SELWAY-MIDDLE FORK PROPOSAL

Strengths of the Collaborative Landscape Restoration Proposal

The Area

Welcome to the Selway-Middle Fork Clearwater Rivers Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program project area. This massive 1.4-million-acre landscape is characterized by Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Research Natural Areas, scenic vistas, coveted big-game species and anadromous fish.

Past management and fire suppression coupled with increasing human settlement in the wildland urban interface have altered the landscape, threatening the unique ecological values of the area. This proposal will protect communities from wildland fires, restore forest structure, function and ecologic processes and contribute to the economy and sustainability of rural Idaho.

The Strength of the Proposal and Strategy

Terrestrial and aquatic restoration needs are identified in a variety of Regional, State, Forest and County plans including the Northern Region Integrated Restoration and Protection Strategy, Idaho Statewide Forest Resource Strategy, Idaho Fish and Game Conservation Strategy and Idaho County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The Selway and Middle Fork Clearwater Rivers Subbasin Assessment provides a comprehensive analysis of specific restoration needs and opportunities within the project area.

The proposed strategy will address aquatic, terrestrial and human concerns by re-establishing and perpetuating landscapes that are diverse and resilient. This suite of restoration activities is the right action on the right piece of ground at the right time.

The Strength of the Ecological Case of the Proposal and the Proposed Ecological Restoration Strategies

Strategic plans at the multi-state, state, county and forest levels all recognize the critical need for terrestrial and aquatic restoration within the proposal area. The need can best be summed by this passage from Chapter 3, page 12 of the Selway and Middle Fork Clearwater Rivers Subbasin Assessment: *In spite of the largely wilderness and roadless character of the subbasins, landscapes at all elevations show moderate to high departure from pre-settlement conditions because of effective fire exclusion since about 1935. Conservation themes are generally applicable only to a few areas or a few elements, where conservation means saving what remains, in terms of either condition or process. Restoration, even in wilderness areas, will be required to recover the array of communities, habitats and species that the assessment area supported before Euro-American settlement.*

To address these needs, the proposal advocates: (1) application of fire and mechanical treatments in a way that emulates natural patterns; (2) reduction of fuels within the wildland urban interface; (3) management of fire in a manner that restores the landscape where appropriate; (4) vegetative treatments to improve and maintain forest composition and structure; (5) improvements to wildlife habitat; (6) decommissioning of problem or unnecessary roads and improvement to road drainage; (7) treatment of noxious weeds; and (8) restoration of native vegetation.

The Strength of the Collaborative Process and the Likelihood of Successful Collaboration throughout Implementation

Clearwater Basin Collaborative
finding solutions

The Clearwater Basin Collaborative is a diverse group of 23 individuals who work collaboratively to provide recommendations concerning the use and management of lands within the Clearwater Basin in north-central Idaho.

The Collaborative was born of conflict. After a decade of direct action protests, appeals and litigation, individuals began talking about a better way of doing business. Those discussions broadened, resulting in the Clearwater Basin Collaborative being formally convened by Idaho Senator Mike Crapo on May 30, 2008. He asked the group ". . . to work together toward a better future for the residents and resources of north-central Idaho."

Once assembled, the Collaborative worked to develop operating protocols to ensure a fair and inclusive process. They also developed a vision: *Enhance and protect the ecological and economic health of the forests, rivers and communities within the Clearwater Basin by working across a diversity of interests*.

The Collaborative has reviewed and supported land management projects, worked behind the scenes to resolve appeals and changed the tone of the dialogue regarding natural resources management within the Basin. The group is recognized for finding creative solutions that address the interests of the group's large, diverse membership.

The public is welcome at all Clearwater Basin Collaborative meetings, which are posted on the Collaborative's website —www.clearwaterbasincollaborative.org.

