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**NEWS RELEASE**

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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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**Focus on forest plan revision: watersheds and aquatic ecosystems**

*Note: This is the second in a six-part series. The first five articles will feature one of the five proposed revision topics. The sixth article will provide information about the comment process.*

Water. It is a precious commodity necessary to sustain life. We drink it, wash with it, and play in it. It is necessary for growing food, generating power and providing transportation.

It is one of the reasons national forests exist. The Organic Act of 1897 defined the purpose of national forest lands: Protect and improve forests for the purpose of securing a permanent supply of timber and ensure conditions favorable to continuous water flow.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that watersheds and aquatic ecosystems have been proposed as a forest plan revision topic.

The Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests are blessed with water, boasting over 8800 miles of streams in the lower Salmon and Clearwater River basins and 2990 acres of lakes. These lakes, rivers and riparian (streamside) areas provide habitat for unique fish and wildlife species. They also provide irrigation and drinking water and support a variety of recreation opportunities.

While many watersheds on the two forests are in pristine conditions, some bare scars from past road building, timber harvest, mining and other human-caused disturbances. Others have also been altered by natural processes such as fires and floods.

Through revision Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Larry Dawson and Acting Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor Steve Williams propose to manage watersheds in a manner that protects water quality, allows fish and wildlife species to flourish and provides for a variety of uses for people.

“Our goal is to manage these national forests in a manner that results in healthy, resilient watersheds,” Dawson and Williams said in a joint statement.

Both agreed changes to the 1987 plans are necessary to achieve that goal.

Developments in two major laws, the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act, are at the heart of the proposal to change existing direction.

In the 1990s, bull trout, Chinook salmon and steelhead trout were listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act.

The Forest Service responded with interim conservation strategies known as PACFISH and INFISH. This direction, which was incorporated into existing forest plans, included measures to protect streams and streamside areas.

According to Dawson and Williams, PACFISH and INFISH requirements dramatically changed management practices and resulting forest outputs. The direction restricted timber harvest within 300 feet each side of fish bearing streams and 150 feet each side of non-fish bearing streams. Fewer roads could be built to access timber stands. Lighter-on-the-land, but costlier, harvest methods such as helicopter logging became common.

The 1987 plans were never amended to reflect the decreased opportunities for timber harvest, changes in harvest methods or the economic consequences of the new requirements.

Dawson and Williams propose to make existing stream protection measures permanent and to explain the impacts in revised plans.

“We believe PACFISH and INFISH, with a few minor adjustments, provide sound direction for protecting and restoring streams and streamside areas,” they explained.

Another change in forest management relates to the 1982 Clean Water Act. It required the State of Idaho, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to develop water quality standards to protect beneficial uses such as drinking water, fisheries, recreation and agricultural uses.

A second, public process was required to identify stream segments that did not comply with state water quality standards and to develop water quality management plans for these areas.

These processes had not been completed when forest plans were signed in 1987.

According to Dawson and Williams, 1559 miles of stream segments on the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests have been identified as not meeting state standards. In most cases problems are related to sediment or temperature.

“This is an important development that must be addressed,” they stated. “The forests propose to incorporate state requirements and processes into revised forest plans.”

Individuals interested in learning more about the forests’ proposal for managing watersheds are encouraged to read the proposed action and notice of intent to revise forest plans. Both are available at local Forest Service offices and on the internet at [www.fs.fed.us/cnpz](http://www.fs.fed.us/cnpz).

Public comment is appreciated. It will be used to define a range of management alternatives.

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