

RECORD OF DECISION
FOR
USDA-FOREST SERVICE

Final Environmental Impact Statement

CHALLIS NATIONAL FOREST
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Custer, Lemhi, Butte, Valley, Blaine and Clark Counties, Idaho

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I. INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision documents approval of the Land and Resource Management Plan (the Plan) for the Challis National Forest (the Forest). The area covered by the Plan is located in the Lemhi, Lost River, Salmon River, Pioneer, Boulder, White Knob, and Pahsimeroi Mountains in central Idaho, and contains 2,516,191 acres of National Forest System lands. The Plan is a program for all natural resource management activities, and establishes management requirements to be employed in implementing it.

The Plan identifies resource management practices, projected levels of production of goods and services, and locations where various types of resource management activities are expected to occur. The Plan also provides broad direction for dealing with applications and permits for occupancy and use of National Forest System lands by the public and for management of impacts from mineral activities on the Forest.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) describes a proposed action (the Plan) and alternatives to the proposed action. It also describes the environment to be affected and discloses the potential environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action.

This FEIS and Plan were developed under implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality, Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 1500-1508 (40 CFR 1500-1508); and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 219 (36 CFR 219).

In promulgating Land and Resource Management Plans the Forest Service is seeking to satisfy two somewhat different purposes:

1. Compliance with the statutory mandate of the NFMA to develop and maintain a management system so that an "interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic, and other sciences" will be applied to all future decisions, 16 U.S.C. 1604(b), 1604(f), 1604(g), and 1604 (c).
2. Linkage with the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Planning Act (RPA) Program and Assessment through current modeling techniques to make forecasts of the outputs which could be produced under the Plan and alternatives to the Plan.

Forecasts of outputs that could be produced under the Plan and alternatives are useful in making comparisons among the alternatives and the Plan. There is no assurance that the outputs will actually occur at the projected number. This is due to limitations of modeling and projections and because on-the-ground conditions, changes in laws and regulations, national and local economic conditions, and appropriate budget levels all affect actual outputs. As with management direction, the projected outputs can be adjusted through rescheduling of proposed implementation schedules (amendments) or revision. The NFMA has a required revision period of 15 years.

The Plan provides the Forest Service, Forest users, and the general public with a framework within which to seek resolutions of future problems that may arise in the management of the Challis National Forest. As shown by the various points of view represented in Chapter VI of the FEIS, it is unlikely that the Forest Service can reconcile the interests in a way satisfactory to everyone. In fulfilling its public trust duty in the administration of the Plan for all the people, the Forest Service will be guided by the basic principles of multiple-use and sustained yield. A discussion of some of the legislative authorities which apply to National Forest management is included in the Preface of the Plan.

Features of the Plan:

1. Forest Condition

The Plan identifies the desired future condition of the Forest. Goals are presented in Chapter IV of the Plan. Goals are timeless and they form the principal basis for developing objectives (36 CFR 219.3).

2. Management Objectives

The Plan identifies management objectives necessary for the Forest to achieve its goals. It also describes how resources are to be managed in order to attain these objectives. The objectives are presented in Chapter IV of the Plan. These objectives are depicted as annual levels of goods and services that will ideally be achieved during the 10- to 15-year planning period. Achievement of these objectives is contingent upon many factors including appropriated level of funding, national and local economic factors, and the dynamic natural and physical factors at work on the Forest.

3. Management Requirements

The Plan specifies management requirements that control and govern how activities will be implemented on the Forest. The Plan includes Forest-wide standards and guidelines and Management Area prescriptions and direction (Chapter IV). Forest-wide standards and guidelines detail overall management requirements that apply to the entire Forest during Plan implementation. They are applied in addition to Management Prescription and Direction for each Management Area. The Plan assigns Management Area Prescriptions to specific land areas within the Forest. Mitigation measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm are incorporated as part of management requirements in Forest Direction and Management Area Prescriptions in Chapter IV of the Plan. Mitigation is also discussed in Chapter IV of the FEIS. The Plan Map displays locations where various Management Area prescriptions apply.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Plan contains monitoring and evaluation criteria to determine how well objectives, and standards and guidelines have been met and how well standards and guidelines have been applied. Monitoring procedures are displayed in Chapter V of the Plan.

5. Amendment or Revision

The Plan establishes management direction for the next 10 to 15 years, when it will be revised. Short-term opportunities, problems, or conflicts may arise in managing the Forest that were not anticipated in the Plan. The Plan provides a framework for responding to unanticipated needs and can be adjusted, if needed, through rescheduling or amendment.

6. Wilderness

The Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness Management Plan, approved March 11, 1985, contains direction for management of the entire wilderness, including acreage on five other National Forests. The Forest Plan incorporates this plan and includes some additional management direction for the 782,255 acre portion of the wilderness that is within the Challis National Forest.

The FEIS also evaluated 28 additional areas on the Challis National Forest for wilderness suitability. Three areas on the Challis National Forest are proposed for wilderness designation:

- * Borah Peak (119,000 acres).
- * Pioneer Mountains (48,000 acres).
- * Boulder/White Clouds (34,000 acres).

Both the Pioneer Mountains and Boulder/White Clouds include additional acres on the Sawtooth National Forest, also proposed for wilderness designation.

