

Management Plan (2008 Forest Plan), incorporating changes made since 2008.

This notice announces initiates the assessment phase of the plan revision process, during which the Agency will identify and evaluate current information regarding the Tongass National Forest from the public, Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other government agencies, and non-governmental parties, 36 CFR 219.5(a)(1), 219.6, 219.19. The Tongass National Forest has initiated consultation with Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations for all phases of the planning process and will consult as part of the assessment phase of revision, 36 CFR 219.4. The Forest Service, Alaska Region, will build on the engagement efforts and the relationships developed as part of the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy to ensure that a broad range of local voices contribute to the assessment and throughout the planning process. Information collected during the formation of the Sustainability Strategy will be utilized in the assessment where appropriate.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the assessment to include information regarding the status and trends of ecological, social, and economic conditions within the planning area and across the broader landscape. In particular, the Agency must identify and evaluate information relevant to the plan area for the following: (1) Terrestrial ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems, and watersheds; (2) Air, soil, and water resources and quality; (3) System drivers, including dominant ecological processes, disturbance regimes, and stressors, such as natural succession, wildland fire, invasive species, and climate change, and the ability of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in the plan area to adapt to change; (4) Baseline assessment of carbon stocks; (5) Threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species, and potential species of conservation concern present in the plan area; (6) Social, cultural, and economic conditions; (7) Benefits people obtain from the National Forest System planning area (ecosystem services); (8) Multiple uses and their contributions to local, regional, and national economies; (9) Recreation settings, opportunities and access, and scenic character; (10) Renewable and nonrenewable energy and mineral resources; (11) Infrastructure, such as recreational facilities and transportation and utility corridors; (12) Areas of tribal importance; (13) Cultural and historic resources and uses; (14) Land status and ownership and access patterns; and (15)

Existing designated areas located in the plan area including wilderness and wild and scenic rivers and potential need and opportunity for additional designated areas. (36 CFR 219.6.)

During this assessment phase, the Forest Service invites other government agencies, Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, non-governmental parties, and the public to share information about social, economic, and environmental conditions of the Tongass National Forest and the broader landscape. Existing information about conditions on the Tongass National Forest, including information gathered through public engagement and tribal consultation, will be integrated into a draft resource assessment.

At 16.7 million acres, the Tongass National Forest is integral to social, ecological, economic and cultural values in Southeast Alaska. The Tongass is of immense cultural significance for Alaska Native peoples, and is within the traditional homelands of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian peoples. It plays an important role in economic opportunity and social well-being for people and communities in Southeast Alaska. It also represents the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest on earth and is considered critical for carbon sequestration and carbon storage to help mitigate climate change. During this assessment phase, the Forest Service invites input on these and other distinctive roles and contributions of the Tongass to the local area, region, and nation (36 CFR 219.2(b)).

The Forest Service will review and incorporate public comments and additional information from tribal consultation on the draft assessment and produce a final assessment that will inform the Agency's understanding of the need to change the plan for the Tongass National Forest. The Forest Service may then initiate the planning phase, which will include development of an environmental impact statement, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

*Responsible Official:* The responsible official for the revision of the land management plan for the Tongass National Forest is Frank Sherman, Forest Supervisor.

Dated: April 22, 2024.

**Troy Heithecker,**

*Associate Deputy Chief, National Forest System.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### **Kootenai National Forest; Montana; Kootenai National Forest Over-Snow Motorized Use Travel Plan**

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, Agriculture (USDA).

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

**SUMMARY:** The Forest Service (Forest Service), United States Department of Agriculture, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to inform a decision about the designation of trails and areas of the Kootenai National Forest which would be open to motorized over-snow use. The environmental impact statement will also inform a decision about the classes of vehicles and times of year for which motorized over-snow use will be allowed on designated trails and areas. Trails and areas designated for motorized over-snow vehicle use will be identified on an Over-Snow Vehicle Use Map which will specify the classes of vehicles and the time of year for which use is designated on the Kootenai National Forest.

**DATES:** The draft environmental impact statement is expected early in 2025, with a 45-day public comment period immediately following publication of this project's Notice of Availability of Draft Environmental Impact Statement in the **Federal Register**. The final environmental impact statement is expected by summer of 2025.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Kootenai National Forest, [SM.FS.knfcontactus@usda.gov](mailto:SM.FS.knfcontactus@usda.gov), 406-283-7740, or Stephani Rust, [stephani.rust@usda.gov](mailto:stephani.rust@usda.gov). Individuals may also visit the project's web page at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/kootenai/?project=64358>. Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf and hard of hearing (TDD) may call the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339, 24 hours a day, every day of the year, including holidays.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**Purpose and Need for Action**

Pursuant to the Travel Management Rule at 36 CFR 212 subpart C, the Forest Service must designate trails and areas to be open for motorized over-snow vehicle use. Once designated, trails and areas open to motorized over-snow vehicle use need to be identified on an Over-Snow Vehicle Use Map (36 CFR 212.81). Over-Snow Vehicle Use Maps must specify the classes of vehicles and the time of year for which use is

designated (36 CFR 212.81(c)). The public shall be allowed to participate in the designation of National Forest System roads, trails, and areas, consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (36 CFR 212.52).

