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Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail Visitor Capacity Environmental Assessment



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Cover photo: A view of a mountain along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail at Joseph Overlook, Oregon. Photo taken by Roger M Peterson, USFS.

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Introduction

The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail (NPNHT) is 2,184 miles long and crosses multiple jurisdictions, including Federal, State, local, tribal, and private lands. Congress designated the trail in 1986, adding it to the nationwide system of scenic, recreational, and historic trails established by the National Trails System Act of 1968 (Trails Act). The congressional designation of the trail was intended to provide national recognition and commemoration of the historical perspective, route, and story associated with the flight of the Nez Perce in their attempt to escape and evade the United States Army in 1887 (USDA Forest Service 1982)

The Trails Act requires the development of a comprehensive plan to provide broad authority and a strategic framework for the development, administration, and management of the trail. The Forest Service is the lead trail administrator and worked collaboratively with Federal agencies, State and local governments, tribes, user groups, stakeholders, and the general public to complete the comprehensive plan in 1990. Since that time, the comprehensive plan has been revised to address changes to existing conditions and to address required components that were not covered in the original plan. One of the required components not included in the 1990 comprehensive plan was a visitor use capacity to assist in the protection and management of trail resources.

In this analysis, we are proposing to set the visitor use capacity and recommend indicators, thresholds, and monitoring direction for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail to comply with the 1968 Trails Act. The revised comprehensive plan (USDA Forest Service 2019) is substantially complete and will be finalized when a decision is made regarding the visitor use capacity of the trail.

Visitor use capacities include the amount, type, timing, and distribution of visitor activities and behaviors. Visitor use capacities are typically determined in part by assessing the areas desired conditions, current use, user conflicts, and resource issues of specific areas.

Location

The Nez Perce National Historic Trail stretches approximately 2,184 miles, extending from the vicinity of Wallowa Lake in eastern Oregon. It crosses the Snake River at Dug Bar entering into central Idaho, then crosses the Clearwater River, after which it parallels the Clearwater and Lochsa Rivers as it enters into Montana at Lolo Pass. The trail then runs south through the Bitterroot Valley, over Gibbons Pass, before continuing through the Big Hole Valley. It crosses Bannock Pass, re-entering Idaho near Leadore. It then runs south through the Birch Creek and Lemhi Valleys before turning eastward toward Dubois heading over Targhee Pass toward Yellowstone National Park. After entering the Park near the West Yellowstone entrance, the trail meanders through Yellowstone until it exits the national park near the east entrance. From there, the Nez Perce National Historic Trail follows the Clarks Fork River in an easterly direction, before crossing over Dead Indian Hill and heading north past Laurel and Lewistown, Montana. The designated trail ends at Bear Paw Battlefield, which is some 16 miles south of Chinook, Montana.

For descriptive purposes, this analysis will organize the Nez Perce Trail into eight trail segments (figure 1), which roughly correspond to the geographic regions identified in the eight auto tour routes already developed for the trail. These segments will then be broken down further by agency and geographic area where necessary to better classify visitor use trends. Visitor use capacity will only be discussed on federally owned lands.

- Segment 1 – Wallowa Valley, Oregon to Weippe Prairie, Idaho
- Segment 2 – Weippe Prairie, Idaho to Lolo, Montana
- Segment 3 – Lolo to Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana
- Segment 4 – Big Hole, Horse Prairie, and Lemhi Valleys
- Segment 5 – Leadore and Island Park, Idaho to Yellowstone National Park
- Segment 6 – Yellowstone National Park
- Segment 7 – Yellowstone National Park to Broadview, Montana
- Segment 8 – Broadview to Bear Paw National Battlefield, Montana.

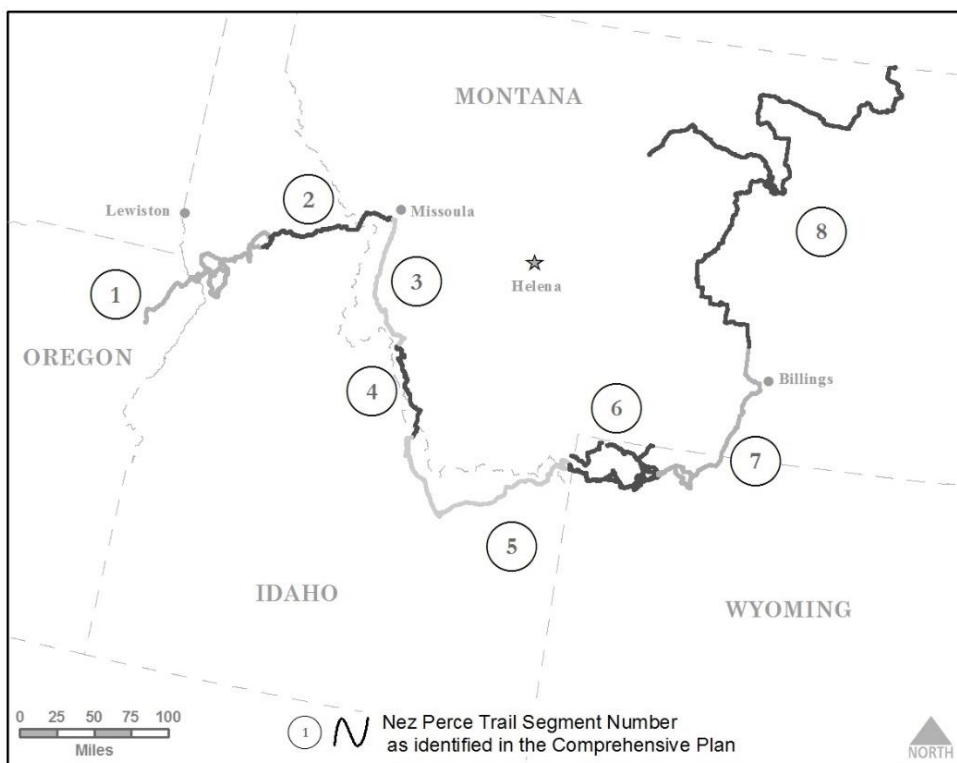


Figure 1. Vicinity map of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail

Need for the Proposal

The National Trails System Act requires that visitor use capacity be addressed in a comprehensive plan (16 U.S.C. 1244 (f) (1)). The Trails Act requires identifying the visitor capacity for the trail. Currently, no visitor capacity is identified which does not meet the intent of the law because the trail values are not specifically protected relative to new trends or using currently available science.

In addition to meeting the regulatory requirements of the Trails Act, establishment of visitor use capacity aids in the identification, management and protection of the inherent resource values associated with the national historic trail. Setting visitor capacity ensures the nature and purpose of the trail as identified in the Trails Act and the comprehensive plan can be maintained and protected in the future, while continuing to provide access to the trail and the connected recreational and tourism opportunities to a growing and diverse public.

Desired Future Condition

The evaluation of the current condition was completed for each resource associated with the trail. These existing condition reports are located in the revised comprehensive plan project file and are incorporated by reference. This existing condition analysis has not identified any areas as having a critical resource concern as a result of visitor use. Additionally, there are no areas currently “closed” to visitors along the trail due to visitor use impacts on resource conditions or heritage resources.

The revised comprehensive plan uses goals to describe the desired future user experience and characteristics towards which land management and resources should be directed. The plan does not prescribe specific actions to be taken by agencies or partners, rather it describes the outcome conditions of desired future actions.

Desired future conditions of the trail relevant to visitor use capacity include the following:

- visitor use is managed in a way that contributes to the preservation and enjoyment of significant natural, historic, and cultural resources of the trail
- visitor use is regulated as necessary to provide for user and public safety; to protect natural, cultural, and historic resources; to minimize conflict and maximize responsible use; to afford recreation experience objectives; and to comply with Federal and State laws
- visitor use monitoring and capacity studies adhere to practices established using the best available science
- visitor use is in balance with protection of the trail and sites along the trail
- use conflicts among trail users are infrequent
- visitors are afforded a range of opportunities to experience the trail
- heritage tourism is recognized as a key component of the economy for gateway communities along the trail
- the historic route and sites directly associated with the flight of the Nez Perce are managed to preserve historic and scenic values, integrity, and qualities; offering visitors high-quality interpretive, educational, and recreational experiences
- the trail is sustainable with no major soil erosion, drainage, or water quality concerns caused by use and management of the trail
- conflicts between hiking and horseback trail users and traditional and cultural use practitioners are infrequent
- land and trail managers remain cognizant and accommodating of, and sensitive to, valid tribal rights and traditional uses in proximity to the trail
- heritage tourism is recognized as a key component of the economy for gateway communities along the trail

Proposed Action

Visitor Use Capacity Recommendation

The proposed action recommends a visitor capacity for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. A visitor capacity is a component of visitor use management and is defined as the maximum amounts and types of visitor use an area can accommodate while achieving and maintaining the desired resource conditions and visitor experiences consistent with the purposes for which the area was established (IVUMC (Interagency Visitor Use Management Council), 2019). The proposed action does not propose specific visitor use management strategies; it is the role of individual units to determine how and when to implement visitor use management strategies to protect the resource and recreation experiences of the trail. This is an administrative action only; no ground-disturbing activities will take place based on this recommendation. Additionally, the proposed action does not directly implement any visitor limit, restriction, or other visitor use management regulation. Ongoing use of the trail is not considered a connected action; this use would occur regardless of recommending the carrying capacity.

