

**Decision Notice
And
Finding of No Significant Impact**

For The

**Proposed Amendments to the Management Indicator Species List for the
Salmon and Challis Land and Resource Management Plans**

And

**Finding of Non-Significant Amendment of the Land and Resource Management Plan for
the Salmon National Forest And Finding of Non-Significant Amendment of the Land and
Resource Management Plan for the Challis National Forest**

USDA Forest Service
Salmon-Challis National Forest
Idaho

Background

The Forest Supervisor for the Salmon-Challis National Forest (S-C NF) has determined the need to reevaluate and refine the Management Indicator Species list for the Salmon and Challis Land and Resource Management Plans. In ways that improve its reliability, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in meeting information needs for the biological effects of active management.

Management Indicator Species (MIS) are defined as “plant and animal species, communities, or special habitats selected for emphasis in planning, and which are monitored during forest plan implementation in order to assess the effects of management activities on their populations and the populations of other species with similar habitat needs which they may represent” (FSM 2620.5). The role of management indicator species in National Forest planning is described in the 1982 implementing regulations for the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976:

“In order to estimate the effects of each [Forest Plan] alternative on fish and wildlife populations, certain vertebrate and/or invertebrate species present in the area shall be identified and selected as management indicator species and the reasons for their selection will be stated. These species shall be selected because their population changes are believed to indicate the effects of management activities. In the selection of management indicator species, the following categories shall be represented where appropriate: Endangered and threatened plant and animal species identified on State and Federal lists for the planning area; species with special needs that may be influenced significantly by planned management programs; species commonly hunted, fished or trapped; non-game species of special interest; and additional plant or animal species selected because their population changes are believed to indicate the effects of management activities on other species of selected major biological communities or on water quality (36 CF 219.12(a)(1)).”

These regulations require the use of MIS populations to reflect the effects of management activities on habitats and population trends. Since adoption of the Forest Plans, Biologists have learned that some of the original MIS occur too infrequently to be reliable indicators for the purposes or habitat types they were selected to represent. Some have proven impractical to monitor economically or efficiently, while others have turned out to be poor indicators due to many different factors affecting populations. Biologists have also found there are species not listed as MIS that appear to be good substitutes for some of those species that now seem inadequate.

Decision and Reasons For the Decision

Based upon my review of the Environmental Assessment and supporting documents, I have decided to implement **Alternative 3: Amphibian Alternative**. This alternative replaces the existing list of Management Indicator Species for both the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Salmon National Forest (Table 1) and the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Challis National Forest (Table 2), and clarifies monitoring and evaluation procedures associated with each of the selected species. The species selected in Alternative 3 include, (1) Pileated Woodpecker as MIS for the coniferous community/habitat type; (2) Greater Sage-Grouse for the sagebrush community/habitat type; (3) Columbia Spotted Frog for the riparian habitat/community type; and (4) Bull Trout for the aquatic habitat/community type. This would

bring both Forest Plans in line with new information and current interpretations of agency regulations and policies concerning MIS, and make the lists consistent for both Forests.

Table 1. Management Indicator Species in the Salmon Land and Resource Management Plan

Common Name	Scientific Name
Rocky Mountain Elk	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>
Bighorn Sheep	<i>Ovis canadensis</i>
Mountain Goat	<i>Oreamnos americanus</i>
Pine Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>
Vesper Sparrow	<i>Pooecetes gramineus</i>
Yellow Warbler	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>
Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>
Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>
Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>
Mountain Bluebird	<i>Sialia currocoides</i>
Anadromous Fish (salmon and steelhead)	<i>Oncorhynchus tshawytscha, O. mykiss, O. nerka</i>
Trout (all species combined)	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss, O. clarki, Salvelinus confluentus</i>
Aquatic Macroinvertebrates***	

***Specific genus and species to be identified at the project level

Table 2. Management Indicator Species in the Challis Land and Resource Management Plan

Common Name	Scientific Name
Rocky Mountain Elk	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>
Bighorn Sheep	<i>Ovis canadensis</i>
Mountain Goat	<i>Oreamnos americanus</i>
Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>
Big Sagebrush and Sub-species	<i>Artemisia tridentata, vaseyana, wyomingensis</i>
Bitterbrush	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>
Bluebunch Wheatgrass	<i>Agropyron spicatum</i>
Idaho Fescue	<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>
Western Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Canadian Thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>
Rainbow Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>
Cutthroat Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarki</i>
Bull Trout	<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>
Steelhead	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>
Chinook	<i>Oncorhynchus tshawytscha</i>
Mayfly	<i>Rhithrogena spp.</i>
Mayfly	<i>Epeorus spp.</i>
Mayfly	<i>Ephemerella doddsi</i>
Stonefly	<i>Zapada spp.</i>
Mayfly	<i>Ephemerella inermis</i>
True Fly	<i>Chironomidae spp.</i>

Alternative 3 also keeps the habitat requirement information in both existing plans for species that were MIS.

