

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Intermountain
Region

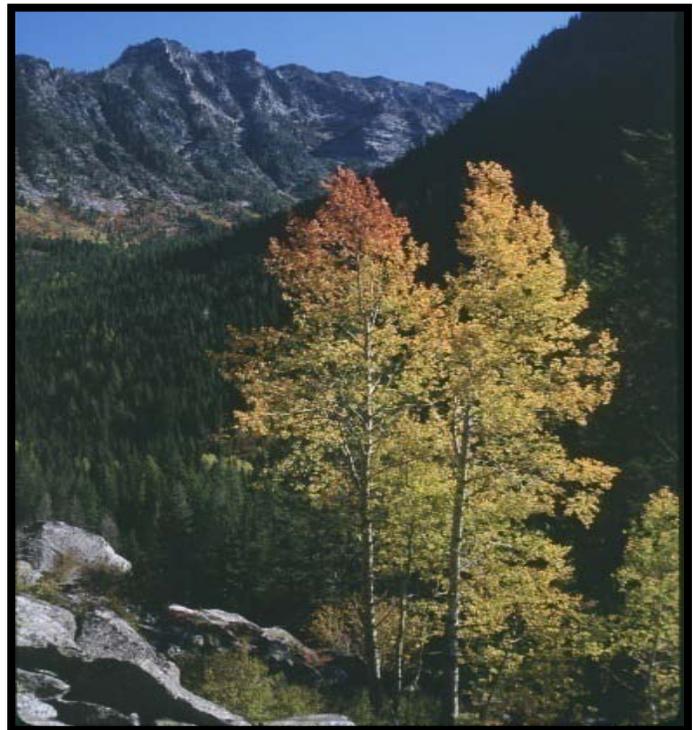


January 2011

**Forest Plan Amendments Proposed to
Facilitate Implementation of the 2011
Plan-Scale Wildlife Conservation Strategy
Phase 1: Forested Biological Community**

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Summary



Payette National Forest

Photo by David Ede

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) is proposing to modify, delete, and add to current land and resource management plan direction in response to new information and/or changed conditions concerning wildlife habitat. This direction would be incorporated into the *Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan) (USDA Forest Service 2003a) through a Forest Plan amendment. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementing regulations.

Assessing habitats occupied by terrestrial wildlife species in the planning unit is very complex. The habitat of nearly 300 vertebrate wildlife species must be considered in management decisions. To reduce this complexity, Forest Plan amendments are expected to be completed through a four-phase approach, over the next 4–5 years, based on the major biological communities below. The EIS addresses Phase 1.

- Phase 1: Forested Biological Community
- Phase 2: Rangeland Biological Community
- Phase 3: Unique Combinations of Forested and Rangeland Communities
- Phase 4: Riparian and Wetland Communities

The Purpose of a Forest Plan

Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), each planning unit of the National Forest System (NFS) is managed under a forest plan. Forest plans are strategic documents describing the overall management direction for a National Forest. A forest plan is similar to a county master plan and associated zoning ordinances. A forest plan describes the desired resource conditions across the planning unit and provides allocations, goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines for resource management to maintain or restore these desired resource conditions in a way that contributes to the social and economic interests of the public. Forest plans do not grant, withhold, or modify any contract, permit, or other legal instrument; subject anyone to civil or criminal liability; or create any legal rights. While forest plans guide site-specific project activities, they do not approve or execute these projects or activities. Decisions to implement site-specific projects are made after completing a separate environmental analysis and public involvement under NEPA.

Location

The area administered by the Payette National Forest (Forest) includes approximately 2,300,000 acres of NFS lands in west-central Idaho, including approximately 768,000 acres of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW). The geographic center of the Forest is near McCall, Idaho, which is approximately 100 miles north of the capital city of Boise (Figure S-1). Parts of the Forest are located in Adams, Idaho, Valley, and Washington Counties. The Forest is bordered on the south by the Boise National Forest, on the east by the Salmon-Challis National Forest, on the north by the Nez Perce National Forest, and on the west by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Oregon.

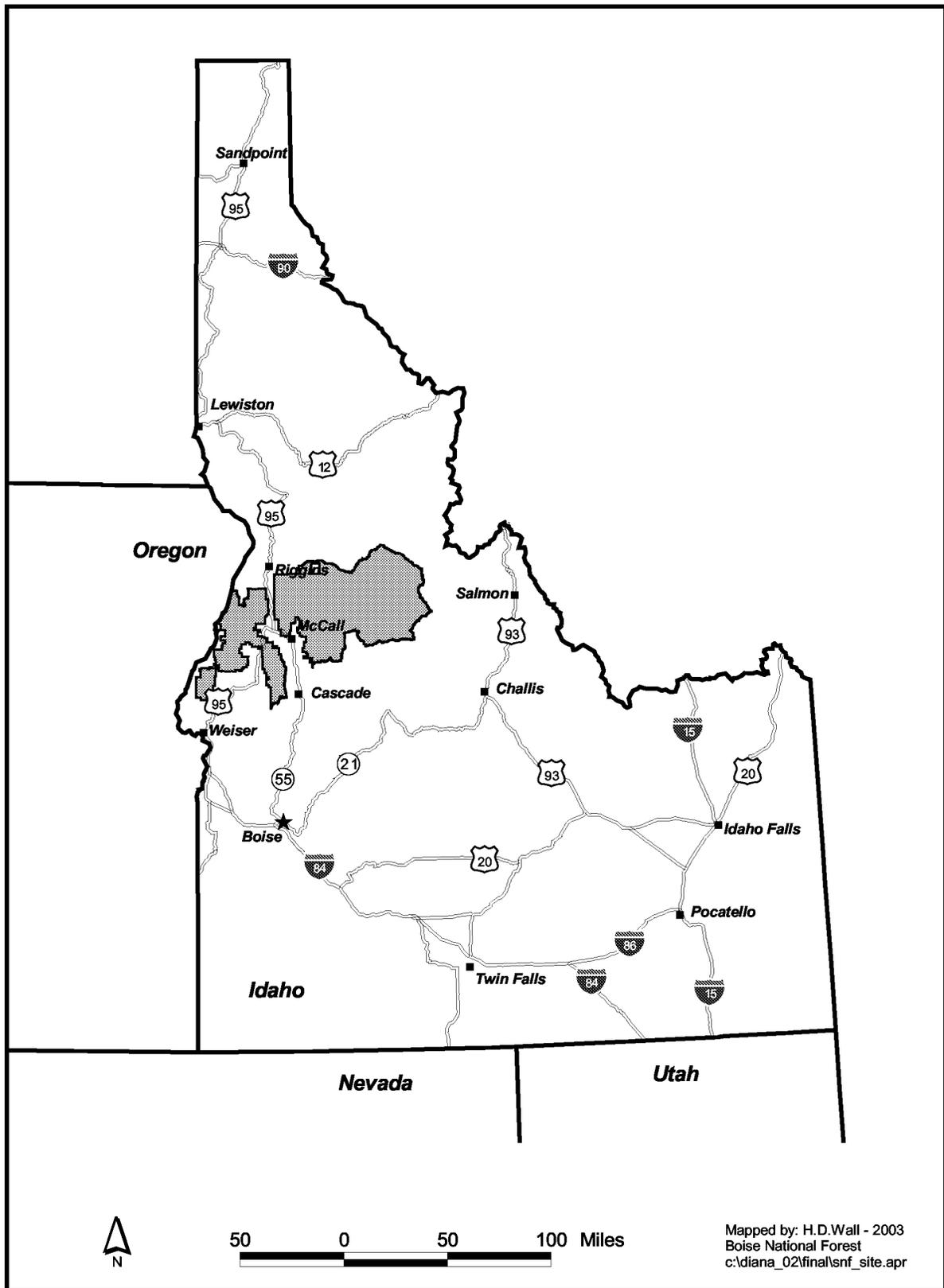


Figure S-1. Location Map—Payette National Forest

Elevations vary greatly across the Forest, from 1,600 feet in the Snake River canyon to over 9,500 feet in the Salmon River Mountains. This wide range of elevations encompasses a diverse geology. The western portion of the Forest is underlain mainly by Columbia River basalts, and much of the eastern part is underlain by granitic rocks of the Idaho Batholith. The southeastern portion of the Forest is underlain by volcanic rocks of the Challis group. The Forest contains important portions of the Salmon, Payette, and Weiser River systems.

