

Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Distinctive Roles and Contributions

Overview

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests (Forests) include over 4 million acres of ruggedly beautiful, productive lands in North Central Idaho. The unique qualities of the Forests and their ability to provide ecosystem services characterize the roles and contributions of the area. These roles and contributions provide the basis for management direction and the foundation for realistic and achievable desired conditions.

In addition to the role of providing common National Forest ecosystem services such as clean air, clean water, nutrient cycling, and carbon sequestration, the Forests play a distinctive role in the local area, the region, and the nation by uniquely contributing the following:

- **Outstanding Outdoor Recreation**

The diverse landscapes and stunning scenery of the Forests provide extraordinary settings for recreational activities such as whitewater rafting, floating, and fishing on the world-renown Selway, Salmon, Clearwater, Snake, and Lochsa Rivers (164 miles of which are designated Wild and Scenic). The Forests serve a unique national role providing vast wildland areas including the Selway-Bitterroot, Gospel-Hump, Frank Church-River of No Return, and Hell's Canyon Wilderness areas for those seeking solitude, as well as many areas for hunting, backpacking, equestrian, and other motorized or nonmotorized recreation experiences.

Travel routes and corridors such as the Northwest Passage Scenic Byway, (U.S. Highway 12), the Lolo Trail corridor (a National Historic Landmark), the Magruder Corridor, and the Elk City Wagon Road trace the paths of the Nez Perce Tribe, Lewis and Clark, and early traders providing recreation access and unique historical and cultural recreation experiences. Historic cabins and lookouts dot the landscape, and continue to serve as overnight destinations for today's visitors. Motor vehicle access connecting communities to the forests from river valley to the remote alpine elevations is a unique aspect of the Forests highly valued by residents and visitors.

- **Social and Economic Sustainability**

As the largest land jurisdiction in three counties, the Forests serve as the backdrop for residents and play a key role in supporting the social and economic sustainability of the local communities, the state of Idaho, and the broader region. The productive forest lands continue to support traditional lifestyles, provide commodities such as timber, grazing, and minerals for regional industry, and support a robust outfitter and guide recreation economy. The sport fisheries for spring and fall Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, smallmouth bass, and kokanee are additional important components supporting the area's economic vitality.

- **Cultural and Heritage Values**

For millennia, the Forests have been uniquely situated at the crossroads of three American Indian cultural areas, each possessing their own language, customs, and traditions. The resulting signature of this multicultural interaction provides a rich oral tradition and an archaeological and historical record not commonly found elsewhere on National Forest System land.

The Forests are the traditional homeland of the Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene American Indian Tribes who continue to rely on forest resources for subsistence and cultural purposes. Two unique trails, the Southern Nez Perce Trail, which winds across the mountains from the Nez Perce

Tribe's homeland on the Camas Prairie to their buffalo-hunting grounds in Montana, and the Nez Perce (Ne-Mee-Poo) National Historic Trail, which follows and commemorates the 1877 flight from their homelands while pursued by the U.S. Army, provide important cultural and historical experiences distinct in the Nation. In addition, these rugged mountain top routes were important to the eastern Salish tribes who travelled west to trade and strengthen kinship ties.

The Salmon River runs through this cultural crossroads and provides a unique window into history. The river's course is exceptional as the longest undammed river system in the contiguous United States. Through the centuries, the river has been home to countless American Indians, Euro-American homesteaders, and miners, as well as Chinese sojourners. While hundreds of thousands of important archaeological and historic sites lie elsewhere in the United States beneath the backwaters of impounded stream systems, the Salmon River flows free. The river's rich history and the accessibility to this remarkable dataset provide a truly distinctive quality of the Forests.

- **Fish, Wildlife, and Plant Habitat**

The Forests possess a tremendous range and unusual diversity of habitats, from boreal and coastal elements in the north to extensive grasslands and pine forests in the south. The maritime influence of the Pacific Ocean also contributes to a unique coastal disjunct ecosystem with associated species uncommon to the Northern Rockies, such as the Coeur d'Alene and Idaho giant salamanders, deerfern, and Pacific dogwood. The local climatic transition caused by extreme terrain differences result in high floral diversity including endemic species like the evergreen kittentail, *Dasynotus*, Idaho barren strawberry, spacious monkeyflower, and the federally listed Spalding's catchfly.

The three major river systems (Salmon, Clearwater, and Snake) and their accompanying tributaries provide important aquatic and riparian habitat for many species including bull trout, steelhead trout, westslope cutthroat trout, Chinook salmon, and sockeye salmon. The Forests' substantial spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead trout and Chinook salmon provides a large portion of the total returns of adult anadromous salmonids in the Snake and Columbia River basins.

In addition, the diverse vegetative communities on the Forests provide terrestrial habitats that host several regionally unique or endemic native wildlife populations. This includes native lineages of Northern Rocky Mountain fisher and bighorn sheep, as well as mountain quail, several endemic species of mollusks, and Harlequin duck. Federally listed wildlife species that may find habitat on the Forests include Canada lynx and the wolverine (proposed for listing). In addition, the Forests provide important habitat for economically valued big game species such as elk, deer, black bear, and others.

- **Volcanic Ash Soils**

The Forests are located directly in the path of ash dispersal from three major Pacific Rim volcanic eruptions: Glacier Peak, Mount Mazama, and Mount Saint Helens, depositing an ash cap as deep as 36 inches in some depressions. The resulting soil fertility and stability supports the Forests' highly productive ecosystems.