KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE ASSESSMENT TEAM

(Source: Coeur d'Alene Geographic Assessment (pp. 17-18))

As mentioned earlier, the assessment team identified key issues or questions for the purpose of focusing the analysis. Along with these key questions, the team looked at the relevant conditions and processes that would define these issues and key ecosystem indicators that would be most useful to interpret the conditions and processes in the basin. A complete list of this information is available in the component reports. The discussion below briefly summarizes the issues and questions.

All the key issues had a common theme: "How do current conditions and ecological processes compare to the historical picture?" That is, what changes have occurred and what is the significance of those changes in terms of the physical, biological, and social components of the ecosystem?

Key issues for the Social and Economic assessment included the following subjects:

* **Sense of Place and User Values.** How does the concept of sense-of-place influence people's values toward public land management options? How should we approach management of conflicts between users, including commodity and non-commodity users/values?

* **Access to Public Lands**. How do road density and road standard relate to resource use in the Basin? What is the projected demand for motorized and non-motorized access in the future? How do people value roaded and roadless areas?

* **Recreation and Tourism**. Can the recreational opportunities provided on Federal lands meet the growing demands of the recreating public of the Spokane/Coeur d'Alene area?

Key terrestrial components (vegetation and wildlife) specifically assessed included:

* **Forest Composition**. What are the implications of changes in the mix of tree and plant species that make up the forest? Is the current forest composition sustainable? Is it practical or desirable to manipulate forest composition towards the historical species mix that was better adapted to local conditions? How should we manage our rare plants and plant communities?

* **Forest Structure**. What are the implications of changes in the age, size, and density of vegetation for wildlife habitat? Is it desirable to manage current forests in ways that would provide the same proportion of historical structures?

* **Landscape Patterns**. What are the implications of changes in the arrangement, distribution, shape, and size of patches of different types of vegetation across the landscape? Would it be favorable for wildlife habitat or disturbance risk to create landscape patterns that are more like historical patterns?

* **Disturbance Regimes**. What were the historical forces that affected changes in forest composition, structure, and patterns (e.g. wildfire, insects and diseases, timber harvest, mining, etc.)? What are the implications of changes in these disturbance processes, especially for risk to human life and property? Can we manage forest vegetation in ways that reduce woody fuels and minimize the risk of wildfire and insects and diseases?

* **Riparian (streamside) Habitats and Plant Communities**. How have riparian areas and plant communities changed? What are the implications of these changes?

* **Wildlife Habitats and Populations**. What is the status of wildlife habitats in the Basin? What are the effects of other resource uses (e.g. recreation, timber harvest) on wildlife habitats and populations?

Aquatic (soil, water, and fish) components specifically assessed included:

* **Soil Productivity**. What is the status of soil productivity in the Basin today? What is the status of compaction and erosion processes? How can we manage soil productivity in the future to protect the potential of the soil to support vegetation and minimize impacts to stream processes.

* **Stream and River Channel Dynamics**. What are the processes at work that shape and define stream channels? How do the frequency and magnitude of flood events affect stream channel development? Do the resulting channels support beneficial uses?

* **Aquatic Species**. What is the status of fish and other aquatic species in the Basin? What are the population trends for native fish species? Do high mountain lakes and rivers in the Basin have the productive capability to meet increasing fishing demands?