



**File Code: 1950-3**

**Date: September 10, 2007**

Greetings:

The Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests (NFs), referred to as the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup (SWIE), propose to complete nonsignificant amendments to their 2003 revised Forest Plans. This letter, and the associated Notice of Intent (NOI) to complete an environmental impact statement (EIS) to be published in the Federal Register on or about September 14, 2007, notifies you of the start of the scoping comment period for this environmental analysis process.

**Summary:** The Forest Service will prepare an EIS to disclose the environmental effects of proposed nonsignificant amendments to the SWIE 2003 Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans). Amendments to the 2003 Forest Plans for the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests will add, and/or modify existing, management direction, as needed, to implement a comprehensive, Forest Plan-level, wildlife conservation strategy (WCS). This WCS will identify both short- and long-term management strategies and priorities for maintaining and restoring habitats associated with terrestrial wildlife species. The proposed nonsignificant amendments will provide management direction and guidance that focuses on those habitats, and their associated species, identified in the WCS as being of greatest conservation concern during the current planning period (i.e., next 10-15 years). Refer to Attachment 1 to this letter for additional background information.

The draft EIS is expected to be available in mid- to late-winter 2008 for a 90-day comment period. A single final EIS and three Records of Decision (RODs), one for each Forest Plan, are expected to be completed by late summer 2008.

**Responsible Officials:** The Responsible Officials are the three Forest Supervisors for the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests:

- Richard A. Smith, Forest Supervisor for the Boise National Forest, USDA - Forest Service; 1249 South Vinnell Way, Suite 200, Boise, Idaho, 83709.
- Suzanne C. Rainville, Forest Supervisor for the Payette National Forest, USDA - Forest Service; 800 West Lakeside Avenue, McCall, Idaho, 83638.
- Jane P. Kollmeyer, Forest Supervisor for the Sawtooth National Forest, USDA - Forest Service; 2647 Kimberly Road East, Twin Falls, Idaho, 83301.

**Nature of Decision To Be Made:** The Responsible Officials will review the final EIS and determine if the 2003 Plan for his/her respective Forest should be amended and/or modified, or if the current Forest Plan should remain unchanged.



**Scoping Comment Period:** Written comments must be received within 30 days from the day following publication of the NOI in the Federal Register. While it is anticipated the NOI will be published on or about September 14, 2007, this is only an estimated publication date. Please verify this publication date at:

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/the-federal-register/indexes.html>

Providing comments within this 30-day time period ensures that they will be available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider them during preparation of the specific proposed amendments and draft EIS.

Additional opportunities for public participation will be provided following completion of specific proposed amendments, prior to release of the draft EIS. Information and status updates of this amendment process, including specific proposed amendments, will begin to be posted on the Web site, <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/boise/>, by early winter 2007.

**Addresses:** Send written comments to Randall Hayman, Forest Planner, Boise National Forest; 1249 South Vinnell Way, Suite 200; Boise, Idaho 83709; or by fax at 208-373-4111; or you may hand-deliver your comments to this office, at the same address, during normal business hours from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to: comments-intermtn-boise@fs.fed.us.

**For Further Information Contact:** Randall Hayman, Forest Planner, Boise National Forest at the address above, or telephone at 208-373-4100.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Richard A. Smith*  
RICHARD A. SMITH  
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

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## ATTACHMENT 1

The Southwest Idaho Ecogroup (SWIEG) is composed of an estimated 6,600,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands on the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests (NFs), primarily in southwest Idaho. The SWIEG administrative boundaries stretch west to the Oregon border, east to the Salmon-Challis NF, north to the Nez Perce NF, and south to Box Elder County, Utah (Figure 1).

Separate Records of Decision (RODs) for revised Forest Plans were issued in July 2003 for each of the three SWIEG National Forests. The RODs implemented Alternative 7, as identified in the single Final EIS that disclosed the environmental effects of seven alternative Forest Plan strategies considered for these three National Forests. Forest Plan implementation began in September 2003.

### Purpose and Need for Non-Significant Amendments

The analyses supporting Forest Plan revision identified the need to include management direction to focus restoration activities in habitats for species of concern (Boise and Payette Forest Plans, p. II-10 and, Sawtooth Forest Plan, p. II-9). However, while the current 2003 Forest Plans include general direction that addresses this need, they do not include specific direction that spatially prioritizes one habitat area over another at scales smaller than Forest Plan management areas. Recognizing the importance of completing this task the Responsible Official included, in each of the 2003 Plans, Forest Plan wildlife objective WIOB03. This objective calls for prioritizing wildlife habitat to be restored at a mid- or Forest-scale using information from sources such as species habitat models and fine scale analyses.