This document records the recommendation to propose a total of approximately 110,000 acres of the Pioneer Mountains on both Forests for wilderness designation. The Record of Decision for the FEIS on the Sawtooth National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan will document the recommendation on the Boulder/White Clouds area. Wilderness classification must be enacted into law by Congress before becoming final.

II. DECISION

The decision of this document is to approve the Plan, referred to as Alternative 11, the Proposed Action, in the FEIS for management of the Challis National Forest.

In light of known needs and potential impacts, the Plan sets forth a strategy for managing the Forest; this is not a plan for day-to-day internal operations. It does not address administrative matters such as personnel, fleet equipment, internal organizational changes, and does not emphasize all site-specific design decisions nor all specific resource outputs. Rather, the Plan prescribes general management practices for the Challis National Forest. The intention is to achieve multiple-use goals and objectives with optimum economic efficiency. Work will be done in an environmentally sound manner to produce goods, services, and amenities providing long-term public benefits.

This decision is based upon a review of environmental consequences of alternatives disclosed in the final EIS. Particular attention was given to responsiveness of alternatives to public issues and management concerns identified through the developmental phases of the Forest Plan, and more recently restated through public comment on the draft EIS and proposed Forest Plan. Public comments and Forest Service responses are included in Chapter VI of the FEIS and discussed in relation to planning questions in the FEIS, Chapter I.

Major aspects of this decision include:

- * **Proposed Wilderness** - Three areas of the Forest totaling approximately 201,000 acres are proposed for wilderness designation. As a result of public comment on the Draft Plan, total acres in the proposal have been increased. With the previously designated Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness, this would raise designated wilderness on the Forest to 983,255 acres or approximately 39 percent of the total Forest area if these additional areas were enacted into law.

Areas proposed for wilderness designation will be managed to protect their wilderness values. These areas will be closed to motorized vehicles where continued use has adverse impacts on wilderness character and new mineral lease applications will not be approved.

- * **Timber** - Programmed timber sales will be reduced by approximately 30 percent from the level of timber offered for the period 1977 through 1985. Allowable sale quantity for the Forest (30 MMBF during 10 years) approximates the volume actually sold during the same period.
- * **Livestock** - Permitted livestock grazing will remain at current levels. Range management and administration will be improved which should result in improved range conditions.
- * **Minerals** - Nonwilderness areas of the Forest generally will be available for mineral entry and leasing. The Plan provides the basis for recommending oil and gas leases and prospecting permits. New mineral leases will not be recommended in areas proposed for wilderness designation. The Plan (Table IV-1 and Appendix E) identifies areas as tentatively having certain restrictions (including 'no surface occupancy').

When each application for a permit or lease is received, it will be evaluated. If the application falls within guidelines provided by the Plan, an additional EA or EIS will not be required prior to issuance of the lease, stipulations will be attached with guidance from the Plan that are specific for conditions at that location.

- * **Water Quality** - Activities on the Forest will be evaluated to determine their potential for adding sediment to perennial streams. If a proposed activity would increase sediment in the spawning gravel by more than 2 percent above existing level or bring total fine sediment to more than 30 percent because sediment greater than 30 percent would significantly reduce their survival; that activity will be mitigated, moved, or eliminated.
- * **Undeveloped Areas** - Four areas within the Lemhi Range will be managed to provide a semi-primitive non-motorized recreation experience except for designated travel routes. There are no plans for development in these areas during this planning period. These areas are not withdrawn from mineral entry or leasing, so mineral exploration or development may occur.

Activities proposed in the Forest Plan will not significantly affect conditions of currently undeveloped areas during the planning period. Mineral activity has the greatest potential to affect these areas.

- * **Wildlife and Fish** - Adequate habitat will be provided to meet 5-year wildlife population projections of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game for deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, antelope, and goats. Improvements to existing habitat will occur under the Plan. The Plan also recognizes and provides habitat to meet Indian Treaty Rights of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe as well as Tribes with treaty rights downstream on the Columbia River System.
- * **Riparian** - Riparian areas will be managed to stabilize streambanks and improve ecological conditions. Management and administration intensity will increase in these areas along with more intense monitoring.
- * **Research Natural Areas** - Iron Bog and Meadow Canyon Research Natural Areas will be managed for research objectives. Middle Canyon, Mahogany Creek, Merriam Lake Basin, Sheep Mountain Smiley Mountain, Surprise Valley, Cache Creek Lakes, Soldier Lakes, and Mystery Lake proposed Research Natural Areas will be recommended for establishment. The natural condition of these areas will be protected.
- * **Funding and Scheduling Effects** - Activities, many of which are interdependent, may be affected by other priorities and funding levels. The Plan will be implemented by way of various site-specific projects; such as building a road, developing a campground, or the sale of timber. If funding is changed in any given year,

projects scheduled for that year may have to be altered or rescheduled. However, goals, management priorities, and land-activity assignments described in the Plan will not change unless the Plan is revised or amended. If funding changes significantly over several years in a way that would alter basic management objectives, the Plan itself may have to be amended [36 CFR 219.10 (e)(1982)].

