

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Land Management Plan Revision for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests



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Draft Environmental Impact Statement
Revised Land Management Plan
for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Lead Agency: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)- Forest Service

Cooperating Agencies: Idaho County, Idaho
Clearwater County, Idaho
State of Idaho
Nez Perce Tribe (pending)

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Abstract: This draft environmental impact statement documents the analysis of alternatives developed for programmatic management of the four million acres administered by the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.

Comments: Comments on this draft environmental impact statement must be received or postmarked within 90 days of the Environmental Protection Agency's publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such a way that they are useful to the Agency's preparation of the final environmental impact statement. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns and contentions. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the respondent with standing to participate in subsequent administrative or judicial reviews.

The decision to approve the revised forest plan for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests will be subject to the objection process identified in 36 CFR Part 219 Subpart B (219.50 to 219.62). Only those individuals and entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests' plan revision during the opportunities provided for public comment will be eligible to file an objection (36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219.53(a)).

Electronic comments may be sent to:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?project=44089>

Comments by U.S. Mail can be sent to: **Zach Peterson, Forest Planner**
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Date Comments Must Be Received: Thursday, March 12, 2020

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Acronyms

ARSC	Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy
BA	Basal Area (square feet per acre)
CCF	Hundred Cubic Feet
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
cfs	Cubic feet per second
CWN	Conservation Watershed Network
DBH (dbh)	Diameter at Breast Height
DC	Desired Conditions
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FSH	Forest Service Handbook
FSM	Forest Service Manual
GA	Geographic Area
HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code
IRR	Idaho Roadless Rule
LCAS	Lynx Conservation and Assessment Strategy 2013
MA	Management Area
MBF	Thousand Board Feet
MMBF	Million Board Feet
MMCF	Million Cubic Feet
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act 1970
NPCLW	Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
NRLMD	Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction 2007
NRV	Natural Range of Variation
NWGC	National Wildfire Coordinating Group
PTSQ	Projected Wood Sale Quantity
PVT	Potential Vegetation Type
PWSQ	Projected Wood Sale Quantity
RMZ	Riparian Management Zone
RNA	Research Natural Area
VCC	Vegetation Condition Class
WSR	Wild and Scenic River

Chapter 1. Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Introduction

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1976) requires the preparation of an integrated land management plan by an interdisciplinary team for each unit of the National Forest System. In May of 2012, the Forest Service began using new planning regulations (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012) to guide collaborative and science-based revision of land management plans that promote the ecological integrity of national forests while contributing to social and economic sustainability. Public involvement must be provided in preparing and revising forest plans. Forest plans must provide for multiple use and sustained yield of products and services and include coordination of outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness. The forest plan does not authorize site-specific projects or activities; rather, it establishes broad direction to guide future project and activity decision making.

The Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests were consolidated in 2013. The official name of the administratively combined forests is the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. For the purposes of this document, it will be referred to as the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Prior to the official combination, each forest had its own land management plan. Part of implementing the consolidation included a combined forest plan revision effort, which includes the preparation of this draft environmental impact statement.

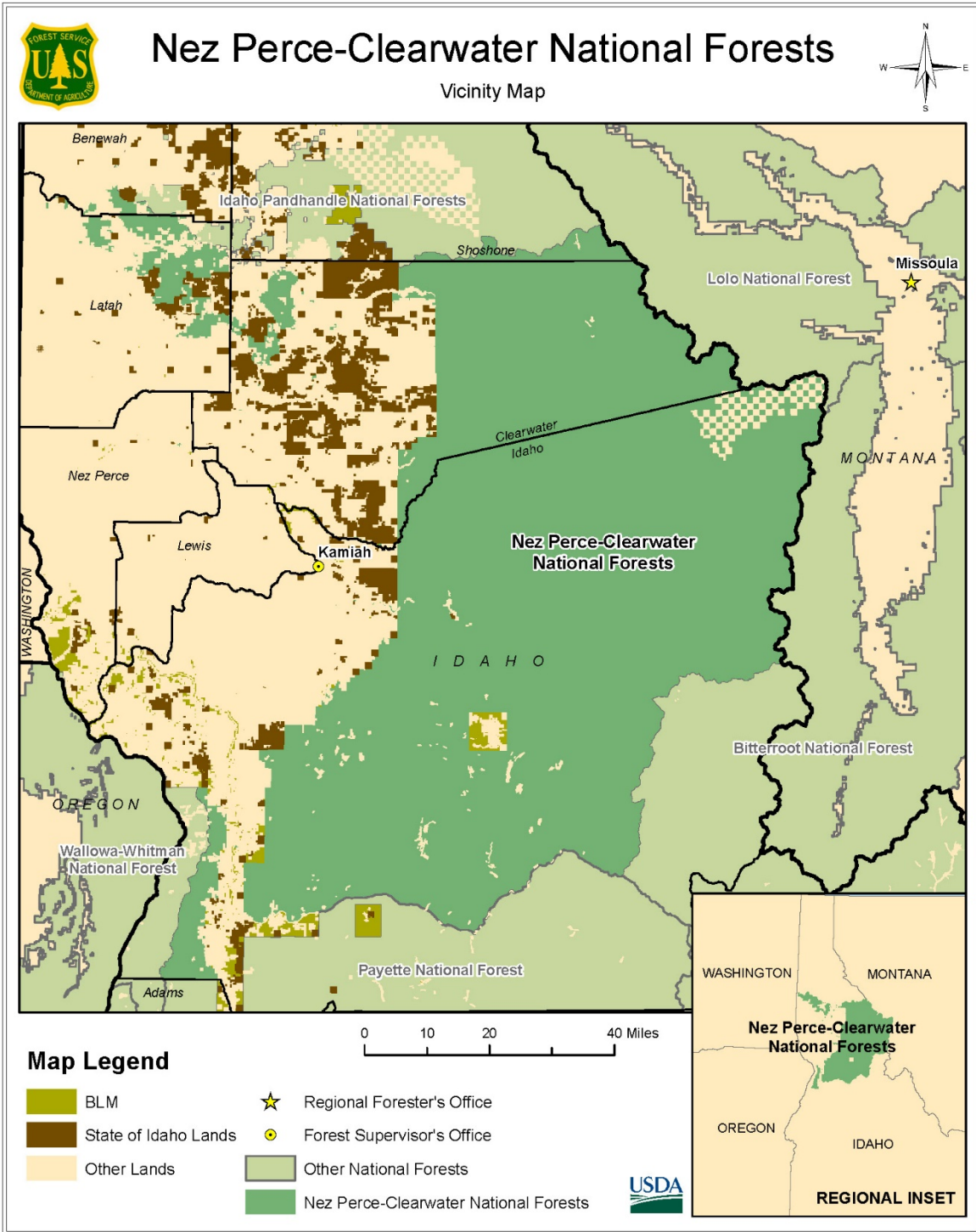
The forest plan revision process began with preparation of an assessment that summarized the current status and management of various resources on the Nez Perce-Clearwater. The assessment of the Nez Perce-Clearwater was published in June 2014. This assessment evaluated existing information about relevant ecological, economic, and social conditions, trends, and sustainability, and their relationship to the land management plan within the context of the broader landscape. This information was used to identify any need for change in forest resources or in the management of those resources and as a basis for preparing the draft revised forest plan.