Sage Grouse

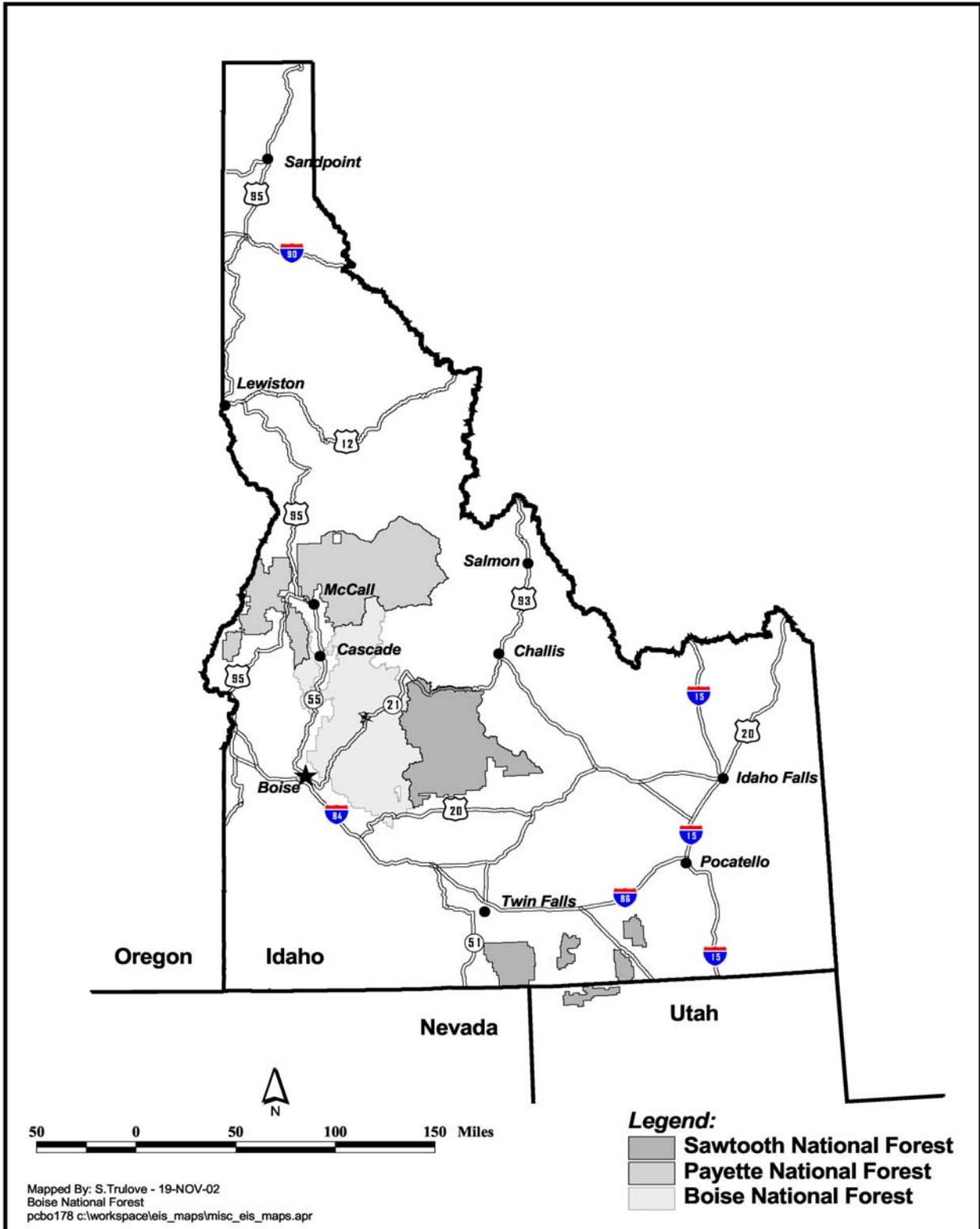


White-headed Woodpecker



As part of completing this Forest Plan objective, the SWIEG Forest Supervisors initiated an update to their Forest Plan-level, multi-scale, wildlife analysis in 2005. The purpose of this proposed action is twofold: (1) to amend management direction and/or other components of the three SWIEG Forest Plans, as needed, to reflect findings and priorities of the updated Forest Plan-level wildlife analysis as needed to guide Forest Plan implementation for the remainder of this planning period; and (2) to update the wildlife assessments pertaining to 36 CFR 219.19 (1982) as needed to reflect findings in updated analyses, as well as outcomes anticipated from implementing the amended Forest Plans.