During implementation, when various projects are designed, more site-specific analysis may be required. These analyses may take the form of Environmental Assessments [40 CFR 1508.9 (1982)], Environmental Impact Statements [40 CFR 1508.11 (1982)], or categorical exclusions [40 CFR 1508.4 (1982)]. The Forest Supervisor may amend the Plan in accordance with 36 CFR 219.10 (f). Any resulting documents will be tiered to the FEIS, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28 (1982).

III. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Eleven management alternatives were developed in response to the requirements of NEPA, NFMA, public input, and roadless resource analysis. The alternatives are presented in detail in Chapter II of the FEIS. They are:

ALTERNATIVE 1 - NO ACTION (CURRENT PROGRAM)

This alternative is designed to continue the current trend of goods and services produced by the Forest. The budget would be constrained to a level necessary to support this trend.

ALTERNATIVE 2 - MARKET EMPHASIS

This alternative would emphasize production of timber, livestock, minerals, developed recreation and special uses that have potential to produce income to the government. Outputs from these resources take precedence over outputs from such non-market resources as wilderness, wildlife, and dispersed recreation. Alternative 2 would produce the highest levels of outputs of all alternatives for timber and range in response to the highbound levels of the RPA. It also approximates the draft 1985 RPA Program for timber and range outputs, except that range produces 116 thousand animal months (MAUM's) in the first decade instead of the 130M AUMs called for under 1985 RPA.

ALTERNATIVE 3 - NON-MARKET EMPHASIS

This alternative would emphasize non-market resources such as wilderness, wildlife, fish, water, dispersed recreation (backpacking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing), and visual quality. It would give development of these non-market outputs priority over market values.

ALTERNATIVE 4 - RPA 1980 PROGRAM

The RPA (Resources Planning Act) Alternative directs management efforts and budgets toward supplying or developing the Forest's share of resource outputs called for by the Intermountain Regional Guide (January 1984).

ALTERNATIVE 5 - MARKET AND NON-MARKET MIX

This alternative would emphasize management of each of the 25 management areas based on the District Rangers and their staff's perspective of the issues, concerns, and opportunities. This includes the manager's perspective of resource potential and realistic levels of management activities capable of being applied to these areas.

ALTERNATIVE 6 - CONSTRAINED (~25%) BUDGET

This alternative would continue current program emphasis modified as necessary to cover fixed costs, and operation and maintenance costs at a reduced budget level. The constrained budget would be \$2.7 million (in 1982 base dollars).

ALTERNATIVE 7 - CURRENT PROGRAM, CONSTRAINED BUDGET

This alternative would have the same emphasis as the No-Action Alternative except where changes are required to meet fixed costs and operation and maintenance activities. It predicts the level of goods and services expected to be produced if current management direction remains unchanged, and if personnel and funding remain at present levels.

ALTERNATIVE 8 - MAXIMIZE WILDERNESS, AMENITY EMPHASIS

Under this alternative, all roadless areas would be managed for wilderness and roaded areas for their amenity values. It would involve managing 2,174,704 acres of the Forest (86 percent) as wilderness.

ALTERNATIVE 9 - HIGH WILDERNESS, COMMODITY EMPHASIS

This alternative would display a significant increase in proposed wilderness acreage while planning high commodity emphasis prescriptions on remaining Forest lands {Table II - 6(9)}. It would recommend 1,064,704 acres of roadless areas for wilderness management. Total wilderness, including existing, would equal 1,846,959 acres, or 73 percent of the Forest.

ALTERNATIVE 10 - CURRENT PROGRAM, UNCONSTRAINED BUDGET

This alternative was designed to continue current trends of goods and services except that timber and range management would be intensified. The budget would be unconstrained.

ALTERNATIVE 11 - 1980 MODIFIED (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)(THE PLAN)

This alternative is a modification of the Forest's share of the 1980 Resources Planning Act program direction. It includes recommendation of wilderness and a less intensive timber management program than proposed in the 1980 RPA program.

IV. RATIONALE FOR THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The approved Plan sets a course of action that, in the opinion of the Regional Forester, maximizes net public benefits and is consistent with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. No single factor determined the decision. Rather, all factors were considered and weighed. Based upon the consideration of all environmental, social and economic factors.

Criteria which formed the basis for decisions in the Plan are described in this section. These social, environmental, and economic criteria relate to many laws and regulations and respond directly to public involvement and to the issues, concerns, and opportunities identified for the Forest.

A. Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities, and Areas of Significant Public Interest:

Issues, concerns, and opportunities (ICO) identified during the planning process cover a full range of resources and management subjects. Points of view as to what constitutes ICO resolution also were equally diverse. Because of this, ICO's were formulated into questions which allowed each alternative to address each ICO, positively or negatively; with each alternative having specific benefits and costs. Analysis of each alternative was based on management goals of optimizing net public benefits while providing a continuous flow of goods and services, and maintaining or improving environmental conditions. The proposed action was identified as the management mix that best met these criteria.

Each of the alternatives addressed the ICO's in a slightly different way. The importance and validity of the ICO's guided the planning process. Chapter II of the FEIS is structured to respond to each of the ICO's by alternative (for a detailed description of the ICO's, see Appendix A of EIS).

Management of resources was addressed according to output priorities in each alternative and the resource base available for management consideration. Each alternative evaluated the roadless area resource for wilderness or non-wilderness areas.

