

NEWS RELEASE



United States
Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Clearwater National Forest

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Forest Service decides to proceed with Upper Lochsa Land Exchange

Orofino, ID—A proposal to exchange up to 28,000 acres of scattered parcels of national forest system lands in north central Idaho for 40,000 acres of private lands in the headwaters of the Lochsa River has received the green light from Forest Service officials.

According to Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Tom Reilly, the conclusion of the recently-completed feasibility analysis is that “. . . the Forest Service enter into an ‘agreement to initiate’ with Western Pacific Timber and proceed with the land exchange process.”

Reilly said the proposed land exchange provides an opportunity for the Forest Service to place privately-owned “checkerboard” lands near the Idaho-Montana border into public ownership.

Checkerboard refers to the pattern of ownership where the Forest Service and Western Pacific Timber own alternating sections of land.

“This is truly a significant opportunity for the Forest Service,” Reilly stated. “These checkerboard lands are located within the headwaters of the Lochsa River. They provide crucial habitat for fish and wildlife, and include important cultural resources, including sections of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.”

Additionally the Forest expects the proposed exchange will reduce administrative costs and provide an opportunity to manage the upper Lochsa drainage in its entirety.

Reilly said the Forest Service has identified national forest system lands within the Idaho Panhandle, Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests to offer in the trade. He

said there are about 46 scattered tracts ranging in size from 6.35 acres (the Forest Service compound in Elk City) to a more than 7600-acre parcel northeast of Elk City.

Reilly said it is likely the 28,000 acres of federal lands identified for transfer will be more than enough to complete the exchange which is based on an equal value of lands.

The land exchange proposal includes a restoration plan designed to identify projects that are necessary to bring the private lands up to forest plan management standards. Western Pacific Timber has committed to contribute funding for the plan's implementation.

The Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to describe the proposal and disclose the effects of the land exchange. The process will include public involvement and a formal public comment period.

“We understand the public has a great deal of interest in this proposal and we are interested in people's reactions and suggested refinements,” Reilly added.

Western Pacific Timber, LLC first approached the Forest Service about a possible land exchange in 2006. In February 2008, the Forest Service, Western Pacific Timber and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation entered into a partnership stating their intent to work on the project.

With the completion of the feasibility analysis and decision to move forward, the Forest Service and Western Pacific Timber have entered into an “Agreement to Initiate” that stipulates the roles and responsibilities of each party.

Documents regarding the proposed land exchange along with legal descriptions and maps showing parcels proposed for exchange will be posted on the Forest's website Wednesday afternoon (September 24) at www.fs.fed.us/r1/clearwater.

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For additional information, contact:

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