Once the analysis and decision for this environmental assessment are complete, the carrying capacity recommendation will be incorporated as part of the revised comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan is a long-term programmatic plan designed to provide strategic guidance and recommendations for future actions that will be pursued through agency and unit-specific land management plans, project-specific National Environmental Policy Act analyses, and agreements with landowners and land managers.

The revised comprehensive plan was developed under the authority of the National Trails System Act, which is independent of existing land and resource management plans. The act requires that the trail corridor “be designed to harmonize with and complement any established multiple-use plans for the specific area in order to insure continued maximum benefits” (16 U.S.C. 1246 (a)(2)). Federal agencies managing land along the trail should ensure their land management plans and resource management plans are compatible with strategic direction provided in the revised comprehensive plan. If modifications of these management plans are needed, the appropriate environmental analysis will be used to incorporate those changes.

If individual units choose to implement specific visitor use strategies that would make changes to the trail use or allow group rides via a special use permit, additional environmental analysis would occur at that point to consider site-specific impacts.

Recommended Visitor Capacity

This analysis will focus only on the official Nez Perce Historic Trail corridor described in the Nez Perce National Historic Trail Revised Comprehensive Plan (revised comprehensive plan) (USDA Forest Service 2019), where it crosses lands managed by the Federal Government. This analysis will not evaluate auto tour routes or trail segments on State, municipal, or private ground.

This recommended visitor use capacity would apply all year accepting that some sections of the trail are clear of snow and passable on a yearlong basis. Conversely it is recognized that many segments are snowed in, or inaccessible for multiple months of the year. Specific to this analysis, the recommended visitor use capacity is far higher than current amounts of use along most portions of the trail providing a foreseeable increase in recreational opportunities. Subsequently, it is anticipated the recommended visitor use capacity would not result in near-term management actions to regulate use levels along the trail.

The visitor use capacity for the Nez Perce Trail is recommended to be set at 350 persons, per day (24-hour period), per 20-mile segment of the trail (table 1). See table 2 for a breakdown of visitor use capacity by type of use. Allowable uses for the trail are identified as foot and saddle stock in the 1990 comprehensive plan. The capacity has been set for these types of uses; although separating out persons from saddle stock provides for a variety of other types of allowed uses along the corridor including hiking, biking, or other recreation activities approved by individual management plans.

Table 1. Recommended visitor use capacity for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail

Amount	Type	Timing	Location
350	Persons	24 hours	20 miles
350	Saddle Stock	24 hours	20 miles

There are a variety of areas in which the identified capacity is expected to be exceeded regularly. These areas are where the trail is co-located with major roads or pass through popular recreation areas managed by the National Park Service. For areas where the trail is co-located with a major roadway or national park site, **a modified capacity will not be identified**, as management of visitor use in these areas are outside the purview of this report. See figure 1 for the location of trail segments.

Table 2. Areas anticipated to exceed visitor use capacity

Trail Segment	Area Identifier	Managing Agency
1	Hwy 95	Bureau of Land Management
1	White Bird Battlefield Overlook	National Park Service
2	Lolo Pass	Forest Service
2	US Hwy 12	Forest Service
3	US Hwy 93	Forest Service
3	State Rd 43	Forest Service
3	Big Hole National Battlefield	National Park Service
4	State Hwy 324	Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service
4	ID St Hwy 29	Forest Service
5	ID St Hwy 29	Bureau of Land Management
5	ID St Hwy 22	Bureau of Land Management
5	US Hwy 20	Forest Service
6	US Hwy 20	National Park Service
6	US Hwy 191	National Park Service
6	Mary Mountain/Nez Perce Trailhead	National Park Service
6	Grand Loop Road	National Park Service
6	US Hwy 20	National Park Service
7	WY St Hwy 296	Forest Service
7	WY St Hwy 120	Bureau of Land Management
7	MT St Hwy 72	Bureau of Land Management
7	US Hwy 310	Bureau of Land Management
8	Bear Paw National Battlefield	National Park Service
1	US Hwy 95	Bureau of Land Management

The trail passes through various areas that are more restrictive than the proposed visitor use capacity proposed above. Some of the visitor use restrictions are legally mandated (designated wilderness and designated wild and scenic rivers), while others are based in agency specific policies, which could be modified with appropriate levels of planning and analysis (for example, general group size or stay limits). The more restrictive constraints by agency or specific unit are identified below in table 3. These constraints include identified group size limits, stock limits, wilderness restrictions, wild and scenic river restrictions, permitting requirements, and designated campsites in Yellowstone National Park.

Table 3. Existing constraints to capacity recommendation

Trail Segment	Agency	Special Designation	Visitor Use Constraint
All	BLM	General BLM camping guidelines	Developed site group size: Group size is limited 10 people and 2 vehicles per developed campsite
All	FS	Non-commercial group use	Organized groups of 75 people or more require a permit
All	NPS	Nez Perce National Historic Park	No camping authorized
1	FS	Hells Canyon Wilderness	Group size: 8 People Stock limit: 16 Head
1		Snake River Wild and Scenic River, scenic section	Powerboat: Commercial: <i>Peak*</i> : 1,506 boat days Private: <i>Peak*</i> : 18 Launches/day for overnight trips on weekends (Fri-Sun), 5 day trip launches/day on weekends; Float Boat: Commercial: Maximum group size 24 persons (including guides) <i>Peak*</i> : 224 launches from Hells Canyon Creek; Private: Maximum group size 8 float craft per party. <i>Peak*</i> : 2 party launches/day weekends (Fri-Sun) and holidays; launches by reservation/permit system; <i>Secondary</i> : Self issued permits for launch
6	NPS	Yellowstone front country camping regulations	Overnight camping or parking is only allowed in designated campgrounds or campsites. Campsite occupancy is limited to 6 people per site. Fishing Bridge is for hard-sided vehicles only (no tents or tent-trailers)
6	NPS	Yellowstone backcountry regulations	Permits are required for all overnight stays in the backcountry. Camping outside designated sites, at sites for which you are not permitted, or within 100 feet of a water source is prohibited. Campsite occupancy ranges from 4 to 12 individuals per site and is site specific. Stock use is authorized at only certain sites, and stock capacity varies per authorized site.
7	FS	North Absaroka Wilderness	Group size: 20 Persons Stock group size: 30 Head of Stock

Trail Segment	Agency	Special Designation	Visitor Use Constraint
8	BLM	Missouri River Wild and Scenic River	Permits: Although user numbers are not regulated all boaters must obtain a permit, and pay a fee, prior to floating. Group Size: June 15 – August 1 Groups of 20+ individuals can launch only on Wednesday – Friday; Groups 30+ must obtain a special recreation permit prior to launch. Motorized Use on Wild and Scenic Sections: June 15 – September 15: Motorized use allowed downstream only, no wake, Thursday – Saturday. No motorized crafts Sunday – Wednesday.

BLM = Bureau of Land Management; FS = Forest Service; NPS = National Park Service

National Park Service Direction

The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (1978 Act) was developed in collaboration with the National Park Service’s Park Planning and Special Studies Division. The 1978 Act requires units of the National Park System to complete general management plans that include:

“...identification of and implementation commitments for visitor carrying capacities for all areas of the System unit (54 U.S.C. 100502).”

In a general management plan, the requirement to identify visitor capacities is initially addressed by understanding current levels of visitor use and baseline conditions for resources and visitor experiences. Then, the planning team develops qualitative statements about the types and levels of visitor use that could be accommodated while achieving and maintaining desired conditions consistent with the purposes of the area. The general management plan also addresses other major elements of visitor use management, including indicators and thresholds to assess desired conditions. Given the general nature of these plans, planning teams typically stop short of identifying visitor capacities for all areas of a National Park System unit. The 1978 Act additionally gives national parks management autonomy from other Federal agencies. As a result, the revised comprehensive plan, and subsequent visitor use capacity, cannot be imposed on and National Park Service lands but can be shared with their management officials to help with future planning efforts.

Rationale

Based upon research of data sets and anecdotal observations by resource professionals associated with the trail, the largest documented gathering of visitors along the trail is associated with the annual Chief Joseph Trail Ride. The Chief Joseph Trail Ride is organized by the Appaloosa Horse Club in conjunction with the Nez Perce Appaloosa Horse Club. The trail ride encompasses the entirety of the Nez Perce Trail, and is completed in 100 mile increments each year. As such, it takes 13 years to complete the trail in its entirety. The ride first began in 1965; with riders from across the Nation and included international participants. On average, the Chief Joseph Trail Ride includes approximately 100 to 150 riders, and an additional 50 to 80 rider support persons. In the past, the event has hosted upwards of 350 riders along with their associated riding stock and support personnel.