The Forest can be broken into 3 relatively distinct areas that have similar management themes under the 2003 Forest Plan (Figure S-2); the westside, central and FC-RONRW . While each portion contains a large number of low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine acres in the nonlethal and mixed1 fire regimes, the westside contains the greatest extent of continuous blocks of these forests. The low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) forests within the central and FC-RONRW are found at lower elevations along the Payette and Salmon River drainages.

An estimated 87 percent of the Forest’s lands are forested; common tree species include ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), grand fir (*Abies grandis*), western larch (*Larix occidentalis*), quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*), Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*), and whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*). The Forest provides habitat for more than 300 terrestrial species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Elk (*Cervis canadensis*) and deer (*Odocoileus spp.*) are the most common large animals; moose (*Alces alces*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), and cougar (*Felix concolor*) are also present. Habitat exists for other wide ranging carnivores, such as wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) and fishers (*Martes pennant*).

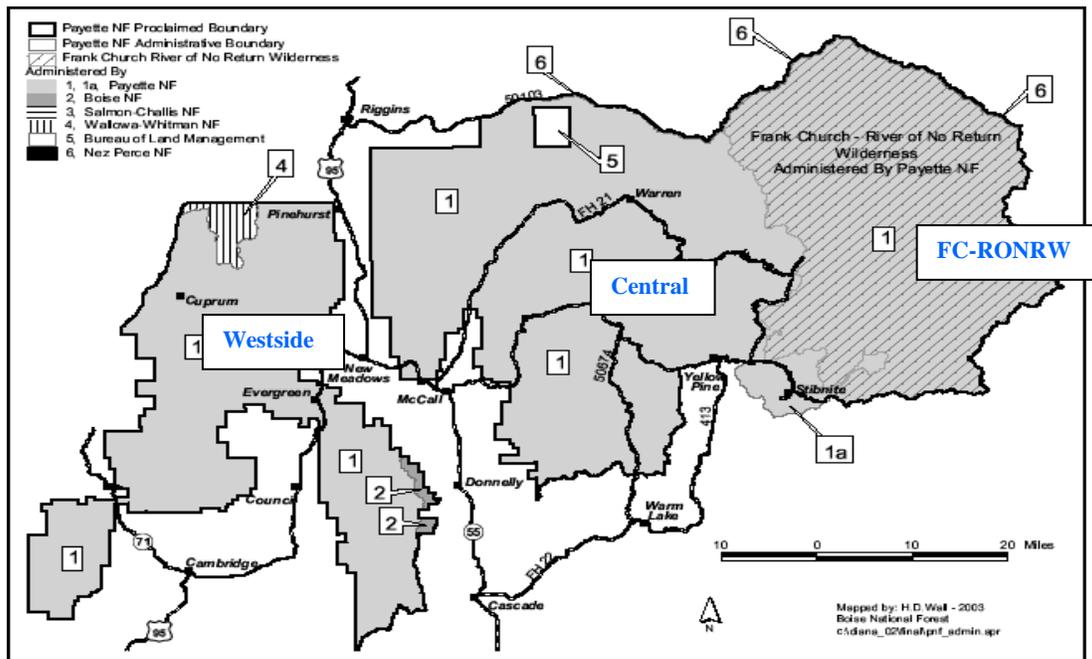


Figure S-2. The Three Distinct Analysis Areas—Westside, Central, and Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW)—within the Payette National Forest Administrative Boundary.

Background

In 2003, the Forest revised its 1988 *Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (USDA Forest Service 1988). The *Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Land and Resource Management Plans Final Environmental Impact Statement* (2003 FEIS) included information for revising the Payette National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2003b). The 2003 Forest Plan included management direction for wildlife based on the analysis in the 2003 FEIS. During Forest Plan revision, wildlife habitat families¹ that had declined from historical conditions were identified, and management direction was developed for these families based on habitat conservation and restoration needs. However, a comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (WCS) that included a spatial prioritization for maintaining and/or restoring one habitat area over another was not finalized in the 2003 Forest Plan. Instead, this strategy was to be completed during the life of the Forest Plan under Forest Plan wildlife objective WIOB03. This objective called for developing a strategy to prioritize wildlife habitat maintenance and restoration, using information from sources such as species habitat models (USDA Forest Service 2003a, p. III-26).

The WCS will be integrated into the Forest Plan via the following components (USDA Forest Service 2007a):

- Forest Plan goals to maintain and restore wildlife habitat resources (Forest Plan Chapter III, Forest-wide Management Direction)
- Conservation principles and indicators for wildlife resources (Forest Plan Chapter III, Forest-wide Management Direction; Forest Plan, Appendix E)
- Forest Plan objectives, standards, and guidelines for management of wildlife resources (Forest Plan Chapter III, Forest-wide Management Direction and Management Area Description and Direction)
- Planning period priorities for habitat families and species of greatest conservation concern (Forest Plan Chapter III, Forest-wide Management Direction; Forest Plan, Appendix E)
- Findings from a multi-scale analysis of watersheds within the Interior Columbia Basin (ICB) and Forest (Forest Plan, Appendix E)
- Identification of the appropriate type of restoration and long-term (15+ years) priorities for vegetation and habitat restoration (Forest Plan Chapter III, Forest-wide Management Direction; Forest Plan, Appendix A)
- Monitoring and adaptive management provisions to track baseline changes and address data limitations and uncertainties (Forest Plan Chapter 4).

The WCS will complement the *Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy* (Idaho CWCS) (IDFG 2005) by building on the broad-scale conservation needs identified in the Idaho CWCS for the Forest area. The Idaho CWCS provides a framework for conservation partners to jointly implement a long-term approach to habitat restoration

¹ A collection of focal species that share similarities in source habitats, with the similarities arranged along major vegetative themes.

and conservation that will benefit species of greatest conservation need (IDFG 2005). Conservation partners include state, Federal, and tribal agencies; local governments; conservation organizations; universities; industry; and private landowners (IDFG 2005).

To ensure the WCS is based on the best available science, it draws upon a variety of scientifically accepted conservation concepts (Appendix 1). These concepts provided the basis for predicting species and habitat responses to conditions where data were incomplete (Miller et al. 2004). These concepts were converted into six general conservation principles to guide development of Forest Plan strategies (i.e., the WCS) to manage habitats (Thomas et al. 1990; Wilcove and Murphy 1991; Noss 1992; Noss and Cooperrider 1994; Noss et al. 1996):

1. Species well distributed across their range are less susceptible to extinction than species confined to small portions of their range.
2. Habitat in contiguous blocks is better than fragmented habitat.
3. Large blocks of habitat containing large populations of species are superior to small blocks of habitat containing small populations.
4. Blocks of habitat close together are better than blocks far apart.
5. Interconnected blocks of fragmented habitat are better than isolated blocks, and dispersing individuals travel more readily through habitat resembling that preferred by the species in question.
6. Blocks of habitat that are in areas where the direct or indirect effects of human disturbance are low are more likely to provide all elements of species' source environments than areas where it is not.

