



File Code: 1950-3

Date: January 25, 2010

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed for your review is a copy of the *Update to the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (DSEIS) to the Final Environmental Impact Statement of the 2003 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and an *Update to the Draft Amendment to the Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP)*. This document contains updates to the information in the DSEIS which was released in October 2008. The DSEIS was written to supplement the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Land and Resource Management Plans Final Environmental Impact Statement completed in 2003. The Intermountain Regional Forester received five appeals of the decision to implement Alternative 7 as described in the Record of Decision, with appellants contending that the Regional Forester violated the National Forest Management Act and the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Act on the Payette National Forest by allowing grazing of domestic sheep within or near the range of bighorn sheep, thus threatening the viability of bighorn sheep through disease transmission.

On March 9, 2005, the Chief of the Forest Service concurred that the effects analyzed and the discussion of cumulative effects pertaining to bighorn sheep presented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement did not adequately address bighorn sheep viability. The Chief reversed the Intermountain Regional Forester's 2003 decision to approve management direction for bighorn sheep and its habitat in the Hells Canyon Management Area. The Regional Forester was instructed to do an analysis of bighorn sheep viability in the Payette National Forest commensurate with the concerns and questions discussed in the appeal review and amend the Forest Plan accordingly to ensure bighorn sheep viability. The analysis was to be thorough enough to determine compliance with applicable law and regulation, specifically the Hells Canyon National Recreation Act and National Forest Management Act.

Specifically, this document contains the following updates:

- Since the release of the DSEIS, the Payette National Forest has worked with population and disease modeling experts from the University of California at Davis to develop models based on telemetry data from bighorn sheep populations utilizing habitat on or adjacent to the Payette National Forest.
- In September 2009, the Regional Forester determined that bighorn sheep merited designation as a sensitive species in Region 4 because of population declines from disease. This document will update and analyze the alternatives in light of this new designation.
- The Socio-Economic analysis level has been changed to include both community level and regional level impact models in response to public comment on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Also included are domestic sheep commodity levels for local counties and grazing fee impacts.



- A section on Environmental Justice has been added to the economic analysis. Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, education level, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws. Environmental Justice seeks to ensure that minority and low-income communities have access to public information relating to human health and environmental planning, regulations, and enforcement. The non-market value economic analysis has also been expanded.

The updated information to the DSEIS describes the effects of several alternatives, including some new alternatives developed in response to the updated information. The effects of management alternatives 1B, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are documented in the 2003 Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Land and Resource Management Plans Final Environmental Impact Statement and in the DSEIS. They are also included in this updated information document. These seven alternatives can be combined into two categories based on how they affect the risk of contact between domestic and bighorn sheep. The first category contains Alternatives 1B, 2, 5, and 7, which did not designate any acres on the Payette National Forest as unsuitable for grazing by domestic sheep or goats; all trailing routes remained open in these alternatives. The second category contains Alternatives 3, 4, and 6, which determined suitable rangeland in all of Management Area #1 and a portion of Management Area #2 that overlapped current bighorn sheep habitat as unsuitable for domestic sheep grazing. Areas inside and outside of current grazing allotments were determined to be unsuitable for domestic sheep grazing as were trailing routes from the areas.

Since the release of the DSEIS, the Forest has worked with population and disease modeling experts from the University of California at Davis to improve models based on telemetry data from bighorn sheep populations that utilize habitat on the Payette National Forest. Updates include revised suitable habitat and core herd home range models and a new risk for contact foray model and disease model. To better address the issue of bighorn sheep viability, several additional alternative management approaches were developed and analyzed in the updated information to the DSEIS. The new models and updated analyses lead to the development of five additional alternatives, which are described and analyzed in this document. With the exception of Alternatives 7E and 7G, the alternatives developed for the 2008 DSEIS (Alternatives 7H, 7J, and 7K) are not included in this update.

Reviewers should provide the Forest Service with their comments during the 45-day review period for the updated information to the DSEIS. Comments on the updated information should be specific and should address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3). The comment period ends 45 days following date of publication of the notice of availability (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.

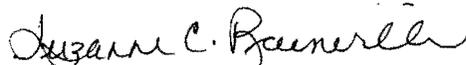
Comments on the updated information to the DSEIS may be submitted electronically, by mail or Fax, or hand delivered. Electronic comments may be sent to payettebighorn@fs.fed.us in message, text, .doc, or .rtf format. Written comments should be sent to the Forest Supervisor, Attn: Bighorn Sheep Comments, Payette National Forest, 800 West Lakeside Ave., McCall, Idaho 83638, or Fax (208) 634-0744. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the project record and available for public review.

The responsible official for this EIS is the Forest Supervisor. Additional copies of the updated information to the DSEIS are available at the Payette National Forest Supervisor's Office in McCall and at Ranger District offices in McCall, New Meadows, Council, and Weiser. The updated information document is also available on the Internet at www.fs.fed.us/r4/payette/publications/big_horn/index.shtml.

You are encouraged to review and comment on the *Update to the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (DSEIS) to the Final Environmental Impact Statement of the 2003 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and an *Update to the Draft Amendment to the Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP)*.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Pattie Soucek, Land Management Planner, Payette National Forest, at (208)634-0700.

Sincerely,



SUZANNE C. RAINVILLE
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

cc: Patricia H Anderson Soucek