The Proposal's Likelihood of Achieving Reductions in Long-term Wildfire Management Costs

Strategically placed fuel treatments, both mechanical and prescribed fire, will have a demonstrable effect in reducing fire behavior and spread potential. This is critical for the priority wildland urban interface areas where protection of values at risk dictates an aggressive fire suppression strategy.

Reduced fire behavior will lead to significant cost savings due to the increased efficiency of initial-attack firefighting resources and the ability to keep small fires from growing. Preliminary modeling of representative stand conditions and fire behavior in WFDSS (Wildland Fire Decision Support System) demonstrates a significant decrease in the stratified cost index per acre through a reduction in fire behavior. Treatments will also minimize the negative ecological and/or social effects of uncharacteristic fire and provide fire managers with tactical options as control points in suppression operations.

The Proposal's Likelihood of Reducing the Relative Costs of Carrying out Ecological Restoration Treatments as a Result of the Use of Woody Biomass and Small Diameter Trees

The proposal focuses on mechanical treatment of fuels within the wildland urban interface. The predominant harvest treatments consist of commercial thinning to reduce stand densities by removing smaller diameter, less dominant, and less fire resistant trees. Wood products from vegetation treatment activities will provide revenue to pay for fuel reduction, road improvement and decommissioning where necessary as well as implementation of restoration and monitoring activities.

The Clearwater Basin is fortunate to be home to sawmill infrastructure that is designed to use small to medium diameter logs, including the state-of-the-art small diameter sawmill operated by Idaho Forest Group in Grangeville, ID, Three Rivers Timber in Kamiah, ID (now Blue North, LLC), Empire Lumber in Weippe, ID, and the Clearwater Paper mill in Lewiston, ID. Additionally, biomass materials not suitable for sawmill use could be made available to existing and future biomass energy facilities. Existing biomass utilization facilities include the cogeneration plant at Clearwater Paper in Lewiston, ID. A new opportunity to provide combined heat and power at the prison in Orofino, ID, is being assessed, and a new cogeneration facility is also under consideration at the Idaho Forest Group sawmill site in Grangeville, ID. Certainly, supply made available from this project could provide material to existing facilities and/or result in new investment in biomass energy infrastructure.

The Proposal's Likelihood of Leveraging an Appropriate level of Non-Federal Investment

The Nez Perce Tribe actively pursues funding for projects within the subbasin, investing approximately $1,000,000 annually within the subbasin to restore anadramous fish populations and improve fish habitat. The Tribe's Department of Fisheries Resources Management is working to restore anadromous fish populations in the Clear Creek and Selway River watersheds through hatchery supplementation and habitat restoration. As the manager of the Kooskia National Fish Hatchery and Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery, the Tribe has recently initiated releases of coho salmon into Clear Creek, spring Chinook into Meadow Creek (Selway), and fall Chinook salmon into the lower Selway River. Total hatchery costs in the Selway are $916,190 annually.

The Nez Perce Tribe has proposed watershed restoration in the Clear Creek and Selway River drainages under the Bonneville Power Administration's Federal Columbia River Power System Mitigation program. Working in partnership with the Forest Service since 1996, the Tribe has netted over $30 million to restore native fisheries and their habitats throughout Treaty Territory.

The Tribe has approximately $100,000 in secured annual funding to conduct aerial and ground spawning ground surveys for spring Chinook salmon, juvenile fish production estimates, and water flow and temperature monitoring in Meadow Creek (Selway).

It is estimated that other partners including the Idaho/Clearwater County Resource Advisory Committee, Clearwater Basin Collaborative, Selway Bitterroot Foundation, Backcountry Horsemen of America, Clearwater Weed Management Association and others will contribute approximately $250,000 annually in cash and/or in kind services towards restoration and monitoring activities.

Additionally, the Clearwater Basin Collaborative is developing a three year, $200,000 Idaho Forestry Projects Western Competitive Allocation grant proposal to facilitate restoration activities on private lands adjacent to the Selway-Middle Fork project area.