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United States
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Forest Service
Salmon - Challis National Forest
1206 South Challis St.
Salmon, Idaho 83467

Contact: Amy Baumer (Public Affairs Officer)
Gina Knudson (Collaboration Specialist)

208-756-5145
208-756-5551

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SALMON-CHALLIS STARTS REVISING DECADES OLD FOREST PLANS

SALMON, IDAHO – The Salmon-Challis National Forest is taking the first steps toward revising forest plans that are 30 years old. Much has changed since the Challis National Forest Plan (1987) and the Salmon National Forest Plan (1988) were written, including the merging of the two Central Idaho forests.

The size and intensity of wildfires has changed dramatically during those decades. Today’s technology requires new cell phone towers and makes information about special places available instantly. Market conditions and other factors have greatly impacted timber and mining sectors. Science has evolved, and in many ways, so has society.

“Given the ecological and social changes over the last 30 years, it is timely that the Salmon-Challis National Forest is beginning Forest Plan revision in 2017. Our ultimate goal is to produce a Forest Plan that provides useful and relatable direction that improves management of the Forest and allows us to adapt to changing conditions in the future,” according to Forest Plan Revision team leader Josh Milligan.

Milligan said the first step the Salmon-Challis National Forest takes is conducting an assessment of current conditions and trends, from an ecological as well as a social, cultural, and economic standpoint.

Milligan said another thing that has changed since the 1980s plans were completed is the Forest Service is asking for the public’s help early on and throughout the 4-year plan revision process. “We know we can’t do this plan revision in a vacuum and collaboration with the public will be critical to its success.”

Public meetings have been scheduled in February to introduce the Forest’s strategy for plan revision, and solicit input on assessment topics that range from socioeconomics, to recreation, to water quality.

“This isn’t the start of a typical public comment period,” Milligan explained. “We’ll be explaining what topics we’re assessing, sharing some of the questions we’re trying to answer in those assessments, and listing what data sources we have to inform the assessment. We want to know if people think we’re on track and if we’re using the best available information. What we reveal in the final assessment will inform what needs to change on the Salmon-Challis National Forest, so this is a really critical first step.”

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Former Lemhi County Commissioner Bob Cope has been a member of the federal advisory committee that created the framework for the Forest Service’s plan revisions nationwide. Cope said local involvement is incredibly important. “When it comes to best available information about our forest resources, nobody knows what’s going on out there more than hunters, ranchers, and people who live in these landscapes,” Cope said. “During plan revision, the Salmon-Challis will be receiving nationwide input, much of it from an urban perspective. The Forest absolutely has to hear from citizens who deeply understand the relationship between the people and the land.”

“The Salmon-Challis has a centuries-long history of people living in this magnificent landscape who have shaped change and adapted to it. What we have heard from citizens so far is that this plan-revision process sets a new stage for local voices to work together, to help shape what this corner of Idaho looks like for our rural communities and our landscape well into the future,” said Toni Ruth, director of Salmon Valley Stewardship. Ruth and SVS plan to help lead a citizen’s group to engage in the forest plan revision. The public meetings will be held at the following locations:

Salmon, Monday, February 13, 6 -8 p.m., Idaho Department of Fish and Game Salmon Region

Mackay, Wednesday, February 15, 6 – 8 p.m., American Legion Hall

Challis, Tuesday, February 21, 6 – 8 p.m., American Legion Hall

The Forest is also offering a virtual meeting on Thursday, February 23, from 3 – 5 p.m. Anyone with an internet connection and a phone line can join this meeting. Details will be posted on the Salmon-Challis National Forest website.

For more information about the meetings, email SalmonChallisPlanRev@fs.fed.us or call collaboration specialist Gina Knudson, 756-5551.

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