USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Payette National Forest | 800 W Lakeside Ave McCall ID 83638-3602 208 634-0700

File Code: 1920
Date: September 18, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

We invite and encourage your comments and participation on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) that reanalyzes the effects of current and proposed management on Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (bighorn sheep) viability within the Payette National Forest (PNF).

The DSEIS and the Forest Plan

This DSEIS is a supplemental analysis to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Payette Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). This DSEIS does not change the proposed action or purpose and need as described in the LRMP FEIS. Throughout a 7 year period, extensive public involvement occurred during the development of the revised LRMP. This DSEIS is intended to provide additional information and analysis to comply with the Chief's appeal decision of March 9, 2005. This DSEIS should be looked at in conjunction with the LRMP FEIS which can be found at http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/sawtooth/arevision/revision.htm.

The Preferred Alternative

In the DSEIS, an agency preferred alternative is identified. This is not the agency's final decision. An agency preferred was identified in accordance with agency regulations (40 CFR 1502.14(e)). The preferred alternative and standards and guidelines offer one option to minimize the potential for contact between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep; we are seeking specific feedback on other options to achieve separation. We would value your feedback on the draft bighorn sheep analysis and the efficacy of the management direction as defined by the draft standards and guidelines.

Public Comment

What is needed now is your feedback to better inform the final decision. Your substantive comments on the draft analysis and management direction would be beneficial as we work together on this difficult issue.

Some specific areas that the PNF would like to hear from you as it pertains to bighorn sheep viability are as follows:

- Are opposing viewpoints and uncertainties surrounding the science considered?
- Are pertinent references included and used in the analysis?

- What level of risk of contact is acceptable?
- What other options/methods can we analyze to achieve separation between domestic and bighorn sheep?
- Are there potential actions to minimize contact that have worked in other parts of the country?
- What suggestions do you have to improve the implementation of the standards and guidelines?
- What other options or alternatives are missing from the analysis?
- Are there any other issues or concerns that have been overlooked?

To validate final conclusions on the viability concerns for the bighorn sheep, the PNF needs to balance public comment with the science information as we eventually move towards a Record of Decision (ROD) that amends the Payette LRMP.

What's Next?

In preparing this analysis, the PNF understands that we do not have all the knowledge. We also know that much work will need to be completed as we move from the DSEIS to the FEIS and ROD to amend the LRMP based on public review of this draft. Some areas that the PNF will continue to work on include:

- Receiving and analyzing public comment;
- Including any other issues or concerns as identified through the public review process that requires further alternative development;
- Incorporating suggestions and workable solutions as provided to the PNF from collaborative groups that facilitate resolution of this difficult issue;
- Incorporate suggestions and workable solutions as provided by the Idaho Governor's Interim Strategy workgroup;
- If available, incorporate information from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game as they complete their revised statewide bighorn sheep management plan;
- Complete a methodology review of the Geographical Population Range (GPR) model which would include a peer review;
- Complete field surveys to validate the GPR and source habitat; and
- Update analysis with current bighorn sheep observations.

Comment Period

The comment period for this DSEIS will be 90 days and begins the day following publication of the Notice of Availably in the *Federal Register*. The Environmental Protection Agency is expected to publish the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the draft documents in the Federal Register on September 26, 2008. Comments must be postmarked by the 90th day following publication of the NOA in the Federal Register. If the time period expires on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, comments are due by the end of the next Federal working day.

To assist the PNF, it is helpful if comments refer to specific pages of the DSEIS and Draft Management Direction. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality

Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection (40 CFR 1501.7 and 1508.22; Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 21).

Enclosed is a copy of the DSEIS and draft management direction for your review and comment. You can also access these documents electronically at http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/payette/publications/big_horn/big_horn_sheep_documents_index.shtml.

Please send your comments to:

Payette National Forest
Attention: Bighorn Sheep Comments
800 W. Lakeside Ave.
McCall, Idaho 83638

or send electronic comments to payettebighorn@fs.fed.us.

Thank you for your interest in this important management issue on the Payette National Forest. I look forward to receiving your comments and collaborative solutions.

Sincerely,

Suzanne C. Rainville

SUZANNE C. RAINVILLE
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure