

Wildlife

WildEarth Guardians
Sierra Club/Alliance for the Wild Rockies
Conservation Northwest

Objectors contend plan components do not provide sufficient protection for wildlife habitat and many individual species, and do not insure population viability.

Response:

Most of the objections related to wildlife issues are based on the belief the Colville NF management should optimize wildlife protection measures and limit or disallow activities that may adversely affect wildlife. However, there is no legal or regulatory language that imposes such stringent requirements. Instead, the plan must “Provide for adequate fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native vertebrate species and provide that habitat for species chosen under §219.19 is maintained and improved to the degree consistent with multiple-use objectives established in the plan” (1982 rule, 219.27). As described in §219.19, the agency achieves this mandate by managing wildlife habitats (primarily indicated by vegetation community composition and structural stage per §219.26), developing additional plan components for particular species, and then evaluating the effects of the alternatives “in terms of both amount and quality of habitat and of animal population trends” (§219.19(a)(2)).

Many plan elements (i.e., desired conditions, standards, guidelines, management areas) were developed to manage wildlife habitat and protect individual species, and the effects of plan implementation on wildlife are disclosed in the FEIS (Vol. 2, p. 441-584) and Biological Assessment. Based on that analysis, and the supporting information in the record (particularly Gaines 2017), the responsible official determined that the LMP met the NFMA diversity and viability requirements (Draft Rod, p. 29-30).

Court decisions have established a broad range of acceptable viability outcomes for wildlife populations. At a minimum, the selected alternative for the plan “cannot be one which the agency knows or believes will probably cause the extirpation of other native vertebrate species from the planning area” (Seattle Audubon Society v. Moseley, 798 F. Supp. 1473, 1484, and 1494 (W.D. Wash 1992)). However, increased viability may not come at the expense of other required considerations, i.e., “the selection of an alternative with a higher likelihood of viability would preclude any multiple-use compromises contrary to the overall mandate of the NFMA” (Seattle Audubon Society v. Lyons, 871 F. Supp. 1291 (W.D. Wash. 1994)). In short, the agency has considerable discretion in the weight given to wildlife protection within a multiple-use framework. The plan components, analysis and conclusions in the Colville LMP record demonstrate compliance with relevant laws and regulations and are well within the bounds for wildlife protection established by court rulings.

Remedy: None recommended – the record demonstrates that the USFS met both the substantive and procedural requirements of the ESA and NFMA regulations.

Objectors contend the coarse filter approach for wildlife management (i.e., focusing on vegetation patterns as wildlife habitat) “may miss some components of biological diversity.”

Response:

The LMP includes many components developed to maintain or restore wildlife habitat, at both coarse (i.e., habitat) and fine (i.e., species) scales. The LMP desired conditions for vegetation consider the historical range of variability with respect to vegetation type and structure, as well as finer-scales

resources such as snags, coarse woody debris and openings (LMP p. 33-39). Additionally, the LMP includes desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines for wildlife and wildlife habitat (p. 58-68) that demonstrate consideration for species-specific management and resource needs. Analysis in the FEIS, Gaines 2017 and the BA showed that implementation of the plan's vegetation and fire management activities, in conjunction with protective measures for particular species and critical resources, would meet requirements for fish and wildlife resources under NFMA.

See also the analysis for viability above.

Remedy: None recommended – the record demonstrates that the USFS met both the substantive and procedural requirements of the USFS planning regulations.

Objectors contend the LMP should have identified several species (e.g., fisher, pine marten, pileated woodpecker, beaver, elk, black-backed woodpecker, owls, etc.) as SCC or MIS, or included elements for additional protection.

Response:

The methods and rationale for analysis of individual species or surrogates for groups of species are described in the FEIS (Vol. 2, p. 441-456) and in Gaines 2017 (p. 1-15). This documentation clearly explains the methods for selection and analysis, which appear to be reasonable, incorporate a range of data sources and adopt external standards for species status that constitute the best available scientific information. These analyses may have excluded species that the objectors believe should have been identified as SCC or otherwise considered, but they did not do so arbitrarily.

Objectors' contentions that specific habitat elements or species were not subjected to detailed analyses may be true, but managing for and analyzing species viability does not require considering the effects of every potential agency action on every species or habitat. That is, specific criticisms related to the scope of analysis (e.g., "species X should have been in category Y and analyzed") are insufficient as arguments against the clear evidence that habitat management and species viability were central considerations for developing elements of the selected alternative and that the analysis methods were reasonable. Based on the analysis of ESA-listed species, surrogate species and other species of management interest, the responsible official determined that the LMP met the NFMA diversity and viability requirements (Draft Rod, p. 29-30).

Remedy: None recommended – the record demonstrates that the USFS met both the substantive and procedural requirements of the USFS planning regulations.

Objectors contend that the FEIS fails to analyze the effects of livestock grazing on wildlife species.

Response:

The effects of livestock grazing on wildlife are evaluated for each alternative in the FEIS, with additional analysis for ESA-listed species in the BA.

Remedy: None recommended

Objectors contend the FEIS did not adequately consider the effects of roads and motorized recreation on wildlife, and did not include management direction to limit potential negative effects.

Response:

The effects of motorized recreation and road access as well as habitat connectivity on wildlife are evaluated for each alternative in the FEIS, with additional analysis for ESA-listed species in the BA.

Remedy: None recommended