



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Northern Region, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

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January 2025

# Executive Summary

## Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land Management Plan

### Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests



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**Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Title Page: Photo Credit** – Top left, going clockwise – Fenn Ranger Station, Nez Perce National Forest; A group of blooming beargrass with Kid Lake in the background, Clearwater National Forest; Leo Lake Area, Nez Perce Clearwater National Forest; Indian Hill Lookout, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest; Orogrande Falls, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest.

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The final environmental impact statement for the Nez Perce-Clearwater revised land management plan contains the following appendices:

- Appendix A: Maps
- Appendix B - Vegetation and Timber
- Appendix C - Wildlife Species and Habitat Summary
- Appendix D - Forest Carbon Assessment
- Appendix E - Recommended Wilderness Process
- Appendix F - Wild and Scenic Rivers Suitability Report
- Appendix G - Climate Change Adaption Strategies
- Appendix H -Comparison of Direction By Alternative
- Appendix I - Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark Administrative Context and Management Recommendations
- Appendix J - Scenery Management System Mapping Process
- Appendix K - Water and Fisheries
- Appendix L - Air Quality
- Appendix M -Response to Comments

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## Purpose and Need for Change

The National Forest Management Act requires all national forests to develop plans that direct resource management activities. These plans must be revised when conditions have changed significantly or around a ten- to fifteen-year cycle.

The existing plans for the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests were completed in 1987 and have been amended many times. The two Forests were administratively combined in 2013, and the Idaho Roadless Rule made management decisions that affected approximately 1.5 million acres of the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Revised Forest Service policies, congressional direction, court decisions, new or updated conservation agreements and recovery plans, and new scientific findings have all highlighted that the current plans are outdated and need to be revised.

To respond to these challenges the Nez Perce-Clearwater is currently in the process of revising the forest plans. The new, combined forest plan will incorporate changes in the natural environment, new scientific understandings, and social trends, and will satisfy regulatory requirements.

The purpose is to revise the 1987 land management plans for the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests into a single revised land management plan under the 2012 Planning Rule based on the Need for Change identified in the proposed action, including:

- Administrative Consolidation and Age of Current Plans
- Integrated Restoration
- Ecological, Social, and Economic Sustainability
- Updates Related to Other Law, Regulation, or Policy
- State and Local Land Management Plans
- Best Available Scientific Information

This environmental impact statement documents a programmatic National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. It discloses the broad environmental impacts and benefits of the proposed alternatives in contrast to analyses conducted for site-specific projects. This document describes, in general terms, the expected effects of management during the plan period but does not predict the site-specific effects of future speculative actions each time the standards and guidelines are implemented at the project level. Those site-specific effects would be disclosed in subsequent NEPA reviews during the implementation of individual projects.

## Best Available Scientific Information

Inventory information about forest land and water resources is more comprehensive than what was available in 1987 as a result of continued updates and new data management tools. The Forest Service now has geographic information system (GIS) technology, which greatly enhances assessment, analysis, and monitoring. Research and monitoring have increased our knowledge of the physical, biological, and social processes occurring on the Nez Perce-Clearwater during the last quarter of a century. Using science in planning provides the responsible official with the knowledge, methods, and resource expertise needed to make an informed decision. To ensure that the revised plan helps contribute to sustainable stewardship of the nation's forests, the Nez Perce-Clearwater has used the best available scientific information to

inform the 2014 Assessment, the development of the proposed plan components, and to support the analysis in the environmental impact statement.

Specialists used a number of sources of information that included peer-reviewed and technical literature; databases and data management systems; modeling tools and approaches; information obtained via participation and attendance at scientific conferences; local information, workshops, and collaborations; and information received during public participation periods for related planning activities, and expert opinion. Resource specialists considered what is most accurate, reliable, and relevant in their use of the best available scientific information. The citation list following each section of Chapter 3 serves as the Nez Perce-Clearwater's initial list of best available scientific information. A final determination of best available scientific information has been made with the Record of Decision.

## The Planning Area

The Nez Perce-Clearwater is located in the heart of north-central Idaho, in a seven-county region comprising Idaho, Clearwater, Latah, Shoshone, Benewah, Lewis, and Nez Perce counties. The plan area encompasses six ranger districts: Palouse, North Fork, Lochsa-Powell, Moose Creek, Salmon River, and Red River. The Nez Perce-Clearwater is responsible for managing approximately four million acres across this landscape. The Clearwater River drains most of these acres within both forests and rugged mountain ranges, pristine rivers and streams, and extensive forested landscapes combine to create diverse ecosystems that provide spectacular recreational opportunities; substantial fish and wildlife habitat; and forest, minerals, and range products.

The Nez Perce-Clearwater is home to 11 listed, candidate or proposed species under the Endangered Species Act including anadromous salmon and steelhead that migrate to the Pacific Ocean and back during their lifecycle. The Forests provide clean water and clean air, timber products, and recreation opportunities for area residents and visitors. Hunting and fishing opportunities abound on the Nez Perce-Clearwater supported by an emphasis on healthy fish and game populations and a variety of access opportunities from passenger vehicle access to multi-day hiking or horseback opportunities.