When compared to other alternatives, Alternative 3 best achieves the purpose and need of meeting requirements for monitoring wildlife habitat and the use of MIS (36 CFR 219 subsection 19).

Population data for the pileated woodpecker is currently available or protocols exist for collection of scientifically credible data. Pileated woodpeckers are detected by the annual Breeding Bird Surveys that are conducted on this forest each year, in conjunction with a large-scale national monitoring effort for birds. This bird is a loud, vociferous species that is easily detected by "point count transects", several of which have been conducted on at least one Ranger District. The relationship of this species with mixed conifer forests communities containing large diameter live trees, standing dead and down logs, particularly in multi-storied stands, is fairly well understood, as is the effect of timber management activities on the characteristics of such stands. Pileated woodpeckers commonly occur in the ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and mixed pine and fir stands where most forested vegetative management occurs on this forest, and are affected by changes in habitats they provide.

Population data for the greater sage-grouse is currently available or protocols exist for collection of scientifically credible data. Greater sage-grouse have been monitored, primarily via lek counts, for several decades on this forest and adjacent public and private lands. The protocol for this monitoring effort is well established and used throughout the range of this species. These efforts are conducted by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), in conjunction with Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) personnel and population data collected are housed by them but readily available to interested parties. This species occurs in the heart of western grazing lands and much research has been conducted concerning the relationship of this species to sagebrush communities and the effects of vegetative manipulation on source habitats.

Population data is currently available for the Columbia spotted frog and protocols exist for collection of scientifically credible data. As a Forest Service Sensitive Species in Region 4 and on the S-C NF, the Columbia spotted frog has been the subject of considerable inventory and monitoring effort for the past decade. This species is known to occupy slow-moving cool water streams, beaver ponds and marshy edges of lakes across the forest and have been found to use adjacent upland habitats as well. Survey and monitoring protocols for amphibians, including this species, are well established and long-term monitoring sites have been selected and surveyed across the forest. In addition, species occurrence data has been collected concurrently with stream inventory efforts for fish species. The Columbia spotted frog occurs in a variety of forest and non-forest communities that are subjected to many different resource management activities ranging from grazing to timber harvest and are known to be sensitive to changes in habitat parameters such as riparian vegetation, water temperatures and quality.

Population data for the bull trout is currently available or protocols exist for collection of scientifically credible data. Bull trout have, since being listed as a "Threatened" species, been intensively monitored through a cooperative monitoring program with FS, IDFG, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries and other agencies. Protocols for electro-fishing, snorkeling and redd counts are well established and much data has been accumulated. Bull trout occur in streams within virtually all coniferous forest communities, which are subject to resource management activities,

including timber and grazing. They are known to be sensitive to stream habitat and watershed alterations.

Other Alternatives Considered

Fourteen other species, identified through public comment, were evaluated as possible MIS species which included, pronghorn, snowshoe hare, white-tailed jackrabbit, ruffed grouse, willow flycatcher, Clark's nutcracker, aspen, willow, black cottonwood, whitebark pine, mountain mahogany, spotted knapweed, leafy spurge, and cryptogamic soils. These species were dismissed because population monitoring is lacking, relationships between population trends and habitat management activities are lacking, or the species are not associated with management areas where habitat manipulation is occurring or allowed.

The Evaluation Assessment focused on the selected Alternative 3, the Proposed Action – Alternative 2, and the No Action Alternative – Alternative 1.

Alternative 1 - No Action would keep each existing species and the monitoring and evaluation criteria associated with each species in both Forest Plans. It was found that many of the species did not meet the criteria for MIS because population monitoring is lacking, relationships between population trends and habitat management activities are lacking, or the species are not associated with management areas where habitat manipulation is occurring or allowed.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action would replace the existing list of Management Indicator Species for both the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Salmon National Forest and the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Challis National Forest, and would clarify monitoring and evaluation procedures associated with each of the selected species. This alternative is very similar to the selected alternative, but includes the beaver instead of the Columbia spotted frog to represent the riparian habitat/community type.

Protocols exist for collection of scientifically credible data for the Beaver, but population data does not exist. Beaver populations are also affected by hunting which make cause-effect relationships between populations trends and management activity effects on habitat difficult without the implementation of plan components outlined in the formerly proposed interagency beaver management agreement for the Salmon–Challis National Forest public lands. (These components call for the determination of existing habitat and activity conditions, potentials and preferences for watersheds across the forest, followed by the determination of watershed-specific beaver management goals and objectives). The task of initiating population data collecting and implementing the interagency beaver management agreement would require time and resources that are already scarce.

Public Involvement

A scoping letter was mailed September 19, 2003 to the 114 addresses on the Forest Mailing list. The proposed action was enclosed with a cover letter inviting comments by October 20, 2003. Four public letters, three internal comments, one public phone call with comments, and one public phone call requesting a copy of the Environmental Assessment were received.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the effects described in the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

The disclosure of effects in the EA found the actions limited in context.

