SADDLE CAMP ROAD REROUTE PROJECT
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
USDA Forest Service, Lochsa-Powell Ranger District,
Nez Perce- Clearwater National Forest, Idaho County, Idaho

Decision Summary

This Decision Notice documents my decision to select Alternative 2 as described in the Saddle Camp Road Reroute Project (EA) issued on December 21, 2015. The selected alternative will construct a new entryway for the Saddle Camp Road 107 just to the west of its existing location that would maintain and improve the safety of all access needs currently provided by the 107 road and the adjacent dispersed campsite access to the west. In addition, the decommissioning of the existing entryway of the 107 road would include the removal of the undersized crossing on Indian Grave Creek, with rehabilitation of the stream channel and former road area. The removal of the undersized crossing will provide unrestricted aquatic organism passage and restore floodplain connectivity.

Project Background

The project is located about 28 miles southwest of Powell, Idaho. The road reroute would involve removing the first approximately six hundred foot segment of the road to avoid crossing Indian Grave Creek and rebuilding the entrance just to the west of its existing location. The Saddle Camp Road Reroute Project area is located in T36N, R11E, Sections 21 and 22 in Idaho County. See attached maps in Appendix B of the EA. The design of this project has been completed in partnership with the Nez Perce Tribe Watershed Division.

There are multiple goals for rerouting the entryway of the 107 Road. One goal is to reduce watershed and aquatic impacts at the existing undersized road crossing on Indian Grave Creek. This crossing is a partial barrier to aquatic organism passage. Rerouting the road outside of the floodplain area would also reduce sediment input and in the long term decrease road maintenance expenses by reducing costly infrastructure. Additionally, there is a need to improve safety, because under the proposal there would only be one access point to the north side of Highway 12 from the 107 Road, with the option to turn off from the newly located 107 Road to the dispersed site. The existing dual access points do not meet Right of Way standards for Highway 12. Line-of-sight for vehicles turning onto Highway 12 is also better at the proposed 107 reroute location.

Decision

After careful consideration of the analyses, applicable laws, and public comments, I have decided to implement Alternative 2. This decision is based on information contained in the project record including the EA and the effects analysis described in Chapter 3; the management requirements of the applicable laws and policies; the mitigation measures and design features described in this document and the comments received during the public involvement process for this project.

I have chosen to implement Alternative 2 because it best meets the purpose and need for managing the Forest's transportation system within the context of multiple objectives for reducing environmental impacts while also providing for safe access and use of the Forest. Habitat and passage improvements are anticipated for aquatic organisms, including steelhead, westslope cutthroat trout, and potentially bull trout, by removing the barrier the existing culvert presents and rehabilitating the stream channel and adjacent floodplain. Sediment introduction into Indian Grave Creek from the 107 Road would also be reduced. Entry to and from Highway 12 onto the newly located 107 Road would also be safer because line of sight would improve, and a redundant entry point would be eliminated while maintaining all current access.

Alternative 2 will implement the following management activities, design and mitigation features and monitoring activities.

Management Activities

Project activities consist of the following:

- A new entryway would be constructed for the 107 Road just to the west of its existing location. The new road area would require about 325 feet of construction in a previously disturbed area, which includes a turnout to the dispersed campsite currently accessed from this side of Indian Grave Creek. The gate and signage near the existing entry to Road 107 would be relocated to the new route, and work would be needed to tie in the new segment of road with the existing road prism.
- About 600 feet of the existing entry of 107 Road and 100 feet of the entryway of the dispersed campsite access would be decommissioned. The road surfaces would be excavated to pre-road levels; decompacted; and then treated with clump plantings and salvaged soil and plant materials from construction activity areas.
- Road decommissioning activities at the 107 crossing on Indian Grave Creek would involve rehabilitating about 60 feet of stream channel. Channel geometry at the existing culvert site would be adjusted for natural channel dimensions to accommodate a 25 foot bankfull width. About 6 feet of floodplain would be created on both banks, sloping up at a 3:1 ratio. Stream bed and bank stability would increase with the installation of grade control, stream bank plantings, and other available natural materials such as wood. The adjusted stream channel geometry would allow for unimpeded aquatic organism passage.

Mitigation, design and monitoring requirements are described below. Best management practices (BMPs), mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements will be implemented as part of my Decision.

Design Features and Mitigation Measures

Project design measures are aimed at avoiding specific resource issues. A majority of these are derived from site specific BMPs from the Idaho Forest Practices Act, the Stream Channel Alteration Handbook, and the Programmatic Biological Opinion for Restoration Activities at Stream Crossings on National Forests and Bureau of Land Management Public Lands in Idaho.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be applied to minimize streambank disturbance, and control erosion and pollutant delivery to Indian Grave Creek from new road construction, channel reconstruction, and road decommissioning. Design features for various project phases are described below.

The following design features would be used during project impementation:

- Ground disturbing activities would be conducted during the dry season and would follow an approved 'Stormwater and Erosion Control Plan' to be submitted by the contractor.
- No large trees would be removed for the project that are currently providing shade, bank stability, or potential large wood to Indian Grave Creek.
- All new road construction would be out-sloped away from Indian Grave Creek.
- Vegetation removed for new road construction would be salvaged for clump planting both on decommissioned road segments and on the new road cut and fill slopes. New cut and fill slopes would be seeded.
- Topsoil and duff excavated for the new road construction would be stockpiled for placement on decommissioned road surfaces.
- Gravel on decommissioned road surfaces would be salvaged for use on the new road surface, and fill to be hauled off to the Wendover Pit.
- Clump planting would occur throughout the decommissioned road surface areas at a minimum of 12 clump plants per 1,000 linear feet. Additionally slash from new road construction and decommissioning would be placed at 40-60% surface coverage.
- The contractor would have fuel spill containment supplies onsite in the event of a fuel spill and their employees would be trained in the proper application and use of those materials.
- The instream work would be conducted between July 15 and August 15 to minimize impacts to steelhead trout and bull trout spawning and rearing.
- Dewatering would occur before any instream construction activities to minimize potential sediment delivery into Indian Grave Creek and would follow an approved 'Work area isolation and dewatering plan' to be submitted by the contractor.
- Electrofishing and fish salvage would occur prior to dewatering. Electrofishing activities would occur in accordance with ESA guidelines from NOAA and the State of Idaho Department of Fish and Game Scientific permit.
- Prior to slowly reintroducing water to the reconstructed channel, the substrate would be washed and dirty water would be pumped and discharged to the adjacent floodplain surface to minimize sediment movement into Indian Grave Creek.
- Any required permits for disturbance of water or wetlands would be obtained prior to initiating work (Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit, Idaho Department of Water

Resources Stream Alteration Permit). Any additional mitigation measures identified in the permitting process would be incorporated into the project plans.

- A permit for the work within the Highway 12 Right of Way area would be acquired from the Idaho Transportation Department. Any additional mitigation measures identified in the permitting process would be incorporated into the project plans.

- During construction, all efforts would be made to reduce the amount of time that access to the 107 Road is restricted, if at all.

Monitoring

Monitoring for noxious weeds on the decommissioned surfaces would occur post-implementation and any infestations would be treated accordingly. Revegetation of rehabilitated surfaces would also be monitored and supplemental planting of native vegetation would occur if necessary.

Rationale For The Decision

My criteria for making a decision on this project was based on how well the management actions analyzed in the EA address the purpose and need of the project and considerations of issues that were raised during the scoping process. I considered Forest Plan and Record of Decision standards and guidance for the project area, and took into account competing interests and values of the public.

I have selected Alternative 2 because it best meets the Purpose and Need for action and is responsive to public comments and other agency concerns (EA, pages 6-8, Appendix A; and project file comment letters). Site specific analysis determined the relocation of the entryway of the Saddle Camp Road 107 would be beneficial for aquatic habitat and water quality in Indian Grave Creek and would also provide for safer access to the Forest in this area from Highway 12.

Under the Action alternative, less road infrastructure would be needed than is existing and the reroute would be a large savings over replacing the aged and undersized Road 107 crossing with a bridge.

Issues were generated internally, by the Interdisciplinary Team, and externally, through public comments. Involvement of all interested individuals, businesses, organizations and county, state and federal agencies, including Idaho Department of Transportation and the Nez Perce Tribe was sought to provide detailed information for defining the issues, concerns, mitigations and project options.

The interdisciplinary team designed the project to minimize effects on resources. Analysis of public and internal comments identified no significant issues that would drive additional alternatives. However, these comments did identify concerns or non-significant issues that deserved consideration, and were used to refine the scope of the alternatives considered. These concerns were addressed through project design features and resource protection measures. I find that the range of alternatives considered is thorough and complete.

