



File Code: 1920
Date: August 15, 2018

Dear Objectors and Interested Persons:

This is my response to the objections filed on the draft records of decision (ROD) and final environmental impact statements (FEIS) for the Flathead National Forest Revised Land Management Plan (revised plan) and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Amendments (NCDE amendments), prepared by Forest Supervisors Chip Weber, Christopher S. Savage, William Avey, and Timothy Garcia.

The draft RODs, final EIS, revised plan, and NCDE amendments were released on December 14, initiating a 60-day objection filing period. I received a total of 69 eligible objections during the objection filing period. Comments received from five individuals that did not meet the objection filing requirements at 36 CFR sections 219.54(c) or 219.56(a) were forwarded to the Forest for consideration in making the final decision. I also received 12 requests from eligible interested persons. All eligible objectors and interested persons will receive notification of my response; it will also be available on the Flathead National Forest webpage at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/flathead/fpr.

My review of the objections was conducted in accordance with 36 CFR 219, subpart B (the pre-decisional administrative review process). The intent of this pre-decisional process is to allow interested individuals to voice objections and point out potential remedies prior to approval of a decision. With a pre-decision objection process, the responsible officials, the reviewing officer, and the objectors have the opportunity to seek reasonable remedies to conflicting views before the plan is approved.

After an initial review of the objections received, I held three days of resolution meetings in Kalispell, Montana to engage with objectors, discuss and clarify issues, agree on facts, and explore opportunities for resolution. The meetings focused on nine topic areas: timber; jobs and income; recommended wilderness; aquatic, grizzly bear, and general habitat management; winter travel management; and two geographic-area specific objections regarding management of Krause Basin and Swan Valley.

All objectors and interested persons participating in the meeting were given an opportunity to speak on each of the topic areas. The discussions at the meeting helped to clarify my understanding of the issues and the remedies suggested by some of the objectors. I appreciate the time offered by the objectors and interested persons, and the open, candid discussions, and encourage the objectors, interested persons, and the responsible officials to continue to engage with each other during implementation of the revised plan and NCDE amendments.

Due to the number and complexity of the objections I received, the process of reviewing the issues and assessing opportunities for resolution has taken longer than anticipated. The inherently comprehensive and complex nature of land management plans contributed to the overall time needed for the review and the need to extend the time to issue the final response (36



CFR 219.56(g)).

The objections covered a broad range of resource management and public use concerns and many were similar enough to consolidate under specific topic areas. The pre-decisional administrative review regulations in the 2012 planning rule state that I must issue a written response to the objections that sets forth the reasons for my response; however, this response need not be point by point. Therefore, all objections have been consolidated into one set of issues found in this response (36 CFR 219.57(b)(1)).

This response is the outcome of a deliberative and extensive review of concerns raised by objectors involving complex regulatory and management issues. My response reflects my findings from review of the planning record, current policies, the objections, the discussions with objectors and interested persons at the resolution meetings, and follow-up discussions with the responsible officials. Although some issues raised in the objections are not specifically cited in my response, all objectors' concerns have been considered.

I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in the Flathead National Forest's planning effort, providing comments on the revised plan and amendments, and for meeting with us to discuss your objections. I look forward to working with you in the future. If you have questions concerning the processing of your objection, please contact Brian Sweatland in the regional office at 404-329-3121.

This letter and enclosed attachments document the completion of my objection review. Once the forest addresses my instructions, Forest Supervisors Weber, Savage, Garcia, and Avey will sign the records of decision (36 CFR 219.58(a) and (b)) and approve the Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan and NCDE Forest Plan Amendments. This written response is the final decision on your objection of this revised plan and/or NCDE amendments, and is not subject to further administrative review by the Forest Service or the Department of Agriculture (36 CFR 219.57(b)(3)).

Sincerely,



LEANNE M. MARTEN
Regional Forester

Enclosures

Enclosure 1 – Response to Flathead National Forest Revised Plan and NCDE Amendment Objections

Enclosure 2 – Chief's Response to SCC Objections

cc: Chip Weber, William Avey, Timothy Garcia, Christopher S. Savage

End of official correspondence