The landscape of the Nez Perce-Clearwater is characterized by deep, rugged river canyons surrounded by either rolling hills or steep, jagged mountains. Mixed conifer forests interspersed with small but distinctive open meadows, grasslands, and pockets of deciduous trees and shrubs comprise most of the vegetative cover. Rivers, lakes, and streams are often framed by lush riparian vegetation. Western redcedar, western larch, western hemlock, Douglas-fir, grand fir, lodgepole pine, and ponderosa pine are the dominant conifer species, which drape the canyon walls and stretch to the uplands. Historically, western white pine and whitebark pine were found throughout the area. Disturbance in the form of wildland fire, landslides, and insect and disease are continually cycling through the landscape. These natural processes create a patchwork of openings with vegetation at all age classes found across the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

The ancestral homeland of the Nez Perce Tribe, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests play an integral part in the past, present, and future culture of the Nez Perce people. The Nez Perce ceded this territory to the U.S. Government in the Treaty of 1855. The Treaty of 1855 is supreme law. Under the Treaty of 1855 and the Treaty of 1863, the U.S. Government is obligated to protect treaty reserved resources and meet trust responsibilities. Trust responsibilities arise from the United States' unique legal relationship with Native American Tribes. It derives from the Federal Government's consistent promise in the treaties that it signed to protect the safety and well-being of the Native American Tribes and Tribal members. Federal Indian Trust responsibility is now defined as a legally enforceable fiduciary obligation,

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on the part of the United States, to protect Tribal lands, assets, resources, and reserved rights, as well as a duty to carry out the mandates of federal law with respect to American Indians and Alaska Native Tribes.

The rich heritage of the area is still visible. American Indian use of the area dates back for millennia and the Nez Perce-Clearwater has been the home of the Nez Perce Tribe for centuries. Early travelers used routes through the Bitterroot Mountains to explore the far reaches of the country. These events have been remembered through the designation of the Lolo Trail Historic Landmark corridor and other historic routes that bisect the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Historic mining towns, log cabins, Forest Service facilities, wagon roads, and fire lookouts dot the landscape, adding to the unique scenic character of the area.



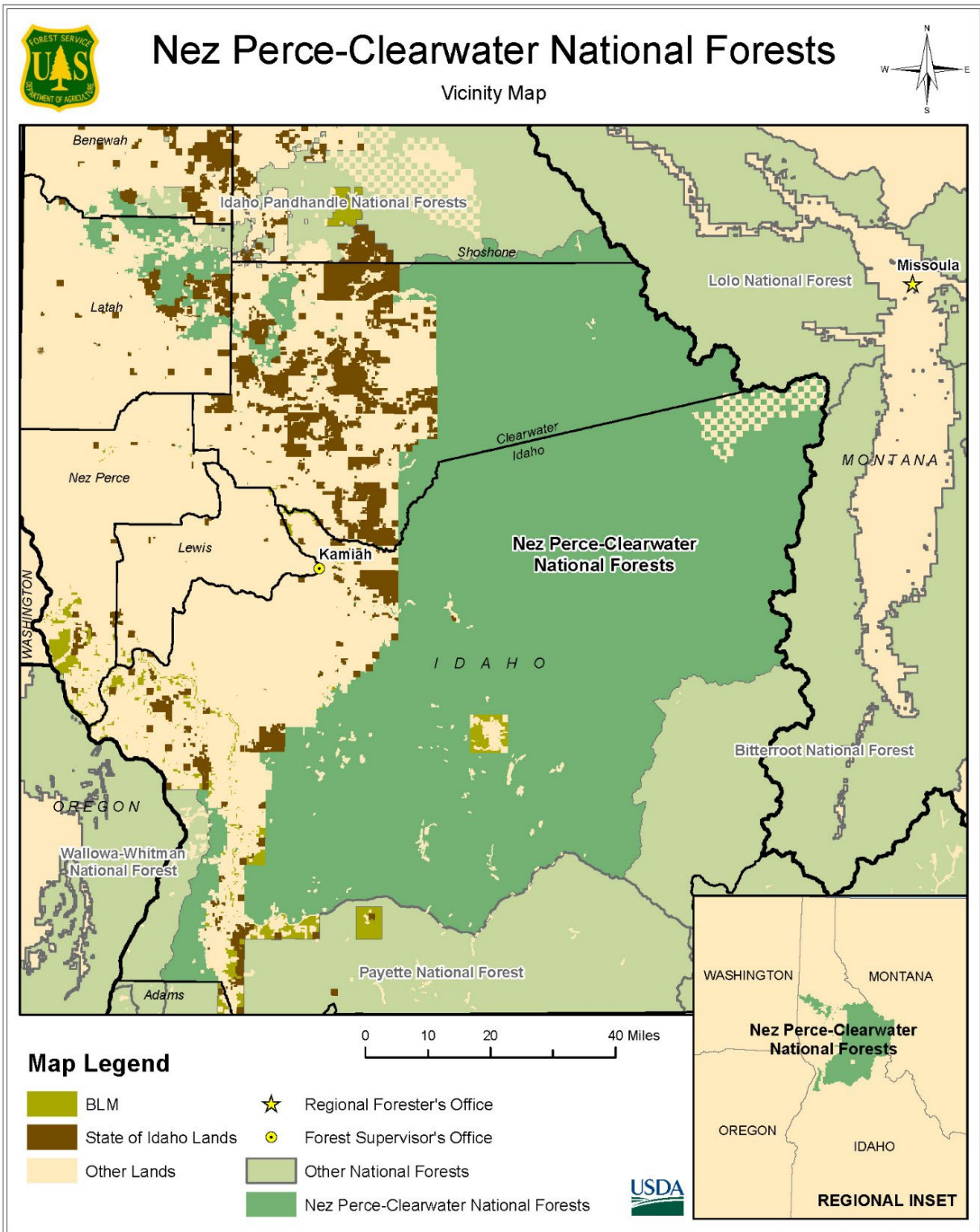


Figure 1. Vicinity Map of Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

## **Management Areas and Geographic Areas**

Management areas and geographic areas are spatially identified areas within the Nez Perce-Clearwater. These areas are assigned sets of plan components, such as desired conditions, suitable uses, and, in some areas, either standards or guidelines, or both. The entire forest is broken into Management Areas in the Revised Forest Plan. Geographic areas, however, are reserved for locations that are important geographically and cross management areas yet are proposed to be managed under a common theme.