When looking at this event in the context of the trail, it is apparent the ride is a critical recreation event and trail use to preserve. The trail ride is the closest representation to a reenactment of the events for which the trail was designated. Additionally, the Chief Joseph Trail Ride is the only event with a modern-day equivalency to the use the trail received during the time for which it is designated, insofar as the large number of stock and persons traveling together along the trail corridor. When discussing the protection of the cultural landscape and the cultural experience for which the Nez Perce Trail was designated, it is

critical to recognize the Chief Joseph Trail Ride and set a visitor use capacity that allows this event to continue on an annual basis.

Currently, the Chief Joseph Trail Ride is permitted through each Federal administrative unit the annual ride crosses, and the appropriate level of environmental analysis is completed prior to authorization of the permit. Resource professionals responsible for the management of the trail and associated Federal lands, who administer the authorization of the Chief Joseph Trail Ride have reported, based on anecdotal evidence, there have been no discernable or enduring impacts to either desired conditions or the nature and purposes for which the trail was designated by allowing this annual event. As such, it can be concluded the 350 riders with their associated stock spread over 20 miles of trail within a 24-hour period are not likely to produce discernable or enduring impacts to either desired conditions or the nature and purposes for which the trail was designated.

Practices Identified in the Comprehensive Plan

Practices identified in the comprehensive plan are constraints on a project or activity that are established to help achieve or maintain a future goal of condition to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet applicable legal requirements. The practices relevant to visitor use and potential impacts are listed below.

Monitoring

- Trail conditions and use patterns will be monitored on lands where Federal agencies have jurisdictional authority.
- Complete site-specific studies in high visitor use areas to determine proper use levels, management actions and public outreach efforts to prevent degradation as well as prevent impacts to natural and cultural resources
- Visitor use monitoring and capacity studies will adhere to the best practices developed by the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council.
- Monitoring will include an assessment of user types and trends using existing visitor use monitoring programs as available
- Historic sites and trail segments associated with the Nez Perce National Historic Trail are monitored to ensure historic and scenic values, integrity, and qualities are preserved.
- Federal units will include trail-specific sites in their unit's visitor use monitoring program.
- Visitor use may be monitored to assist in adaptive management strategies.
- Project-specific design criteria, mitigation measures, and best management practices should be monitored to ensure activities and infrastructure do not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes for which the trail was established.
- Visitor use levels may be monitored to develop adaptive management strategies and maintain visitor use opportunities.

Regulating Visitor Use

- Leave No Trace principles are encouraged along the entirety of the trail.
- Visitor use is regulated only when other design criteria and mitigation is determined to be unsuccessful through monitoring.

- Visitor use is regulated to the extent necessary to provide for user and public safety; to protect natural, cultural, and historical resources; to minimize conflict and maximize responsible use; to achieve recreation experience objectives; and to comply with Federal and State laws.
- Management actions will discourage activities that would degrade the trail's physical, natural, and cultural resources or social values, including use by groups or organizations involved in promotion, sponsorship, or participation in spectator events or competitive activities or by organized groups that by their size or commercial interest generate use inconsistent with the trail's purpose and nature.
- To the greatest extent practical, adverse impacts from land management activities to user experience; historic trail tread; threatened, endangered, and sensitive species; soil and water; sacred sites; traditional cultural properties; and viewsheds should be limited with appropriate design criteria, mitigation measures, and best management practices.
- Permitted events or activities may be authorized by agencies with jurisdiction provided they are compatible with or would not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes for which the Nez Perce Trail was designated.

Monitoring Protocol

Federal, State, and local agencies retain their respective jurisdictional responsibilities, including monitoring and evaluation, for lands associated with or surrounding the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. Examples of monitoring that can be undertaken by respective jurisdictions may include visitor use levels, satisfaction surveys, trail condition surveys, solitude, scenic integrity, historic integrity, effectiveness of design criteria, and best management practices.

Monitoring may occur at a variety of locations including trail sections, trailheads, parking lots, visitor centers, or other areas deemed critical by the managing unit. Monitoring can be accomplished by field crews, interpretive staff, or volunteers as they complete their normal work or on specific monitoring routes. Data to be recorded include the number of encounters, the type of user (hiker, stock user, etc.), and the location and time of the encounter. Typically, the number of encounters is observed as the encounter occurs, and the data is recorded immediately afterwards with no effect on the visitor's experience. If an area has a required permit or registration system, encounter monitoring books or tally sheets can also be used to record number of visitors who obtained a permit or registered

Monitoring will be the responsibility of the individual management agencies and management units along the trail. The degree of monitoring necessary depends on many factors that may be specific to an individual area. Monitoring should occur at a frequency deemed appropriate by local trail managers, depending on the level of use and level of impacts a particular trail segment receives. If it is probable there are areas where crowding is an issue, standards are likely being exceeded, and management actions are likely to be taken, adopting a more rigorous monitoring program would be appropriate to develop defensible data. However, managers have pointed out that once an area has been thoroughly documented as being well above standard, it is not necessary to continually invest a high degree of monitoring effort to repeatedly establish what is by then known. In areas where conditions are well within standards, a monitoring program can be designed to track changes in conditions over time but would likely not require high quantities of time and resources.

Visitor Use Encounters

Visitor use encounters are the indicator utilized to monitor visitor use impacts. Indicators in combination with thresholds warn trail managers about deteriorating conditions and assist trail managers in assessing progress towards attaining desired conditions.

After reviewing the latest research and use data, relying on conversations with local trail managers, and evaluating the current land and resource management plans, it was concluded that trail encounters are the most relevant unit of measure for setting visitor use capacity along the Nez Perce Trail. A trail encounter is defined as a user or group meeting another user or group while traveling the trail. Trail encounters are measured by the number of groups, including pack stock, a trail user(s) encounter during their time on the Nez Perce Trail. Encounters are not separated by use type in this case or by a single person versus a group.

The monitoring protocol for encounters on the Nez Perce Trail has been adapted from “A guide to monitoring encounters in wilderness” (Broom). If managers or visitors perceive crowded conditions along trails, data produced by monitoring can provide actual use data for planning or management action purposes. What will be measured is the number of people, groups, or both that pass the monitor during a period of time.

In the broadest conceptualization, an encounter occurs when a person or group becomes aware of the presence of another person or group along the trail. This definition is purposefully vague to capture the range of possible options for what counts as an encounter. The encounter involves awareness—typically seeing or hearing—as well as cognitive or affective reactions. To be useful to management, there is a need to define the measurable aspects of encounters. Encounters have predominantly been categorized into two types: 1) encounters between groups while traveling and 2) encounters with other groups while a party is at a campsite. These two encounter types, traveling and camping, can be operationalized and measured in a variety of ways. However, all encounter monitoring takes place within a specified area during a prescribed period of time (Shelby, 1986).

Thresholds

To provide more detailed guidance for monitoring visitor use impacts on the trail, thresholds have been developed utilizing visitor use encounters by recreation setting using the recreation opportunity spectrum classification framework. The visitor encounter thresholds presented in table 4 apply to the length of the trail where it crosses lands managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Depending on the context and organization of events and visitors, an organized ride of 100 individuals could still be considered a single group encounter.

Table 4. Nez Perce National Historic Trail visitor use encounter thresholds

ROS Class or Recreation Setting	Average # of Groups Encountered per Day	Maximum # of Groups Encountered per day	Encounters at Camps
Primitive	3	6	3
Semi-primitive nonmotorized or backcountry	6	15	6
Semi-primitive motorized or middle country	15	30	15
Roaded natural or front country	30	50	30
Rural	50	75	50
Urban	75	125	75

ROS = recreation opportunity spectrum

Rationale

As described in the regulatory setting section of this report, the recreation opportunity spectrum classification framework is comprised typically of six land classes that define physical, biological, social, and managerial relationships of different recreation zones, and parameters and guidelines for management of recreation opportunities. Although all Forest Service units utilize the recreation opportunity spectrum framework in their land management plans, it is not used in all Bureau of Land Management resource management plans. In Bureau of Land Management plans that do not utilize the recreation opportunity spectrum, recreation setting characteristics are used to define the desired condition of recreation opportunities. Recreation setting characteristics describe recreation setting and characteristics similar to recreation opportunity spectrum class settings.

Defining recreation opportunity spectrum class settings is relatively standard across Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management units, but there are variations unit by unit; some incorporate a defined encounter range in the social setting characteristic. The soon-to-be-released Forest Service Manual 2310 (sustainable recreation manual), standardizes recreation opportunity spectrum setting characteristic description and includes numerical encounter expectations for the primitive and semi-primitive classifications. Recreation setting characteristics utilize a narrative format when describing recreation setting, recreation opportunities, and management objectives. Although Bureau of Land Management Handbook 8320-1 does not specifically define recreation opportunity spectrum or recreation setting characteristics classes, descriptions used in the resource management plans for the field offices along the trail are similar to the standardized Forest Service definitions.