These principles are widely accepted and are among the best supported precepts of current conservation biology (Noss 2007). The principles and the indicators generated by the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) provided the framework for developing the Proposed Action. These principles and indicators also provide benchmarks for evaluating and comparing outcomes of alternative management strategies on wildlife habitat families and associated species in Chapter 3 of the EIS (Palik et al. 1997; MacNally et al. 2002; Groves 2003).

The vegetative baseline used for the Forest Plan reflected conditions through 2000. The multi-scale analysis completed for the Forest Plan was updated to ensure WCS development is based on current conditions. Initiated in 2006 and completed in 2008, the update compared the current condition of macrovegetation to estimates of the historical range of variability (HRV) (Morgan and Parsons 2001). The WCS and proposed Forest Plan amendments rely on the vegetation baseline updates, which reflect vegetative conditions through 2007. These conditions include changes resulting from unplanned wildland fire and planned forest management activities. Since 2000, the Forest has experienced extensive wildfire, affecting more than 800,000 acres (35 percent) of lands within the Forest's administrative boundary. These fires have ranged from high-severity, stand-replacing fires to low-severity forest underburns. Additionally, about 26,000 acres (1 percent) were treated mechanically for vegetation management purposes.

This analysis draws on principles and science generated as part of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) (Raphael et al. 2000; Wisdom

et al. 2000). In the ICBEMP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Strategy 2003, the Forest Service agreed that “management plans shall address ways to maintain and secure terrestrial habitats that are comparable to those classified by the science findings as ‘source habitats.’” Therefore, the WCS was developed using both source habitat and source environment to assess conditions for terrestrial vertebrate species. Source habitats are defined by macrovegetation characteristics that contribute to stable or positive population growth for species in a specified area and time (Wisdom et al. 2000). Source environments are the composite of all environmental conditions, including the effects of human disturbance on source habitat, occurring in a specified area and time that result in stationary or positive population growth. Source habitat contributes to source environments (Wisdom et al. 2000). This updated multi-scale analysis includes important midscale assessments, such as the previously discussed Idaho CWCS and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC) subbasin assessments (NPCC 2004).

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THIS ACTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to complete a comprehensive WCS for the Forest and amend the 2003 Forest Plan to integrate the recommendations of the WCS.

The long-term goal of the WCS will be to maintain or restore a representative, resilient, and redundant network of habitats across the Forest that will provide for a diversity of terrestrial wildlife species and be consistent with overall multiple-use objectives. Short-term emphasis will be placed on restoring habitats associated with species believed to be of greatest conservation concern, such as the wolverine (Figure S-3) and white-headed woodpecker (*Picoides albolarvatus*) (Figure S-4). This short-term approach will prioritize habitats in need of restoration. The long-term component of the strategy will



Figure S-4.
White-headed
Woodpecker



Figure S-3. Wolverine

address restoring habitats for the composite of wildlife species in forested habitats across the Forest and will be integrated with priority habitat restoration where and when practicable.

Developing a WCS at the planning-unit scale (2.3 million acres) allows the Forest Service to identify priorities to restore natural disturbance regimes, expand source environments, reconnect functional habitat areas, and better understand the effects of human disturbance. Prioritizing wildlife habitat restoration helps managers integrate future wildlife habitat restoration projects with other resource priorities—such as those identified in the Forest Plan Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS)—and with areas where human values at risk must be addressed (e.g., wildland-urban interface [WUI]). Integrating priorities across the spectrum of biophysical and socioeconomic needs allows the Forest Service to capitalize on common funding sources and minimize or avoid

unintended effects.

Need

The nearly 2.0 million forested acres on the Forest have been grouped into four generalized fire regimes (Table S-1): nonlethal (about 27 percent of the forested acres), mixed1 (about 15 percent), mixed2 (about 40 percent), and lethal (about 18 percent).

Table S-1. Percent of Forested Acres on the Payette National Forest by Fire Regime

Fire Regime	Percent of Forested Acres	Fire Interval	Fire Intensity	Vegetation Patterns (Agee 1998)
Nonlethal	27	5–25 years	Low—10% mortality or less	Relatively homogenous with small patches generally <1.0 acre of different seral stages, densities, and compositions created from mortality
Mixed1	15	5–70 years	Low to moderate—10–50% mortality	Relatively homogenous with patches created from mortality ranging in size from <1.0 to 600 acres of different seral stages, densities, and compositions
Mixed2	40	70–300 years	Moderate to high—50–90% mortality	Relatively diverse with patches created by mixes of mortality and unburned or underburned areas ranging in size from <1 to 25,000 acres of different seral stages, densities, and compositions
Lethal	18	100–400 years	High—over 90% mortality	Relatively homogenous with patches sometimes >25,000 acres of similar seral stages, densities, and compositions. Small inclusions of different seral stages, densities, and compositions often result from unburned or underburned areas.

Historically, wildfire disturbance helped shape these forested landscapes. However, decades of fire exclusion, forest management, insect outbreaks, and other factors have substantially altered the structure of forests on the Forest, especially those that were historically within the nonlethal-to-mixed1 fire regimes (about 42 percent of the Forest's forested acres). Fire regimes in these forests have transitioned from mostly nonlethal and mixed1 to more lethal fire regimes. In many areas, these low- to mid-elevation forests have substantially fewer old legacy ponderosa pine and western larch trees compared to what existed historically (i.e., 100 years ago and longer). These areas often have multiple canopy layers, dense forest structure, and continuous high fuel levels and are at increased risk for stand-replacing wildfires, insect outbreaks, or intensified disease outbreaks.

While fire frequency has remained relatively stable, ongoing drought, fire, severe weather conditions, and in some cases altered forest structure, have contributed to a dramatic increase in the number of acres affected by wildfire over the last two decades. In addition, past forest management—which actively suppressed most wildfires and favored harvesting large, economically desirable ponderosa pine and other fire-resistant species—has helped create conditions that vary from historical conditions.

These same influences have directly and indirectly affected habitat quality, quantity, and distribution, especially within the historical nonlethal and mixed1 fire regimes. Moreover, the updated multiscale assessment indicates that most terrestrial wildlife species of concern associated with the forested biological community are linked to

habitats found in the nonlethal-to-mixed1 fire regimes. Compared to HRV, the updated assessment found or projected the following trends:

- Substantial reductions in the abundance and extent of the large tree size class and old-forest habitat, especially in the nonlethal and mixed1 fire regimes
- Substantial reduction in the abundance of legacy ponderosa pine and western larch trees and large snags in managed areas. The Forest Service believes this reduction is a result of substantial reductions in the large tree size class and old-forest habitat, snag removal levels in historical salvage operations, and an increase in removal of wood products where road access is greater. Although this reduction in the abundance of legacy ponderosa pine and western larch trees and large snags in managed areas cannot be conclusively documented, it is likely based on preliminary assessment of forest inventory data.
- Substantial increases in tree densities and ladder fuels within stands, resulting in reduced habitat quality and increased risks for habitat loss from future uncharacteristic wildfire or insect events in the nonlethal and mixed1 fire regimes
- Reductions in habitat quality due to increases in climax tree species (e.g., grand fir) that historically would not have been as widespread within the nonlethal and mixed1 fire regimes
- Reductions in forest cover from uncharacteristic wildfire and/or insect and disease events, all of which have become more extensive and severe with changes in tree species composition and increases in tree density and continuous ladder fuels, combined with ongoing drought and extreme weather events

Reductions in habitat quantity and quality due to historical and/or continued human-use increases across forested landscapes—increased human use has reduced and fragmented habitat through forest management, recreation, and continued residential development. Similar findings were observed in other mid- to broad-scale assessments completed since 2003 that encompassed all or parts of the Forest, including the Idaho CWCS (IDFG 2005), the NPCC subbasin assessments (NPCC 2004), and *Preserving and Restoring the Old-Growth Ponderosa Pine Ecosystem in Idaho* (Mehl and Haufler 2004). These regional findings also mirror those observed across the West (Covington et al. 1997; Wisdom et al. 2000; Brown 2002; Lindenmayer and Franklin 2002; Carey 2003; Folke et al. 2004; Nowicki and George 2004; Graham and Jain 2005; Noss et al. 2006; Franklin et al. 2008; Crist et al. 2009).

Forest Plan amendments are necessary because of the needs listed below:

1. The need to develop a more comprehensive and diverse strategy for wildlife conservation that relies on scientifically accepted conservation concepts (Appendix 1) and associated principles.

The 2003 Forest Plan wildlife standard WIST01 is a “threshold that represents the minimum percent of a landscape area retained in the large tree size class...for assuring the viability of terrestrial wildlife species” (USDA Forest Service 2003a, p. A-3). This standard is no longer considered an appropriate “threshold” for wildlife habitat conservation based on local agency expert reviews of best available science including Fahrig (2001), Fahrig (2003), and Schulte et al. (2006).

2. The need to shift 247,000 acres from commodity production emphasis to a restoration emphasis.

Desired conditions for areas within Management Prescription Category (MPC) 5.2 in the 2003 Forest Plan fall outside the HRV, in some cases substantially. These desired conditions do not align with restoration objectives for forested vegetation, wildlife habitat, or hazardous fuel reduction. The WCS was developed under the premise that the risks to species persistence, ecosystems, and genetic diversity increase as source environments depart from the HRV (McComb and Duncan 2007).

3. The need to emphasize retention of most forest stands that meet the definitions of old-forest habitat or the large tree size class.

Acres of forests that meet the definition of large tree size class are deficient in nearly all forest types compared to historical estimates. Of particular concern for wildlife species persistence are deficits in the low- to mid-elevation pine forests that historically fell within the nonlethal and mixed1 fire regimes.

4. The need to focus restoration to promote desired old-forest habitat or large tree stand conditions and reduce hazards and risks to these habitats.

Changes in tree species composition and uncharacteristically high tree densities in stands classified as large tree size class and/or medium tree size class occur throughout the low- to mid-elevation forests. These conditions reduce habitat quality and increase fuel, insect, and disease hazards across landscapes—hazards that may present an unacceptable risk for loss of important wildlife habitat.

5. The need to emphasize retention of large snags while balancing other objectives associated with a given management prescription emphasis.

At the Forest scale, the number of large snags (≥ 20 inches diameter at breast-height [d.b.h.]) appears to be within desired conditions. However, large snags are not well distributed; they are abundant in wildfire and insect disturbance areas but not in managed areas. Large snags are an important attribute of wildlife habitat. Scientists do not agree about the benefits and consequences of salvaging dead trees following disturbance events (e.g., wildfire), especially on lands not suitable for timber production (McIver and Starr 2001; Duncan 2002; Hutto 2006; Mazza 2007; McIver and Ottmar 2007; Lindenmayer et al. 2008). While allowances for the salvage of some large snags following disturbance events on lands designated as suitable for timber production may further objectives, the extent of large snag salvage on other forestlands will be limited by management direction.

6. The need to prioritize vegetative and wildlife habitat restoration treatments to increase the overall probability of restoration success.

Vegetation and wildlife habitat restoration in nonlethal and mixed1 fire regimes is necessary across the Forest as these areas show the greatest departure from the HRV. However, due to limited resources and funds, not all needs can be addressed at once. Prioritizing restoration areas will help ensure source environments are expanded and functional habitat areas are reconnected in a manner and timeframe that benefits the species of greatest conservation concern the most.

In addition, the likelihood of restoration success increases as a landscape prioritization strategy is developed and implemented. A landscape prioritization strategy helps managers better understand how restoration in a given area relates to that in another area; how benefits can be maximized for a given cost; and how, through integration with other resources within and between agencies, managers can capitalize on common objectives and minimize unintended effects to accomplish various restoration objectives (USDA Forest Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management 2000; Rieman et al. 2000; Mehl and Haufler 2004; Brown 2002; Crist et al. 2009).

7. The need to identify the location of priority or key habitat areas for wide-ranging carnivore species, such as the wolverine, and retain linkages between these habitats. Identify where conflicts between this species and human use may exist and whether further review is warranted.

Science has clearly shown that human use can directly and indirectly impact wildlife habitat and directly disturb individual animals during critical life phases, such as the denning period. Some species show a high vulnerability to human-use impacts. Assessments used for developing the WCS rely on indicators, such as road densities and winter recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS), to help identify potential conflict between wildlife and human use.

Understanding where potential conflicts may exist within important wolverine habitat areas will allow areas to be prioritized for future monitoring. Monitoring winter recreation activities in wolverine habitat priority watersheds will assist the Forest Service and scientists in verifying whether conflicts between winter recreation activities and wolverine use on landscapes exist, and what, if any, additional action might be needed to alleviate or resolve these conflicts through subsequent site-specific actions.

8. The need to balance wildlife habitat restoration needs with multiple-use objectives, the exercise of existing rights, and other public needs.

While wildlife habitat restoration is the primary objective of the WCS, the Forest Plan recognizes other important multiple-use objectives. Examples of other objectives include handling emergencies (including wildfire for resource benefit); reducing hazardous fuel in the WUIs surrounding residential areas; providing for public health and safety; exercising prior existing rights and Native American treaty rights; and addressing other statutory requirements such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Summary of the Proposed Action

There are six parts of the Proposed Action (described as Alternative B in Chapter 2) that are included as Appendix 2 of the EIS.

1. *Forest-wide Management Direction*: Goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines that apply across all acres within the planning unit would be modified, added, or deleted in the Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate Species (TEPC); Wildlife Resources; Vegetation; Fire Management; Timberland Resources; Roads and Facilities; and Recreation sections to address findings in the WCS. Forest-wide Management Direction outlined in the Proposed Action would supplement or replace Forest Plan Management Direction in these five sections.

Five key changes are proposed to Forest-wide Management Direction: (1) retain existing old-forest habitat and large tree forested stands; (2) restore habitat such that it promotes recruitment of old-forest habitat; (3) retain legacy ponderosa pine and western larch trees; (4) use a common set of conservation principles in project design to help assess a proposed project's contribution to Forest Plan goals and objectives pertaining to the Forest Plan WCS; and (5) prioritize restoration of habitats of greatest conservation concern (e.g., low- to mid-elevation pine forests) and their associated species. There will be exceptions where needed to balance with other multiple-use objectives.

2. *MPC Allocation and Associated Management Direction*: MPC 5.2, "Commodity Production Emphasis within Forest Landscapes," would be replaced with MPC 5.1, "Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forest Landscapes." MPC 5.1 management direction would apply to the reallocated acres.

In addition, new vegetative management direction for snag retention would be added to MPCs 3.1, 3.2, 4.1c, 4.2, 5.1, and 6.1. Additional direction would be added to 4.2, 5.1, and 6.1 regarding personal use fuelwood program management. Exceptions will be available where needed to balance with other multiple-use objectives.

A new road guideline is also proposed in MPCs 5.1 and 6.1, describing how public motorized use would be managed when building new roads to implement vegetation restoration projects.

3. *Management Area Descriptions, Objectives, Standards, and Guidelines for Individual Management Areas*: Resource descriptions for Vegetation, Wildlife Resources, Timberland Resources, and Fire Management would be updated to reflect the updated multi-scale analysis. Objectives and/or guidelines would be added and/or modified in some management areas to focus on restoration priorities.
4. *Proposed Monitoring Plan*: Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan would be updated to modify or add monitoring elements to address risks to habitats and species, as well as uncertainties. Monitoring would be used to evaluate the effects of management practices and any need for change in the Forest Plan.

Management indicator species (MIS) listed in Appendix E would be moved to Chapter 4.

A monitoring element would be added for winter recreation activities in priority watersheds identified in the Source Environment Restoration Strategy and Map (Appendix 3). Information from this monitoring will assist the Forest Service in evaluating the relationship between winter recreation activities and wolverine use on landscapes.

5. *Appendix A, Vegetation Resources*: Appendix A in the 2003 Forest Plan would be reformatted and modified to clarify how this appendix relates to the WCS. Changes to Appendix A would reflect the integration of several key conservation concepts (EIS Appendix 1): desired conditions for coarse filter and mesofilter vegetation elements, emulating natural disturbance, desired vegetative diversity, and patch dynamics. A Vegetation and Wildlife Restoration Strategy and spatial map would also be added to this appendix that reflects the Forest Service's proposed progression of "matrix management" activities this planning period.
6. *Appendix E, Wildlife Resources*: Appendix E of the 2003 Forest Plan would be modified to summarize the conclusions from the multi-scale assessment and how they will be used to help understand the purpose and interpret the use of proposed management direction during Forest Plan implementation. A short-term Vegetation and Wildlife Restoration Strategy and spatial map, which would complement the broader Vegetation Restoration Strategy, would also be added to this appendix. Short-term wildlife restoration needs would focus on fine-filter needs for species of conservation concern, including key vegetative elements or habitats that need a more focused, short-term spatial strategy than provided by the Appendix A Vegetation Restoration Strategy alone.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Decisions to be made in this Amendment Process

The EIS analyzes a range of alternatives for amending Forest management direction. Based on the analysis in the EIS, comments received, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), the Responsible Official will select an alternative to amend the Forest Plan. Documentation and rationale for the decision will be included in the Record of Decision (ROD) accompanying the FEIS.

The decisions to be made will address the following questions:

- Should Forest Plan management direction pertaining to wildlife habitat conservation, restoration, and maintenance be changed to ensure adequate and well-distributed habitats are provided for a diversity of plant and animal communities, and if so, how should management direction be changed?

To respond to this question, the following will be specifically addressed:

- a. Should wildlife standard WIST01 be replaced by a more comprehensive and diverse set of management direction that relies on accepted conservation concepts and principles for wildlife conservation, and if so, with what?
- b. Should approximately 247,000 acres allocated to MPC 5.2 (Commodity Production Emphasis within Forested Landscapes) be reallocated to an MPC with desired conditions consistent with vegetation and habitat conservation,

- maintenance, and restoration objectives and fuel reduction objectives, and if so, which MPC or MPCs should these acres be reallocated to?
- c. Should management direction be added for the remainder of the planning period to emphasize retention of most forest stands that meet the definition of old-forest habitat or the large tree size class, and if so, with what and how?
 - d. Should management direction be added to focus restoration in forested stands classified as large or medium tree size class to promote old forest habitat and large tree stand conditions and to reduce hazards and risks to these habitats, and if so, with what and how?
 - e. Should management direction be added or modified to emphasize retention of large snags while balancing other objectives, and if so, with what and how?
- Should exemptions to new or modified Forest Plan direction be included for activities that an authorized official determines are necessary for the protection of life and property during an emergency event; to reasonably address other human health and safety concerns; to meet hazardous fuel reduction objectives within WUIs; and/or to allow reserved or outstanding rights, tribal rights, or statutes to be reasonably exercised or complied with, and if so, what should the exemption or exemptions to direction be?
 - Should Forest-wide and management area direction be modified or added to prioritize vegetative and associated wildlife habitat restoration treatments to increase the overall probability of restoration success and if so, how?
 - Should potential conflicts between human use and species of greatest conservation concern, such as the wolverine, be monitored in priority habitat areas, and if so, how and why?
 - Should the number of acres designated as suitable for timber production change and/or management on these acres be modified to address vegetative and wildlife habitat conservation and restoration needs, and if so, how and what will the resulting effect be to the decadal ASQ determination for timber that may be sold from the suited timber base?
 - Should monitoring and evaluation under the Forest Plan strategy be modified if Forest Plan direction is deleted, modified, or added, and if so, what modifications should be adopted?

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Forest Service uses scoping to determine the scope of the issues to be addressed and identify the major issues related to a proposal. As part of the scoping process, the Forest Service invites the public, American Indian tribes, and other governmental agencies to participate (40 CFR 1501.7; 36 CFR 220.4(e); FSH 1909.15, Chapter 11).

During scoping, public involvement on the Wildlife Conservation Strategy (WCS) and the associated Forest Plan amendment was sought at various points and multiple venues:

- Notices of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were published in the *Federal Register* in September 2007, December 2008, and April 2009.

- Over 700 scoping packages outlining the WCS and comment process were mailed out in September 2007.
- A WCS newsletter was distributed to over 1,000 potential commenters in December 2008.
- A Web page explaining the WCS was developed and periodic updates provided.
- Articles were published in local newspapers.
- Contact with Congressional offices and State and other Federal agencies have been ongoing.
- Consultation with tribal governments has been ongoing.

During the scoping process, the Forest Service received over 50 comments on the WCS from individuals, organizations, tribes, and other governmental agencies. The EIS interdisciplinary team (IDT) compiled these comments and identified preliminary issues that would (1) help develop alternatives; (2) influence proposed Forest Plan direction; and/or (3) be used to track potential effects. The IDT presented these preliminary issues to the Responsible Official for review and selection of the major issues to be analyzed. The comments and concerns and the process used for identifying issues are presented in detail in the planning record.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Issues are unresolved conflicts with the Proposed Action and are used in environmental analysis to formulate alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures, and focus the analysis of environmental effects. (At the Forest planning level, mitigation measures are incorporated into management direction [or management prescriptions] that influence the type, amount, and intensity of management actions that are implemented under the Forest Plan.) The Responsible Official decided which issues are important for the proposed Forest Plan amendment based on one or more of the following criteria:

- Would these issues be used to help develop management alternatives or additional management direction in the Proposed Action, or would they be used in the allocation of management prescriptions?
- Would changes in Forest Plan direction or prescriptions responding to issues result in discernable differences in effects to related resources?
- Would effects to the resources raised in these issues be different enough by alternative to provide the Responsible Official with rationale for choosing a preferred or selected alternative?

Issues that Generated Alternatives Considered in Detail

Using the comments received and the above criteria, the Responsible Official identified three major issues that generated alternatives to the Proposed Action that were considered in detail. These alternatives are described in “Alternatives Considered in Detail, Including the Proposed Action” (section 2.4.2). The three issues used to develop the alternatives are described below using an issue statement, a brief background explanation, and a summary of the issue indicators that will be used to track effects associated with the issue.

Issue 1

Under the Proposed Action, acres in need of habitat restoration assigned to MPC 5.2 (Commodity Production Emphasis within Forested Landscapes) would continue to be designated as lands considered suitable for timber production when reassigned to MPC 5.1 (Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes). Reallocating these acres to an active management MPC that still includes objectives to provide wood products that contribute to the Forest Plan's ASQ may further degrade wildlife habitat (or impede its restoration), regardless of whether or not commodity production is emphasized. Of specific concern are the low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine forests, a forest type identified as one of greatest conservation concern.

Indicators for Issue 1

- Change in number of acres assigned to each MPC
- Change in number of acres identified as suitable for timber production
- Change in wood product availability (i.e., ASQ and total sale program quantity [TSPQ])
- Trend in large tree size class acres in the low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine forests on the westside of the Forest.
- Trend in old-forest habitat² acres in the low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine forests on the westside of the Forest.