Public Involvement

On March 31, 2015, a scoping letter describing the proposed action, location and purpose and need were sent to 133 interested individuals, businesses, organizations and agencies including the Nez Perce Tribe and the Idaho Transportation Department. A legal notice and request for public comment appeared in the Lewiston Morning Tribune on that date. Letters or messages received from six commenters were considered in the analysis.

The EA was sent out to the six commenters and the Nez Perce Tribe, and a legal ad appeared in the Lewiston Morning Tribune on December 21, 2015. Three comments were received.

Consideration of Issues

There were no issues identified during scoping that lead to the development of alternatives to the proposed action (EA, pg. 6-7).

Other issues were raised and discussed in the EA (pgs.7-8) but were not evaluated in detail because the alternatives already mitigated the issue through design feature implementation (effects to sensitive or ESA listed species) or the issue was not applicable to the proposal.

I believe the issues and concerns identified throughout the scoping and planning process were fully addressed during alternative development and analysis.

Consideration of Public and Other Agency Comments

The formal scoping period for this project ended April 29, 2015. Comments that were received were used to develop the issues and alternatives that were included in the EA and to ensure that those issues and alternatives were adequately analyzed.

The comment period for the EA ended on January 19, 2016. Three comments were received during the EA comment period. All three comments received were in support of the project and two requested clarifying information concerning the details of project implementation.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have determined through the Saddle Camp Road Reroute Project Environmental Assessment that this is not a major federal action individually or cumulatively that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This determination is based on the analysis of the context and intensity of the environmental effects, including the following factors:

(1) *The analysis considered both beneficial and adverse effects.* Beneficial and adverse direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the Environmental Assessment have been disclosed within the appropriate context and intensity. No significant effects on the human environment have been identified. There will be no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to threatened, endangered, MIS, or sensitive species, or other components of the environment (*EA, pgs. 14-22*).

(2) *No significant adverse effects to public health or safety were identified.* None are unusual or unique to this project.

(3) *There will be no significant impacts to unique characteristics of the area* such as wetlands, park lands, wild and scenic rivers, floodplains, prime farm lands, old growth forests, range and forest land, minority groups, civil rights or consumers. No effects are expected to historic properties or cultural resources (*EA, pg. 18*).

(4) *The effects of implementation of this decision are not likely to be highly controversial* and therefore there has been no scientifically backed information that indicates substantial controversy about the effects disclosed in the Environmental Assessment.

(5) Based on similar actions in the area and the resource professionals that worked on this project, *the probable effects of this decision on the human environment, as described in the EA, are well known and do not involve unique or unknown risks*. Activities approved in this decision notice are routine projects similar to those that have been implemented under the Clearwater National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 29 years.

(6) *This action does not establish precedence for future actions with significant effects*, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Activities approved in this decision notice are routine projects similar to those that have been implemented under the Clearwater National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan over the past 29 years.

(7) *These actions are not related to other actions that, when combined, will have significant impacts.* This decision is made with consideration of past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest land within potentially affected areas which could have a cumulative significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Each resource section effects analysis contained in the Saddle Camp Road Reroute Project EA discusses cumulative effects; none were found to be significant (*EA, Chapter 3*).

(8) *The action will have no effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.* The project complies with the terms of the Clearwater National Forest Programmatic Agreement (PA) with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The project is in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and consistent with state and federal archaeological statutes (Project Record, Cultural Resources Section). There would be no effects to cultural resources from project activities. (*EA, pg. 18*).

(9) *The effects on endangered or threatened species and their habitat are discussed in the programmatic Biological Assessment* which has been completed for the project. As required by the Endangered Species Act, specific habitat needs for Threatened and Endangered species of fish and wildlife in regards to the proposed project were analyzed and documented in a Biological Assessment (see project file). The effects analysis concluded that the project would have a *no effect* determination for Canada lynx. As per the ESA consultation process, the no effect determination concludes the ESA process for Canada lynx and their habitat. The project *"may affect"*, and is *"likely to adversely affect"* steelhead trout and bull trout. Effects would be short term with

long term benefits. The project *"may affect"*, but is *"not likely to adversely affect"* designated critical habitat for steelhead trout or bull trout due to the limited amount and temporary nature of the sediment added to the stream. Consultation with NOAA Fisheries and the US Fish and Wildlife Service has initiated, with concurrence likely to be reached on these determinations through the new Programmatic Biological Opinion for ***Restoration Activities at Stream Crossings on National Forests and Bureau of Land Management Public Lands in Idaho***. The Forest would not make any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources which would affect the formulation or implementation of any reasonable and prudent alternative measures so as not to violate subsection (a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act.

