



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Tom Montoya
Forest Supervisor
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
P.O. Box 907
Baker City, OR 97814

Subject: Initiation of Formal Consultation on the Proposed Revised Blue Mountains Forest Plans (30-day sufficiency letter) (*FWS reference* 01EOFW00-2018-F-0108)

Dear Mr. ^{Tom}Montoya:

The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received an initial request, on August 30, 2017, for formal consultation for the revision of the Forest Plans for the Blue Mountains National Forests (Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests) and effects to bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and its critical habitat, Spalding's Catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), MacFarlane's Four O'Clock (*Mirabilis macfarlanei*), and Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). The Forest Service also requested to conference on the proposed Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), and candidate Whitebark Pine (*Pinus albicaulis*). Finally, the Forest Service requested formal consultation on effects to bull trout and its critical habitat for implementation of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Comprehensive Management Plan. A final biological assessment was provided with this request. The Forest Service considered the Revised Forest Plans to be a "framework programmatic" action, because Forest Plans are federal actions that approve a framework for the development of future actions(s) that are authorized, funded, or carried out at a later time, and any take of a listed species would not occur unless and until those future action(s) are authorized, funded, or carried out and subject to further ESA section 7 consultation.

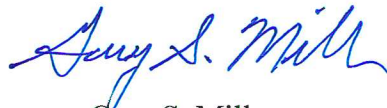
Prior to the Service being able to provide a 30-day sufficiency letter, we were notified by the Forest Service that the Cooperating Counties had concerns regarding the revised Plan's grazing guideline, GM-3G. Due to these concerns, and based on the outcomes of two additional meetings with the Counties, Congressional members/staff, Forest Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Service, the Forest Service subsequently modified GM-3G from what was originally provided in the August 30, 2017, biological assessment. An addendum to the final biological assessment was provided on November 13, 2017, with a request to complete our review of the assessment (including addendum) and finalize formal programmatic consultation

on the Blue Mountain Plan revision. It was also noted that while the Forest Service provided updated information on the GM-3G guideline, and asked for consultation on this less protective guideline than was originally provided in the August biological assessment, the Forest Service ultimately will make a decision on the final GM-3G language in the final Record of Decision, which may include implementing the more protective original GM-3G in future project actions.

The Service believes that the information provided by the Forest Service, as of the November 13, 2017 addendum, represents sufficient information to initiate formal consultation on that date. Based on the 135-day timeline to complete interagency consultation and prepare the Service's biological opinion, we will be working to issue the final biological opinion by March 28, 2018, unless we mutually agree to an extension.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact Marisa Meyer at 541-962-8597 or Suzanne Anderson at 541-962-8583.

Sincerely,



Gary S. Miller
Field Supervisor

cc:

Steve Beverlin, Malheur National Forest, John Day, Oregon
Genevieve Masters, Umatilla National Forest, Pendleton, Oregon
Kathy Ramsay, Umatilla National Forest, Pendleton, Oregon
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