Issue 2

Under the Proposed Action, activities within the WUI designed to reduce hazardous fuels that unacceptably increase wildfire risks³ to residential developments and public health and safety are exempt from proposed Forest-wide standards concerning retention of large-tree stands, old-forest habitat, and large snags. This exemption may affect the Forest Service's ability to restore the extent and distribution of old-forest habitats associated with some species of greatest conservation concern (e.g., white-headed woodpecker). Of specific concern are the remaining acres of existing old-forest habitat—or those forest stands that could be restored to this condition in the near future—that are within the low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine forests.

² In the EIS analysis, “old- forest habitat” could not be specifically assessed because not all components of old- forest habitat were available in the mid-scale dataset (e.g., snags, trees species composition, coarse woody debris). Consequently, macrovegetative components of “old- forest habitat” were used as an indicator of potential old-forest habitat (tree size class and stand density or canopy closure within specific potential vegetation groups (PVGs)). For the purposes of this EIS analysis “old-forest habitat” and old-forest macro-vegetation are used interchangeably.

³ Unacceptable risk represented by hazardous fuels is determined by the Responsible Official, who considers those factors relevant to that site-specific situation and professional judgments of local agency experts.

Indicators for Issue 2

- WUI exemption within low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine forest within the nonlethal and mixed1 fire regime
- Trend in large tree size class acres in the low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine forests on the westside, central, and Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW)
- Trend in old-forest habitat acres in the low- to mid-elevation ponderosa pine forests on the westside, central, and FC-RONRW
- Sustainability outcome for wildlife Habitat Family 1, current and future trend
- Sustainability outcome for white-headed woodpecker, current and future trend

Issue 3

Assessments supporting WCS development indicate that forested lands have fewer large trees than desired in most forest types. In areas with higher road densities, it is believed that there are fewer large snags than desired. The Forest needs to retain all large trees and snags, especially in existing “old-growth” habitat, until habitat is restored.

Indicators for Issue 3

- Total acres where MPC standard within MPCs with suited forestland to retain snag numbers in salvage operation at the high end of the range in Table A-6 (Appendix A [see Appendix 2]) applies
- Total acres where MPC standard within MPCs with unsuitable forestland to retain all snags >20 inches diameter at breast-height (d.b.h). in mechanical vegetation management activities applies
- Trend in large tree size class acres across all fire regimes on the Forest
- Trend in old-forest habitat acres across all fire regimes on the Forest

Concerns Raised in Response to Scoping

The Responsible Official reviewed other concerns raised during scoping. These concerns are valuable, but they do not raise unresolved conflicts with the Proposed Action and therefore are not treated as “issues.” These concerns address a variety of subjects:

- Address and/or incorporate aquatic and fish resource needs in the WCS
- Consider needs across all habitats (i.e., all four phases identified in Chapter 1) in a single analysis and EIS to properly consider wildlife
- Include invertebrate and plant species in these considerations
- Consider ecological changes likely from nonnative invasive species
- Include a new restoration MPC and actively promote a restoration economy and volunteer efforts as part of this strategy
- Consider recent wildfire effects
- Compare existing conditions with those of the previous decade; going back further in time (use of the historical range of variability [HRV] as defined) is guesswork and could cause restrictions based on false assumptions

- Consider the effects of authorizing livestock grazing in forested landscapes on wildlife habitat restoration
- Consider expected climate change
- Use best available science and clearly disclose the science used
- Anticipate the effects on local communities, private inholdings, and counties
- Develop additional Forest Plan management direction to eliminate human disturbance to wolverine denning habitat
- Implement management direction from the Northern Rockies lynx management direction project (USDA Forest Service 2007b)

The concerns raised through public involvement and Forest Service responses are contained in the planning record.

DEVELOPMENT OF A REASONABLE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

The issues identified during scoping were used to generate a preliminary set of alternatives, which were then divided into “alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study” and “alternatives considered in detail.” Both sets of alternatives are included in the range of alternatives considered for the Forest Plan amendment.

Only alternatives that met the purpose and need for change and addressed one or more of the major issues identified by the Responsible Official were considered for detailed study. However, not all alternatives that met these criteria were studied in detail, as the number would have been prohibitively large. Instead, the Responsible Official identified alternatives that met the criteria in section 2.3, “Issues and Concerns,” to create a reasonable range of outputs, directions, costs, management requirements, and effects.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

The National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). The following alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study.

- Reallocate Forested Lands Assigned to MPC 5.2 (Commodity Production Emphasis) to MPC 3.1 (Passive Restoration and Maintenance)
- Reallocate Low- to Mid-elevation Ponderosa Pine Forests (Within Nonlethal and Mixed1 Fire Regimes) Currently Assigned to Wilderness or Passive Management MPCs (MPCs 1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 3.1, 4.1a, and 4.1c) to MPC 5.1 (Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes)
- Add Diameter Limits
- Add Road Density and Winter Recreation Management Direction to Protect Wolverine
- Add Management Direction to Prohibit Trapping and Provide Subpopulation Connectivity to Protect Wolverine
- Increase Winter Motorized Recreation to Benefit Community Economies

Alternatives Considered in Detail, Including the Proposed Action

The alternatives considered in detail all have features in common. They cover the same areas within and surrounding the Forest boundaries and comply with the same Federal laws and regulations. The two action alternatives meet the purpose and need for this action and address the major issues to varying degrees.

Each action alternative includes proposed modifications in six areas of the Forest Plan:

- Changes in Chapter III of the Plan for Forest-wide management direction in five resource areas—Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate (TEPC) Species; Wildlife Resources; Vegetation; Fire Management; and Timberland Resources
- Changes in MPC allocations of NFS lands across the Forest in Chapter III of the Forest Plan
- Changes in individual management area standards, guidelines, and objectives in Chapter III of the Forest Plan
- Updates to the Forest Plan monitoring and evaluation strategy in Chapter IV of the Forest Plan
- Revisions to Forest Plan Appendix A—Vegetation Desired Conditions, Vegetation Mapping, and Vegetation Classification
- Revisions to Forest Plan Appendix E—Wildlife and Fish

Alternative A: No Action

Alternative A is the no action alternative, which provides the baseline for comparing alternatives in the EIS. Under Alternative A, management of the Forest would continue under the 2003 Forest Plan (as amended, and as updated with errata and corrections disclosed in annual Forest monitoring reports). A map of Alternative A is included in Appendix 3.

Alternative A includes the following key aspects, provided here to help when comparing the other alternatives considered in detail.

Forest-wide Management Direction

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate Species

The Forest-wide direction would continue under the Forest Plan, Chapter III (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-8 through III-15).

Wildlife Resources

The Forest-wide direction would continue under the Forest Plan, Chapter III (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-25 through III-28).

Vegetation

The Forest-wide direction would continue under the Forest Plan, Chapter III (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-29 through III-31).

Fire Management

The Forest-wide direction would continue under the Forest Plan, Chapter III (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-38 through III-40).

Timberland Resources

The Forest-wide direction would continue under the Forest Plan, Chapter III (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-41 through III-43).

Roads and Facilities

The Forest-wide direction would continue under the Forest Plan, Chapter III (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-58 through III-60).

Recreation

The Forest-wide direction would continue under the Forest Plan, Chapter III (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-61 through III-66).

Management Prescription Category Allocation and Associated Management Direction

Management Prescription Category Allocation

For Alternative A, NFS lands would remain assigned to MPCs as displayed in the page-sized maps illustrating each of the 14 Forest Plan Management Areas in the Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-89 through III-275) and as summarized in Table S-2.

