

ALERT

WHAT: Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests soliciting comments on EIS Alternative development for the Forest Plan Revision.

WHEN: Comments due by February 28.

WHERE: Send comments to Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

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INTRODUCTION: This Forest Plan Revision will be the first major change in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest's Plan since 1987. It is critical for us to comment because it will affect the way the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests are managed and protected for the next 15-30 years.

DETAILS: The 1.5 million acres of roadless wildlands on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests are a critical part of the Northern Rockies ecosystem and represent the largest remaining undeveloped stretch of wildlands left in the lower 48 states. The forests harbor tremendous biodiversity found in country ranging from low elevation habitat with coastal disjunct species in wet cedar-hemlock forests to wind-swept mountain peaks carpeted in beargrass and heather under occasional whitebark pine, mountain hemlock and subalpine fir stands. This region is crucial to the survival and dispersion of threatened fish such as Chinook salmon, bull trout and west-slope cut-throat trout, various prey animals such as big horn sheep, mountain goats, mule deer and elk, as well as endangered predators such as lynx, fisher, wolverine, gray wolves and even the occasional grizzly bear. The revised Forest Plan will be key to guiding the management of these lands over the next 15-30 years.

The forest has been operating under their 1987 Forest Plan for thirty years. Forest managers put forth a Revision Proposed Action in 2014 and are currently seeking input in four main areas: recommended wilderness, recreation opportunities, desired future conditions and logging levels.

Recommended wilderness: Despite the value of these roadless lands to a functioning Northern Rockies ecosystem, the FS proposal recommends only 20% of them for wilderness. Since Congress can designate as wilderness only those areas recommended by the agency, and recommended wilderness is managed as *de facto* wilderness prior to congressional designation, it is paramount that as much of the roadless acreage as possible be recommended for wilderness. Crucial Roadless Areas left out of the proposal include Pot Mountain, Weitas Creek, Upper North Fork, Fish and Hungery Creek and Meadow Creek. ***Request an alternative which recommends all the roadless areas for wilderness, or at least designates them as backcountry areas with no mechanized or motorized use, no road-building and no timber harvest.***

Recreation: Current Forest Service Direction favors more and more motorized recreation which threatens important fish and wildlife habitat as well as opportunities for non-motorized users who value quiet, non-mechanized recreation. ***Ask for alternatives which emphasize non-motoized/non-mechanized recreation.***

Desired Future Conditions. *Request alternatives which allow natural processes instead of active management to determine future conditions in roadless lands.* The only DFCs currently proposed for the forest are for stand composition, and bizarrely the upshot of these is that the natural mix of cedar, pine, fir and larch will be converted mainly to pine. Standards found in the 1987 Forest Plan must be maintained to insure future conditions favorable to wildlife. In the 2014 Proposed Action, PAC/IN Fish buffers prohibiting sediment generating activity within 300 ft of water courses will be reduced to 100 ft. Old growth standards will be eliminated, and logging in old growth will be allowed. Stream cobble embeddedness standards which are essential for healthy fish spawning habitat will be eliminated. If all of these standards are eliminated from the Forest Plan, our future forest will more resemble a tree farm than a natural ecosystem. ***All of the stream buffer, old growth and water quality standards must be maintained in the Forest Plan Revision to achieve future conditions suitable for wildlife.***

Logging Levels: Logging on the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests reached a combined annual harvest of upwards of 300-million board feet in the latter part of the twentieth century. These levels could not be sustained while at the same time maintaining the standards mandated by our environmental laws and the 1987 Forest Plan. Thus to comply with the law, conservationists forced the FS to scale back harvest levels to 40-50-million board feet in more recent times. The Proposed Action aims to return harvest levels to the 150-million board feet range. History must not repeat itself. Pristine roadless lands, fisheries, wildlife habitat and old growth would all be sacrificed to once again “get out the cut”. ***Alternatives should not allow roading or timber harvest in Roadless Areas, and standards must be maintained and enforced. This will not allow drastic increases in harvest levels to occur.***



Cayuse Creek flowing to Kelly Creek and then to the North Fork of the Clearwater.