Traditional management techniques and scientific research focused on addressing resource impacts that occur as a result of visitor use and defining a numeric limit on visitor numbers below which resource conditions would be protected. More recent research has shown the correlation between the amount of use and the severity of resource damage occurs at relatively low levels of use, with further use producing only small amounts of additional change (Marion J. Y.-F., 2016). Therefore, limiting visitor use by utilizing a one-person-at-one-time capacity limit can be an ineffective management tool for managing resource protection objectives and addressing resource and social impacts.

Research suggests visitors may have standards about how many trail and camp encounters are acceptable before the quality of the visitor experience declines to an unacceptable degree. These standards are based upon visitor perceptions and their historical experiences. Standards regarding social encounters, both trail and camp, are included in multiple planning frameworks, including recreation opportunity spectrum, limits of acceptable change, and visitor experience and resource protection, to define the desired condition for recreation opportunities in all land and resource management plans that are in place for the Federal land management agencies along the trail, rendering encounters a suitable unit to define capacity for the Nez Perce Trail. The amount to which a visitor begins to feel crowded is subjective, based on the individual's desire for their recreation experience.

Encounter limits are assigned to established recreation opportunity spectrum or recreation setting characteristics areas defined for the trail corridor in existing land or resource management plans. Recreation opportunity spectrum classes and recreation setting characteristics are mapped in each land management plan, applying a specific classification to each section of the trail. Encounter limits were set using the guidance provided in Forest Service manual and handbook direction, encounter ranges provided in land and resource management plans, and from observations on visitor use along the trail. By utilizing recreation opportunity spectrum class or recreation settings identified by land management plans and adjusting encounter rates based on existing encounter recommendations that reflect the desired condition for the resource area and trail, an encounter estimate can be made about what constitutes crowding.

It is important to note we anticipate encounter levels may be exceeded during periods of high use. Encounter limits are an indicator and assist in establishing thresholds for visitor use along any portion of the trail. Land managers can compare encounter data to the mapped recreation opportunity spectrum class and assess whether trail use is exceeding a threshold and trail condition is being impacted as a result. Exceeding an established encounter limit does not, in and of itself, trigger a form management action, but does indicate that further analysis of the area may be required.

Tracking Monitoring

Monitoring data can be collected in a simple spreadsheet or in a notebook carried by field crews or volunteers. Data to be collected should include the following:

- the area in which the observations are being made
- the date and day of week
- the time the observations began and ended
- the time the encounter occurred
- the number of individuals in each group encountered
- the length of stay of the group encountered (day or overnight)
- the number of stock
- whether the group had been seen before that day
- which direction the party was traveling in relation to the observer

Utilizing Encounter Monitoring Data

Trail encounter monitoring data is best used as part of an overall monitoring program that measure visitor use as well as resource conditions. The data is useful for collaborative planning processes and in setting design conditions and standards for management plans. It is critical to recognize that if monitoring data shows encounter limits are being met in an area, this does not immediately trigger a specific management action. If encounter limits are exceeded on a regular basis, it will be the responsibility of the associated land management agency, in conjunction with the trail administrator, to determine if impacts to the trail's purpose or trail values are occurring. A variety of visitor use management options can be utilized including, but not limited to, requiring self-issued trail permits, require a special recreation permit (fee) for trail use, restricting use on the trail corridor, rerouting or redesigning trail tread, or closing and rehabilitating dispersed camping areas.

Any number of adaptive strategies for managing visitor use may be employed as visitor use capacity thresholds are met or exceeded. Additional strategies may include, but are not limited to, implementing design criteria, additional monitoring, setting more refined visitor use capacity thresholds, and regulating visitor use numbers.

As always, the use of best available scientific methods in the collection, analysis, and setting more localized visitor use numbers is encouraged for Federal agencies with jurisdiction over the trail.

Decision to be Made

The regional forester will decide whether to set the visitor capacity for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail as proposed. Considerations for making this decision include the following:

1. Does the visitor capacity implement direction identified in the revised comprehensive plan?
2. Does the visitor capacity protect the natures and purposes of Nez Perce National Historic Trail for which it was designated?
3. What mitigation measure(s) and monitoring will be recommended during implementation?
4. Would setting the visitor capacity of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail have significant impacts that would trigger the need to prepare an environmental impact statement?

Environmental Impacts

This environmental assessment will not discuss the affected environment; instead, a full description of resource setting, and visitor use are in existing condition reports filed in the project record. These reports provide a management overview, recreation facility descriptions, travel management status, visitor use trends, and visitor satisfaction.

The proposed action recommends a visitor capacity for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. A visitor capacity is a component of visitor use management, and is defined as the maximum amounts and types of visitor use that an area can accommodate while achieving and maintaining the desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that are consistent with the purposes for which the area was established (IVUMC (Interagency Visitor Use Management Council), 2019). This visitor capacity recommendation will be incorporated into the revised comprehensive plan once the decision notice for this proposed action is signed. Agencies managing land along the trail should ensure their land management plans and resource management plans are compatible with strategic direction provided in the revised comprehensive plan. If modification of these management plans is needed, the appropriate environmental analysis will be used to incorporate those changes.

The proposed action does not propose specific visitor use management strategies; it is the role of individual units to determine how and when to implement visitor use management strategies to protect the resource and recreation experiences of the trail. Implementation considerations for future site-specific analysis have been provided in appendix A as a resource for individual units as they consider future visitor use management.

Conclusion

Recommending a visitor capacity is an administrative non-ground-disturbing action. Additionally, the proposed action does not directly implement a visitor limit, restriction, or other visitor use management regulation. **Based on this, there are no expected or anticipated direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to any resource. See the “Findings Required by Law, Regulation, or Policy” section and the “Findings of No Significant Impact” section for required findings.**

Findings Required by Law, Regulation, or Policy

The following topics were not identified as issues which required detailed analysis. The following information offers a basis for the responsible official to make a decision and findings required by laws, regulations, and policy.

Revised Nez Perce National Historic Trail Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan provides practices and purposes of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and allows regulation of visitor use to the extent necessary to provide for user and public safety; to protect natural, cultural, and historical resources, including wildlife; to minimize conflict and maximize responsible use; to afford recreation experience objectives; and to comply with Federal and State laws. Likewise, visitor use should only be regulated when other design criteria and mitigation measures have been determined to be unsuccessful (pages 61, 66). This project is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

National Trails System Act

To provide for addressing the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population and to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the outdoor areas and historic resources of the United States, 16 U.S.C. 1241-1244 of the National Trails System Act provides for establishing trails within scenic areas and along historic travel routes of the United States. 16 U.S.C. 1244 (f) of the National Trails System Act requires all designated national historic trails to develop a comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan will provide broad authority and a strategic framework for the development, administration, and management of the trail. The Trails Act requires also requires that visitor use capacity be addressed in a comprehensive plan (16 U.S.C. 1244 (f) (1)). The act requires identifying the visitor capacity for the trail.

The proposed action would meet the regulatory requirements of the Trails Act. Additionally, establishment of visitor use capacity aids in the identification, management, and protection of the inherent resource values associated with the trail.

Setting visitor capacity ensures the nature and purpose of the trail, as identified in the Trails Act and the Nez Perce National Historic Trail Comprehensive Plan, can be maintained and protected in the future, while continuing to provide access to the trail and to the connected recreational and tourism opportunities for a growing and diverse public.

Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice

This order requires Federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the U.S.

An assessment of environmental justice communities is outlined in the socioeconomic evaluation of the current condition of the trail (located in the comprehensive plan project file). This assessment finds there are communities which may merit consideration as potential environmental justice populations based on the presence of low-income and minority populations. The proposed action is an administrative non-ground-disturbing action and therefore will not have any adverse, disproportionate effect on these populations.

Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended)

This act directs Federal agencies to conserve endangered and threatened species. USDA regulation 9500-4 reflects this Endangered Species Act mandate and reinforces the need for agencies within the department to conduct activities and programs to conserve currently listed species, as well as avoid contributing to species decline and need for future Endangered Species Act listings.

Finding

This project complies with the Endangered Species Act, as amended. The project biological evaluations for terrestrial aquatic and botanical species determined the proposed action will not affect federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat. This conclusion is based on the administrative nature of the visitor capacity recommendation. Refer to the project biological evaluations for additional information.

Forest Service Manual Chapter 2670 – Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Plants and Animals

2670.22 – Objectives for Sensitive Species. Maintain viable populations of all native and desired nonnative wildlife, fish, and plant species in habitats distributed throughout their geographic range on National Forest System lands.

2670.32 – Policy for Sensitive Species. Review programs and activities as part of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 process through a biological evaluation, to determine their potential effect on sensitive species; avoid or minimize impacts to species whose viability has been identified as a concern.