Figure 1.1. Vicinity Map for the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup



### **Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to implement non-significant Forest Plan amendments that will include new or modified management direction and/or other components of the three Forest Plans to reflect findings and priorities identified in the updated multi-scale analysis as needed to guide Forest Plan implementation for the remainder of this planning period.

### **Additional Background Information**

Analyses supporting revision of the SWEIG Forest Plans in 2003 identified wildlife habitats that had declined from historical conditions and associated these habitats with species of conservation concern (2003 Final EIS, pp. 3-255 to 3-289), such as sage grouse and white-headed woodpecker. As discussed under the purpose and need above, the analyses supporting Forest Plan revision identified the need to include management direction to focus restoration activities in habitats for species of concern (Boise and Payette Forest Plans, p. II-10 and, Sawtooth Forest Plan, p. II-9). However, while the current 2003 Forest Plans include general direction that addresses this need, they do not include specific direction that spatially prioritizes one habitat area over another at scales smaller than Forest Plan management areas. Recognizing the importance of completing this task the Responsible Official for these revised Forest Plans included in each of the 2003 Plans, Forest Plan wildlife objective WIOB03. This objective calls for prioritizing wildlife habitat to be restored at a mid- or Forest-scale using information from sources such as species habitat models and fine scale analyses.

To generate the baseline information needed to accomplish WIOB03, the three SWIEG National Forest Supervisors identified in their respective 2006 Forest Plan Annual Monitoring Reports that an update to the 2003 multi-scale terrestrial wildlife analysis had been initiated in 2005. This analysis is currently being finalized and information from this analysis update will assist the Forests in identifying priorities for maintaining and restoring habitats associated with species of conservation concern during the remainder of the 10-15 year planning period. The analysis will also identify priorities for longer term (i.e., 15+ years) maintenance and restoration of other habitats that have experienced varying levels of decline.

This updated multi-scale analysis was developed using the principles and science generated in support of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP MOU and Strategy, 2003; Raphael et al. 2000; and, Wisdom et al. 2000), as was the analysis supporting decisions in the 2003 Forest Plan. In addition, this updated analysis incorporates new information generated after the revised Forest Plans were implemented in September 2003. New information incorporated includes mid-scale assessments such as the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies for the State of Idaho and Utah, respectively (Idaho CWCS 2005 and Utah CWCS 2005), and the Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage Grouse in Idaho (2006 Public Review Draft).

To describe how this analysis and habitat prioritization process, along with other components of the 2003 Forest Plan (LRMP), result in a Forest Plan-level comprehensive strategy for wildlife conservation, a “Wildlife Conservation Strategy” (WCS) will be proposed. This WCS, in conjunction with the existing Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) and current Forest Plan direction, will provide a comprehensive strategy for managing the bio-physical elements of the Forest. The anticipated seven components of the WCS are:

1. Forest Plan Goals to Maintain and Restore Wildlife Habitat Resources
2. Conservation Principles and Indicators for Wildlife Resources
3. Forest Plan Objectives, Standards and Guidelines for Management of Wildlife Resources
4. Planning Period Priorities for Habitat Families and Species of Greatest Conservation Concern
5. Multi-Scale Analysis of Watersheds within the Interior Columbia Basin, Ecogroup and Forest.
6. Identification of the Appropriate Type of Restoration and Long-term (15+ years) Habitat Family Priorities
7. Forest Plan Monitoring and Adaptive Management Provisions to Track Baseline Changes and Address Data Limitations and Uncertainties

**Early Notice of Importance of Public Participation in Subsequent Environmental Review**

As stated in the cover letter, comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received within 30 days following the date of publication of the NOI in the Federal Register. The Draft EIS is expected to be available in mid- to late-winter 2008 for a 90-day comment period. The single Final EIS and three RODs, one for each Forest Plan, are expected to be completed by late summer 2008.

The Forest Service will prepare a single EIS to disclose the environmental effects of proposed non-significant amendments to the three Forest Plans. Amendments to the 2003 Forest Plans for the Boise, Payette and Sawtooth National Forests will add, and/or modify existing, management direction as needed to implement the comprehensive, Forest Plan-level WCS which will be the result of the updated multi-scale analysis initiated in 2005. The proposed amendments will provide management direction and guidance that focuses on those habitats, and their associated species, identified in the WCS as being of greatest conservation concern during the current planning period (i.e. next 10-15 years).

A legal notice will be published in the newspaper of record for each National Forest and a Notice of Availability (NOA) will be published in the Federal Register to inform the public when the Draft EIS is available for review and comment. The Draft EIS will be distributed to all parties who respond during the scoping process, or who otherwise notify the agency at some point following publication of this NOI of their interest to continue to receive information pertaining to this proposal.

Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.