

**File Code:** 1900  
**Date:** February 11, 2016

Dear Interested Party:

The Council Ranger District, Payette National Forest, is preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Middle Fork Weiser River Landscape Restoration Project that proposes landscape restoration treatments on approximately 24,000 acres, which would do the following:

- Move forest stands toward desired conditions as described in the Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan by returning fire to the ecosystem (on approximately 24,000 acres); promoting the development of large-tree forest structures mixed with a mosaic of size classes; and improving growth, species composition, and resiliency to insects, disease, and fire.
- Improve habitat for Family 1 wildlife species, represented by the white-headed woodpecker, by restoring forest conditions that contribute to source habitat for these species and provide appropriate Family 2 habitat, represented by the pileated woodpecker. Provide appropriate habitat for wildlife in Families 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, and 13.

Proposed vegetation treatments would:

- Apply thinning treatments to forest stands followed by prescribed burning.
- Apply regeneration treatments where vigorous, fire-resistant trees are absent by creating openings up to 10 acres in size. Forest structure for wildlife habitat would be retained in these openings. Sites would be prepared for planting or natural regeneration using prescribed burning and/or hand scalping.
- Thin plantations and reduce fuel loading in older stands using skidding, lop and scattering, and/or mechanical piling followed by prescribed burning.
- Restore conditions within dry non-forest and wet meadow areas with commercial and noncommercial treatments and prescribed burning.
- Remove, pile, or burn biomass in harvest treatment areas.
- Create a shaded fuel break to protect values at risk, including 15 acres of treatment within a Riparian Conservation Area (RCA).

The Middle Fork Weiser River Landscape Restoration Project (Project) proposes to improve water quality, enhance aquatic habitat, and restore riparian and floodplain function by reducing road-related impacts. The Proposed Action would decommission 64.6 miles of unauthorized routes and 16.1 miles of National Forest System road and replace two culverts currently restricting aquatic organism passage.



The Project also proposes managing recreation use in the Project area, with an emphasis on improving Cabin Creek Campground facilities, identifying and hardening primary dispersed recreation areas, improving and realigning existing trails, and developing new trail opportunities.

The approximately 49,276-acre Project area is located within the Weiser River drainage on the Council Ranger District approximately 6 miles southeast of Council, Idaho, in Adams County.

The Draft EIS is available for review at the Council Ranger District, PO Box 567, 2092 Highway 95, Council, Idaho 83612. The documents and maps are also available online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=41687>. Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from: Steve Penny, Team Leader, Payette National Forest, 500 North Mission Street Building 2, McCall, Idaho 83638; phone: 208-634-0801; email address: [spenny@fs.fed.us](mailto:spenny@fs.fed.us). Persons interested in receiving updates about this project may subscribe to GovDelivery for project updates via email by clicking the link “subscribe to email updates” on the right side of the project webpage.

## **Background**

The Forest’s 800,000 acre Weiser-Little Salmon Headwaters Project (WLSH) was accepted in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program<sup>1</sup> (CFLRP) in 2012, and the Project is within the WLSH area. The purpose of the CFLRP is to encourage the collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes. Planning for this Project was initiated in summer 2013 in collaboration with the Payette Forest Coalition (PFC). The PFC, formed in June 2009, is a collaborative group comprised of stakeholders from a broad range of outside interests, including the environmental community, timber industry, recreational groups, interested citizens, and state and county government. The goal of the PFC is to work to sustain the ecologic function of landscapes and the economic health of rural communities.

## **How to Comment and Timeframe**

The Environmental Protection Agency is expected to publish a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the DEIS in the Federal Register on February 19, 2016. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 45 days following that date. The publication date of the NOA in the Federal Register is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for a proposed action documented in a DEIS. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

**The preferred method to submit comments is electronically via the project webpage and must be submitted to:** <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=41687>. Simply click on “how to comment” on the right side of the page and fill out the web form with your comments. Written comments must be submitted to Keith Lannom, Forest Supervisor, Payette National Forest, 500 North Mission Street Building 2, McCall, Idaho 83638 or by fax to 208-634-0744. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments may also be submitted in a format such as an email message, pdf, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc or .docx) and must be sent to [comments-intermtn-payette@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-payette@fs.fed.us). Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments. For objection eligibility each individual or representative

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<sup>1</sup> Established with the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, PL 111-11

from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request. All comments received will be published with authorship information in the public reading room on the project webpage.

Only those who submit timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project during a public comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection.

A public meeting is planned at the Council Ranger District office on March 8, 2016, 4 pm to 6 pm. Team members and the District Ranger will lead a presentation describing the Proposed Action and alternatives and be available to answer questions from the public.

We appreciate your interest in the Payette National Forest and this project. If you have any questions regarding this project or comment period, please contact the Team Leader, Steve Penny, at 208-634-0801 or [spenny@fs.fed.us](mailto:spenny@fs.fed.us).

Sincerely,

*/s/ Pattie Soucek for*

KEITH LANNOM  
Forest Supervisor