This draft environmental impact statement documents a programmatic National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. It discloses the broad environmental impacts and benefits of the proposed alternatives in contrast to analyses conducted for site-specific projects. This document describes, in general terms, the expected effects of management during the plan period but does not predict the site-specific effects of future speculative actions each time the standards and guidelines are implemented at the project level. Those site-specific effects would be disclosed in subsequent NEPA reviews during the implementation of individual projects.

Planning Area: The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

The Nez Perce-Clearwater is located in the heart of north-central Idaho, in a seven-county region comprising Idaho, Clearwater, Latah, Shoshone, Benewah, Lewis, and Nez Perce counties. The plan area encompasses six ranger districts: Palouse, North Fork, Lochsa and Powell, Moose Creek, Salmon River, and Red River. The Nez Perce-Clearwater is responsible for managing approximately four million acres across this landscape. The Clearwater River drains most of these acres within both forests and rugged mountain ranges, pristine rivers and streams, and extensive forested landscapes combine to create diverse ecosystems that provide spectacular recreational opportunities; substantial fish and wildlife habitat; and forest, minerals, and range products.

Figure 1. Map of Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.



The landscape of the Nez Perce-Clearwater is characterized by deep, rugged river canyons surrounded by either rolling hills or steep jagged mountains. Mixed conifer forests interspersed with small but distinctive open meadows, grasslands, and pockets of deciduous trees and shrubs comprise most of the vegetative cover. Rivers, lakes, and streams are often framed by lush riparian vegetation. Western redcedar, western larch, western hemlock, Douglas-fir, grand fir, lodgepole pine, and ponderosa pine are the dominant conifer species, which drape the canyon walls and stretch to the uplands. Historically, western white pine and whitebark pine were found throughout the area. Disturbance in the form of wildland fire, landslides, and insect and disease are continually cycling through the landscape. These natural processes create a patchwork of openings with vegetation at all age classes found across the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

The rich heritage of the area is still visible. American Indian use of the area dates back for millennia and the Nez Perce-Clearwater has been the home of the Nez Perce Tribe for centuries. Early travelers used routes through the Bitterroot Mountains to explore the far reaches of the country. These events have been remembered through the designation of the Lolo Trail Historic Landmark corridor and other historic routes that bisect the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Historic mining towns, log cabins, Forest Service facilities, wagon roads, and fire lookouts dot the landscape, adding to the unique scenic character of the area.

Distinctive Roles and Contributions

The unique qualities of the Nez Perce-Clearwater and its ability to provide ecosystem services characterize the roles and contributions of the area. These roles and contributions provide the basis for management direction and the foundation for realistic and achievable desired conditions.

In addition to the role of providing common National Forest ecosystem services, such as clean air, clean water, nutrient cycling, and carbon sequestration, the Nez Perce-Clearwater plays a distinctive role in the local area, the region, and the nation by uniquely contributing diverse outdoor recreation opportunities; social and economic sustainability; cultural and heritage values, and ecological diversity.

1.1.1.1 Outdoor Recreation

The diverse landscapes and stunning scenery of the Nez Perce-Clearwater provides extraordinary settings for recreational activities, such as camping, whitewater rafting, jet boating, trails for both motorized and non-motorized users and fishing, on the world-renown Selway, Salmon, Clearwater, and Lochsa Rivers.

Recreation opportunities also include wildlife-oriented recreation, such as hunting, wildlife watching, photography, and sport fishing. The Nez Perce-Clearwater provides crucial habitat for salmon, steelhead, and freshwater fish, which include nationally renowned blue ribbon fishery streams, including Kelly Creek, the North Fork Clearwater River, and the Lochsa River.

The Nez Perce-Clearwater serves a unique national role providing vast, contiguous wildland areas, including the Selway-Bitterroot, Gospel-Hump, and Frank Church-River of No Return wilderness areas with regional linkages to the Hells Canyon Wilderness and Idaho Roadless Rule areas, such as the Great Burn (Hoodoo) and Mallard-Larkins. Together these areas comprise the largest complex of unroaded lands in the lower 48 states.

Travel routes and corridors, such as the Northwest Passage Scenic Byway, also known as U.S. Highway 12; the Lolo Trail corridor, a National Historic Landmark; the Magruder Corridor; and the Elk City Wagon Road, trace the paths of the Nez Perce Tribe, Lewis and Clark, and early traders, providing recreation access and unique historical and cultural recreation experiences. The Nez Perce-Clearwater road and trail

systems provide a community backyard connection from the river valleys to the remote alpine elevations that are highly valued by residents and visitors. In addition, seven backcountry airstrips provide a distinct opportunity for access to the remote areas of the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

Summer and winter access is provided by a network of trails and roads. Trail opportunities for both non-motorized and motorized users are plentiful in both the summer and the winter.

1.1.1.2 Social and Economic Sustainability

As the largest land jurisdiction in Idaho and Clearwater counties, the Nez Perce-Clearwater serves as a backdrop for the local area and plays a key role in supporting the social and economic sustainability of local communities, the State of Idaho, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the broader region. The productive forest lands continue to support traditional lifestyles and generational ties to the land; provide commodities, such as timber, grazing, and minerals for regional industry; and sustain an outfitter and hunting guide recreation economy. The sport fisheries for spring and fall Chinook salmon, westslope cutthroat trout, steelhead trout, and kokanee and big game hunting opportunities for elk, black bear, moose, and big horn sheep are important components supporting the area's social and economic vitality.

The Nez Perce Tribe has reserved treaty rights which entitle them to hunt, fish, gather, and graze livestock on the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering are both socially and economically critical to Nez Perce people and are not viewed by them as recreation activities. The Nez Perce Tribe is involved in consultation regarding the management of the Nez Perce-Clearwater and staff from both organizations strive for a productive working relationship, particularly in efforts to support recovery of anadromous fisheries. In addition to being culturally and socially important to the tribe, healthy salmon runs are an important economic component for both the tribe and local communities.

1.1.1.3 Cultural and Heritage Values

For millennia, the Nez Perce-Clearwater has been uniquely situated at the crossroads of several American Indian cultural areas, each possessing their own characteristic lifeways, languages, customs, and traditions. The river systems that bisect this topographically and culturally diverse region have helped create a unique archaeological and historical record on National Forest System land. The Salmon River is exceptional as the longest undammed river system in the contiguous United States. Through the centuries, the river was home to countless American Indians, Euro-American homesteaders, and miners, as well as Chinese sojourners. While thousands of archaeological sites now lie inundated under dams on the Columbia Plateau, the Salmon River flows free and the archaeological record remains relatively intact.

The Nez Perce-Clearwater's rugged landscape required the development of ancient trail networks. The two most important were the Southern Nez Perce Trail and the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, which connected the Nez Perce homeland with buffalo country in Montana and the northwestern plains and facilitated the dramatic 1877 flight of the Nez Perce from the U.S. Army. These mountain routes were also important to other Great Basin and Plateau American Indian groups, including the Coeur d'Alene, Shoshone, and Pend 'd Oreille and Flathead Salish tribes, who traveled and used the area for subsistence, trade, and to maintain kinship ties and tribal alliances. Today, these American Indian groups and descendant communities, including the Nez Perce, retain an on-going and vibrant culture with unbroken ties to this region.