2672.4 – Biological Evaluations. Review all Forest Service planned, funded, executed, or permitted programs and activities for possible effects on endangered, threatened, proposed, or sensitive species. The biological evaluation is the means of conducting the review and of documenting the findings. Document the findings of the biological evaluation in the decision notice.

Finding

The project biological evaluation determined the proposed action will not affect any Northern Region sensitive species. This conclusion is based on the administrative nature of the visitor capacity recommendation. Refer to the biological evaluations in the project record for additional information.

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940, as Amended

This law provides for the protection of the bald eagle and the golden eagle (as amended in 1962) by prohibiting the take, possession, sale, purchase, barter, offer to sell, purchase or barter, transport, export or import, of any bald or golden eagle, alive or dead, including any part, nest, or egg, unless allowed by permit (16 U.S.C. 668(a); 50 CFR 22). "Take" includes pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest or disturb (16 U.S.C. 668c; 50 CFR 22.3).

Finding

The proposed action would not result in take of bald or golden eagle.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, Executive Order 13186 of January 10, 2001

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act 1918, as amended, protects migratory bird species. Executive Order 13186 (Responsibilities for Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds) created a more comprehensive strategy for the conservation of migratory birds by the Federal government, thereby fulfilling the government's duty to lead in the protection of this international resource.

Finding

This project complies with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, Executive Order 13186 of January 10, 2001, and the April 11, 2018 Department of the Interior memorandum. Because the proposed action is an administrative decision, no take of migratory birds would occur.

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, directs all Federal agencies to consider the effects of their undertakings (actions, financial support, and authorizations) on properties included in or eligible for the National Register.

Finding

No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to cultural or archaeological resources would occur because the proposed action is solely an administrative action with no ground-disturbing activities. The proposed action would have no effect on cultural resources eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. As a result, this project will be in compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

When individual units adopt visitor capacity recommendations or develop visitor management strategies, implementation of recommended design features (see appendix A) would maintain compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

National Forest Management Act

Land management plans for national forests are required under the National Forest Management Act. They provide guidance for trail management and other land uses that may affect watersheds containing the trail and trail corridor. The proposed action is consistent with land management plans for national forests.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management follows resource management plans that provide guidance for watershed protection on lands they manage. Most notable is land the Bureau manages along the Idaho and Montana segments of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. The proposed action is consistent with Bureau of Land Management resource management plans.

National Park Service

Management of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail is covered under management plans for individual National Park Service units.

States of Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana

Federal laws designate States as the authority to determine compliance with water quality standards and other water quality stewardship roles throughout the States. Federal lands recognize State authority regarding roles in water quality protection and management. The proposed action is consistent with State laws.

Other Laws, Policies, and Regulations

A variety of Federal laws and regulations apply to the management of recreation resources and visitor use management; a full list of all applicable laws, orders, and regulations, can be found in the revised comprehensive plan, existing condition reports for each resource (located in the project file), and the visitor use analysis report (Greenwood 2018).

The following laws relate specifically to or mandate agencies to plan for and manage visitor use, and the proposed action is consistent with them:

- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended (Public Law 94-579)
- General Authorities Act of 1970 (16 U.S.C. section 1a–7)
- Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (as amended through December 31, 1996, Public Law 104–333)
- National Forest Management Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1600(note))
- National Park and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625, section 604)
- Sikes Act ((16 USC 670a-670o, 74 Stat. 1052), as amended, Public Law 86-797, approved September 15, 1960)
- The Wilderness Act of 1964
- Water Resources Development Act of 1986
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-542)

The following laws relate specifically to or mandate agencies to plan for soil and water protection, and the proposed action is consistent with them:

- The Organic Administration Act of 1897 (16 USC 475) states that one of the purposes for which the national forests were established was to provide for favorable conditions of water flow.
- The Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) as amended, intends to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation’s waters. This law applies to all lands along the trail. Compliance with the Clean Water Act by national forests and other landowners along the trail route is regulated and achieved under state law.
- Best management practices are part of the Clean Water Act and have been adopted by Federal agencies that help maintain the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and protect water quality on Federal lands.
- The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) prevents watershed conditions from being irreversibly damaged and protects streams and wetlands from detrimental impacts. It applies on National Forest System lands. Land productivity must be preserved. Fish habitat must support a

minimum number of reproductive individuals and be well distributed to allow interaction between populations.

- The Safe Drinking Water Act Amendment of 1996 applies throughout areas along the trail and provides the states with more resources and authority to enact the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1977. This amendment directs the states to identify source areas for public water supplies that serve at least 25 people or 15 connections at least 60 days a year.
- Executive Order 11988 directs Federal agencies to provide leadership and take action on Federal lands to avoid, to the extent possible, the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Agencies are required to avoid the direct or indirect support of development on floodplains whenever there are practicable alternatives and evaluate the potential effects of any proposed action on floodplains.
- Executive Order 11990, as amended, requires Federal agencies exercising statutory authority and leadership over Federal lands to avoid to the extent possible, the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands. Where practicable, direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands must be avoided. Federal agencies are required to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. Other laws pertinent to watershed management on National Forest System lands can be found in Forest Service Manual 2501.1.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Council of Environmental Quality regulations define a finding of no significant impact as a document by a Federal agency briefly presenting the reasons why an action, not otherwise excluded (section 1508.4), will not have a significant effect on the human environment and for which an environmental impact statement therefore will not be prepared

Finding

As the responsible official, I am responsible for evaluating the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). I have reviewed and considered the environmental assessment and documentation included in the project record, and I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As a result, no environmental impact statement will be prepared. My rationale for this finding is as follows.

Context

For the proposed action and alternatives, the context of the environmental effects is based on the environmental analysis in this environmental assessment and summarized in table 5.

Resource Conditions for Finding of No Significant Impact Consideration

Recommending a visitor capacity is an administrative non-ground-disturbing action. Additionally, the proposed action but does not directly implement a visitor limit, restriction, or other visitor use management regulation. **Based on this, there are no expected or anticipated direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to any resource.**

Table 5. Evaluation of resource conditions for the likelihood of significant effects

Resources for consideration (ref. 36 CFR 220.6(b) and 40 CFR 1508.27(b))	Present (yes/no)	If present, would the project result in adverse effects on the resource? Explain briefly	Significant Effects Likely? (yes/no)
Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat and Regional Forest Service sensitive species.	Yes	Project area contains habitat for species listed in the wildlife, aquatic and botanical existing conditions reports for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail (Nee-Me-Poo) Comprehensive Management Plan No effects to federally listed species, designated critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species would occur because the proposed action is solely an administrative action with no ground-disturbing activities.	No
Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds	Yes	No effects to water, water quality, soils, or geologic hazards would occur because the proposed action is solely an administrative action with no ground-disturbing activities. Flood plains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds are present in the project area but would not be impacted.	No
Parklands, prime farmlands	Yes	Prime farmlands are present in the trail corridor but would not be affected.	No
Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas, inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.	Yes	The trail crosses various designated areas, including wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, national historic trails, national scenic trails, and wild and scenic rivers. The proposed action recommends no specific management or visitor use regulation. Existing regulations in designated areas that are more restrictive than the recommended capacity, or any future proposed visitor use management strategy, would continue to direct management of the area.	No
Research natural areas or ecologically critical areas	Yes	Candidate research natural areas are present in the trail corridor but would not be affected.	No
American Indian religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places	Yes	No effects are expected to cultural or archaeological resources because the proposed action is solely an administrative action with no ground-disturbing activities. Recommended design criteria would prevent effects from future projects	No

Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of this environmental assessment and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits.

My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project (described above) and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

No adverse impacts are expected to occur due to the implementation of the proposed action.

Recommending a visitor capacity is an administrative non-ground-disturbing action. Additionally, the proposed action but does not directly implement a visitor limit, restriction, or other visitor use management regulation. Based on this, there are no expected or anticipated direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to any resources.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

There are no expected impacts from the proposed action and therefore no effects to public health or safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as the proximity to historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no expected impacts from the proposed action and therefore, no effects to historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

There is no controversy surrounding the nature of the impacts from setting the visitor capacity for the trail. The proposed action is an administrative action only. No ground-disturbing activities will take place based on this recommendation. Additionally, the proposed action does not directly implement a visitor limit, restriction, or other visitor use management regulation.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The proposed action is an administrative action only. There are no uncertain risks associated with the proposed action.

6. The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The National Trails Act requires the development of a comprehensive plan to provide broad authority and a strategic framework for the development, administration, and management of the trail. As such, the comprehensive plan does not authorize site-specific projects, activities, or prohibitions nor does it obligate funds or commit Federal managers to take specific actions. The revised comprehensive plan does not amend land management plans; however, revised or amended land management plans and site-specific project decisions may adhere to strategies in the revised comprehensive plan.

The Forest Service is the lead trail administrator and worked collaboratively with Federal agencies, State and local governments, tribes, user groups, stakeholders, and the general public to complete the revised comprehensive plan.