On the 2.2-million-acre Kootenai National Forest, there is a need to designate trails and areas which would be open to motorized over-snow vehicle use. There is also a need to designate trails and areas open to motorized over-snow vehicle use within the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area of the Kootenai National Forest.

### Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to designate approximately 1,302,000 acres of the Kootenai National Forest, including the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area, as areas open to cross-country motorized over-snow vehicle use. Approximately 987,000 acres are proposed as areas open for all classes of cross-country motorized over-snow travel from December 1 to May 31 each year. Approximately 315,000 acres are proposed as areas open for all classes of cross-country motorized over-snow travel from December 1 to March 31 and would be closed to motorized over-snow vehicle use on March 31 each year to accommodate grizzly bear den emergence. Areas designated for over-snow vehicle use would be identified on an Over-Snow Vehicle Use Map, in accordance with 36 CFR 212.81. Over-Snow Vehicle Use Maps would specify the classes of vehicles and the time of year for which use is designated (36 CFR 212.81(c)).

Additionally, the Forest Service proposes to designate approximately 380 miles of trails in the Kootenai National Forest, including in the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area, as open to motorized over-snow vehicle use. Approximately 285 miles of groomed over-snow trails and approximately 49 miles of ungroomed over-snow trails are proposed to be open to any over-snow vehicle class between December 1 and March 31 each year. Approximately 16 miles of groomed over-snow trails and 30 miles of ungroomed over-snow trails are proposed to be open to any over-snow vehicle class between December 1 and March 31 each year. Trails designated for over-snow vehicle use would be identified with the publication of an Over-Snow Vehicle Use Map, in accordance with 36 CFR 212.81.

An amendment to the Kootenai National Forest 2015 Land Management Plan may be considered to modify the boundaries of management area 5a

(Backcountry-Non-motorized Year-round).

### Expected Impacts

The minimization criteria were applied to the identification of the National Forest System areas and trails. Impacts to wolverine, grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and whitebark pine will be assessed in a biological assessment, and consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to occur. An amendment to the Kootenai National Forest 2015 Land Management Plan may be considered to modify the boundaries of management area 5a (Backcountry-Non-motorized Year-round) as it currently is mapped in the 2015 Land Management Plan. The following substantive requirements are likely to apply (219.13(b)(2)) to the potential amendment: 36 CFR 219.8(b) to guide the plan area's contribution to social and economic sustainability, taking into account: (1) social, cultural, and economic conditions relevant to the area influenced by the plan; (2) sustainable recreation; (3) multiple uses that contribute to local, regional, and national economies in a sustainable manner; and 36 CFR 219.9(a)(2) the plan must include plan components that maintain or restore the diversity of ecosystems and habitat types throughout the plan area.

### Responsible Official

Kootenai National Forest Supervisor.

### Scoping Comments and the Objection Process

Public scoping of this project occurred in April 2015 and July through September 2023; those scoping efforts have informed this proposed action. Public scoping will not be repeated; however, additional opportunities for public comment will be provided when the Draft EIS is available.

Any decision about this project may be subject to 36 CFR 218 and/or 36 CFR 219 pre-decisional review (objection). Unless received anonymously, public comments received during the scoping period from July 13, 2023 through September 29, 2023 or other designated opportunities for public comment may establish eligibility for participation in pre-decisional administrative review. Issues raised in an objection must be based on previously submitted comments, unless based on new information arising after designated opportunities.

### Nature of Decision To Be Made

The decision will determine the designation of trails and areas of the Kootenai National Forest which will be

open to motorized over-snow use, as well as determining the classes of vehicles and times of year for which motorized over-snow use will be allowed on designated trails and areas.

### Substantive Provisions

An amendment to the Kootenai National Forest 2015 Land Management Plan may be considered to modify the boundaries of management area 5a (Backcountry-Non-motorized Year-round) as it currently is mapped in the 2015 Land Management Plan. The following substantive requirements are likely to apply (219.13(b)(2)) to the potential amendment: 36 CFR 219.8(b) to guide the plan area's contribution to social and economic sustainability, taking into account: (1) social, cultural, and economic conditions relevant to the area influenced by the plan; (2) sustainable recreation; (3) multiple uses that contribute to local, regional, and national economies in a sustainable manner; and 36 CFR 219.9(a)(2) the plan must include plan components that maintain or restore the diversity of ecosystems and habitat types throughout the plan area.

Dated: April 22, 2024.

**Troy Heithecker,**

*Associate Deputy Chief, National Forest System.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests; Idaho; End of the World Project

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, Agriculture (USDA).

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

**SUMMARY:** The Forest Service ("Forest Service"), United States Department of Agriculture, is giving notice of its intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the End of the World Project on the Salmon River Ranger District of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests in Idaho. The Forest received an unpublished order in *Friends of the Clearwater v. Cheryl F. Probert*. The court ordered the environmental assessment (EA), decision notice (DN), and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for the End of the World project to be remanded to the United States Forest Service for further evaluation under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and National Environmental Policy Act