(10) *This decision is in compliance with relevant federal, state and local laws, regulations and requirements designed for the protection of the environment.* Effects from this action meet or exceed state water quality standards through the implementation of design features and best management practices (*EA, pgs. 14-22*).

Other Findings

This decision is consistent with the goals, objectives, and direction contained in the 1987 Clearwater National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act (*EA, pgs. 26-27).*

This decision is in compliance with Executive Order 12989 "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations". No minority or low-income populations would be disproportionately affected under either alternative.

Implementation

Implementation of this project can begin within 5 days of the signing of this Final Decision Notice/FONSI.

Contact Person

For further information concerning the Saddle Camp Road Reroute Project, contact Brandon Knapton, Lochsa-Powell District Ranger at (208) 926-6400 or bknapton@fs.fed.us during normal business hours. You may also contact Taylor Greenup, Restoration Hydrologist, with questions at (208) 476-8228 or tgreenup@fs.fed.us.

Brandon Knapton
Lochsa-Powell District Ranger
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

4-5-2016
Date

APPENDIX A
Response to Comments

Project Scoping

On March 31, 2015, a scoping letter was sent to 133 interested individuals, businesses, organizations and agencies including the Nez Perce Tribe and the Idaho Transportation Department. There were six replies. The letters were reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Team. The comments and responses are summarized below. Those who commented on the scoping letter:

Phil Foster, Back-Country Horsemen of North Central Idaho, Grangeville, Idaho
Brad Chinn, Hailey, Idaho
Gary Macfarlane, Friends of the Clearwater, Moscow, Idaho
Johnatahan Oppenheimer, Idaho Conservation League, Boise, Idaho
Jeff Cook, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Boise, Idaho
Daniel Stewart, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Lewiston, Idaho

Phil Foster, Back-Country Horsemen of North Central Idaho, Grangeville, Idaho
Mr. Foster expressed support for the project, "believing it to be a logical and economical way to prevent future sedimentation while maintaining access".

Thank you for your comments of support.

Brad Chinn, Hailey, Idaho
Mr. Chin believed that the project was in support of "welfare logging". He also requested clarification of how the project would reduce watershed and aquatic impacts; an analysis of project cost versus maintenance costs; and more details on the proposal.

Thank you for your comments. There is no logging is associated with this project. The Environmental Analysis contains the information requested. Chapter 2 provides and in-depth description of the project (pgs. 10- 13), and the details of the watershed and aquatic effects are discussed in Chapter 3 (pgs. 14 – 17). Tables 2-1 and 2-3 on pages 12 and 13 give a succinct summary of the project versus taking no action, which includes the costs of the project.

Gary Macfarlane, Friends of the Clearwater, Moscow, Idaho
Mr. Macfarlane expressed concern about disturbing additional area within the riparian area for new road construction. He believed that compaction would be an issue for recovery of the proposed road decommissioning area, and requested to know the timeframe for recovery for the existing road to return to pre-disturbance structure and function. He also expressed concern that access to the dispersed campsite to the west would be lost and that the proposed decommission area would become a new campsite. Finally, he requested that the analysis demonstrate that implementing the project would be a benefit over maintaining the status quo, including replacing the culvert with a bridge.

Thank you for your comments. The proposed new road construction area was specifically

chosen to limit impacts to the riparian area of Indian Grave Creek. The topography in the area of the proposed reroute is out-sloped away from the creek and the area has been disturbed within the recent past. In order to address compaction at the proposed decommission sites, roadbed materials would be excavated to bring the surface to pre-road levels and would then be mechanically decompacted. Additional design measures that address treating these areas for forest recovery are described in Chapter 2 (pgs. 11-12). As for recovery timelines, research conducted within the Lochsa Basin found that within 10 years, recontoured roads were not significantly different from unroaded areas in terms of trees, shrub, forb cover and percent bare ground (Lloyd et al. 2010).

In response to your concerns over loss of access to the campsite to the west, the proposed design would maintain access to this area. Regarding the potential for the decommissioned areas to become new campsites, the approach off of Highway 12 would prevent vehicular access and the placement of wood and vegetative materials would also make the area undesirable for camping.

As discussed above, please refer to the Environmental Assessment for a discussion of the benefits of the proposed project. Tables 2-1 and 2-3 on pages 12 and 13 give a succinct summary of the project proposal versus taking no action, which includes the evaluation of replacing the crossing with a bridge.