Management Direction

Management direction for large snags during vegetation management activities, including salvage, would remain the same on lands identified as suitable and unsuitable for timber production within MPCs that allow salvage activities (i.e., MPCs 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1c, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, and 6.1).

Management Area Standards, Guidelines, and Objectives for Individual Management Areas

Management Area Direction—including standards, guidelines, and objectives for individual management areas—would remain the same as Chapter III of the 2003 Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. III-89 through III-275).

Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

The Forest Plan monitoring and evaluation strategy would remain the same as Chapter IV of the 2003 Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. IV-1 through IV-18).

Appendix A (Vegetation Desired Conditions, Mapping, and Classification)

Appendix A of the Forest Plan would remain the same as in the 2003 Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. A-1 through A-29).

Table S-2. Management Prescription Categories (MPCs) Allocated in the Forest Plan

MPC	Emphasis	Area (acres)	Percentage of Forest (%)
1.1	Designated Wilderness	768,000	33
1.2	Recommended Wilderness	215,000	9
2.1	Wild and Scenic Rivers	4,000	<1
2.2	Research Natural Areas	14,000	1
3.1	Passive Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources	401,000	17
3.2	Active Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources	198,000	9
4.1a	Undeveloped Recreation: Maintain Inventoried Roadless Areas	57,000	3
4.1c	Undeveloped Recreation: Maintain Unroaded Character with Allowance for Restoration Activities	135,000	6
4.2	Roaded Recreation Emphasis	18,000	1
5.1	Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes	193,000	8
5.2	Commodity Production Emphasis within Forested Landscapes	247,000	11
6.1	Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Shrubland and Grassland Landscapes	50,000	2

Appendix E (Wildlife and Fish)

Appendix E of the Forest Plan would remain the same as in the 2003 Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2003a, pp. E-1 through E-11).

Alternative B: Proposed Action

Alternative B is the Proposed Action presented to the public in 2007, 2008, and 2009. Alternative B is the Forest Service's proposal to address the needs for change identified by the Forest Service. A map of Alternative B is included in Appendix 3.

The following update has been incorporated into the Proposed Action in response to public comments and preliminary analysis:

- Priorities for the study of potential wolverine and human conflicts are shown on a Forest-wide map (Appendix 3). These priorities were developed to design a wolverine conservation approach that identifies if and where conflicts exist and develop appropriate mitigation.

The Forest Service has begun to study wolverine–human conflict in southwestern Idaho forests. This effort involves both land management agencies and winter recreation user groups. For example, the Idaho State Snowmobile Association is participating in and contributing funding to a multiagency wolverine study that involves parts of the Forest (Mitchell 2009). The importance of proactively addressing whether human uses may affect wolverines was recognized by the local Resource Advisory Council (RAC), which also contributed funding to this effort. In future years, it is anticipated that this study will be expanded to include the Boise and Sawtooth National Forests.

Alternative B includes the following key aspects (detailed in Appendix 2).

Forest-wide Management Direction

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate Species

- Modify for clarity Forest-wide goals TEGO01, TEGO02, TEGO03, TEGO04, TEGO05, and TEGO06.
- Modify Objective TEOB03 to add reference to restoration strategies.
- Correct or clarify objective TEOB14.
- Delete objectives TEOB16, TEOB17, and TEOB18 that refer to species no longer listed under the ESA such as bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*).
- Delete guideline TEGU09 because it is duplicative.

Terrestrial Wildlife Resources

- Modify goals WIGO01, WIGO02, WIGO03, and WIGO04 for clarity.
- Add objective WIOB20 and standards WIST10 and WIST11 to focus source habitat maintenance and restoration activities in wildlife priority watersheds and emphasize conservation and restoration of old-forest habitat, respectively.
- The following exemption is proposed for Forest-wide standards WIST10 and WIST11:
This standard shall not apply to activities that an authorized official determines are needed for the protection of life and property during an emergency event; to reasonably address other human health and safety concerns; to meet hazardous fuel reduction objectives within WUIs; or to allow reserved or outstanding rights, tribal rights, or statutes from being reasonably exercised or complied with.
- Add objective WIOB21 to coordinate with research to address species of conservation concern.
- Add objective WIOB22 to work with the State of Idaho to address species and habitats identified in the *Idaho CWCS*.
- Add objective WIOB23 to address the need to reduce road-related effects on wildlife habitat.
- Add guideline WIGU18 to address monitoring of Management Indicator Species (MIS).
- Add guideline WIGU19 to address monitoring of winter recreation use in wolverine denning habitat.
- Add guideline WIGU20 to, where possible, meet both WUI hazardous fuel reduction and wildlife habitat conservation/restoration objectives.
- Modify objectives WIOB01, WIOB02, and WIOB03; standard WIST03; and guidelines WIGU04 and WIGU05 for clarity.
- Modify objectives WIOB08 and WIOB09 for clarity and to remove references to MIS.
- Delete objective WIOB07 and standard WIST01 that specify managing for 20 percent large tree by 5th Hydrologic Unit (HU).

- Delete objective WIOB10 because it would be incorporated into WIOB08.
- Delete guideline WIGU01 and replace with WIGU17, which promotes the use of conservation principles to design projects and/or assess effects of projects on wildlife habitat.
- Delete goals WIGO05 and WIGO06 because direction concerning the maintenance or improvement of habitat for MIS already exists in WIGO01 through WIGO04.

Vegetation

- Modify Forest-wide goals VEGO01, VEGO02, VEGO03, VEGO04, VEGO05, VEGO06, and VEGO07 for clarity and/or to describe the condition desired.
- Add objective VEOB08 to identify how many acres are anticipated to be treated on a decadal basis to further vegetation restoration and maintenance efforts.
- Add standard VEST03 and guidelines VEGU07, VEGU08, VEGU09, and VEGU10 to retain important elements of vegetative diversity (e.g., large-tree stands) and to address the conservation of vegetation diversity elements (e.g., legacy trees). The same exemption discussed above for WIST10 and WIST11 would apply to VEST03.
- Modify objectives VEOB01 and VEOB07 and guideline VEGU03 for clarity.
- Delete guidelines VEGU01 and VEGU02 since Appendix A of the Forest Plan provides appropriate information concerning assessment scales and analysis approaches.

Fire Management

- Modify objective FMOB04 to identify how many acres of hazardous fuel reduction and maintenance treatments are anticipated to be scheduled in the WUI on a decadal basis.
- Add objective FMOB08 to identify how many acres are anticipated to be treated using prescribed fire on a decadal basis to contribute to FMOB04 and VEOB08 objectives.

Timberland Resources

- Modify objective TROB01 to specify acreage anticipated to be treated on a decadal basis using commercial and noncommercial mechanical treatments that will contribute to FMOB04 and VEOB08 objectives.
- Modify objectives TROB02 and TROB03 to reflect the change in ASQ and TSPQ should this alternative be implemented.

Roads and Facilities

- Modify objective FROB12 to include wildlife habitat in the list of bio-physical resources to be addressed.

Recreation

- Modify guideline REGU07 to include sensitive wildlife species habitat in the list of bio-physical resources to be addressed.

Management Prescription Category Allocation and Associated Management Direction

Management Prescription Category Allocation

- Reallocate about 247,000 acres from MPC 5.2 (Commodity Production Emphasis within Forested Landscapes) to MPC 5.1 (Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes).
- Delete MPC 5.2 and its associated direction.
- Add a vegetation standard specifying snag retention to MPCs 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, and 4.1c. The same exemption discussed above for WIST10, WIST11, and VEST03 would apply here, but the exemption would also apply to personal use fuelwood collection in these MPCs.
- Add a vegetation standard to MPCs 4.2, 5.1, and 6.1 specifying how snags are to be retained in commercial salvage sales. The same exemption discussed above for WIST10, WIST11, and VEST03 would apply here.
- Add a vegetative guideline to MPCs 4.2, 5.1 and 6.1 specifying how the personal use fuelwood program should be managed to retain large snags.
- Add a road guideline to MPC 5.1 and 6.1 describing how public motorized use would be managed when building new roads to implement vegetation restoration projects. Where these roads are not needed for long-term management, temporary roads should be used and decommissioned following the restoration activity.

