

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/4/2026 7:00:00 AM

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Organization: Idaho Forest Group

Title: Director of Forest Resources and Policy

Comments: Full letter attached.

Dear District Ranger Carroll: Idaho Forest Group (IFG) submits the following comments in support of the Wepah Salvage Project Proposed Action, as described in the July 2026 Proposed Action for Comment. We appreciate the opportunity to comment and respectfully urge the Forest Service to proceed with the proposed action, as designed, without modification or delay. Our interest in this project IFG is a family-owned lumber producer operating five sawmills in Idaho supporting roughly 1,200 full-time personnel and 2,000 logging and hauling contractors. Timber salvaged from the Wepah Salvage Project would be delivered primarily to our Lewiston mill, which is within economical haul distance of the Palouse Ranger District. The Lewiston mill has a capacity of more than 300 million board feet per year and is specifically configured to process Douglas-fir/larch and hem-fir species [mdash] the same species that dominate the White Pine Fire-affected stands proposed for salvage in this project. A reliable, timely supply of salvage logs from this project would directly support production and jobs at our Lewiston facility, and the mill's existing infrastructure is well suited to efficiently process this volume without delay. IFG supports the important role that National Forests play in managing healthy forests and wildfire risk, as well as in contributing to healthy communities, particularly in areas like the Palouse Ranger District that rely on a natural resource-based economy. We support the proposed action as written. We support the full scope of the proposed action, including: 600 acres of commercial salvage harvest (559 acres regeneration harvest, 41 acres intermediate harvest) within the 2025 White Pine (Wepah) Fire perimeter; The associated road work needed to safely and efficiently haul this timber [mdash] approximately 20.5 miles of system road maintenance (NFSRs 768, 1423, 1423-I, 377, 3307, and 768-J) and approximately 8.5 miles of temporary road construction; and- The related infrastructure and recreation improvements (the Trail 221-A bridge replacement at Mannering Creek, the Trail 228 reroute, and the Giant White Pine trailhead parking expansion), which will improve safe access to the project area for both the public and forest managers. The proposed action's own analysis makes clear why timely action matters: the timber burned in the 2025 White Pine Fire is rapidly deteriorating in economic value, and delay directly erodes the recoverable value of this resource. The Proposed Action document notes that a no-action alternative would result in a complete loss of value in the impacted timber stands, forgo funding that would otherwise support reforestation and fuels treatment, and leave hazardous fuel accumulations and fire-killed hazard trees unaddressed along roads and trails. We agree with this assessment and see no benefit [mdash] economic, ecological, or public safety related [mdash] to delaying implementation. The project appropriately balances economic recovery with resource protection. We note that the proposed action already incorporates substantial resource protection measures [mdash] retention of live trees and snags for wildlife habitat, riparian management zone buffers, soils and water quality best management practices, and temporary road decommissioning upon completion of harvest and reforestation. These measures, drawn directly from the 2025 Land Management Plan, provide a reasonable and well-supported basis for proceeding with a single proposed action rather than developing additional alternatives, as the interdisciplinary team concluded in its screening. We agree with that conclusion and do not believe further analysis or additional alternatives are necessary or would meaningfully change the outcome for the resources considered. On the subject of temporary roads specifically, IFG supports minimizing the long-term road footprint on the National Forests and decommissioning temporary roads once they are no longer needed. That said, we encourage the Forest Service to evaluate, on a road-by-road basis, whether any of the proposed temporary roads would provide continued value for reforestation, noxious weed treatment and monitoring, recreation, fire suppression access, or other activities with a positive long-term benefit to the project area. Where such a benefit exists, we would support retaining those specific roads rather than defaulting to full decommissioning of every temporary road immediately after harvest. We urge a prompt decision given the emergency authority under which this project has been developed (Secretarial Memo 1078-006 and IJA Section 40807) and given the short window before fire-killed timber in this stand loses

commercial value entirely, we respectfully urge the Forest Service to issue its decision on this project as quickly as practicable following the close of this comment period, and to proceed with implementation this fall as anticipated in the Proposed Action document. We also want to underscore the urgency of the recreation-related components of this project. The Giant White Pine Campground, trailhead, and surrounding trail system are heavily used by a wide range of recreationists, and the White Pine Fire has left the area with a destroyed trail bridge, an eroding trail alignment, and inadequate trailhead parking. These are not cosmetic improvements [mdash] they are public safety and access issues in an area that draws significant recreational use, and every season these fixes are delayed is a season the public bears that risk. We urge the Forest Service to treat the Trail 221-A bridge replacement, the Trail 228 reroute, and the trailhead parking expansion with the same urgency as the timber salvage itself. Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for the work your staff has put into developing this proposal. Please contact us if additional information from IFG would be helpful to the record. Sincerely, Tera R. King, Director of Forest Resources and Policy