The history of the Nez Perce-Clearwater, especially that related to timber and mining, continues to influence local communities today. Mining began in the early 1860s around today's Elk City, Florence, and Pierce, Idaho. Together, these localities provided the political and financial impetus that culminated

in Idaho statehood in 1890. Today, the ghost town of Florence is the oldest town site in Idaho on National Forest System land. The diverse landscape of the Nez Perce-Clearwater contains an abundance of agriculture, industrial, and domestic ruins and standing structures that document and enhance local history and are important to the identity of many rural communities within and near the Nez Perce-Clearwater boundaries.

1.1.1.4 Ecological Diversity

The Nez Perce-Clearwater is located directly in the path of ash dispersal from three major Pacific Rim volcanic eruptions – Glacier Peak, Mount Mazama, and Mount Saint Helens – depositing an ash cap as deep as 36 inches in some depressions. The resulting soil nutrient and water-holding capacity supports the Nez Perce-Clearwater’s highly productive ecosystems.

The Nez Perce-Clearwater possesses a tremendous range and unusual diversity of habitats, from boreal and coastal elements in the north to extensive grasslands and pine forests in the south. The maritime influence of the Pacific Ocean also contributes to a unique coastal disjunct ecosystem with associated species uncommon to the Northern Rockies, such as the Coeur d’Alene and Idaho giant salamanders, deerfern, and Pacific dogwood. The local climatic transition caused by extreme terrain differences result in high floral diversity including endemic species like the evergreen kittentail, *Dasynotus*, Idaho barren strawberry, spacious monkeyflower, the federally listed Spalding’s catchfly, and four species of pine. The three major river systems, comprised of the Salmon, Clearwater, and Snake Rivers, and their accompanying tributaries provide important aquatic and riparian habitat for many species, including bull trout, steelhead trout, westslope cutthroat trout, and Chinook salmon. Additionally, a large number of endemic gastropods are found in the major river systems, particularly in the Salmon River. The sheer number of endemic aquatic species within the planning area is notable and exemplary within the western United States. The Nez Perce-Clearwater’s substantial spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead trout and Chinook salmon provides a large portion of the total returns of adult anadromous salmonids in the Snake and Columbia River basins.

In addition, the diverse vegetative communities on the Nez Perce-Clearwater provide terrestrial habitats that host several regionally unique native wildlife populations. This includes native lineages of fisher and bighorn sheep, as well as mountain quail, white-headed woodpecker, and Harlequin duck. The extensive acreage of undeveloped lands both on the Nez Perce-Clearwater and interconnected neighboring public lands provide important habitat security and linkage for wide-ranging species, such as lynx, wolverine, and other carnivores. Historic large herds of elk are significant to the people of the area. Many economies within the planning area benefit greatly from the elk herds.

1.1.1.5 Plant and Animal Species

Bighorn Sheep

Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep historically occurred in northeastern Oregon, central Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and northeastern Nevada. After a severe population decline in the early 1900s, bighorn remained in only a few isolated areas of their former habitat (Wisdom et al., 2000a, 2000b). The current range represents an increase in occupied habitat since that time because of a combination of reintroductions and protection of remnant populations. Much of the historical range, however, is still unoccupied in the Salmon and Clearwater River basins and Idaho (Idaho Department of Fish and Game, 2005; Wisdom et al., 2000a, 2000b).

Bighorn sheep prefer open habitats with short vegetation, both for high-quality forage (Wisdom et al., 2000a, 2000b) and to maintain high visibility for predator avoidance. Additionally, cliffs, talus, and

seasonal springs and seeps are important drivers of bighorn habitat. The location of cliffs and talus ultimately defines the distribution of bighorn sheep because such features are essential for escape cover and the secure rearing of young (Wisdom et al., 2000a, 2000b).

The primary reason the bighorn declined is due to their susceptibility to pneumonia after exposure to bacteria (*Pasteurella spp.*), viruses (*Parainfluenza type-3*), lungworm, and stress agents. Sources of these diseases are generally domestic sheep and goats. Major reductions or total extirpation of bighorn herds due to pneumonia outbreaks are well documented.

Bighorn in the planning area have survived when other regional populations have been reduced or extirpated. This, coupled with the fact that domestic sheep grazing on the Nez Perce-Clearwater has been ongoing for centuries, make these populations of bighorn particularly interesting. In fact, individuals of this population have served as the source for other bighorn re-introductions around the west (Mack, Kasprzak, & Luiz, 2017).

Bighorn are a species of great cultural value to the Nez Perce Tribe. Additionally, they are an important game species historically and presently in Idaho.

Fisher

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests and southern Idaho Panhandle National Forests are the primary areas that support fisher in the U.S. Forest Service Northern Region (Raley, Lofroth, Truex, Yaeger, & Higley, 2012) (personal communication Sauder 2013, personal communication Schwartz 2013). The fisher is a forest-dependent species that evolved in the northern Rocky Mountains in a complex landscape mosaic shaped by regularly occurring environmental influences to its preferred habitat, such as fire, tree disease, and wind-throw. Fishers are associated with areas of high cover and structural complexity in large tracts of mature and old-growth forests (Powell & Zielinski, 1994; Sauder & Rachlow, 2014; Schwartz, DeCesare, Jimenez, Copeland, & Melquist, 2013). Other important site characteristics include the presence of nearby water, slope, elevation, and snow characteristics (Olson et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Interior, 2011).

Anadromous Fish

The Nez Perce-Clearwater supports four fish species federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and one listed as endangered. Spring and summer Chinook salmon on the Nez Perce-Clearwater constitute nationally renowned fisheries of considerable local socioeconomic importance. Their cultural importance to the indigenous people of the area, particularly the Nez Perce Tribe, cannot be overstated. Snake River steelhead trout on and originating from the Nez Perce-Clearwater form a nationally-renowned fishery of considerable socioeconomic importance, attracting anglers from all over the western United States and places beyond. Spawning and rearing habitat provided by rivers and streams on the Nez Perce-Clearwater is vital for both species within the context of the Snake River basin and for all stocks of Chinook salmon within the Columbia River basin.

Endemic gastropods

The plan area supports high gastropod diversity, including slugs and snails. In fact, approximately 68 species of gastropods are known to occur in the plan area, which is the result of the Northern Rocky Mountain refugium (Stagliano, Stephens, & Bosworth, 2007) (Brunsfeld et al, 2001). This area occurs along the Idaho and Montana border and was neither covered by northern ice sheets during glaciation periods nor paved with lava from the south and west (Stagliano et al., 2007). Many species of gastropods in the plan area are regional endemic species limited to northern Idaho, western Montana, southern

British Columbia, and eastern Washington. Others are Idaho endemics limited in many cases to Idaho while some are local endemics with distributions limited to parts of the Nez Perce-Clearwater and some lands just outside the plan area. The Selway forestsnail (*Allogona lombardii*), the Mission Creek Oregonian (*Chryptomasix Magnidentata*) and the Nimapuna disc (*Anguispira nimapuna*) are some examples of local endemic gastropods.

Similarly, the lower Salmon River canyon has exceptional landsnail diversity, which has been recognized by scientists since the 1860s (Frest & Johannes, 1995) (Frest and Johannes, 1997). Several species and sub-species of landsnail species are local endemics limited to the lower Salmon River canyon. Some of them are only known from small or scattered areas within the lower Salmon River canyon. Most of these species occur outside of the plan area boundaries at lower elevations but some taxa have been observed on Nez Perce-Clearwater.