A major reason for selecting an alternative is based on how well that alternative responds to public issues and management concerns. Since many issues and concerns conflict, it is not possible to address all

issues and concerns in a positive manner. Also, resolution of an issue or a concern is perceived differently by different people. The major issues of public concern are included in the discussion below. (For those readers interested in directly reviewing comments on these issues, see the FEIS, Chapter VI).

1. Integrated Resource Outputs

The Forest Service has been managing National Forest System lands under a multiple-use concept for many years. The Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960 gave increased emphasis to this concept. However, various segments of the public feel too much emphasis has been given to commodity outputs like timber production and livestock grazing, while others feel too much emphasis has been given to noncommodity outputs like recreation and wilderness. Some publics believe that cumulative effects of management action are not being considered or shown in environmental documents. Other publics feel that cultural and historic resources are not being given adequate protection, and the Forest Service should include areas containing such resources in wilderness.

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 re-emphasized that all National Forests will continue to be managed under a multiple use and sustained yield concept. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and subsequent regulations, require that an interdisciplinary team of professionals be involved in the decision making process along with the public. The public needs to be assured that this requirement will be met in identifying issues to be addressed, identifying potential impacts, resolving conflicts and identifying trade-offs and mitigation measures.

Much of the input received both before and after release of the DEIS and proposed Plan related to respondents perception of how the Forest should be managed or areas of special interest. Many comments conflicted. For example, some respondents supported large increases in designated wilderness while others opposed any increase.

2. Riparian Area Management

Riparian ecosystems including aquatic ecosystems, wetlands and flood plains are among the most productive, sensitive, diverse, and geographically limited portions of the Forest. Although they make up less than 3 percent of the land area, more resource conflicts occur in these areas than on any other areas on the Forest.

Past abuse of many of these areas from livestock grazing, mining, logging, and roading have caused gullies, lowered water tables, created unstable streambanks and have caused a change to subclimax vegetative cover. Through improved management, many are in better condition today, but continued improvement is desirable. Riparian areas are preferred grazing and camping areas. They also

contain many cultural and historic sites. Threatened and endangered species of plants and animals are often in these areas.

Past impacts have reduced water quality, fish habitat by increasing sediment, shading, and wildlife habitat.

The Plan provides for significant restoration and improvement in riparian areas. Such improvement will result from improved management, administration and monitoring of activities that affect riparian areas such as livestock grazing, recreation use and surface uses associated with mining activities.

3. Wildlife and Fisheries Management

Most of the public agrees that huntable and fishable populations of wildlife should be maintained or increased. Disagreements are about desired levels of those populations. Many people want improved wildlife and fish habitat and favor wildlife and fish over other uses like livestock grazing, timber harvest, ORV use and mining. There is considerable public emphasis on improvement and enhancement of anadromous fish habitat. Many people also want new timber and mining roads closed.

There is an increasing interest by the public for more recognition of nongame and small game habitat management. The need for recognizing, protecting and enhancing threatened and endangered species habitat is also becoming more important.

Various agencies, Indian Tribes and user groups have interests in or responsibilities for specific, often overlapping, aspects of habitat and animal management. Cooperation and coordination is essential to effectively meet the needs and responsibilities of these groups.

The Plan provides habitat to exceed Idaho Department of Fish and Game 5-year population projections for all species occurring on the Forest, including threatened and endangered species. The Plan provides levels of monitoring, coordination and habitat improvement that will appropriately emphasize wildlife resources on the Forest.

4. Firewood Management

Demand has increased 400 percent since 1981. People are concerned that good firewood is harder to obtain. Many people feel that better access should be provided specifically for firewood. Other factors in this issue include firewood regulations, firewood conflicts with other resource objectives, and the amount of information that should be provided.

Some areas with significant amounts of dead trees exist, but are inaccessible by road. There is a concern that the priority for easily accessed fuelwood areas should be for personnel, rather than commercial use. There are also many areas of small diameter

decadent conifer stands that are not feasible to harvest for lumber products but could provide a long term source of firewood.

The Plan provides for firewood to be sold in quantities that will meet local demand. Money received from firewood sales will help to off-set the costs of constructing firewood roads and administering the program.

5. Minerals Management

For more than 100 years, areas within the Challis National Forest have been important for mineral exploration, development and production. For many early operations, reclamation following mining activities was neither a requirement nor a concern. Interest exists for both mining and petroleum activities. The main areas of concern are:

- * Coordination with and mitigation of impacts on other resources.
- * Providing adequate land base and reasonable access for exploration and development.
- * Ensuring that operating plans contains appropriate reclamation measures and adequate bonds.
- * Monitoring to insure compliance.
- * Recognition of valid existing rights in wilderness.
- * Mitigation for protection of wilderness qualities of areas with high potential for wilderness designation.
- * Coordination with other agencies with mineral management responsibilities.

The Plan provides for mineral prospecting location and development while providing adequate protection for other resources. The three areas proposed for wilderness designation would reduce the land base available for mineral activities. The relatively low mineral potential of these areas was considered in preparing the proposal. The Plan directs the Forest to respond in a timely manner to industry and to provide administration and monitoring to ensure that other resources are not unnecessarily affected.

