

Nez Perce National Forest
Route 2, Box 475
Grangeville, ID 83530
208-983-1950



Clearwater National Forest
12730 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
208-476-4541

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Laura Smith

Contact: Kimberly Delgado-Nelson

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Focus on forest plan revision: comments with clout

Note: This is the sixth and final article in the six-part series about forest plan revision.

Kamiah –How do I comment? Does anyone read my comments? Will my comments make a difference? These are many of the questions being fielded by the forest plan revision team.

“We want to assure people all comments are carefully read and considered,” Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Larry Dawson and Acting Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor Steve Williams stated. “They do make a difference.”

The planning team is currently organizing to read and analyze hundreds, possibly thousands, of comments regarding the proposed action. “It is a big task that we take very seriously,” they explained.

Comments that are received by the Forest Service will be read multiple times: once by all planning team members, a second time by a “coder” who identifies relevant information and ideas, and a third time by a person checking the coder’s work.

All information and ideas will then be entered verbatim into a database. Database reports track all input and allow analysts to identify public concerns and information.

A report will be created to organize and summarize all input. Each topic presented will be supported with representative quotes. This report—an organized compilation of thousands of comments—will be used to refine issues and craft alternative forest management strategies.

Both Dawson and Williams acknowledged that responding to the proposed action can be a daunting task. “At this time, the proposal is rather sketchy,” they explained. “Some people have told us they really don’t know how to start.

To help people offer comments about the proposed action and notice of intent to revise forest plans, Dawson and Williams offer these suggestions:

1. **Provide a name and address.** This information, which becomes part of the public record, enables the agency to communicate with respondents. It is also required.
2. **Put yourself in the shoes of the forest supervisor.** Ask: If I were supervisor, what problems would concern me? What revision topics would I propose? Why would I do so? Answers to these questions will help the agency identify issues and refine revision topics.
3. **Be specific.** General expressions of support or dissatisfaction are not helpful. What do you like? Why? What do you want changed? Why? Specificity and rationale are critical.
4. **Acknowledge the legitimacy of a variety of uses and activities.** Timber harvest, grazing, four-wheeling, hiking, mining, opportunities for wilderness experiences, etc. are all legitimate activities on national forest land. Through revision the agency will ultimately make a decision about the mix of uses and activities and the locations of those uses and activities.
5. **Understand the “sideboards.”** The agency is looking for alternative management strategies that (1) comply with existing laws and policies, (2) are sustainable (can be maintained over time) and (3) are within resource capabilities (can be produced without causing permanent harm). Suggestions that don't fall within this range probably can't contribute to possible management scenarios.
6. **Focus on the geographic areas of interest to you.** Twenty-seven geographic areas are presented in the proposed action. Find your favorite place. Let the Forest Service know how you would like to see the area managed. What would your emphasis be? What uses and activities should be allowed? Where? Why? Answers to these questions will be very helpful.
7. **Comment in a timely manner.** Information will be accepted at any time; however, to be incorporated into the draft environmental impact statement comments must be received by December 31, 2004.

Dawson and Williams thanked the public in advance for their comments. Both pledged to explain specifically how the input was used when the draft environmental impact statement and draft forest plans are released next year.

Comments can be provided to the revision team via mail (Content Analysis, Forest Plan Revision, Rt. 2, Box 191, Kamiah, ID 83536), fax (208-935-4275) or from the “Contact Us” link on the revision website (www.fs.fed.us/cnpz).

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For further information contact Elayne Murphy or Ihor Mereszczak at (208)935-4273