Elk

Historically, elk herds were scattered and numbers were low in the planning area. Few elk were found along the Clearwater River by Lewis and Clark in the early 1800s, probably due in part to the dense, unbroken canopy of forest that covered the area. Wildfires burned over vast expanses near the beginning of the twentieth century, creating vast shrub-fields that provided abundant forage areas for elk. Elk numbers subsequently increased and then peaked around 1950. Elk herds declined into the 1970s, partially due to the maturation of the shrub-fields and ensuing decline in forage availability, logging and road-building activity that increased elk vulnerability to hunters under liberal hunting seasons and the loss of some major winter ranges due primarily due to invasive species (Wakkinen et al., 2017).

Elk are a high profile culturally important species both historically and currently and one of high economic value in the area. Much local collaboration has occurred with the primary goal of increasing elk herds. The Nez Perce-Clearwater is considered essential in providing habitat for elk.

Harlequin Duck

Harlequin ducks are medium sized ducks that prefer turbulent, highly oxygenated waters. They breed in fast moving mountain streams and prefer rivers with closed canopies for breeding. On the Nez Perce-Clearwater, populations are routinely monitored on the Lochsa River and its major tributaries, including North Fork Spruce Creek. The Lochsa River has the highest number of breeding pairs of harlequins in the State of Idaho according to the 2017 Idaho State Wildlife Action Plan (Idaho Fish and Game, 2017). Many observations are documented to occur on tributaries of the North Fork Clearwater and Selway Rivers (Idaho Species Diversity Database).

Harlequin migrate and winter on rocky coastlines. Harlequin face many of the same threats other migratory birds face and their populations have diminished greatly over time. The breeding habitats on the Nez Perce-Clearwater are some of the best breeding habitats in Idaho and in the continental United States.

Mountain Quail

Mountain quail populations on the Nez Perce-Clearwater are remnants of once larger populations in Idaho and Oregon. Until the 1950s, mountain quail populations were abundant in western Idaho. They were found from the southwestern deserts north to the area along the lower Snake, Salmon, and Clearwater Rivers. Now they are found in only a few places, mostly along the Salmon River. They live in steep rugged terrain and can survive along dry slopes. The reasons for their decline are unknown.

Mountain quail, as their name suggests, are usually found at higher elevations unlike the more common California or valley quail. Mountain quail are quite unique. They are Idaho's largest quail species and also the only North American quail that exhibits locally migratory behavior. They move up and down along riparian zones changing elevation depending on snow conditions, food availability, and other factors.

Whitebark Pine

Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*), currently a candidate for listing by the Fish and Wildlife Service, is found at higher elevations on the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Whitebark pine is native to subalpine and timberline zones. In northern Idaho, whitebark pine is a seral component of subalpine fir communities and dominates the highest peaks and ridges of greater than 6,000 feet. Understory cover is typically discontinuous on these high-elevation sites. Engelmann spruce, Rocky Mountain lodgepole pine, and Rocky Mountain Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *glauca*) may associate with whitebark pine, especially on mid-elevation sites. Whitebark pine is a fire adapted species, reseeding quickly following fire with assistance from the Clark's nutcracker. Due to white pine blister rust, a fungus that causes about 96 percent mortality once infected, and fire suppression, whitebark pine is in decline across its native range.

1.2 Background to Forest Planning

1.2.1 Forest Plan Revision

The National Forest Management Act requires all national forests to develop plans that direct resource management activities. These plans must be revised when conditions have changed significantly or around a ten- to fifteen-year cycle.

The existing plans for the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests were completed in 1987 and have been amended many times. The two Forests were administratively combined in 2013, and the Idaho Roadless Rule made management decisions that affected approximately 1.5 million acres of the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Revised Forest Service policies, congressional direction, court decisions, new or updated conservation agreements and recovery plans, and new scientific findings have all highlighted that the current plans are outdated and need to be revised.

To respond to these challenges the Nez Perce-Clearwater is currently in the process of revising the forest plans. The new, combined forest plan will incorporate changes in the natural environment, new scientific understandings and social trends, and will satisfy regulatory requirements.

Eight primary decisions are made in forest plans:

1. Forestwide components to provide for integrated social, economic, and ecological sustainability and ecosystem integrity and diversity while providing for ecosystem services and multiple uses. Components must be within Forest Service authority and consistent with the inherent capability of the plan area (36 CFR 219.7 and CFR 219.8–219.10).
2. Recommendations to Congress (if any) for lands suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and/or rivers suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (36 CFR 219.7(2)(v) and (vi)).
3. Identification or recommendation (if any) of other designated areas (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(vii)).

4. Identification of suitability of areas for the appropriate integration of resource management and uses, including lands suited and not suited for timber production (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(vii) and 219.11).
5. Identification of the maximum quantity of timber that may be removed from the plan area (36 CFR 219.7 and 219.11 (d)(6)).
6. Identification of geographic or management area specific components (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(3)(d)).
7. Identification of watersheds that are a priority for maintenance or restoration (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(3)(e)(3)(f)).
8. Plan monitoring program (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(x) and 219.12).

Many other laws and regulations apply to the management of the national forests, including, but not limited to, the National Trails Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. These laws are generally not repeated or referenced in the language of the forest plan unless there is an issue that merits a reference to the direction of the law.

Additional direction for managing National Forest System lands comes from a variety of sources, including Executive Orders, the Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs) and the Forest Service directive system, which consists of the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and the Forest Service Handbook (FSH). This direction does not need to be restated in the revised forest plan and will not be found in the following sections.

1.2.2 Nature of the Decisions Made in a Forest Plan

Forest plans are strategic in nature, making general decisions that are often referred to as programmatic decisions. They provide the framework for integrated resource management and guidance for subsequent project and activity decision making on the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

The revised plan will describe desired ecological, social, and economic conditions of the Nez Perce-Clearwater and provide plan component direction that will focus management activities towards maintaining or achieving those conditions over time. The proposed plan components are designed to provide for the maintenance and restoration, where needed, of the ecological integrity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and watersheds; to guide the Nez Perce-Clearwater's contribution to social and economic sustainability; and to meet the Forest Service's responsibility to American Indian tribes in relation to trust responsibilities and treaty resources.

Historically, many forest communities developed strong natural-resource-based economies in the mining, logging, agricultural, and grazing industries. Over time, other values have become increasingly important, such as protecting water quality and quantity, providing recreational settings that support tourism, and providing for functioning and intact ecosystems. Forest planning today seeks to balance these public values and expectations. When making decisions for the revised plan, the potential ecological and biological impacts will be examined, as well as the economic and social impacts to the Nez Perce Tribe, local counties, the broader regional level, and the nation.

1.2.3 The Life of the Plan

The National Forest Management Act of 1976, Section 6 Part 5, modified the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 to require forest plans and states that "[Forest Plans] be revised from time to time when the secretary finds conditions in a unit have significantly changed, but at

least every fifteen years.” Thus, the regulatory life of the plan is not to exceed fifteen years. However, based on experience nationwide, plans will be in effect until such time they are revised by a new plan, which may be longer than fifteen years between revisions. The first forest plans on the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests have been in effect since 1987 and will continue to be in effect until a Record of Decision is signed on a revised forest plan, estimated to be 34 years since the forest plans originated. As such, the life of the plan throughout this environmental impact statement will be used to mean the time from the signing of a Record of Decision on this plan through signing a Record of Decision on future forest plans. The timeframe is assumed to be 20 to 30 years, despite the regulatory definition of not to exceed fifteen years. When “the life of the plan” is used in plan components or analysis, it is assumed that the component or analysis will be based on implementation over 20 to 30 years.

