

3 January 2024

Objection Reviewing Officer, Northern Region
USFS
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Dear Sir

This objection letter concerns the new Forest Plan for the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests, and in particular, the language and decisions in that Plan dealing with the Southern Nez Perce Trail (called SNPT here to save time). In the draft, I commented on this trail and the large roadless area (Meadow Creek) which it largely traverses. As part of the Friends of the SNPT, and with the permission of both the Forest Service and the Nez Perce Tribe, I have spend the past decade working to locate, mark, and brush out this ancient route across the Bitterroots. This trail is largely intact and is roughly 10,000 years old.

The new Forest Plan allocates virtually all of the large Meadow Creek Roadless Area (all of which is covered by the Idaho Roadless Rule) to motorized use, including most of Bargamin Creek, the meadows of upper Meadow Creek, and the hillside just east of Red River Hot Springs. Most of the SNPT west of the Selway Wilderness boundary lies within these roadless lands, now available to motorized use thanks to the new Plan.

Up until about 1680, the SNPT was a foot path, managed chiefly by fire, and on a location still usually visible. Horse travel on the SNPT began at about the time of the Pueblo Revolt. Some destructive machine use occurred on the SNPT segment just east of Red River Hot Springs, and NO machine use has ever occurred on the longer trail segment running east from the old Red River Ranger Station toward the Wilderness boundary on Three Prong Ridge north of Burnt Knob LO.

The new Forest Plan mentions the SNPT in the ROD, and vaguely has a goal to list the SNPT as a "national trail," a generally meaningless designation. In the past, on three occasions, the Nez Perce NF staff prepared three detailed applications for National Register status, but never submitted them.

By allocating the land along the SNPT route, and without clear, precise language designed to ensure only historic uses of the trail, the SNPT is now at risk of loss and destruction. In the absence of such an assurance of historic management, the work of volunteers led by the Friends of the SNPT must come to an end.

The Regional Forester can protect the trail's true, historic status, by adding this language as a Plan STANDARD (not a goal):

The Forest Service will ensure that all segments of the SNPT east of the Red River RS are managed for use and travel only by foot and horseback, and will not permit new road crossing of the trail. An effort will be started to locate and mark the SNPT west of the Elk City Section, and work will resume on the proposed National Register listing for the trail.

With this new standard, the trail can be assured of protection. Thank you.

Dennis Baird, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Dennis Baird

*By 1 May 2024 TO PERMIT
A TRAIL WORK PLANING*

BAIRD



CLEARWATER / NEZ PERCE
PLANS

RI Room
Received 1/9/24
Eric Corbett
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