Management Area Standards, Guidelines, and Objectives for Individual Management Areas

- Update resource descriptions of conditions for Vegetation, Wildlife Resources, Timberland Resources, and Fire Management to reflect the updated multi-scale analysis.
- Add objectives and/or guidelines to
 - focus restoration on important vegetation components, such as whitebark pine or old-forest habitat
 - reduce road densities where they affect source habitat for white-headed woodpecker (a species of conservation concern) use in priority watersheds
 - conserve or restore source habitat for white-headed woodpecker
 - determine whether winter recreation activities are affecting wolverine (a species of conservation concern) during the critical winter denning period
 - emphasize treatments in WUIs and the importance of coordinating these treatments with adjacent landowners

Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

- Clarify and modify monitoring elements concerning TEPC species, sensitive species, and MIS.
- Move the MIS section in Appendix E to Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan.

Appendix A (Vegetation Desired Conditions, Mapping, and Classification)

- Modify discussions in Appendix A to note that desired conditions for tree size class, canopy cover, and species composition would be evaluated on a Forest-wide scale, rather than 5th HU scale, and spatial patterns (described in terms of fire regimes and potential vegetation groups [PVGs]) would be evaluated at the 5th HU scale.
- Clarify discussions in Appendix A by reformatting content and making stronger associations with fire regimes.
- Add a *Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Strategy* that would emphasize large tree size class, spatial patterns, and declining seral tree species.
- Delete all desired conditions pertaining to MPC 5.2 from this appendix.
- Delete old growth versus old forest discussion from this appendix and move to Appendix E. Old-forest habitat is more appropriately discussed in the appendix associated with wildlife.

Appendix E (Terrestrial Wildlife Resources)

- Update Forest Plan Appendix E, making it specific to Terrestrial Wildlife Resources.
- Summarize the WCS, how it was integrated into the Forest Plan, and how it relates to Appendices A and B.
- Add detailed discussions concerning conservation principles and how they should be used in subsequent fine- and project/site-scale analyses.
- Add a *Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Strategy* that would emphasize large tree size class, spatial patterns, and declining seral tree species.
- Delete the section concerning ESA and sensitive species because it is duplicative with existing Forest Service Handbook (FSH) direction and delete the connectivity map provided for lynx because it is unnecessary with the WCS now complete.
- Add an old-forest habitat discussion, including definition of old-forest habitat for each PVG.
- Delete the big game section, “Management Strategies To Address Elk Vulnerability To Mortality, Travel Management Impacts, And Security Needs.” Strategies to address elk vulnerability and security needs are developed and implemented during project-specific planning when actions proposed may have an impact. Strategies, procedures, and processes are updated as new information becomes available and adapted to address each site-specific situation. Providing an overview of these strategies in Appendix E of the Forest Plan has not provided any substantive value to project planning in the first 5 years of plan implementation and therefore will be deleted.

Alternative C

Alternative C was developed to address Issues 1, 2, and 3 (sections 2.3.1.1, 2.3.1.2, and 2.3.1.3).

Under Alternative C, 247,000 acres would shift into MPC 3.2 (see USDA Forest Service 2003a p. III-86). Corresponding requirements under MPC 3.2 would apply to these acres.

A map of Alternative C is included in Appendix 3. Alternative C includes the following similarities or key differences proposed changes in Alternative B.

Forest-wide Management Direction

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate Species

- Modifications to Forest-wide management direction for TEPC species would be the same as described under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.1).

Terrestrial Wildlife Resources

- Modify Forest-wide management direction for terrestrial wildlife resources as described under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.1). However, in response to Issues 2 and 3 concerning the effects of WUI hazardous fuel reduction treatments on wildlife habitat, the exemption proposed for WIST10 and WIST11 would not include the WUI exemption. The exemption under Alternative C would be as follows:

This standard shall not apply to activities that an authorized official determines are needed for the protection of life and property during an emergency event; to reasonably address other human health and safety concerns; or to allow reserved or outstanding rights, tribal rights, or statutes from being reasonably exercised or complied with.

Vegetation

- Modify Forest-wide management direction for vegetation the same as described under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.1).
- Modify the exemption to proposed Vegetation standard VEST03 to remove the exemption for activities pertaining to hazardous fuel reduction in a WUI, as stated above under Wildlife Resources.

Fire Management

- Modify Forest-wide management direction for Fire Management the same as described under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.1).

Timberland Resources

- Modify objective TROB01 that same as described under Alternative B (section 2.4.2.2.1).
- Modify objectives TROB02 and TROB03 to reflect the change in ASQ and TSPQ that results from this Alternative.

Roads and Facilities

- Modify Forest-wide management direction for Roads and Facilities the same as described under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.1).

Recreation

- Modify Forest-wide management direction for Recreation the same as described under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.1).

Management Prescription Category Allocation and Associated Management Direction

Management Prescription Category Allocation

- Delete MPC 5.2 and its associated direction.
- In response to Issues 1 and 3, the 247,000 acres of MPC 5.2 would be reallocated to MPC 3.2 (Active Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Wildlife Resources).
- Similar to MPC 5.1 allocations, reallocation of these acres to MPC 3.2 would change the desired condition on forested acres designated as suited timberland within these 247,000 acres (i.e., approximately 160,000 acres) to one that falls within the estimated HRV.
- Reallocation to MPC 3.2 would designate the forested acres within this area as *not* suited for timber production, reducing suited timberlands from 323,300 to 163,000 acres.
- The same vegetation standard added to MPCs 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, and 4.1c in Alternative B for large-snag retention would be included under this alternative. The exemption from Alternative B applies to this alternative, except for WUI hazardous fuel treatments.
- The same vegetative standard added to MPCs 4.2, 5.1, and 6.1 for retention of snags during commercial salvage sales would be added in this alternative. The exemption from Alternative B applies to this alternative, except for WUI hazardous fuel treatments.
- The same vegetative guideline added to MPCs 4.2, 5.1, and 6.1 for management of the personal use fuelwood program would be added under this alternative. The same guideline would be added to MPC 3.2 under this alternative. This guideline was added to the MPCs with high road densities and thereby access for fuelwood collection. Acres currently within MPC 5.2 have the highest road densities of all the MPCs. When they are reallocated to MPC 3.2, this situation remains and thus necessitates the addition of this guideline to MPC 3.2.
- The same road guideline added to MPC 5.1 and 6.1 under Alternative B, describing how public motorized use would be managed when building new roads for vegetation restoration projects, would be added under this alternative. This guideline was not added to MPC 3.2 because existing road and duration of effects standards in MPC 3.2 address road activities

Management Area Standards, Guidelines, and Objectives for Individual Management Areas

- Management Area descriptions, standards, guidelines, and objectives would be modified as under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.3).

Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

- The Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy would be modified as under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.4).

Forest Plan Appendix A (Vegetation Desired Conditions, Mapping, and Classification)

- Forest Plan Appendix A would be modified as under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.5).

Appendix E (Terrestrial Wildlife Resources)

- Forest Plan Appendix E would be modified as under Alternative B (see section 2.4.2.2.6).

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The preferred alternative is Alternative B, the Proposed Action.

The Responsible Official's selected alternative for implementation could be this alternative, one of the other alternatives considered in detail, or a different combination of the other alternatives considered in detail. The final decision will be documented in a record of decision (ROD) accompanying the EIS.