1.3 Purpose and Need for Change

In developing a proposed plan revision, the responsible official “shall review relevant information from the assessment and monitoring to identify a preliminary need to change the existing plan and to inform the development of plan components and other plan content” (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(i)).

The need to change a plan should be predicated on the status of key ecosystem characteristics, the needs and opportunities for restoration or maintenance of these characteristics, and the potential for plan components to promote ecological integrity within the terrestrial, riparian, and aquatic ecosystems relevant to the plan area. The assessment of ecosystem integrity and status of at-risk species in the plan area should be reviewed to identify and evaluate opportunities for the plan area to maintain ecological sustainability and the diversity of plant and animal communities.

Similarly, the responsible official’s identification of the need to change the plan should identify opportunities for the plan area to contribute to the social and economic sustainability of the plan area and affected communities.

The purpose is to revise the 1987 land management plans for the Clearwater and Nez Perce Forests into a single revised land management plan under the 2012 Planning Rule.

Administrative Consolidation and Age of Current Plans

In February 2013, a five-year effort to consolidate leadership and programs across the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests culminated in a decision to combine the forests into a single administrative unit called the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. Forest Service planners analyzed both the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests existing plans in their entirety and identified areas where adjustments are necessary. The two individual 1987 Forest Plans provide different management strategies for some resources, such as recommended wilderness areas or elk habitat. Implementation monitoring of the existing plans have identified management concerns. Additionally, the [2014 Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests’ Assessment](#) and input from collaborative public outreach has identified new information that contributes to the need for change.

The National Forest Management Act includes a provision to “revise forest plans from time to time when the Secretary finds conditions in a unit have significantly changed, but at least every fifteen years” (16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(5)(A)). The 1987 Forest Plans were developed under planning regulations completed in 1979 and amended in 1982 Planning Rule. Since that time, much has changed regarding our understanding of land management planning, including improved understanding of science and sustainability, as well as a better understanding of the values and benefits public lands provide citizens. The current plans limit the pace and scale of restoration and are slow to respond to the challenges of changing conditions, such as climate change or recreation demand. In May of 2012, the Forest Service

began implementation of new planning regulations, titled the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219), to guide collaborative and science-based revision of land management plans that promote the ecological integrity of national forests while considering social and economic sustainability.

- There is a need to revise the two 1987 Forest Plans under the provisions of the 2012 planning regulations to provide the combined forests consistent, adaptable management guidance in consideration of best available scientific information while continuing to provide a range of social, economic, and ecological benefits for the present and into the future.

Integrated Restoration

Current forest plan monitoring, the 2014 Assessment, the 2014 Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, and the 2011 Watershed Condition Assessment identify integrated restoration needs across the Nez Perce-Clearwater to address forest health, including resiliency to stressors, such as insects and disease, drought, and climate change, wildfire risk, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat, invasive species, soil productivity and function, and road management. In February 2012, then Secretary Tom Vilsack released the *Increasing the Pace of Restoration and Job Creation on Our National Forests* report. It describes the need to increase the pace and scale of restoration of the nation's forests to improve both the ecological health of our forest ecosystems and the economic health of forest-dependent communities. The report outlines management actions that land managers can utilize to step up the pace and scale of restoration activities on the ground.

- There is a need to revise the 1987 Forest Plans to emphasize integrated restoration of terrestrial and aquatic resources to restore vegetation composition, structure, and landscape patterns; reduce fuel loading; and improve watershed conditions to support wildlife and other resource values while contributing to the social and economic sustainability of local and regional communities.

Ecological, Social and Economic Sustainability

The 2012 Planning Rule directs the Forest Service to manage National Forests for ecological, social, and economic sustainability. In addition, the rule considers the three as having equal importance in revising land management plans.

- There is a need to revise the 1987 Forest Plans to provide for ecological, social, and sustainability in an integrated manner. Additionally, the plans need to be revised to better consider multiple uses and ecosystem services desired by local, regional, and national publics.

Updates Related to Other Law, Regulation, or Policy

In addition to updated planning regulations since development of the 1987 Plans, laws and other regulations have changed and additional species have been listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

- There is a need to revise the 1987 Forest Plans based on best available scientific information to update direction from the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) and Pacific Anadromous Fish Strategy (PACFISH) with forest-specific aquatic conservation strategies.
- Update lynx habitat boundaries from the 2007 Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction.
- In addition, there is a need to incorporate direction established in the Idaho Roadless Rule.

State and Local Land Management Plans

The revised forest plan took into account local and state plans. Chapter 3 provides a summary of how local plans were incorporated into the planning process and any items that could not be incorporated into an alternative.

Plans considered include:

- County Natural Resource Plans
 - Idaho County Natural Resources Plan
 - Clearwater County Natural Resources Plan
 - Benewah County Natural Resources Plan
- County Wildfire or All Hazard Mitigation Plans
 - Idaho County
 - Clearwater County
 - Lewis County
 - Nez Perce County
 - Latah County
 - Benewah County
 - Shoshone County
- State of Idaho Plans
 - State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)
 - State Forest Action Plan
 - Idaho Water Resource Board Comprehensive State Water Plan
 - Department of Environmental Quality Total Maximum Daily Load Implementation Plans
 - Idaho Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Best Available Scientific Information

Inventory information about forest land and water resources is more comprehensive than what was available in 1987 as a result of continued updates and new data management tools. The Forest Service now has geographic information system (GIS) technology, which greatly enhances assessment, analysis, and monitoring. Research and monitoring have increased our knowledge of the physical, biological, and social processes occurring on the Nez Perce-Clearwater during the last quarter of a century. Using science in planning provides the responsible official with the knowledge, methods, and resource expertise needed to make an informed decision. To ensure that the revised plan helps contribute to sustainable stewardship of the nation's forests, the Nez Perce-Clearwater has used the best available scientific information to inform the 2014 Assessment and the development of the proposed plan components.

Specialists used a number of resources that included peer-reviewed and technical literature; databases and data management systems; modeling tools and approaches; information obtained via participation and attendance at scientific conferences; local information, workshops, and collaborations; and information received during public participation periods for related planning activities. Resource specialists considered what is most accurate, reliable, and relevant in their use of the best available scientific information. The citation list following each section of Chapter 3 serves as the Nez Perce-

Clearwater's initial list of best available scientific information. A final determination of best available scientific information will be made with the Record of Decision.

1.4 Scoping

The Nez Perce-Clearwater is proposing to revise their current land management plans. Scoping was done with the release of the July 2014 proposed action and Notice of Intent in the Federal Register (79 FR 41252 document number 2014-16534). The proposed action document included preliminary identification of forestwide and management area desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and the suitability of lands for specific multiple uses, including those lands suitable for timber production. The proposed action included preliminary identification of the long-term sustained yield and planned sale quantity. It included a description of the plan area's distinctive roles and contributions within the broader landscape; the preliminary identification of priority restoration watersheds; and proposed and possible actions that may occur on the plan area over the life of the plan. The 2014 proposed action yielded 13,800 comments. From those comments, issues were identified (see Section 1.7).