### **Management Area 1: Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Historic Landmark Areas**

Management Area 1 is comprised of protected areas with national designations. This management area consists of three sub-categories, each with their own specific management direction. The sub-categories include designated wilderness, designated wild and scenic rivers, and National Historic Landmarks. Components specific to Management Area 1 are coded as “MA1.”

### **Management Area 2: Backcountry**

Management Area 2 includes lands within Idaho Roadless Areas, recommended wilderness areas, suitable wild and scenic rivers, parts of the Gospel-Hump Geographic Area, and proposed and designated research natural areas. This management area is made up of relatively large areas, generally without roads, and provides a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. Trails are the primary improvements constructed and maintained for recreation users. In some areas, lookouts, cabins, or other structures are present, as well as some evidence of management activities. Components specific to Management Area 2 are coded “MA2.”

### **Management Area 3: Front Country**

The rest of the Nez Perce-Clearwater comprises Management Area 3. Most of this management area consists of the areas with roads, trails, and structures, as well as evidence of past and ongoing activities designed to actively manage the area. This management area includes parts of the Gospel-Hump Geographic Area and proposed and designated special interest areas. This management area provides a wide variety of recreation opportunities, both motorized and non-motorized. Components specific to Management Area 3 are coded “MA3.”

### **Geographic Area: Gospel-Hump**

The Endangered American Wilderness Act (1978) divided the roadless area formerly known as the Gospel-Hump area into three portions. The largest portion, consisting of 206,000 acres, became wilderness; another portion, comprising 45,000 acres, became available for immediate development; and a third portion, including three areas totaling 92,000 acres referred to as the Gospel-Hump Multi-Purpose Area, was designated for multiple purpose resource development. Section Four of the Endangered American Wilderness Act directed the completion of the Gospel-Hump Multi-Purpose Plan, which was completed in 1985 and incorporated into the 1987 Nez Perce Forest Plan. The Endangered American Wilderness Act provides for periodic updates to this multi-purpose plan. This section fulfills that legislative intent and would replace the direction for the area found in the Gospel-Hump Multipurpose Resource Development Plan and the 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Land Management Plan.

## **Geographic Area: Lower Salmon River**

The Lower Salmon River area contains rich geological complexity, contributing to a biological community that is unique within the plan area. This geographic area contains a large portion of the driest of the warm dry potential vegetation group dominated by ponderosa pine under a frequent low intensity fire regime. These habitats support species associated with ponderosa pine dominated habitats, including several species of conservation concern.

## **Geographic Area: Pilot Knob**

The Pilot Knob geographic area, known as T'amloyiitsmexs by the Nez Perce, is a very important cultural and sacred site to the Nez Perce Tribe. T'amloyiitsmexs is a significant landmark used by the Nez Perce for "weyekin" or spiritual quests. Pilot Knob has a significant historic meaning with respect to the Nez Perce religious values and practices that have been used from time-immemorial and remains to be respected and used by Nez Perce tribal members. Per the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, these tribal religious rites can be conducted in no other place. The Nez Perce Tribe strives to maintain its cultural and traditional practices and to keep alive the knowledge of the beliefs and interpretations of such values. Because of its elevation and central location, Pilot Knob started being used as a site to locate communication equipment in 1977 with issuance of a communication use permit to the State of Idaho Military Division Public Safety Communications Unit. By 1988, the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee described that most of Pilot Knob's features had been altered, defaced, or destroyed by man-made devices. The Pilot Knob Geographic Area is also an Idaho Roadless Area with a "Special Areas of Historic or Tribal Importance" theme.

## **Geographic Area: Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark**

The Lolo Trail, a National Historic Landmark administered in cooperation with the National Park Service, is part of the Nez Perce National Historical Park. The trail extends through the Nez Perce-Clearwater from Lolo, Montana, to Weippe, Idaho. The Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark was designated in 1963. Its significance lies in its roots as an ancient American Indian trail. This trail comprises the route Lewis and Clark traveled from 1805 to 1806, as well as the path taken by the Nez Perce Indians during the Nez Perce Indian War of 1877. The landmark stretches about 62 miles from the Nez Perce-Clearwater boundary near Musselshell Meadows to the Nez Perce-Clearwater boundary near Lolo Pass and is approximately 55,760 acres in size. The Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark is a geographic area and also part of Management Area 1 as a congressionally designated landmark.

## **Tribal Consultation**

The Forest Service has consulted with the Nez Perce Tribe through the life of the revision of the Land Management Plan. The Tribe has been influential in the preparation of both the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements. Co-stewardship of resources on the Nez Perce's ceded land was codified and strong standards stating that we will uphold and honor the Treaties of 1855 and 1863 were carried into new plan components developed in tandem with the Nez Perce Tribe during the objection period. Staff to staff meetings between the Tribe and the Forest Service began in 2012 are ongoing. Forest Leadership has also met with the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee to provide updates and incorporate important components to the Land Management Plan. The Tribe has also received documents and analysis during the Cooperating Agency reviews as well as throughout the process.

## Public Involvement and Collaboration

The Nez Perce-Clearwater began public participation activities in 2012 and facilitated numerous public and interagency meetings to bring together information for the Nez Perce-Clearwater to consider in preparing the assessment, developing the proposed action, and developing alternatives to the proposed action. There were 22 rounds of public meetings between 2012 and 2014 to develop the 2014 Proposed Action. The first meeting was a summit to introduce the concepts of forest plan revision to the public. The next meetings discussed the Need to Change, the Desired Conditions, and Forest Resource Management, including wilderness and timber suitability and other plan components. Public input was compiled at each meeting, as well as throughout the process. The dialogue and recommendations from this public involvement process were used to help develop the proposed action.

In addition to postal mail and email, public meeting information was announced via the forest plan revision website<sup>1</sup>. The website also included a means for public comment using electronic or printed comment forms or submitting comments via an electronic database and posted meeting results and other information. Updates were posted periodically.

The notice of intent for the proposed action to prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on July 14, 2014. The notice of intent asked for public comment on the proposal for a 60-day period, which was extended to 120-days based on public requests. The Nez Perce-Clearwater held five public meetings to provide opportunities to better understand the proposed action so that meaningful public comments could be provided by the end of the scoping period. Using the comments from the public, other agencies, tribes, and organizations, the Nez Perce-Clearwater interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address through changes to the proposed action, development of alternatives, or in analysis of impacts of the proposed action. A corrected notice of intent was published on September 5, 2019, to correct the anticipated dates of availability of the draft environmental impact statement from 2015 to 2019 based on changes to our timeline.

Since the scoping period, public involvement has been ongoing. Stakeholders have been defined as any individual, organization, government, or tribe that is interested in our planning process. The forest plan revision team met with thousands of individuals from hundreds of organizations since 2012. Following the scoping period, the team continued to meet with any and every organization that invited the team to meet with them. This included attendance at well over 100 meetings between 2014 and the release of the draft environmental impact statement. The Nez Perce-Clearwater convened meetings on several occasions, including a meeting in May 2015 to update the public on what has happened since scoping, a webinar in December 2017 to prepare the public for alternative development, a meeting in January 2018 to solicit input on alternatives over three days in two locations, and another meeting in the summer of 2018 to share the alternatives being analyzed with the public over six meetings across the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Additionally, in 2018, County Commissions were briefed in public county commission meetings in the counties of Idaho, Clearwater, Latah, Lewis, Nez Perce, Benewah, and Shoshone in Idaho and the counties of Ravalli, Superior, and Missoula in Montana.

Comments have been accepted at any time during the process and that acceptance will continue throughout the process. These comments have helped the interdisciplinary team develop plan components and alternatives, conduct analysis, determine the best available scientific information, conduct wilderness evaluations, create wild and scenic suitability reports, and develop a monitoring plan. Comments have also been used by the Regional Office in development of the Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) list.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nezperceclearwater/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5447338>

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Collaboration with groups terming themselves as such has also provided the Nez Perce-Clearwater with information that is used by the Nez Perce-Clearwater the same as other comments. The Nez Perce-Clearwater attends their meetings at their invite and does not give any decision-making authority to these collaborative groups. However, groups of people with diverse thoughts and needs working to solve problems working towards consensus on issues is taken very seriously and input of this sort is highly valued by the Forest Service, whether it comes from an organized collaborative or from elsewhere. The interdisciplinary team has met with the following collaborative groups since 2012:

- Forest Plan Collaborative 2012-2014, U.S. Forest Service convened
- Clearwater Basin Collaborative (CBC) 2014-current, at their invitation
- Efficiency in Public Collaborative (EPC) 2019-current, at their invitation

Following the release of the draft environmental impact statement, the publication of the Federal Register Notice on December 20, 2019, initiated a formal 90-day comment period. The comment period was extended for 30 days, concluding on April 20, 2020, for a total comment period duration of 120 days. Public meetings were held in Kamiah, Grangeville, Orofino, Elk City, Lowell, Coeur d'Alene, Lewiston, Moscow, Riggins, McCall, and Boise in Idaho and Superior, Missoula, and Hamilton in Montana. Comments were accepted through the Forest Plan Revision commenting site, by e-mail, and by written mailed or hand delivered comment.

During the formal comment period, 20,837 comments were received in total. 1,329 unique comment letters were received. Within these letters, 4,134 individual substantive comments were identified. The substantive comments were grouped into 133 concern categories with approximately 400 concern statements were developed from these substantive comments. See Appendix M for additional information and a response to the concern statements. As part of the public involvement process, the agency has made available the documents listed in table 1 available on the Nez Perce-Clearwater webpage.

The decision to approve the revised land management plan for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests' were subject to the pre-decisional administrative review (objection process) pursuant to 36 CFR 219 subpart B.

The 60-day objection filing period began the day after a legal notice was published in the Lewiston Morning Tribune on November 28, 2023. The objection filing period closed on January 29, 2024. There were approximately 275 eligible objectors, including five objections regarding SCC from 13 objectors, and 25 interested persons requests. Associated Deputy Chief Jacqueline Emanuel served as the Reviewing Officer for all objections related to species of conservation concern, and Regional Forester Leanne Marten served as the Reviewing Officer for all other objections. The Northern Regional Officer hosted objection resolution meetings during the week of May 5th, 2024.

Based on these meetings and review of the objection received, the Reviewing Officer for the list of species of conservation concern issued a written response on September 26, 2024. The Reviewing Officers for the revised land management plan issued a written response to the objectors on September 27, 2024. The written responses constitute the final decisions by the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the objections.

The Objection Reviewing Officers found that for most issues, the FEIS, revised land management plan, draft ROD, and associated planning record established that I, as the Responsible Official, sufficiently addressed the objection issued and complied with current law, regulation, and policy. For those issues that required additional clarification or modifications, the Objection Reviewing Officer issued instructions to

me as the Responsible Official. These are detailed in the Nez Perce-Clearwater Nationals Forests Plan Revision Objection Response Letter, available on the land management plan webpage.

## Government Agency Involvement

Three agencies or governments have signed a cooperating agency agreement for plan revision with the Forest Service. These cooperating agencies participate in the development of the revised forest plan and draft environmental impact statement with regards to their areas of specialized expertise. Cooperating agencies participation in the forest plan revision is not an endorsement of the Revised Forest Plan nor does cooperating agency status limit their ability to participate during the public involvement process. Cooperating agencies include:

- Idaho County
- Clearwater County
- State of Idaho by and through the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation (lead agency)

The State of Idaho has been involved with Forest Planning since 2012. Various state agencies have been present at public meetings, met with the interdisciplinary team, provided information and data, and assisted in the development of plan components.

State agencies, offices, and commissions that have been involved include:

- Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation (lead agency)
- Idaho Governor's Office of Energy and Mineral Resources
- Idaho State Department of Agriculture
- Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho State Historic Preservation Office
- Idaho Department of Lands
- Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
- Idaho Department of Water Resources
- Idaho Geological Survey
- Idaho Governor's Idaho Roadless Commission
- Idaho Governor's Lewis and Clark Trail Commission

## Forest Service Planning

The National Forest Management Act requires all national forests to develop plans that direct resource management activities. These plans must be revised when conditions have changed significantly or around a ten- to fifteen-year cycle.

The existing plans for the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests were completed in 1987 and have been amended many times. The two Forests were administratively combined in 2013, and the Idaho Roadless Rule made management decisions that affected approximately 1.5 million acres of the Nez Perce-Clearwater. Revised Forest Service policies, congressional direction, court decisions, new or updated conservation agreements and recovery plans, and new scientific findings have all highlighted that the current plans are outdated and need to be revised.

To respond to these challenges the Nez Perce-Clearwater is currently in the process of revising the forest plans. The new, combined forest plan will incorporate changes in the natural environment, new scientific understandings, and social trends, and will satisfy regulatory requirements.

The National Forest Management Act of 1976, Section 6 Part 5, modified the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 to require forest plans and states that “[Forest Plans] be revised from time to time when the secretary finds conditions in a unit have significantly changed, but at least every fifteen years.” Thus, the regulatory life of the plan is not to exceed fifteen years. However, based on experience nationwide, plans will be in effect until such time they are revised by a new plan, which may be longer than fifteen years between revisions. The first forest plans on the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests have been in effect since 1987 and will continue to be in effect until a Record of Decision is signed on a revised forest plan, estimated to be 34 years since the forest plans originated. As such, the life of the plan throughout this environmental impact statement will be used to mean the time from the signing of a Record of Decision on this plan through signing a Record of Decision on future forest plans. The timeframe is assumed to be 20 to 30 years, despite the regulatory definition of not to exceed fifteen years. When “the life of the plan” is used in plan components or analysis, it is assumed that the component or analysis will be based on implementation over 20 to 30 years.

The responsible official for the revised forest plan is the Forest Supervisor. After reviewing the results of the analysis evaluated in the environmental impact statement, the responsible official has issued a draft record of decision, in accordance with agency decision making procedures (40 CFR § 1505.2) that will:

- disclose the decision (identifying the selected alternative) and reasons for the decision;
- discuss how public comments and issues were considered in the decision; and
- discuss how all alternatives were considered in reaching the decision, specifying which one is the environmentally preferable alternative (defined in 36 CFR § 220.3).

The revised forest plan provides a set of integrated plan direction for managing the Nez Perce-Clearwater for the next 10 to 15 years. However, even after approval of the plan, project level environmental analysis will still need to be completed for specific proposals to implement the direction in the forest plan.

Forest plans do not make budget decisions. Should Congress emphasize specific programs by appropriation, a redistribution of priorities would follow, regardless of the alternative implemented.

## **Issues**

The Nez Perce-Clearwater identified the following significant issues during scoping based on the scoping document titled “Proposed Action.”

### **Recommended Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers**

The Proposed Action may not adequately apportion recommended wilderness areas across the Nez Perce-Clearwater. The proposed action may not adequately apportion suitable Wild and Scenic River segments across the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

## **Recreation and Access Management**

The proposed action may not adequately apportion motorized and non-motorized recreation access opportunities in the front country (Management Area 3) and backcountry (Management Area 2) areas across the Nez Perce-Clearwater.

## **Forest Vegetation**

Desired conditions for forest vegetation should be met through natural processes or through active management. The rate of progress towards the desired conditions should occur at a faster or slower pace. Desired conditions should include higher compositions of early seral species and increased or decreased patch sizes and increased or decreased tree densities to meet ecological habitat needs of wildlife species, maintain resiliency of forest vegetation communities, and meet the social needs of forest users at a local, regional, and national scale.

## **Timber**

The Potential Timber Sale Quantity should be increased or decreased to better provide for a balance of ecological sustainability, economic, and social resiliency. The maximum regeneration harvest unit size should be increased or decreased.

Significant issues represent unresolved conflict among available resources. Numerous other items that may not have been sufficient in the proposed action were identified through public comment. Those items helped guide the Nez Perce-Clearwater as the forest plan revision team continued to develop plan components.

## **Alternatives**

Action alternatives were developed based on internal and external input, including collaboration on alternative development. All alternatives analyzed in the environmental impact statement met a minimum bar of being ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable per the 2012 planning rule. Furthermore, each alternative contributes to rural prosperity and other Department of Agriculture Strategic Goals.

Alternative themes and the thought process behind their development are described below:

### **No Action**

Under the no-action alternative, the two current management plans would continue to guide management of the plan area. The no-action Alternative includes plan components developed under the 1982 planning rule that offer protections and restrictions on management. It includes three designated wild and scenic rivers, one suitable wild and scenic river and 29 eligible rivers. It includes three designated wilderness areas, and three recommended wilderness areas. The no action alternative allows motorized use on 61 percent of the Forests in the summer and 63 percent of the Forests in the winter. Additional information on the specifics of the No Action Alternative is available in the FEIS.