6. Motorized Vehicle Management

Management of off-road vehicles, on both roads and trails, has been a persistent and controversial issue on the Challis National Forest. Groups have organized on both sides of this issue. Of the 2.5 million acres on the Challis, 782,255 acres are closed to off-road vehicles because of wilderness designation. The Plan proposes an additional 201,000 acres for wilderness designation,

which are closed to off-road vehicles. A continuing demand for off-road motorized recreation exists on the Forest.

Concern has centered on wildlife disturbance, soil erosion, lowered water quality, availability of open trails, conflicts with non-motorized recreation and inadequate education about and enforcement of closures. Issue area 14 (Undeveloped Management) is closely related to this issue.

The wilderness proposal and areas identified for non-motorized recreation in the Plan should meet the need for those types of activities and experiences.

In addition to wilderness proposal, the Plan calls for areas in the Lemhi Range to be managed in a way that provides for a non-motorized recreation experience which should meet the need for those types of activities and experiences. At the same time, an appropriate balance is provided in other areas on the Forest available for off-road vehicle use if unacceptable resource impacts do not occur. Other alternatives are viewed by special interest groups as providing too many or too few areas for motorized vehicles.

The Plan provides for increased education, enforcement, and monitoring of vehicle use. The Forest will continue to utilize state funding for construction of trails for use by off-road vehicles. Volunteer efforts will be encouraged. It is recognized that resource conflicts may occur which will require that certain areas be closed to vehicle use. Those closures will be documented as revisions to the Forest Travel Plan. The present Forest Travel Plan will be revised as soon as the Forest Plan goes into effect. It will be reviewed annually and updated as needed.

7. Road, Trail and Facilities Management

Commenters noted that many roads and trails, open for public travel, are deteriorating and need to be maintained at a level that provides safe passage for expected use. Comments supported both providing additional road access and not constructing additional roads. A few comments expressed concern that recreation facilities were not receiving adequate maintenance. Some pointed out the value of occupied guard stations for protection and public safety.

The Plan provides the highest level of trail construction/reconstruction of all alternatives considered. Arterial and collector road reconstruction would occur more slowly than under all but two alternatives. No new arterial or collector roads will be constructed. Local roads will be constructed at the minimum level to meet specific needs. When these roads are no longer needed, they will be closed and reclaimed. This road program adequately meets other resource needs of the Plan.

Facilities will be maintained and reconstructed as necessary to meet the needs of the Forest as identified in the Plan. Little Creek, Simplot, and Falconberry guard stations within the Frank Church--River Of No Return Wilderness are no longer needed and will be closed. If other facilities become unsafe or unneeded, they will also be closed.

8. Soil Productivity, Water Quality

Several comments addressed water quality, especially as it relates to anadromous fish production. The greatest threats to water quality were perceived as being livestock grazing, mining activities and sediment from roads. Instream flow was identified as important to maintain fish populations and habitat. Livestock grazing and timber harvest were infrequently mentioned as reducing soil productivity.

Under all alternatives water quality on the Forest would meet or exceed Best Management Practices for the state's non-point water quality standards. Through improved administration and monitoring of grazing, mining and other activities with potential to produce sediment, water quality should improve further. The Plan provides a higher level of watershed improvement projects than any other alternative and the highest level of maintained soil productivity. Under the Plan, the program of identifying and protecting instream flow needs will continue.

9. Timber Management

There is a growing controversy over timber harvest on the Forest, especially in roadless areas. Environmental coalitions and others feel that timber stands on the Forest are of low quality, uneconomical to harvest and cannot be regenerated. The timber industry maintains that timber stands are of commercial quality and should be included in the long-term timber base, thereby helping to maintain a regional timber industry.

A common misinterpretation of the DEIS and proposed Plan was that timber harvest would increase three times over past harvest levels and that large volumes of uneconomic timber would be harvested. Concern was also expressed that extensive road systems would be constructed and remain open to impact other resources such as wildlife, recreation and water quality.

Tree growth on the Forest is marginal due to low site productivity, lower precipitation and short growing seasons. Predominant tree species are Douglas Fir and Logdepole Pine. There are 792,571 acres of Forest land, of which 340,608 acres are tentatively suited for timber production and characterized as follows:

<u>Species</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Douglas Fir	188,421	55
Lodgepole Pine	122,966	36
All Other Species	<u>29,221</u>	<u>9</u>
	340,608	100

Of the tentatively suited acres, 60 percent, or 204,370, acres occur on mountain slopes greater than 45 percent. These are mostly scattered, non-contiguous Douglas Fir stands. Road access is not feasible in most situations due to combinations of erosive soils, high construction costs and marginal quality of timber.

The 136,238 acres of tentatively suited on slopes less than 45 percent slope has greater opportunity for timber management. These areas are more economically and environmentally viable for conventional timber harvesting methods and road construction because of gentler slopes.

The Forest Plan has 96,915 acres of timber land suited for timber production. The allowable sale quantity (ASQ) is 3 MMBF/year. This volume was projected to meet the short-term timber demand of local mills during the 10 to 15 year duration of the Forest Plan. At the time this was analyzed for the Draft EIS (1984), the benefits of this vegetative manipulation or timber harvesting outweighed the costs (or cost efficient). Since that time, cost-benefit relationships have shifted. Individual timber sales may not be cost efficient. Each timber sale will be evaluated on an individual basis before being offered, to assure that the maximum net public benefits are being achieved.