Once the analysis and decision for this environmental assessment are complete, the visitor capacity recommendation will be incorporated as part of the revised comprehensive plan. Agencies managing land along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail should ensure their land management plans and resource management plans are compatible with strategic direction provided in the revised comprehensive plan. If modification of these management plans is needed, the appropriate environmental analyses will be used to incorporate those changes.

- 7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.**

No significant impacts are likely to occur based on resource specialist analyses and conclusions. See table 5 for a summary of the evaluation for significant impacts.

- 8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to cultural or archaeological resources would occur because the proposed action is solely an administrative action with no ground-disturbing activities. The proposed action would have no effect on cultural resources eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. As a result, this project will be in compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

When individual units adopt visitor capacity recommendations or develop visitor management strategies, implementation of the design features recommended would maintain compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

- 9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.**

No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to federally listed species, designated critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species would occur because the proposed action is solely an administrative action with no ground-disturbing activities.

This project complies with the Endangered Species Act, as amended. The project biological evaluation for terrestrial, aquatic, and botanical species determined the proposed action will not affect federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat; this conclusion is based on the administrative nature of the visitor capacity recommendation. Refer to the project biological evaluations for additional information.

- 10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**

The proposed action complies with all Federal, State or local laws, agency regulations and policies. See the section of the environmental assessment regarding “Findings Required by Law, Regulation, or Policy”.

Agencies or Persons Consulted

Forest Service personnel began the comprehensive plan revision process by consulting other Federal agencies; State and local governments; affected Indian Tribes; and interested members of the public for input on the plan development.

Other Federal Agencies

The National Trails System Act directs the Secretary of Agriculture to consult with the heads of all other affected Federal agencies (16 U.S.C. 1246 (a)(1)(A)). The Nez Perce National Historic Trail crosses many other Federal agency lands, including:

- National Park Service (NPS)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE)
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- Department of Energy (DOE)

The Federal agencies listed above, together with the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration, signed a memorandum of understanding on the National Trails System in 2016 in an effort to facilitate, encourage, and assist interagency cooperation at the national, regional, State and local levels to implement the National Trails System Act. The memorandum identifies roles and responsibilities of the agencies and reaffirms the responsibility of the agencies to administer and manage the Nez Perce National Historic Trail seamlessly across jurisdictional boundaries (The National Trails System Memorandum of Understanding, 2016).

Affected Indian Tribes

The regional forester for the Northern Regions is conducting ongoing consultation with 26 federally recognized Indian Tribes, in accordance with Forest Service Handbook section 1509.13, chapter 10, *Consultation with Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations* (USDA Forest Service 2016). Consultation with Indian Tribes must be government-to-government. The revision of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail Comprehensive Plan is a Federal undertaking subject to compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470), which requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of a proposed undertaking on historic properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in consultation with affected tribes, State Historic Preservation Offices, and interested parties.

State and Local Jurisdictions

The National Trails System Act directs the Secretary of Agriculture to consult with the heads of all other affected State agencies (16 U.S.C. 1246 (a)(1)(A)) and to coordinate with local jurisdictions. This plan was developed in consultation with the respective governors, departments of transportation, and State historic preservation offices of the states of Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Wyoming.

The National Trails System Act also permits State or local agencies to nominate protected segments on State or local land to the Secretary of Agriculture for certification as part of the National Trail System. Sites and segments must meet the national historic trail criteria established in the National Trails System Act and be administered without expense to the United States (16 U.S.C. 1242 (a)).

The Forest Service and other managing Federal agencies may enter into cooperative agreements with states and local agencies to operate, develop, and maintain any portion of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail within or outside of a federally administered area. These agreements may include provisions for limited financial assistance to encourage participation in the acquisition, protection, operation, development, or maintenance of the trail (16 U.S.C. 1246 (h)(1)).

Private Landowners

The National Trails System Act encourages coordination and collaboration with private landowners to manage national trails. With 48.6 percent, or nearly half, of the trail crossing private lands, private landowners play an integral role in its management and administration. State and local governments are encouraged to enter into written cooperative agreements or acquire such lands or interest from landowners to facilitate land management outside the boundaries of federally designated areas (16 U.S.C. 1246 (e)). Federal agencies may also enter written agreements with willing private landowners or acquire lands or interests from willing private landowners to facilitate administration and management of the trail within the boundaries of their administration (16 U.S.C. 1246 (d)).

The Forest Service may also enter into cooperative agreements with private landowners to operate, develop, and maintain any portion of the trail within or outside a federally administered area. These agreements many include provisions for limited financial assistance to encourage participation in the acquisition, protection, operation, development, or maintenance of the trail (16 U.S.C. 1246 (h)(1)). Private landowners may also participate in the site certification process described in this plan in chapter 4.

Partners and Volunteers

The National Trails System Act recognizes the valuable contributions that volunteers, private, and nonprofit trail groups have made to the development and maintenance of the nation's trails and encourages "volunteer citizen engagement in the planning, development, maintenance, and management, where appropriate, of trails" (16 U.S.C. 1246 (h)(1)).

The Forest Service and other agencies with jurisdiction over lands on and adjacent to the trail may enter into cooperative agreements with private organizations and volunteers to operate, develop, and maintain any portion of the trail either within or outside federally administered areas. These agreements may include provisions for limited financial assistance to encourage participation in the acquisition, protection, operation, development, or maintenance of the trail (16 U.S.C. 1246 (h)(1) and 16 U.S.C.1250).

Public Involvement

Forest Service personnel held a series of 20 workshops between December 2010 and February 2012 and an additional 12 workshops in 2014 in gateway communities along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. They conducted additional consultation and public involvement in 2018, prior to final approval of the comprehensive plan.

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Appendix A. Implementation Considerations for Future Site-Specific Analyses

Agencies managing land along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail should ensure their land management plans and resource management plans are compatible with strategic direction provided in the revised comprehensive plan. If modification of these management plans is needed, the appropriate environmental analysis will be used to incorporate those changes.

If individual units choose to implement specific visitor use strategies that would make changes to the trail use, or allow group rides via a special use permit, additional environmental analysis would occur at that point to consider site-specific impacts.

The following considerations are offered for use by individual units as they adopt the visitor capacity and analyze the effects of visitor management strategies in future site-specific environmental analyses.

Recreation

Analysis could describe the effects of the proposed visitor capacity on visitor use, recreation experience, and the recreation value along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. Analysis of these components should be based on the best professional judgment of recreation planners, data gathered to compile the existing condition report for the recreation resource condition report, visitor use analysis, and research from other specialists.

Topics that could be addressed in the future analysis include the effect of new management direction on recreation access and opportunities, quality of experience, and interpretation and education.

Impacts on visitor use and experience along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail were determined through an assessment of changes in access and opportunities to trail uses, as well as the character of visitor experience while recreating along the trail. As a result, resource indicators and measures for future analysis may be qualitative only, providing a large-scale overview of potential effects.

Resource indicators for use in evaluating the following visitor uses and associated experiences:

- **Recreational Access and Opportunities:** This includes impacts on the level of access and types of recreational opportunities that can be experienced along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. This includes activities such as hiking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, scenic driving, camping, and other recreation activities conducted either privately or through authorized permitted providers.
- **Quality of Experience:** This includes impacts on characteristics associated with visitor experience along the trail and consists of elements pertaining to perceived crowding, satisfaction with facilities and services, and opportunities to experience the historic nature of the trail along with the natural quality of the area.
- **Interpretation and Education:** This includes impacts on the opportunities for visitors to experience interpretation and education about the nature, purpose, history, and values associated with the trail.

The following impact thresholds have been developed for analyzing the effects of future site-specific actions on visitor use and experience. To provide a metric for quantifying the intensity of the impacts to visitor use and experience, the definitions for the impact intensity and thresholds are as follows:

- **Negligible:** Most visitors would likely be unaware of any effects associated with implementation of the alternative.
- **Minor:** Changes in visitor opportunities, setting conditions, or both would be slight but detectable; would affect a few visitors; and would not appreciably limit or enhance experiences identified as fundamental to the purpose and significance of the trail.
- **Moderate:** Changes in visitor opportunities, setting conditions, or both would be noticeable; would affect many visitors; and would result in some changes to experiences identified as fundamental to the purpose and significance of the trail.
- **Major:** Changes in visitor opportunities, setting conditions, or both would be highly apparent; would affect most visitors; and would result in several changes to experiences identified as fundamental to the purpose and significance of the trail.

Recreational Access and Opportunities

A wide variety of recreation activities may be affected by implementation of visitor use management strategies. These activities include, but are not limited to, trail-based recreation (hiking and horseback riding), boating, fishing, scenic driving, photography and wildlife viewing, picnicking, camping, interpretation, and education opportunities offered within the trail corridor. The variety of recreational opportunities and access along the trail provide long-term, major, beneficial impacts for visitors recreating along the trail corridor, and adjacent communities.

