number 20230039, EPA Project Number 14-0008-AFS). EPA has conducted its review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act and our review authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. The CAA Section 309 role is unique to EPA and requires EPA to review and comment publicly on any proposed federal action subject to NEPA's environmental impact statement requirement.

The Draft Supplemental EIS further evaluates old growth and cumulative effects to old growth under the 1 National Forest Management Act and NEPA consistent with a June 2022 court decision and supplements the old growth assessment provided in the project's September 2020 Final EIS. The project area is located 17 miles southeast of Grangeville, Idaho County, Idaho in the Mill Creek and Johns Creek watersheds within Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. The project includes timber harvest, site preparation/activity fuel treatments, and reforestation; road construction, improvement and decommissioning; and stream crossing improvement, riparian area planting, and meadow restoration.

EPA identified environmental concerns and deficiencies in the analysis that should be addressed in the Final Supplemental EIS. The following recommendations will help improve the FSEIS analysis and address recent federal guidances and the forthcoming forest plan revision:
Climate Change
On January 9, 2023, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) published interim guidance to assist
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federal agencies in assessing and disclosing climate change impacts during environmental reviews. CEQ developed this guidance in response to Executive Order 13990, Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis. This interim guidance is effective

immediately. CEQ indicated that agencies should use this interim guidance to inform the NEPA review for all new proposed actions and may use it for evaluations in process, as agencies deem appropriate, such as informing the consideration of alternatives or helping address comments raised through the public comment process. EPA recommends the FSEIS apply the interim guidance as appropriate, to ensure robust consideration of potential climate impacts, mitigation, and adaptation issues.

[1] Friends of Clearwater v. Probert, 3:21-cv-00189-CWD (D. Idaho Jun. 24, 2022)

[2] https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/01/09/2023-00158/national-environmental-policy-act-guidance-on-consideration-of-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-climate. Accessed 4/12/23.

Traditional Knowledge

Since the release of the project's March 2021 Record of Decision, CEQ has published November 30, 2022 Guidance for Federal Department and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge[3]. EPA recommends the FSEIS include the identification, inclusion, and integration of Traditional Knowledge into the NEPA analysis. In addition to anticipated impacts from the project, as well as traditional hunting and land use patterns in the area, this can include the collection of local and traditional knowledge concerning the affected environment and could be used to support the understanding of how climate change has impacted local environmental resources and subsistence resources. In addition to reviewing any pertinent traditional environmental knowledge currently available, additional studies and outreach may be conducted as necessary to clearly identify potential impacts, including cumulative impacts, from the proposed project and project alternatives, and help inform avoidance, minimization, and compensation strategies across affected environmental resources.

Forest Plan Revision

The Draft Revised Forest Plan and DEIS for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests (CEQ# 20190295) were issued on December 20, 2019. According to the project website, the FEIS is expected in Summer 2023 and the ROD in Winter 2023/2024. Once the ROD is finalized, EPA encourages the Hungry Ridge Restoration Project to incorporate the Revised Forest Plan goals, desired outcomes, and new scientific understandings through Section 18.1 review[4], if applicable.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the DSEIS for this project. If you have questions about this review, please contact Susan Sturges of my staff at (206) 553-2117 and sturges.susan@epa.gov, or me, at (206) 553-1774 or at chu.rebecca@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Chu, Chief
Policy and Environmental Review Branch

[3] https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSTP-CEQ-IK-Guidance.pdf. Accessed 4/12/23.

[4] Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 - NEPA Environmental Policy Handbook: https://www.fs.usda.gov/cgi-bin/Directives/get_dirs/fsh?1909.15. Accessed 4/12/23.