1. There are no adverse environmental impacts or beneficial environmental impacts although the changes in MIS will provide for improved understanding of relationships between management actions and specific habitats.
2. This action has no bearing on public health or safety since it is simply a change in what species will be monitored for the purpose of correlating wildlife population trends with effects of management activities on habitat.
3. This action has no effect on unique characteristics of the geographic area (historic cultural resource, park land, prime farm lands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers) because which species is monitored to meet MIS requirements will not result in any impacts to these resources.
4. The effects of this action on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no effect on the human environment. The effect is one of improving the use of wildlife population monitoring to understand effects of management activities on habitats.
5. The effects of this action are not highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or unknown risks because monitoring of the selected species has been conducted successfully for a number of years. Monitoring of these species has no effect on the species themselves or the resource they occupy.
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because the action is to choose a species for monitoring that is well-suited to the purposes stated for Management Indicator Species. The effects of this monitoring are expected to be a better understanding of effects of management activities on habitat and population trends and no precedent for future actions with significant effects is established.
7. This action is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts because this change in MIS will result in improved compliance with 36 CFR 219 but will have no environmental effects.
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because the focus of the decision is to replace the monitoring requirements in both the Salmon Forest Plan and the Challis Forest Plan Management Indicator Species with an updated list that will improve the use of wildlife population monitoring to understand effects of management activities on habitats. The action will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resource because it is

about which species to monitor for evaluating effects of management activities on habitats and populations and results in no environmental effects.

9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has not been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 because there is no effect other than the potential for improved understanding of effects of management activities on habitats and populations.
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. This action amends the Salmon National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Challis National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The National Forest Management Act regulations at 36 CFR 219.10(f) state: "Based on and analysis of the objectives, guidelines, and other contents of the forest plan, the Forest Supervisor shall determine whether a proposed amendment would result in a significant change in the Plan." The Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12) provides a framework for consideration, and section 5.32 lists four factors to be considered when determining whether a proposed change to a Forest Plan is significant or non significant: (a) timing; (b) location and size; (c) goals, objectives, and outputs; and (d) management prescriptions. I have evaluated the proposed amendments and concluded they do not constitute a significant amendment for either the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Salmon National Forest or the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Challis National Forest.

(a) Timing: The timing factor examines at what point, over the course of the forest plan period, the Plan is amended. The Challis and Salmon Land and Resource Management Plans were completed in 1987 and 1988. Revision of these plans is scheduled to begin in 2005, however, the revised forest plans may not be in effect for up to five years. The need for a revised MIS list is appropriate because that list will be needed until the revision is complete, however the changed monitoring is unlikely to lead to significant change in the management actions on the Salmon or Challis National Forests compared to the level of actions that have already occurred in the last 15 years. The timing factors imply that these amendments are non-significant.

(b) Location and size: The key to location and size is context, or "the relationship of the affected area to the overall planning area." The change in MIS has no direct effect on any specific area of the Forest, however this amendment is designed to focus MIS monitoring on areas where management activities are most likely to occur. Active resource management at this time is limited primarily to those areas that are not currently designated as Wilderness or roadless. This is approximately 854,000 acres or 20% of the Salmon-Challis National Forest. In terms of location and size, the action of monitoring and evaluating MIS related to these amendments does not result in a significant change in the plans.

(c) Goals, objectives, and outputs: This factor involves the determination of "whether the change alters the long-term relationship between the level of goods and services in the overall planning area". This amendment will not result in any change to levels of goods and services in the overall planning area. It replaces the list of Management Indicator Species for both

Forest Plans and clarifies monitoring and evaluation procedures associated with each of the selected species. No changes to level of goods and services imply that these amendments do not result in a significant change in the plans.

(d) Management prescriptions: This factor involves the determination of (1) "whether the change in a management prescription is only for a specific situation or whether it would apply to future decisions throughout the planning area" and (2), "whether or not the change alters the desired future condition of the land and resources or the anticipated goods and services to be produced." These amendments do not change any management prescription, nor do they change desired future conditions or anticipated goods and services. With regard to these factors it can also be determined to be non-significant amendments.

Based on review of the Environmental Assessment and supporting documents and considering the above guidance and findings, it is my determination that these amendments do not result in a significant change to the Forest Plans and is therefore are non-significant amendments.

Implementation Date

This project will be implemented 7 working days after the decision has been published.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217.3. A written appeal must be postmarked or received in duplicate by the Appeal Reviewing Officer within 45 days (time period begins the day after the notice is published) of the date of publication on the legal notice regarding this decision in the Recorder Herald, Salmon Idaho and The Challis Messenger, Challis, Idaho. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 217.9 and be mailed to:

Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service
324 25th Street
Ogden, Utah 84401

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Karryl Krieger, Planning Team Leader, Salmon-Challis National Forest, 50 Highway 93 South, Salmon, Idaho 83467, (208) 756 5102.

/s/ Lesley W. Thompson

February 2, 2004

LESLEY W. THOMPSON
Acting Forest Supervisor

Date