Johnatahan Oppenheimer, Idaho Conservation League, Boise, Idaho
Mr. Oppenheimer expressed support for the project on behalf of the Idaho Conservation League and recommended consultation with NOAA, NMFS, and the Nez Perce Tribe.

Thank you for your comments of support. The Forest Service has been working with representatives from NOAA and USFWS on this project since early 2015. This project is a partnership with the Nez Perce Tribe Watershed Division, and all notices of comment and the Environmental Assessment have been sent to the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee.

Jeff Cook, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Boise, Idaho
Mr. Cook expressed support for the project but requested that the safety of entering and exiting Highway 12 at the proposed project location be analyzed. He also requested that the reroute be constructed before decommissioning the old route so that no public assess is lost during project implementation. Upon completion of the project, he would like the Forest Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) to be updated.

Thank you for your comments. The Forest Service has been working closely with the Idaho Transportation Department to ensure that the proposed project design meets safety standards for the Highway 12 Right-of-Way, in addition to Forest standards for the Saddle Camp Road 107. During project implementation, the plan would be to start the proposed new route construction prior to decommissioning the old route. All efforts will be made to minimize the time that the 107 Road would be closed during construction, if at all.

The 107 Road from Highway 12 to the 500 Road junction is closed seasonally to all motorized use from December 1 to May 15. This project would not affect that seasonal use designation. Updating the MVUM is a separate process from the Environmental Assessment, but the MVUM

would be corrected as part of the annual update process after project implementation.

Daniel Stewart, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Lewiston, Idaho
Mr. Stewart notified that Indian Grave Creek is fully supporting all of its beneficial uses and that the project would be considered a nonpoint source activity subject to regulation including implementation of approved or specialized best management practices (BMPs) to protect the beneficial uses of waters of the State.

Thank you for your comments. Project design measures are aimed at avoiding specific resource issues. A majority of these are derived from site specific BMPs from the Programmatic Biological Opinion for Restoration Activities at Stream Crossings on National Forests and Bureau of Land Management Public Lands in Idaho; the Idaho Forest Practices Act and Stream Channel Alteration Handbook. BMPs will be applied to maintain slope stability, minimize soil disturbance, erosion and sediment delivery. In addition, the contractor must provide a 'work area isolation and dewatering plan' plan subject to agency approval to minimize the introduction of sediment to Indian Grave Creek.

Draft Environmental Assessment

On December 21, 2016, the draft Environmental Assessment was sent to the six commenters above and the Nez Perce Tribe. A public notice was also published with information on the document in the Lewiston Tribune on this date. Three comments were received during the EA comment period. The letters were reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Team. The comments and responses are summarized below. Those who commented on the Environmental Assessment:

Brad Smith, Idaho Conservation League, Boise, Idaho
Jeff Cook, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Boise, Idaho
Ken Helm, Idaho Transportation Department, Lewiston, Idaho

Brad Smith, Idaho Conservation League, Boise, Idaho
Mr. Smith wrote to express support of the project.

Thank you for your support.

Jeff Cook, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Boise, Idaho
Mr. Cook wrote to express support for the project and also to seek clarification on whether access on the Saddle Camp Road 107 would remain open during construction so that public access can be maintained during construction.

Thank you for your support. A design feature was included in the Environmental Assessment to emphasize that continuing to provide access on the 107 Road is desired during all phases of construction. Some of the improvement work proposed on the segment of the 107 Road that would remain in place may require up to 4 hour delays (e.g. gravel application, ditch relief culvert installation). Barring any unforeseen issues encountered during construction, these delays should be the extent of effects to access on the 107 Road.

Ken Helm, Idaho Transportation Department, Lewiston, Idaho
Mr. Helm was wondering if tree removal for improving site distance at the new turnout was being considered. ITD also brought up concerns about site distance and access to a dispersed campsite on the south side of the Highway in the project vicinity.

Thank you for your comments. Limited tree removal within the Highway 12 Right of Way for this project was discussed during our field trip in the summer of 2015, and discussions are ongoing between our agencies as part of the permit process for work within the Right of Way. At this point in time, it appears that fewer than 20 small diameter trees would need to be removed for the project, which would be used to provide additional material for the proposed decommission areas. As far as the issues presented at the dispersed site access on the south side of Highway 12 in this area, those are outside of the scope of this project. Any work at that dispersed site would need to undergo NEPA analysis and would be a separate project.