Modifications of the 2014 proposed action led to the release of the [2017 Framework for Alternative Development](#). This document explicitly stated it was not an alternative in itself, but rather a set of theoretical plan components that could be used to develop alternatives. That document was considered as an alternative but will not be analyzed in detail. Some portions of the *Framework for Alternative Development* moved forward into one or more action alternatives to be analyzed based on robust collaboration during alternative development while other portions did not move forward at all.

1.5 Decision Framework

Given the need for change, the deciding official reviews the action alternatives, the No Action Alternative, and the environmental consequences in order to make the following decisions:

- Forestwide components to provide for integrated social, economic, and ecological sustainability and ecosystem integrity and diversity while providing for ecosystem services and multiple uses. Components must be within Forest Service authority and consistent with the inherent capability of the plan area (36 CFR 219.7 and CFR 219.8–219.10).
- Identification of geographic or management area specific components (36 CFR 219.7(d)).
- Identification of suitability of areas for the appropriate integration of resource management and uses, including lands suited and not suited for timber production (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(vii) and 219.11).
- Identification of the maximum quantity of timber that may be removed from the plan area (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(ix) and 219.11(d)(6)).
- Identification of watersheds that are a priority for maintenance or restoration (36 CFR 219.7(f)(i)).
- Recommendations to Congress (if any) for lands suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and/or rivers suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(v) and (vi)).
- Identification or recommendation (if any) of other designated areas (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(vii)).
- Plan monitoring program (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(x) and 219.12).

The responsible official for the revised forest plan is the Forest Supervisor. After reviewing the results of the analysis evaluated in the draft environmental impact statement, the responsible official will issue a draft record of decision, in accordance with agency decision making procedures (40 CFR § 1505.2) that will:

- disclose the decision (identifying the selected alternative) and reasons for the decision;
- discuss how public comments and issues were considered in the decision; and
- discuss how all alternatives were considered in reaching the decision, specifying which one is the environmentally preferable alternative (defined in 36 CFR § 220.3).

The draft forest plan provides a draft set of integrated plan direction for managing the Nez Perce-Clearwater for the next 10 to 15 years. However, even after approval of the plan, project level environmental analysis will still need to be completed for specific proposals to implement the direction in the forest plan.

Forest plans do not make budget decisions. Should Congress emphasize specific programs by appropriation, a redistribution of priorities would follow, regardless of the alternative implemented.

1.6 Public Involvement and Collaboration

The Nez Perce-Clearwater began public participation activities in 2012 and facilitated numerous public and interagency meetings to bring together information for the Nez Perce-Clearwater to consider in preparing the assessment, developing the proposed action, and developing alternatives to the proposed action. There were 22 rounds of public meetings between 2012 and 2014 to develop the 2014 Proposed Action. The first meeting was a summit to introduce the concepts of forest plan revision to the public. The next meetings discussed the Need to Change, the Desired Conditions, and Forest Resource Management, including wilderness and timber suitability and other plan components. Public input was compiled at each meeting, as well as throughout the process. The dialogue and recommendations from this public involvement process were used to help develop the draft proposed action.

In addition to postal mail and email, public meeting information was announced via the [forest plan revision website](#). The website also included a means for public comment using electronic or printed comment forms or submitting comments via an electronic database and posted meeting results and other information. Updates were posted periodically.

The notice of intent for the proposed action to prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on July 14, 2014. The notice of intent asked for public comment on the proposal for a 60-day period, which was extended to 120-days based on public requests. The Nez Perce-Clearwater held five public meetings to provide opportunities to better understand the proposed action so that meaningful public comments could be provided by the end of the scoping period. Using the comments from the public, other agencies, tribes, and organizations, the Nez Perce-Clearwater interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address through changes to the proposed action, development of alternatives, or in analysis of impacts of the proposed action. A corrected notice of intent was published on September 5, 2019, to correct the anticipated dates of availability of the draft environmental impact statement from 2015 to 2019 based on changes to our timeline.

Since the scoping period, public involvement has been ongoing. Stakeholders have been defined as any individual, organization, government, or tribe that is interested in our planning process. The forest plan revision team met with thousands of individuals from hundreds of organizations since 2012. Following

the scoping period, the team continued to meet with any and every organization that invited the team to meet with them. This included attendance at well over 100 meetings between 2014 and the release of the draft environmental impact statement. The Nez Perce-Clearwater convened meetings on several occasions, including a meeting in May 2015 to update the public on what has happened since scoping, a webinar in December 2017 to prepare the public for alternative development, a meeting in January 2018 to solicit input on alternatives over three days in two locations, and another meeting in the summer of 2018 to share the alternatives being analyzed with the public over six meetings across the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Additionally, in 2018, County Commissions were briefed in public county commission meetings in the counties of Idaho, Clearwater, Latah, Lewis, Nez Perce, Benewah, and Shoshone in Idaho and the counties of Ravalli, Superior, and Missoula in Montana.

Comments have been accepted at any time during the process and that acceptance will continue throughout the process. These comments have helped the interdisciplinary team develop plan components and alternatives, conduct analysis, determine the best available scientific information, conduct wilderness evaluations, create wild and scenic suitability reports, and develop a monitoring plan. Comments have also been used by the Regional Office in development of the Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) list.

Collaboration with groups terming themselves as such has also provided the Nez Perce-Clearwater with information that is used by the Nez Perce-Clearwater the same as other comments. The Nez Perce-Clearwater attends their meetings at their invite and does not give any decision-making authority to these collaborative groups. However, groups of people with diverse thoughts and needs working to solve problems working towards consensus on issues is taken very seriously and input of this sort is highly valued by the Forest Service, whether it comes from an organized collaborative or from elsewhere. The interdisciplinary team has meet with the following collaborative groups since 2012:

- Forest Plan Collaborative 2012-2014, U.S. Forest Service convened
- Clearwater Basin Collaborative (CBC) 2014-current, at their invitation
- Efficiency in Public Collaborative (EPC) 2019-current, at their invitation

The State of Idaho has been involved with Forest Planning since 2012. Various state agencies have been present at public meetings, met with the interdisciplinary team, provided information and data, and assisted in the development of plan components.

State agencies, offices, and commissions that have been involved include:

- Idaho Governor's Office of Energy and Mineral Resources (lead agency)
- Idaho State Department of Agriculture
- Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho State Historic Preservation Office
- Idaho Department of Lands
- Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
- Idaho Department of Water Resources
- Idaho Geological Survey
- Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation.
- Idaho Governor's Idaho Roadless Commission
- Idaho Governor's Lewis and Clark Trail Commission

Four agencies or governments have signed a cooperating agency agreement for plan revision with the Forest Service. These cooperating agencies participate in the development of the revised forest plan and draft environmental impact statement with regards to their areas of specialized expertise. Cooperating

agencies participation in the forest plan revision is not an endorsement of the Revised Forest Plan nor does cooperating agency status limit their ability to participate during the public involvement process. Cooperating agencies include:

- Nez Perce Tribe
- Idaho County
- Clearwater County
- State of Idaho by and through the Idaho Governor's Office of Energy and Mineral Resources

Following the release of the draft environmental impact statement, a formal 90-day comment period will commence. Public meetings will be held in Kamiah, Grangeville, Orofino, Elk City, Lowell, Coeur d'Alene, Lewiston, Moscow, Riggins, McCall, Boise and Lapwai in Idaho and Superior/St. Regis, Missoula and Hamilton in Montana. The updated meeting schedule is posted on the website at:

<http://bit.ly/NezClearFPR>.