### **Alternative W**

Resources and land allocation on the Nez Perce-Clearwater are not mutually exclusive. It may be possible to have high levels of timber harvest; sustain rural economies; recover fish and wildlife species listed within the Endangered Species Act; provide clean air and clean water; and provide habitat for viable populations of wildlife species all at the same time. For instance, areas evaluated for recommended wilderness are independent from most areas that provide for timber harvest due to the Idaho Roadless



Rule. As such, it is possible to recommend all or nearly all Idaho Roadless Rule areas for recommended wilderness and have a very high level of timber outputs.

Alternative W is a “have it most” alternative. The intent is to couple items that may otherwise be viewed as being mutually exclusive. This alternative has higher levels of recommended wilderness coupled with a higher timber output and a faster rate of movement towards forest vegetation desired conditions. Forest vegetation desired conditions would be minimally met within thirty years. Areas not selected as recommended wilderness allow for motorized use, including within Idaho Roadless Rule areas. Wild and Scenic Rivers found suitable stem from a collaborative approach that looks at rivers outside the wilderness.

## **Alternative X**

Alternative X responds to a number of state and local plans, which call for few or no areas of recommended wilderness fewer or no suitable wild and scenic rivers and higher timber outputs. In this alternative zero areas are recommended as wilderness. The Comprehensive Water Plan is used as a surrogate to continue to protect key tributaries to the North and South Fork Clearwater Rivers while not pursuing Wild and Scenic River Suitable status on any river. Forest vegetation would be within the lower bound of the desired conditions within twenty years. Alternative X has the highest timber output, including a departure from the Sustained Yield Limit (SYL) for a period of two decades at 241-261 million board feet annually.

## **Alternative Y**

Alternative Y provides for intermediate level of recommended wilderness and moves towards forest vegetative desired conditions in fifty years. Historic snowmobiling areas in the Great Burn are removed from consideration as recommended wilderness resulting in a boundary change, but within the areas moving forward as recommended wilderness we do not authorize any uses that may preclude designation as wilderness in the future. This alternative also looks at the major rivers not designated in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as suitable for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River system. The major rivers not designated include the North Fork Clearwater and South Fork Clearwater.

## **Alternative Z**

Alternative Z responds to requests to have an alternative in which natural processes dominate over anthropogenic influence. In this alternative a proposal for recommended wilderness that was brought forward by a group of national and state wilderness advocacy groups was mostly carried forward. Additionally, rivers were viewed as part of a larger system and major tributaries to the Nez Perce-Clearwater’s largest rivers will be analyzed as being suitable for inclusion in the wild and scenic rivers system. Areas in Idaho Roadless Rule Areas will not be opened up for additional motorized use and most current motorized use would not be impacted. Reliance on natural process would warrant a slower movement towards forest vegetation desired conditions within an anticipated one-hundred-years or longer. Timber outputs would also be lower and near a lower threshold needed to provide for economic sustainability and sustain rural economies. Additional plan components related to snag guidelines, live tree retention, and elk security are included that limit uncertainty regarding how and where these features will be located on the landscape.

## **Preferred Alternative**

The Preferred Alternative was developed following the comment period on the draft environmental impact statement. This alternative integrates concerns from the public and attempts to find balance and

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compromise with the major issues. This alternative responds to public comments and is a compilation of portions of all other alternatives analyzed in detail in the draft environmental impact statement. The Preferred Alternative integrates ecological, social, and economic sustainability while responding to both local and national interests.

The Preferred Alternative is designed to allow for movement of the forest toward the Natural Range of Variation (NRV) within 35-40 years. Less than 25 percent of the Forest is considered suited for timber harvest as a tool to move towards NRV. These areas are generally in the rural, motorized areas near communities where the need for fuels reduction and precise restoration techniques is the greatest. On over 75 percent of the Forests, over 3 million acres, fire will be the primary restoration tool and movement towards NRV will be less precise or predictable. This alternative integrates terrestrial vegetation and aquatic system restoration in a wholistic, ridgetop to ridgetop approach. It includes more Recommended Wilderness acres than the No Action and finds 11 rivers suitable for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. It responds to public comments and underserved community needs through application of Recreation Opportunity Spectrum suitability which would allow increased motorized opportunities in key locations. Underlying ALL the land allocations, are a suite of forest plan components that ensure ecological, social, and economic sustainability.

## Management Areas by Alternative

**Table 1. Acres within each management area by alternative.**

Management Area	No Action*	Alt W	Alt X	Alt Y	Alt Z	Preferred
1(a)- Designated Wilderness	1,139,059	1,139,059	1,139,059	1,139,059	1,139,059	1,139,059
1(b)- Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers	57,891	57,891	57,891	57,891	57,891	57,891
1(c) National Historic Landmark	55,760	55,760	55,760	55,760	55,760	55,760
MA1 subtotal	1,231,638	1,231,638	1,231,638	1,231,638	1,231,638	1,231,638
2(a) Idaho Roadless Areas	1,481,636	1,481,636	1,481,636	1,481,636	1,481,636	1,481,636
2(b) Recommended Wilderness	197,695	856,932	0	309,332	569,755	263,357
2(c) Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers	155,477	74,646	0	110,252	166,176	76,032
2(d) Gospel-Hump-MA2	30,164	28,498	28,498	30,164	28,498	28,498
2(e) Designated RNA	29,499	29,499	29,499	29,499	29,499	29,499
2(f) Proposed RNA	2,946	2,946	2,946	2,946	2,946	2,946
MA2 subtotal	1,489,736	1,468,505	1,463,081	1,487,434	1,472,364	1,467,078
MA3 subtotal	1,217,683	1,238,913	1,244,337	1,219,984	1,235,055	1,240,340
Forest Acreage**	4,074,832	4,074,832	4,074,832	4,074,832	4,074,832	4,074,832

\* No Action Alternative numbers are estimates to compare against alternatives. The 1987 Forest Plans had dozens of management areas.

\*\* Forest Acreage numbers represent the administrative Nez Perce-Clearwater boundary.