During preparation of the final EIS and Forest Plan, two situations developed that may influence timber supply/demand relationships for the Challis NF in the first 10-year planning period. They are the import tax on Canadian lumber entering the U.S. and release of "A Report on Idaho's Timber Supply," February 1987.

Any increase in national timber demand caused by the imposition of the import tax on Canadian lumber entering the U.S., when localized to the marketing zone influenced by timber supplies off the Challis NF is considered to be negligible.

Review of the "Report on Idaho's Timber Supply," referenced above, indicates that future timber supplies from private lands statewide may be less than in the past. The Challis NF is within the Southeast Marketing Zone identified in the report. Within this zone, timber supplies from private, state or other federal land are virtually non-existent. Therefore, overall timber supply in this area will continue to come off of National Forest System lands. It is estimated that local mill timber supply expectations can be met without increasing the ASQ of 3 MMBF/year in the first decade.

Based on the analysis, the 3 MMBF ASQ is projected to be sufficient during this decade. This is 1.3 MMBF higher than recent purchases or harvest levels by local dependent mills in Challis, MacKay, and Stanley which utilize primarily Douglas Fir sawlogs. During the second decade, the ASQ raises to 4 MMBF/year under the Plan. This applies only to the first 5 years of the second decade (1997-2002), since the Plan must be revised after that time.

The reason for this ASQ level is to provide a continuing supply of timber volume to support local dependent mills. Other multiple use benefits to be achieved by cutting timber are to change age class distributions from old growth to young growth in order to provide future timber supplies and create small increases in forage and hiding cover for key wildlife species on the Forest.

As a result of the "Report on Idaho's Timber Supply," which projected a shortfall in timber from private lands, the Forest identified an opportunity for an additional 2 MMBF/year on acres that are now classified as suited for timber production. Preliminary analysis shows that if conditions were to warrant the offering of this volume, it could be provided without sacrificing goals and objectives for "other resource" programs. Any increase in the ASQ would, however, be preceded by an environmental analysis following NEPA procedures. If the result of the analysis showed that increasing the ASQ provided positive net public benefits, then the Forest Plan could be amended accordingly.

10. Fire Management

Some public comments expressed concern about high costs of fire suppression and potential for resource damage by heavy equipment. Many favored less restrictive fire policies for wilderness and areas that contain uneconomical timber stands.

Under the Plan and all alternatives except 6 and 8, fire management prescriptions would be prepared. The amount of vegetation burned by wildfire is a function of many factors including amount of fuel available, weather, other activities occurring on the Forest and fire suppression resources available. For each fire, an analysis is conducted to determine if the management strategy is appropriate in achieving Forest Plan objectives.

In addition to other factors, considered is potential damage that may result from a fire and resources affected.

11. Range Management

There are conflicts between livestock and other resources and uses. Most local residents favor providing levels of livestock use to maintain local ranching economy. Others feel that livestock grazing should be reduced to favor wildlife, fisheries and recreation. One of the most intense current issues is livestock impacts on riparian vegetation and effects on fisheries, wildlife,

soil and water, and recreation. Some comments stated that livestock grazing was subsidized and resulted in unacceptable damage to other resources.

Ranchers are concerned about how inclusion of allotments in recommended wilderness will affect continued use. There is also a concern that continued livestock use in recommended wilderness could degrade wilderness values. Construction of permanent range improvements can be permitted if it is to protect or enhance wilderness values. Reductions in permitted grazing levels within wilderness or proposed wilderness will not occur unless wilderness values are threatened and other means are not available to resolve conflicts.

The decision would continue grazing permits at the current level of 115 thousand animal unit months (MAUM). This level will help maintain diversity in the local economy provided by ranching. The Plan provides for updating of grazing allotment plans to increase permittee involvement in developing and maintaining range improvements, and to reduce effects on other resource activities. Administration will be improved and monitoring of grazing activities increased over current levels, especially in riparian areas to identify and reduce conflicts with other resources.

The Morgan Creek Burro and Alder Creek Wild Horse territory was analyzed in conjunction with BLM management framework planning. Both agencies determined that the territories did not provide necessary requirements for maintenance of viable populations, therefore, both territories were eliminated.

12. Recreation Management

Many people mentioned the unique scenery, rich history and unspoiled environment of the Challis National Forest as important attractions for recreation users. Several also pointed out the importance of the varied recreational opportunities to the local economy. Concern about commitment of the Forest to maintain recreation facilities and administer recreation uses, especially those using motorized vehicles, was commonly mentioned. A few people identified the Custer Historic Site and the Yankee Fork Dredge as developed recreation opportunities that need special interpretation and management. Many people identified need for additional trails and increased trail maintenance.

The need for a variety of recreation opportunities is recognized. Primary emphasis is on dispersed recreation, including trail maintenance and resolving conflicts with other activities, particularly in riparian areas. Wilderness recreation management will be directed toward protecting wilderness values and experiences, and also maintaining the trail system. Developed recreation management will be directed toward protecting and maintaining investments in existing campgrounds during the planning period. The Custer Historic Site and the Yankee Fork

Dredge will be managed to interpret and protect their unique history.