Implementing specific visitor use management strategies will be the decision of each unit, on a case-by-case basis. These actions may have the potential for visitor use to be limited or restricted if individual units identify that conditions are deteriorating or that visitor use may threaten the nature and purpose of the trail.

The lack of trail-specific monitoring may dilute any information managers do collect about visitor use and trends along the trail corridor, making it difficult to assess the need for changes along the trail. This could result in long-term, moderate, adverse impacts on recreational opportunities and access corridor-wide, as trail and experience degradation may not be identified in a timely manner. Degradation of trail access and opportunity may result in the permanent displacement of certain recreation activities. Conversely, if trail specific monitoring programs are implemented, the result would have moderate, beneficial, long-term effects on recreational access and opportunities along the trail.

Quality of Experience

Impacts on the quality of visitor experience along the Nez Perce Trail include elements pertaining to perceived crowding and conflict, satisfaction with facilities and services, and opportunities to experience solitude and natural quiet. Currently, existing national visitor use monitoring and National Park satisfaction surveys have determined visitors are largely satisfied with the experiences they have while recreating along various segments of the trail. Visitor satisfactions surveys indicated some attention is needed at developed facilities, parking lots, interpretive displays and for maintaining roads and trails.

Increases in visitation and external factors, such as increased motor vehicle traffic adjacent to the trail, could contribute to noise impacts that affect visitor experience in the future. Research suggests that under current conditions, most visitors along the trail do not feel crowded while recreating. There are locations where crowding is felt, primarily at popular recreation points, highway waysides, and within the national parks; these locations are listed in the visitor use analysis (Greenwood, Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail: Visitor Use Analysis Report, 2018).

Many recreationists prefer experiencing recreation along the trail with fewer encounters with other visitors. The purpose and nature of the trail do not speak to specific recreation opportunities or experiences. Instead the purpose is protecting and preserving cultural properties and cultural landscapes along the trail. Although the purpose and nature of the trail is not necessarily to provide opportunities for solitude and primitive experiences, for many, experiencing and understanding the people and events associated with the trail and the flight of the Nez Perce means enjoying the trail and experience in a less crowded, more primitive, and more independent setting.

Without additional monitoring of resources and social conditions pertaining to visitor use, the quality of visitor experience may be diminished in the future. If visitor use increased substantially, perceived crowding and sound-related impacts could occur, aesthetic impacts could intensify, and satisfaction could decrease. These actions could result in long-term, moderate, adverse impacts on visitor experience. However, the implementation of a visitor use management and monitoring efforts to assist management in measuring can be used to address potential impacts on visitor experience. Through implementation of strategic visitor use management decisions could have moderate, beneficial, long-term effects on the quality of visitor experience along the trail corridor by reducing the user conflicts, resource impacts, or both that affect visitor enjoyment.

Interpretation and Education

There are many opportunities to experience interpretation and education within and surrounding the trail corridor. These include elements such as roadside and trailhead signage, interpretive displays, visitor centers, museums and learning structures, Federal interpretive staff, and the auto tour pamphlets. These opportunities allow visitors to learn about the trail and the historical context of events leading up to the 1877 War and flight of the Nez Perce, while gaining understanding of proper behavioral ethics to protect trail resources. Research suggests that the majority of visitors seek and receive information from these sources, suggesting that these dissemination methods are an important component of visitor use and experience (Littlejohn, 1995).

The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail Interpretive Plan identifies interpretive goals and objectives and help land managers determine which stories are key for interpreting along the trail (USDA, Forest Service, 2016). This plan presents adopted themes and storylines for the trail, lists potential projects as identified in prior planning efforts and through this planning process, and present criteria as to how to prioritize future projects for implementation

Long-Term Considerations

The diverse nature of recreational access and opportunities offered along the trail provides visitors with long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts pertaining to visitor use and experience. Without proper visitor use management and monitoring, visitor opportunities and associated access may be diminished due to proliferation of visitor-use-related impacts such as vegetation impacts, wildlife displacement, and social deterioration (crowding, aesthetic impacts, and safety concerns). These actions may result in long-term, moderate, adverse impacts on recreational opportunities and access.

Empirical research and resource monitoring suggest visitors are largely satisfied with the experiences they have while recreating along the trail. Crowding has been experienced at some of the busier interpretive sites, viewpoints, and historical areas. Additionally, human-caused noise has been found to detract from visitor experience at sites near trail. If visitor use increased substantially, perceived crowding could occur, aesthetic impacts could intensify, and satisfaction could decrease. These actions could result in long-term, moderate, adverse impacts on visitor experience.

There is the possibility of an increase in visitation, or a change in visitor interests and demand, due to potential changes in regional populations or national recreation trend. However, these effects are unknown at this time. If visitation were to increase, it would increase the potential for visitor-use-related impacts on resources and perceived crowding, which may lead to additional impacts such as lack of solitude and increased human-caused noise masking the sounds of nature. Changes in recreation trends may result in social conflicts among visitors. For example, if alternative types of watercraft, such as river boards or paddleboards, become more popular, they may affect other boaters or anglers or if an increase in the use of e-bikes resulted in conflicts with stock users. At this time, uncertainty prevents accurate descriptions of the associated impacts that may exist with alterations in recreation trends.

Other changes that could result in impacts on visitor use and experience include population fluctuation on adjacent lands. If surrounding populations and associated developments increase, they may impact opportunities to access the trail by affecting traffic flows in and out of the surrounding protected areas. This could also affect visitor abilities to see wildlife due to habitat and migration alterations that may occur from exterior population fluctuations. Developments associated with population growth would likely impact the visibility of the night sky by introducing more light pollution and decreasing air quality.

Additionally, climate change may transform the current environment, modifying wildlife habitat and migration patterns and visitor access and recreational opportunities. Climate change modeling indicates temperature increases could make more miles of trail available for longer periods into the winter, when past snow levels made the trail inaccessible. The natural occurring "rest" period for the trail could therefore disappear, resulting in a greater need for visitor use management to protect the trail, recreation experience, and trail values.

Scenery

During 1877, the U.S. Army forced the Nez Perce to flee their cherished homeland where they had dwelled for over 11,000 years. Today, scenery is a large component to how the modern visitor experiences the trail. The same fabric of landform and vegetative cover exists in relatively similar conditions as occurred during their flight. Some vegetation types have been significantly altered such as the conversion of prairie and camas meadows into cropland and pasture. Many of the ancient trails have been armored with pavement and gravel to accommodate vehicles. Many streams have been altered through water projects such as impoundments and diversions. With the exclusion of fire, forest communities have become crowded and woody plants have encroached into meadows. Much of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail setting has been altered, but the essence of the landscape remains natural appearing.

The Nez Perce National Historic Trail intertwines with two other national trails: the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. It also shares the Bitterroot Valley with a spur of the Ice Age Floods National Geologic Trail. It crosses 5 designated wild and scenic rivers and numerous others that are eligible for designation with outstandingly remarkable values. Wending through the geysers fields of the world's first national park, it exists east into a designated wilderness (one of two along the trail). The trail also crosses the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. Audubon Society important bird areas dot the trail, a testament to the incredible ecological heritage from which the Nez Perce people have evolved.

The Scenery Management System is the Forest Service policy for the inventory and analysis of aesthetic values on National Forest lands (USDA 1995). The Nez Perce Trail is both a nationally important, primary travelway and a historic area. A large number of viewers have a high concern for scenic quality as seen from the trail. Therefore, the Scenery Management System classifies the trail as a concern level 1 viewing platform.

Foreground views (defined as 0 to 1/2 mile) from the trail are the most sensitive. From this distance zone, people can distinguish intricate details and receive other sensory messages, such as sounds. Individual forms are dominant. Middleground views (defined as 1/2 to 4 miles) from the trail are the predominant distance zone from which the landscapes of the national historic trail are viewed. From this distance zone, form, texture, and color remain dominant, and patterns of vegetation are important. Background views, 4 miles to horizon, from the Nez Perce Trail provide the backdrop to the trail's scenic quality. At this distance zone, details are lost but major contrasts are apparent.

Individual land management plans establish the scenic integrity objectives for their respective plan areas. For the Nez Perce National Historic Trail on National Forest System lands, the Scenery Management System establishes objectives for high and very high scenic integrity. These objectives have a desired condition of "naturally evolving" or "natural appearing" scenic character with little evidence of human modification.

Within designated wilderness, research natural areas, special interest areas, and eligible and designated wild and scenic rivers, the desired condition for scenic integrity is naturally evolving. The scenic character through which the trail passes expresses the natural evolution of biophysical features and processes with very limited human intervention. Outside these areas on National Forest System lands, the desired condition for trail scenic integrity is naturally appearing. Here human modifications may occur are not dominant to the scenic character.

Discrete areas along the trail will be cultural landscapes. These areas have built structures and landscape features that display the dominant attitudes and beliefs of specific human cultures. These cultural landscapes are typically outside National Forest System lands and are either administered by the National Park Service or privately owned.