In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency has made available the following documents on the Nez Perce-Clearwater webpage <http://bit.ly/NezClearFPR>.

Table 1. Documents on Nez Perce-Clearwater webpage.

Document/media	Required?	Purpose	Date	Link
Notice of initiating the development of a proposed Forest Plan Revision	No	To initiate Forest Plan Revision.	June 27, 2013	https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2013/07/11/2013-16633/nez-perce-clearwater-national-forests-idaho-notice-to-proceed-with-forest-plan-revision
Assessment	Yes	To rapidly evaluate existing information about relevant ecological, economic, and social conditions, trends, and sustainability and their relationship to the land management plan within the context of the broader landscape and to inform the need for change.	June 2014	https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nezperceclearwater/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5396919
Notice of Intent	Yes	To announce the intent to prepare an EIS and begin the 60-day scoping period.	July 14, 2014	https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2014/07/15/2014-16534/nez-perce-clearwater-national-forest-idaho-forest-plan-revision-for-the-nez-perce-clearwater
Proposed Action	Yes	The proposed action was a detailed scoping document that was transmitted with the Notice of Intent.	July 14, 2014	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3807168.pdf
Preparing for Alternative Development	No	To provide the public with a starting place to consider development of alternatives. This document is based on the 2014 proposed action but is updated to reflect internal and external comments.	December 18, 2017	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd566853.pdf
Webinar on Alternative Development	No	A webinar (recorded) to update the public on the process for alternative development and answer questions.	December 2017	https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nezperceclearwater/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5396919
Wild and Scenic Rivers Draft Suitability Report	No	A suitability report for the 89 eligible wild and scenic river segments.	July 2018	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd566853.pdf

Chapter 1. Purpose of and Need for Action

Document/media	Required?	Purpose	Date	Link
Wild and Scenic Rivers Story Map	No	An interactive story map to display the eligibility process and take comments electronically.	July 2018	https://usfs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=88d41b083eb640f6a329c673d2b83188
Draft Recommended Wilderness Evaluation	No ¹	An initial draft of the recommended wilderness report that will inform alternatives.	July 2018	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd588678.pdf
Recommended Wilderness Story Map	No	An interactive story map to display the recommended wilderness process and solicit comments electronically.	July 2018	https://usfs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=231d095745e647dab29d022d9ac61996
What we Heard	No	To display alternatives that will be analyzed in the DEIS and inform the public how their comments were used in development of alternatives.	July 2018	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd589005.pdf
Corrected Notice of Intent	Yes	To correct errors in the 2014 Notice of Intent, including the dates of release of the DEIS and the responsible official.	September 5, 2019	https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/05/2019-19089/nez-perce-clearwater-national-forests-idaho-forest-plan-revision-for-the-nez-perce-clearwater

¹ The Planning Rule requires an evaluation of areas considered for wilderness; however, sharing that evaluation prior to release of the DEIS is not required.

1.7 Issues

The Nez Perce-Clearwater separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, forest plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations explain this delineation in Section 1501.7 as “...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3) ...” A list of non-significant issues and reasons regarding their categorization as non-significant may be found in the project record.

Significant Issues

The Nez Perce-Clearwater identified the following significant issues during scoping based on the scoping document titled “Proposed Action².”

1.7.1.1 Recommended Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers

Issue 1: The Proposed Action may not adequately apportion recommended wilderness areas across the Nez Perce-Clearwater. The proposed action may not adequately apportion suitable Wild and Scenic River segments across the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

Background:

The Nez Perce- Clearwater contains some of the wildest lands in the United States. Parts of three wilderness areas are found on the Nez Perce-Clearwater. The Nez Perce-Clearwater is also home to wild rivers, including the Middle Fork Clearwater River and Salmon Rivers, which were among the first to be designated in the original Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Yet many more acres of wild country and many more miles of wild rivers are found on the Nez Perce-Clearwater. The Planning Rule directs the Nez Perce-Clearwater to evaluate areas to determine if they should be recommended for wilderness and look at rivers to determine if they are eligible and suitable for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

Recommended wilderness and wild and scenic rivers are a polarizing topic amongst the public. While nearly all acknowledge they appreciate wild lands and wild and free rivers, there is no agreement as to how best manage those lands. During collaborative efforts and based on comments received, many expressed concern that additional recommended wilderness areas were not warranted. Some felt the current designated wilderness areas are already the best possible wilderness areas. Others stated that by percentage, the Nez Perce-Clearwater has a very high amount of designated wilderness areas compared to other national forests, regions, states. Many were concerned with the loss of recreational opportunities, including motorized, over-the-snow, and mechanized uses, that may come with additional recommended wilderness areas. Similarly, citizens and elected officials are concerned with the negative economic impact that may be realized by counties by recommending wilderness areas. Also mentioned was the perspective that the Idaho Roadless Rule (IRR) has successfully maintained many of

² The 2014 Proposed Action was a scoping document originally intended to be an alternative analyzed in the DEIS. However, based on internal and external comments, that alternative will not be analyzed in detail in the EIS. The issue statements from the Proposed Action helped to form all action alternatives in the EIS. References to the proposed action refer to the 2014 scoping document, not a proposed or preferred alternative in the DEIS.

the wilderness characteristics of these areas. Alternatively, many commented that the Nez Perce-Clearwater has some of the largest remaining roadless expanses in the United States and that those should be protected by recommending them for a wilderness area designation. Many felt that the Idaho Roadless Rule does not adequately protect the Idaho Roadless Areas due to the allowance of motorized travel within them. A few wanted all or most all Idaho Roadless Areas to be recommended as wilderness areas. Many more wanted a large number of roadless areas, but not all, to be recommended. Many wanted specific areas to be recommended for a variety of ecological and social reasons.

The public is equally divided as to whether the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is the most appropriate mechanism to continue to protect our rivers. Many, including elected officials and the county commissions of both Idaho and Clearwater counties, felt that the Nez Perce-Clearwater already has the best of the best designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers. They said that no other rivers rose to the level of the Lochsa, Selway, Middle Fork Clearwater, and Salmon Rivers. Some suggested that current protections on the rivers, such as PACFISH, the Clean Water Act, and Endangered Species Act, do enough to protect the outstandingly remarkable values. Others expressed that the act originally was meant to protect against dam construction and that dam construction is not likely to be considered on any river on the National Forest. There was widespread agreement that people did not want to see a dam constructed on the North Fork or South Fork Clearwater, or other major rivers, and would support limitations on dam construction. A considerable discussion regarding unintended consequences of suitability, eligibility, or designation brought into question how rivers would be managed and if a suitable finding would curtail forest management, interstate commerce, recreation, and other activities within and outside the corridor. These limitations and their relevance to the economies of local communities was discussed by several, including the county commissions of Idaho and Clearwater counties.