## Summary of Alternatives

Table 2. Overview of Alternatives

Resource Topic	No Action	Alt W	Alt X	Alt Y	Alt Z	Preferred
Recommended Wilderness	Hoodoo, Mallard-Larkins, Portions of: North Fork Spruce-White Sands and Sneakfoot Meadows	Bighorn-Weitas, Hoodoo, North Lochsa Slope, Mallard-Larkins, East Meadow Creek, Moose Mountain, Rapid River, North Fork Spruce-White Sands, Sneakfoot Meadows, Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork	None	East Meadow Creek; Hoodoo with Boundary change to create GA for snowmobiling; Mallard Larkins; Rapid River	East Meadow Creek, West Meadow Creek, Hoodoo, Mallard-Larkins, Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork; North Fork Spruce-White Sands, Rapid River, Rawhide, Sneakfoot Meadows, Pot Mountain	Mallard Larkins (82,286 acres); Hoodoo (108,276 acres) and East Meadow Creek (72,795 acres)
Mechanized/Motorized Recreation Uses in Recommended Wilderness	No over-snow motorized travel. No summer motorized or mechanized travel. Motorized and mechanized equipment suitable for administrative use.	No over-snow motorized travel. No summer motorized or mechanized travel. Motorized and mechanized equipment suitable for administrative use	n/a	No over-snow motorized travel. No summer motorized or mechanized travel. Motorized and mechanized equipment suitable for administrative use	Winter over-snow motorized travel allowed. Summer mechanized travel allowed. No motorized summer travel. Motorized and mechanized equipment suitable for administrative use.	No winter motorized travel, no summer motorized or mechanized travel. Motorized and mechanized equipment suitable for administrative use.

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Wild and Scenic Eligible and Suitable Rivers	<p>1 Suitable: Salmon River;</p> <p>28 Eligible: Bargamin Creek; Bear Creek Complex (Bear, Brushy Fork, Cub, Paradis, Wahoo); Cayuse Creek; Fish Creek; Hungery Creek; Johns Creek; Kelly Creek; Lake Creek; Little North Fork Clearwater River; Meadow Creek (Selway); Moose Creek Complex (East Fork Moose, Moose, North Fork Moose, West Fork Moose Creek, Rhoda); North Fork Clearwater River; Running Creek; Slate Creek; South Fork Clearwater River; Three Links Creek Complex (Three Links, West Fork Three Links); West Fork Gedney Creek; White Bird Creek; White Sand Creek (renamed Colt Killed Creek)</p>	<p>12 Suitable: Cayuse Creek, Fish Creek, Hungery Creek, Johns Creek, Kelly Creek, Little North Fork Clearwater River, Meadow Creek (Selway), Middle Fork Kelly, North Fork Kelly, Salmon River, South Fork Kelly, Weitas Creek</p>	<p>0 Suitable: manage 21 rivers consistent with the Idaho Department of Water Resources "State Protected Rivers" direction.</p> <p>North Fork Clearwater River Subbasin: North Fork Clearwater River, Weitas Creek, Elk Creek, Isabella Creek, Beaver Creek, Elmer Creek, Kelly Creek, North Fork Kelly Creek, Middle Fork Kelly Creek, South Fork Kelly Creek, Cayuse Creek, Little North Fork Clearwater River</p> <p>South Fork Clearwater Subbasin: American River, Johns Creek, Gospel Creek, West Fork Gospel Creek, Meadow Creek, Red River, Silver Creek, South Fork Clearwater River, West Fork Crooked River</p>	<p>14 Suitable: Cayuse Creek, Fish Creek, Hungery Creek, Johns Creek, Kelly Creek, Little North Fork Clearwater River, Meadow Creek (Selway), Middle Fork Kelly Creek, North Fork Clearwater River, North Fork Kelly Creek, Salmon River, South Fork Clearwater River, South Fork Kelly Creek, Weitas Creek</p>	<p>37 Suitable: Systems Approach: Bargamin Creek, Bear Creek, Big Sand Creek, Bostonian Creek, Boundary Creek, Brushy Fork Creek, Buck Lake Creek, Caledonia Creek, Colt Killed Creek, Crooked Fork Creek, Cub Creek, East Fork Meadow Creek (Selway), East Fork Moose Creek, Fish Creek, Graves Creek, Hungery Creek, Johns Creek, Kelly Creek, Little North Fork Clearwater River, Meadow Creek (South Fork Clearwater River), Middle Fork Kelly Creek, Moose Creek, North Fork Kelly Creek, North Fork Moose Creek, North Fork Storm Creek, Rhoda Creek, Running Creek, Sabe Creek, Salmon River, Silver Creek, South Fork Kelly Creek, South Fork Storm Creek, Storm Creek, Upper Lochsa River, Weitas Creek, West Moose Creek, Wounded Doe Creek</p>	<p>11 Suitable: Cayuse Creek, Fish Creek, Hungery Creek, Weitas Creek, Kelly Creek, North Fork Kelly Creek, Middle Fork Kelly Creek, South Fork Kelly Creek, Colt Killed Creek, Meadow Creek (Selway) and the Salmon River.</p> <p>1 Eligible: Little North Fork Clearwater River</p>
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Access	Clearwater travel plan; site specific closure orders in some areas on the Nez Perce Forest (no travel plan in place)	All Backcountry Restoration IRA's motorized ROS in summer; most areas open in winter	More summer motorized access, Motorized loop opportunities expanded in MA2	Motorized loop opportunities expanded in MA2	Similar to existing condition in summer, increased winter motorized	More summer and winter motorized access. Important areas for non-motorized access in the future delineated.
Percentage of Forest in Motorized ROS Category	Summer: 61 percent	Summer: 47 percent	Summer: 58 percent	Summer: 44 percent	Summer: 43 percent	Summer: 55 percent
	Winter: 63 percent	Winter: 48 percent	Winter: 70 percent	Winter: 62 percent	Winter: 70 percent	Winter: 60 percent
Percentage of Forest in Non-Motorized ROS Category	Summer: 39 percent	Summer: 53 percent	Summer: 42 percent	Summer: 56 percent	Summer: 57 percent	Summer: 45 percent
	Winter: 37 percent	Winter: 52 percent	Winter: 30 percent	Winter: 38 percent	Winter: 30 percent	Winter: 40 percent
Acres of Disturbance / Restoration Annually to be within Natural Range of Variability <sup>1</sup>	40,000	53,000-64,500	53,000-64,500	53,000-64,500	53,000-64,500	53,000-64,500
Timber Harvest Acres annually	4,300	12,600	14,000	7,500	3,700	8,825-10,000
Timber Output Restoration potential timber sale quantity	50-60 MMBF	221-241 MMBF	241-261 MMBF (Departure)	120-140 MMBF	60-80 MMBF	190-210 MMBF
Maximum opening Size	40 acres	207 acres	207 acres	207 acres	207 acres	207 acres

