



File Code: 1570
16-01-00-0010

Date: April 5, 2016

Dwight Clift
PO Box 482
Pinehurst, ID 83850

Dear Mr. Clift:

This letter is in response to your objection regarding the St. Joe Travel Plan, on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. District Ranger Matthew Davis, the Responsible Official, and I, as the Objection Reviewing Officer, have read your objection; and reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA), and the draft Decision Notice. This letter details my response to your objection based on my review of the project in accordance with 36 CFR 218, *Project Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process*.

The regulations allow for a meeting between objectors and the Reviewing Official. I appreciated the opportunity to hear from you in person at our meeting on Friday, March 25th, 2016. You reiterated your contention that the level of motorized use on Trail 191 and the amount of security provided by the vegetation and topography along the trail do not merit a seasonal closure during hunting season. No resolution was reached during our meeting; however, I have revisited the information for this trail.

I have considered your issues and suggested remedies as specified by 36 CFR 218.11(b), and my responses are as follows:

You allege that the decision to implement a seasonal closure on Trail 191 to address potential wildlife harassment in two elk management units was not based on site-specific observation and documentation. The National Environmental Policy Act does not require site-specific observation when a decision is grounded in scientifically acceptable methodology, as is the case with elk security modeling. The Forest Plan relies on the best available science to establish the methodology for calculating elk security, and the St. Joe Travel plan follows Forest Plan direction.



I find that the District Ranger followed direction in the Forest Plan for elk management units and appropriately analyzed the issue in the St. Joe Travel Plan EA; however, I do not intend to unnecessarily restrict motorized travel, and I believe we can accommodate your recommended remedy while minimizing harassment of wildlife. I have determined that we can maintain single-track motorized (STM) use on the trail with no seasonal restriction in order to provide the recreational experience you and others desire while adequately protecting resources. Therefore, I am directing the District Ranger, Matthew Davis, to designate Trail 191 as a STM trail in the final decision for this project.

In the analysis of possible options for Trail 191 I considered the recreation experience it provides, input from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and the effects of motorized use on the trail for wildlife and other resources. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game recommended we consider the option of having this trail non-motorized during hunting season. I considered that option and determined that Alternative D, with this one change for Trail 191, increases elk security in the affected elk management units over existing conditions. Although the improvement is not as much as originally proposed in Alternative D, the decision still meets the 2015 Forest Plan direction for elk security. With the other trail designations, this decision provides large areas of elk security habitat, and other routes will be available for non-motorized hunting experiences in the Wonderful-Shefoot Recreation Analysis Area. I have reviewed the project and find that incorporating your remedy complies with all applicable laws and the Forest Plan.

My review constitutes the final administrative determination of the Department of Agriculture; no further review from any other Forest Service or Department of Agriculture official of my written response to your objection is available (36 CFR 218.11(b)(2)).

Sincerely,



MARY FARNSWORTH
Forest Supervisor

cc: Ray Smith, Matthew Davis, Karl Dekome, and Lynette Myhre