13. Wilderness Additions

Wilderness designation generated the largest number of comments both prior to and following release of the DEIS and proposed Plan. Comments ranged from support for designation of all unroaded areas as wilderness to opposition to any additions. Comments in support of designating additional wilderness cited protection of certain resources from effects of development, keeping areas the way they are now, protecting unique areas, protecting areas for future generations and maintaining wilderness values of unroaded areas. Comments opposing designation of additional wilderness cited the lock up of potentially valuable resources, prohibition of certain recreational activities, the relatively small number of people who use such areas, and the large amount of area already designated wilderness in Idaho.

Borah Peak and Pioneer Mountains have been recommended for wilderness designation since RARE II. White Clouds/Boulder have been in a further study status since passage of the Sawtooth NRA legislation.

The DEIS proposed portions of the Borah Peak, Boulder/White Clouds, and Pioneer Mountains roadless areas for wilderness designation. These areas have high wilderness values, are relatively low in commodity resource production potential, and have strong public support.

- * As a result of public comment, the Borah Peak boundary was modified to provide a more manageable boundary. This added 3,000 acres making a total of 119,000.
- * The Challis portion of the proposed Boulder/White Clouds Wilderness was increased 28,000 acres to a total of 34,000 acres to include some areas with high wilderness values without other resource conflicts.
- * Challis National Forest portion of the proposed Pioneer Wilderness was increased 10,000 acres to a total of 48,000 acres.

Until Congress acts on these proposals, the areas involved will be managed to protect their wilderness values.

This document records the recommendation to propose a total of approximately 110,000 acres on both the Challis National Forest and the Sawtooth National Forests within the Pioneer Mountains for wilderness designation. The Record of Decision for the Sawtooth National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan will document the recommendation for wilderness in the Boulder/White Clouds area.

14. Undeveloped Area Management

This issue is closely related to the previous issue of wilderness additions. Many comments suggested that some areas should be managed to preserve their natural character. This management was suggested as a less limiting alternative to wilderness or as a second choice if an area was not designated as wilderness. Several comments opposed this type of management because it prevents timber harvest or restricts motorized recreation uses.

Less than 5 percent of the currently roadless undeveloped area would be impacted during the 10-15 year planning period. A special roadless management classification is inappropriate in any case because no development is planned in most previously identified "roadless areas." After reviewing public comment on the DEIS, it is apparent that most respondents would prefer no development for portions of the North and South Lemhi Range. Part of these will be managed for non-motorized recreation, but they remain open to mineral leasing, claim location, exploration, potential mineral development and purchase. Most of the Forest outside of these areas, designated wilderness and areas proposed for wilderness designation will remain open to motorized vehicles. This will be evaluated annually and the travel map amended as needed.

B. Factors used in Evaluating the Selected Alternative (SA)

Based upon issues, planning criteria, and constraints, the following factors were considered relevant to the decision concerning the selected alternative:

1. Ability to favorably address public issues and management concerns.
2. Compatibility with other public agency goals.
3. Ability to maintain or promote social and economic stability.
4. Ability to maintain or improve environmental quality.
5. Ability to achieve goals for Forest management in an economically efficient manner.

An evaluation of these criteria is contained in the following sections: C, D, E, and F.

C. Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Alternative 11 is the environmentally preferable alternative based on comparison of alternatives on pages II-92 through II-136 of the FEIS. The determination is based on the following: relatively low amounts of earth disturbing activities, rehabilitating

disturbed areas, improving ecological trends, fairly high amounts of Forest remaining undeveloped, and increased administration and mitigation of resource utilization activities.

Potential adverse impacts to physical and biological components of the environment normally will be mitigated by Management Direction in Chapter JV of the Forest Plan. Impacts that cannot be avoided are disclosed on page IV-59 of the final EIS.

D. Alternatives with Higher Present Net Values (PNV)

Present net value (PNV) is used to compare economic efficiency of alternatives. PNV is the difference between total discounted benefits and total discounted costs of all priced outputs over the analysis period. The PNV rankings are higher in alternatives 8, 6, 5, 7, and 1; however, total differences between these alternatives are relatively small. The goal of the alternative selection process was to maximize net public benefit. Net public benefit (NPB) is the overall value to the Nation of all outputs and positive effects (benefits), minus all inputs and negative effects (costs) of producing those primary benefits. Some benefits and costs can be quantitatively valued and some cannot. NPB is the sum of PNV plus the full value of nonpriced outputs, such as catchable fish, jobs gained and payments to counties, minus nonpriced costs or disadvantages, such as increased stream sedimentation, decreased visual quality, and jobs lost.

Overall, Alternative 11 provides the best response to public issues, management concerns, and management opportunities related to the Challis National Forest. It has the highest net public benefit because it provides for present levels of resource utilization and social and economic stability, while ensuring a continuation of nonmarket amenities.

While Alternatives 8, 6, 5, 7 and 1 have higher PNV ratings than the Proposed Action, their budgets are generally lower for such items as facilities, lands, protection, soil and water. Since expenditures in these areas return no priced benefits, the high PNV Alternatives reduced their funding to the minimum management requirements level. Alternative 11 increased the budget levels for these items, resulting in lower PNV when compared to these other alternatives. Increased expenditures above current funding under Alternative 11 would improve quality of fish and wildlife habitat.