Some of the public appeared to be on the fence regarding finding rivers suitable. They asked that the Nez Perce-Clearwater find the right rivers for the right reasons suitable but not to make it more or less expansive than it needs to be. During the eligibility process, several rivers rose to the top. These rivers have multiple outstandingly remarkable values, have the potential for dam construction as documented in historic documents showing validated dam construction sites, and are located outside designated wilderness areas. These rivers generally are the best within their respective subbasins. These rivers also tend to have the most support for a finding of suitable. Others felt an approach that was more holistic was in order and termed this the systems approach. Rivers should not be thought of only as individual rivers or river segments but rather as river systems. Connectivity of high-quality aquatic systems is important for fisheries, wildlife, and recreation. The Nez Perce-Clearwater has some of the best aquatic habitat and rivers in the country. An alternative should be developed that finds many, or most, of the rivers suitable, with a preference on the rivers with the greatest contribution to their subbasin.

Indicators

- Acres of recommended wilderness areas that provide primitive recreation opportunities.
- Acres of recommended wilderness areas that provide semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities.
- Acres of recommended wilderness areas currently providing semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities.
- Idaho Roadless Areas providing High and Medium –High Capability for providing wilderness character as assessed using wilderness character attributes of untrammelled, natural, undeveloped, outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation and Special Features such as Ecological, Geologic, Scientific, Educational, Scenic or Historical Values.

- Idaho Roadless Areas with the potential to add underrepresented ecological communities to the national wilderness system as assessed using number and percentage of underrepresented ecological communities at forest, regional and national landscape scales.
- River segments with outstandingly remarkable values.
- Eligible River segments suitable for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River system.

1.7.1.2 Recreation and Access Management

Issue 2: The proposed action may not adequately apportion motorized and non-motorized recreation access opportunities in the front country (Management Area 3) and backcountry (Management Area 2) areas across the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

Background:

The Nez Perce-Clearwater currently provides for motorized opportunities on approximately 35 percent of the Nez Perce-Clearwater based on current travel plans. During scoping and in conversations with stakeholders since, it again became apparent that there is a divide between perspectives of how motorized and non-motorized use should be managed. Motorized recreation is very important to the people in the area. Local economies are very connected to motorized recreation and the users. Additional opportunities for motorized recreation should be available in the future. Of particular importance is the opportunity for additional loop systems, including motorized loops of varying length and skill level. In each recreation opportunity, whether roaded modified, semi-primitive, and primitive, there is a desired to be able to access these opportunities with a motorized vehicle in both the winter and summer. Conversely, the forest plan revision team heard some areas of the National Forest should remain free of motorized use. In addition to additional recommended wilderness areas, other areas should not allow motorized use in both the summer and winter seasons. Keeping areas free of motorized use is important for solitude of visitors, to reduce visitor conflict, and to provide habitat for wildlife.

Indicators

- Acres of Nez Perce-Clearwater currently providing semi-primitive motorized or mechanized opportunity in winter or summer areas that would be managed as recommended wilderness.
- Acres of Nez Perce-Clearwater by use season providing semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunity providing secluded recreation experiences in the backcountry management area (Management Area 2).
- Acres of Nez Perce-Clearwater by use season providing motorized recreation opportunities in the front country (Management Area 3).

1.7.1.3 Forest Vegetation

Issue 3: Desired conditions for forest vegetation should be met through natural processes or through active management. The rate of progress towards the desired conditions should occur at a faster or slower pace. Desired conditions should include higher compositions of early seral species and increased or decreased patch sizes and increased or decreased tree densities to meet ecological habitat needs of wildlife species, maintain resiliency of forest vegetation communities, and meet the social needs of forest users at a local, regional, and national scale.

Background

Forest vegetation desired conditions were assumed to be an unresolved conflict among available uses. However, as comments came in and through additional conversations with various stakeholders, it became clear that for most the issue was not the desired conditions but how fast the forest moved

towards desired conditions, the extent to which active management was used to move towards desired conditions versus letting natural processes dominate, and how special habitats were treated in the plan, such as old-growth forests, snag densities, and live tree retention.

As a result, the forest vegetation desired conditions are nearly identical across alternatives but rather vary by management area and in the rate at which desired conditions are assumed to be met by alternative. Old-growth, snag, and live tree retention plan components also varied by alternative. In general, the public did not comment during scoping regarding the inadequacy of our forest vegetation desired conditions but did comment on how much management was being done, or not done, and how the Nez Perce-Clearwater intended to treat legacy habitats, such as old-growth and snags into the future.

Indicators

- Forest composition and structure
 - Predicted changes to tree species composition (dominance types/species presence-abundance) and structure (tree size classes, density, old growth, and snags)
- Landscape pattern of the forests
 - Potential changes to the pattern of forest conditions (e.g., successional stages, species composition, tree density, and fuels) on the landscape
- Resistance and resilience of the forest
 - Response of vegetation to disturbances and stressors — effects of the alternatives on the hazard of wildfire, key insects and diseases, weather disturbances, and climate change
 - Carbon stocks

1.7.1.4 Timber

Issue 4: The Potential Timber Sale Quantity should be increased or decreased to better provide for a balance of ecological sustainability, economic, and social resiliency. The maximum regeneration harvest unit size should be increased or decreased.

Background

Timber harvest and the potential timber sale quantity are directly tied to Issue Number 3 – Forest Vegetation Desired Conditions. Timber has become a metric used to discuss the amount of activity occurring on the Nez Perce-Clearwater. In this plan, timber volume is an output from the number of acres being treated to achieve desired conditions at various rates that vary by alternative. However, as the public expects a discussion regarding timber outputs, the rule’s requirement to state a potential timber sale quantity and the implications the potential timber sale quantity has on local industry and the sustainability of milling infrastructure over time is discussed here as an issue.

Based on acres treated by alternative, the timber harvest levels vary by alternative and range from a level similar to what is being done currently on the Nez Perce-Clearwater up to a departure from the sustained yield limit in order to move towards desired conditions at a faster rate. Some would like to see higher levels of potential timber sale quantity to support local communities while others would like to see the highest level that is sustainable in the long-term. Others would rather see natural processes, such as fire, insect and disease, and wind throw, work over time to move towards forest vegetation desired conditions and would like to see a lesser timber harvest.

Indicators

- Potential Timber Sale Quantity
- Potential Wood Sale Quantity (includes biomass)

- Maximum regeneration harvest unit size

Non-Significant Issues

Significant issues represent unresolved conflict among available resources. Numerous other items that may not have been sufficient in the proposed action were identified through public comment. Those items helped guide the Nez Perce-Clearwater as the forest plan revision team continued to develop plan components and include:

- Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark should get special management area protection with a boundary and specific desired conditions
- Levels of protections for aquatic resources should be at least as strong as in the Pacific Anadromous Fisheries Strategy (PACFISH)

Wildlife

- Does the plan provide for the diversity of plant and animal communities and keep common native species common, contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain species of conservation concern within the plan area, within agency authority, and the inherent capability of the land?
- Does the plan contribute toward diverse, connected ecosystems with ecological integrity which over time will create or maintain ecological conditions which support the abundance, distribution, and long-term persistence of most native species within a plan area, as well as provide for diversity of plant and animal communities?
- Availability of foraging, calving, and thermal cover habitat for elk
- Does management of vegetation benefit elk, including providing for foraging, calving, and thermal cover areas?
- Availability of habitat for the fisher
- Does the plan provide the quantity, quality, and distribution of habitats for big game species or address known factors that limit or reduce populations, such as disease in bighorn sheep or disturbances during crucial life phases to include winter habitat for elk, moose, mountain goats, or calving and breeding habitat?

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