<sup>1</sup> Disturbance acres include wildfire, prescribed fire, timber harvest and other fuels treatments designed to meet desired conditions and be consistent with NRV.

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**Table 3. Summary of Proposed Activities Allowed in Recommended Wilderness (RWA)**

<b>Proposed Activities in Recommended Wilderness Areas</b>	<b>No Action Alternative</b>	<b>Alternative W</b>	<b>Alternative X</b>	<b>Alternative Y</b>	<b>Alternative Z</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative</b>
Motorized Travel	Not Allowed in RWA	Not Allowed in RWA	N/A	Not Allowed in RWA	Yes-Winter Motorized	No
Mechanized Travel	Not Allowed in RWA	Not Allowed in RWA	N/A	Not Allowed in RWA	Allowed in RWA	No
Motorized and mechanized tools for public use	Not Allowed in RWA	Hand-Held Motorized (e.g., Chainsaws) allowed	N/A	Not Allowed in RWA	Allowed in RWA	No
Motorized and mechanized tools for administrative use	Allowed in RWA	Hand-Held Motorized (e.g., Chainsaws) allowed	N/A	Not Allowed in RWA	Allowed in RWA	Yes
Aircraft landing for recreational use	Not Allowed in RWA	Not Allowed in RWA	N/A	Not Allowed in RWA	Allowed in RWA	No
Aircraft landing for administrative use	Allowed in RWA	Allowed in RWA	N/A	Allowed in RWA	Allowed in RWA	Yes

## Summary of Ecologic, Social and Economic Impacts

### Economic Sustainability

**Table 4. Relative contributions to social and economic sustainability by alternative.**

Key Social Benefit from the Nez Perce-Clearwater	Relative Contributions					
	Greatest			Smallest		
Income – payments in lieu of taxes, secure rural schools, labor income in various industries: recreation, timber, and grazing	X	W	Preferred	Y	Z	No Action
Jobs – including induced jobs such as recreation, timber, and grazing	X	W	Preferred	Y	Z	No Action

### Social Sustainability

**Table 5. Summary of consequences to social benefits by alternative**

Measurement Indicator	No Action	Alt W	Alt X	Alt Y	Alt Z	Preferred
Population size	No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect
Short-term population change	No effect	No effect	Potential short-term population increase	No effect	No effect	No effect
Long-term population change	No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect

### Ecologic Sustainability

The revised forest plan provides direction to restore, establish, and maintain functioning ecosystems that would have greater adaptive capacity to withstand stressors and recover from disturbances, especially changing and uncertain environmental conditions, and extreme weather events.

The revised forest plan provides ecological conditions to sustain ecosystems that maintain the diversity of plant, fish, and animal communities and the persistence of native species in the plan area.

The revised forest plan takes into account the effects of a changing climate and provides climate change adaptation strategies.

The revised forest plan provides for ecological integrity, ecosystem services, and multiple uses in an integrated manner.

### Decision to be Made

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide the following:

1. Forestwide components to provide for integrated social, economic, and ecological sustainability, and ecosystem integrity and diversity, while providing for ecosystem services and multiple uses. Components must be within Forest Service authority and consistent with the inherent capability of the plan area (36 CFR 219.7 and CFR 219.8–219.10).



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2. Recommendations to Congress, if any, for lands recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and/or rivers suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (36 CFR 219.7(2)(v) and (vi)).
3. Identification or recommendation, if any, of other designated areas (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(vii).
4. Identification of suitability of areas for the appropriate integration of resource management and uses, including lands suited and not suited for timber production (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(vii) and 219.11).
5. Identification of the maximum quantity of timber that may be removed from the plan area (36 CFR 219.7 and 219.11 (d)(6)).
6. Identification of geographic or management area specific components (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(3)(d).
7. Identification of watersheds that are a priority for maintenance or restoration (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(3)(e)(3)(f).
8. Plan monitoring program (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(x) and 219.12).

## Findings Required by Other Laws

The Forest Service manages the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests in conformance with many laws and regulations. I have considered the statutes specific to individual resources as described in the final EIS, and I find that this decision meets our obligations to the current statutory duties of the Forest Service. Following laws and regulations are addressed by the revised land management plan:

- American Indian Religious Freedom Act
- Archeological Resources Protection Act
- Clean Air Act
- Clean Water Act
- Endangered Species Act
- Environmental Justice
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act
- Executive Order 13751
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act
- National Environmental Policy Act
- National Forest Management Act
- National Historic Preservation Act
- Idaho Roadless Rule
- Wetlands and Floodplains executive orders
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
- Wilderness Act