Of the alternatives with PNV higher than Alternative 11 (the Plan), only Alternative 5 has a higher Forest budget. The higher PNV results primarily from larger projected timber harvest in some areas and very low intensity of management in most other areas.

variability, in payments to counties is mostly the result of differences in timber revenues produced by the alternatives.

Income - The Plan ranks fifth among alternatives in income. Alternatives 2, 4, 5 and 9 derive their higher rankings primarily from larger volumes of timber offered.

Minority Groups and Civil Rights - Effects will result from internal Forest Service programs in which members of minority groups and women are hired directly by the agency, and from other opportunities in which members of minority groups and women work on Forest Service projects through contracts and permits. Currently, approximately 10 percent of the dollar value of all contracts is set aside to develop minority and women contractors. Key indicators of effects of each alternative on minorities and women include total budget expenditures and expenditures on capital investment projects. Both directly influence total Forest Service employment and values of contracts awarded.

V. MITIGATION AND MONITORING

Management constraints were imposed on the alternatives to ensure long-term productivity of the land and compliance with threshold soil and water requirements. These requirements are standards and guidelines which apply to all management prescriptions within each alternative. The standards and guidelines act as mitigation measures to ensure that sustained yields of renewable resources are maintained.

In the case of the mineral resource, once the resource has been extracted, it is gone except where secondary recovery becomes feasible. Conservation of these resources might be defined as the planned rate of removal. Mitigating measures involved in location, development, and removal of such nonrenewable resources are expressed as occupancy stipulations in mining plans, project level environmental documents, and in Management Area direction in the Plan.

Maintaining visual quality objectives, viable populations of wildlife management indicator species, cover/forage ratios, nondeclining even-flow of timber resources, and state water quality standards are all examples of standards and guidelines which act as mitigation measures prescribed in Chapter IV of the Plan.

Each resource has a minimum management requirement (MMR's) level which acts as the base upon which alternative management programs were developed. Commitments below the MMR's were not considered as viable options.

Standards and guidelines and mitigating measures will be enforced in all project level activities. Mitigation measures are discussed in Chapter IV of the Plan for renewable resources. As long-term effects of planned management prescriptions on the various management areas are assessed and new research results and technology become available, some adjustments may be made to update prescribed standards and guidelines.

An aggressive implementation, monitoring, and evaluation program has been outlined in Chapter V of the Plan. The purpose of the program is to facilitate implementation of the Plan in an orderly manner while maintaining environmental safeguards.

Monitoring will help determine if prescriptions are being properly applied to management areas, provide for an evaluation of the appropriateness of the Plan's management direction, and track condition trends of Forest resources. Evaluation data will be used to update resource inventories, fine-tune mitigation measures, and determine the need for amending or revising the Plan. The monitoring plan outlines data sources and monitoring techniques by resource element, establishes frequency of measurements, and details conditions which would initiate further evaluations.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

The Plan will be implemented 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Plan, EIS, and Record of Decision appears in the Federal Register. Time needed to bring activities into compliance with the Plan will vary depending on types of projects.

The Forest Supervisor will ensure that (1) annual program proposals and projects are consistent with the Plan; (2) program budget proposals and objectives are consistent with management direction specified in the Plan; and (3) implementation is in compliance with the Regional Guide and goals and objectives in 36 CFR 219.10 (e), 36 CFR 219.11 (d), and 36 CFR 219.27.

Implementation is guided by management requirements contained in Forest Goals and Objectives, Direction, Standards and Guides, and Management Area Prescriptions found in Chapter IV of the Plan. These management requirements were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to mitigate or eliminate significant long-term adverse effects. Any unavoidable adverse environmental effects, such as disruptive effects of vegetation manipulation on recreation or livestock grazing, will be temporary and will involve only a small percentage of the Forest at any one time. As can best be determined, practical mitigation measures have been adopted and are included in Chapter IV of the Plan.

Proposals to use National Forest System lands will be reviewed for consistency with the Plan. Management Direction contained in Chapter IV of the Plan will be used to analyze any proposal. Existing permits, contracts, and other instruments for occupancy and use of Forest lands will be consistent with Management Direction in Chapter IV. This is required by 16 USC 1604(i) and 36 CFR 219.10(e).

VII. APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to:

J. S. Tixier, Regional Forester
Intermountain Region
USDA, Forest Service
324 25th Street
Ogden, Utah 84401


The notice of appeal, a statement of reasons to support the appeal, and any request for oral presentation must be filed within 45 days after the date of this decision. The appeal period cannot expire prior to 30 days after publication by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Notice of Availability of the Final EIS in the Federal Register.

An appeal of this decision does not halt Forest Plan implementation. A stay of the decision must be requested. A stay may be requested at any time during the appeal period or until a decision on the appeal is made by the Chief, USDA Forest Service.

No final decisions on site-specific projects are made in this document, although a number of projects are identified. Those projects identified in various parts of the Plan or Final EIS are included to indicate approximate scheduling, location, and prescribed practice.

Final decisions on site-specific projects will be made during Forest Plan implementation. Anyone dissatisfied with a specific project should appeal the site-specific decision once it is made.

Proposed wilderness designations contained in the Forest Plan are non-binding recommendations and not a decision within the context of 36 CFR 211.18, and therefore not subject to appeal.



J. S. TIXIER
Regional Forester

JUN 3 1987

Date

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