Effects of visitor use on scenery can include erosion, soil compaction, exposed soils, or damaged vegetation. Similar effects would have been evident after the immediate historic events in 1877. However, modern technology causes effects that differ in magnitude and duration. For instance, modern vehicles create long-lasting, double-track linear features of compacted soil through natural-appearing vegetation. In comparison, horse travel creates less compaction and less linear effects that contrasts less with natural-appearing vegetation. Materials of trash and graffiti are also noticeable differences between effects of modern and historic visitor use. Visitor management strategies that may be implemented to curtail the number of people who visit the trail at one time may lessen the effects of visitor use.

Effects of visitor use can include erosion, soil compaction, exposed soils, or damaged vegetation. These visual cues can negatively affect and strongly dominate the scenic character and views, contrasting with the desire for a naturally appearing scenic character in the trail corridor. Visitor management strategies may help move scenery towards desired future conditions as prescribed in individual land management plans. If management actions are deemed necessary to protect the trail's resources from visitor use, goals and practices in the revised comprehensive plan would help to protect the trail's natural-appearing scenery.

Heritage

The War and Flight of 1877 resulted in a briefly used path across the landscape from Oregon to Montana. Many of the sections utilized were trails already in existence and some portions of the landscape were transformed by the War and Flight of 1877 and later used as regular trails. High potential sites and segments were identified through analysis for the National Historic Trails Act (Morris 2017, USDA 2019). Certain segments have been identified as historic trail tread and may be impacted if carrying

capacity reaches the upper limit identified in this document. This is most likely to happen during events when large groups use the trail. The existing conditions report (Morris 2017: 28) recommends both to retain the primitive character of the trails while recognizing there are natural processes and allowing them to proceed.

Large numbers of trail users in a concentrated fashion may cause damage the primitive character of the trails (see Recommendations and Goals for Heritage Resource Existing Condition Report for the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail). Therefore, it is recommended that high potential sites and segments with identified historic tread should be monitored on a regular basis to ensure the trail maintains historic character under the recommended visitor capacity. In situations where group size is expected to approach recommended limits in carrying capacity, mitigations could include staggering numbers of trail users over a longer period to prevent adverse effects.

Design Features for Implementation of Future Site-Specific Analysis

1. Monitoring of segments with intact historic tread, measuring width and depth, should be done on a 5-year basis. This will provide baseline data to determine future requests for large numbers under a special use permit and other future environmental analyses on a site by site basis.
2. In situations where group size is expected to reach upper limit of visitor capacity, mitigations could include staggering numbers of trail users over a longer time period to prevent adverse effects.
3. If heritage resources are identified during any project implementation (unanticipated discovery) related to this project or future projects, all work would cease immediately in that area until the situation is reviewed by a qualified archaeologist and an assessment and mitigation plan instituted to ensure protection of the site.
4. Historic properties located within the project's area of potential effect but not close to identified disturbance areas shall be protected from indirect project impacts such as use of areas, staging, or any other activities.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

Existing land management plan direction addresses threatened, endangered, proposed, and sensitive species, other special-status aquatic species, or critical habitats relative to the Nez Perce National Historic Trail location, its use, and associated facilities. Existing forest plan monitoring for terrestrial and aquatic and botanical threatened, endangered, proposed, and sensitive species would detect general issues associated with trail use that would then be analyzed if a change or mitigation is warranted (for example, re-route of current trail, placing boulders to obstruct user-created trails, fencing, trail or structure modification at stream crossings, etc.), and those changes would be analyzed in the appropriate site-specific level.

Visitor activities can have deleterious impacts to natural areas vegetation, soil, water, wildlife, and cultural resources (Marion et al. 2019). Effects of recreation on animals include behavioral responses such as increased flight and vigilance; changes in spatial or temporal habitat use; declines in abundance, occupancy, or density; physiological stress; reduced reproductive success; and altered species richness and community composition. Many species respond similarly to human disturbance and predation risk, meaning that disturbance caused by recreation can force a trade-off between risk avoidance and fitness-enhancing activities such as foraging or caring for young (Larson et al. 2016 and 2019).

However, the relationship between amount of recreational use and wildlife impacts is not well understood, and very few studies have systematically examined the effects of varying numbers of visitors

on wildlife. Such studies are methodologically challenging because they need to measure and account for both environmental and population dynamic influence before and during the experimental addition of recreation use as a cause-and effect influence (Marion et al. 2019). As a result, information specific to wildlife-human interactions that may trigger re-evaluation or adjustment of trail visitor capacity is unavailable at this time and would likely require site-specific consideration. Direct effects that could result from future site-specific projects would be evaluated when those projects are proposed.

It is assumed that impacts from fishing, such as direct take and behavioral modification (for example, feeding), are closely related to the number of anglers fishing at individual sites. Potential effects of recreation on aquatic animals include behavioral responses such as increased avoidance movements; changes in spatial or temporal habitat use; declines in abundance, occupancy, or density; physiological stress; reduced reproductive success; and altered species richness and community composition. Visitor activities can also have negative impacts to aquatic habitat and adjacent riparian habitat, including vegetation and soil. Therefore, future decisions would consider any actions that could affect the quantity of visitor use at individual aquatic habitat locations, and the corresponding effects to aquatic species and their habitat.”

If individual units choose to implement specific visitor use strategies that would change the trail use or allow group rides via a special use permit, an environmental analysis to consider site-specific impacts would be necessary. At that time, the types of information that could trigger re-evaluation and adjustment of visitor capacities would be determined. Information about wildlife-human interactions that could trigger re-evaluation or adjustment of trail visitor capacity is unavailable at this time and would require site-specific consideration.

Watershed

Through the use of best management practices, adverse effects to the trail and surrounding areas would be mitigated and the trail maintained. National core best management practices have been developed for National Forest System roads (USDA Forest Service 2012), and the Forest Service national best management practices program is the agency’s nonpoint source pollution control program for achieving and documenting water resource protection.

Best management practices are mitigations that help reduce the effects of land management and development on water quality. Best management practices have generally been adopted by local and State jurisdictions along the trail corridor and include actions that help maintain the trail. Water quality protection is the fundamental purpose for using best management practices along the trail, in that they can reduce sediment erosion and runoff. Best management practices also play a role in maintaining the trail tread and preventing gully and other erosion across or along the trail. Best management practices are widely deployed for managing road runoff for both paved and gravel roads. Generally, best management practices designed for trail and road management have been extensively used on Federal lands.

Several trail segments have water quality problems. Currently several streams along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail corridor that are classified as not meeting water quality standards for their designated uses. The highest number of miles of impaired streams cross highway or roads near auto tour routes 7 (429) and 8 (488), and the least in tour routes 2 in the Lolo Motorway area and Route 6 in Yellowstone National Park. Water quality problems range from high sediment, nutrients or water temperature levels to chemical pollution. However, the trail itself is not the cause for these water quality impairments. The proposed action would not lead to further impairment of water quality as a result of the proposal, however, for any future proposed visitor capacity water quality impacts would require analysis.

Large fires, drought or extreme flood events continue to have an effect on water quality in most trail segments under the proposed action. Large fires occur along the trail, and often result in increased sediment getting to streams. Typically, these events only affect water quality for a short time (1 to 5 years) before natural stabilization and recovery occur. Fire histories in many areas show that wildfires are common along the trail corridor, so water quality effects from fires should be expected in future environmental analysis.

Watershed Indicators for Effects Analysis

- Protection and preservation of the roads and trails that are part of the trail and other roads and trails in the corridor
- Water quality protection
- Erosion and maintaining road and trail drainage, flood proofing roads and trails, and sustainability
- Trail response to fire and flood damage
- General trail design and maintenance to prevent erosion and enhance stability

Geologic hazards that may be affected by, or have an effect on, management of the trail include:

- slope and channel instability (landslides, debris flows, rockfalls, mudflows, soil slips, dry ravel) with the highest degree of hazard mainly above over-steepened slopes above roads
- seismic zone activity (earthquake shaking, ground rupture or displacement, seismic-induced waves on water bodies [seiches]) such as Yellowstone Lake
- subsidence, collapse, and liquefaction mainly along prairie highways or roads that are part of the trail
- foundation failures associated with dams, roads, bridges and retaining structures along the trail
- flooding including flash floods
- naturally occurring rocks with toxic heavy metals or other hazardous minerals
- active and abandoned/inactive mines (and associated physical and chemical hazards) and abandoned/inactive landfills (which may contain hazardous materials and pathogens that could contaminate groundwater, surface water and soil)
- contaminated groundwater

Best Management Practices for Consideration in Future Projects

National best management practices are available for National Forest System lands (USDA Forest Service 2012). The purpose of the national best management practices program is to provide a standard set of core practices and a consistent means to track and document the use and effectiveness of those practices on National Forest System lands. National forests and Bureau of Land Management managed areas along the trail corridor have adopted other best management practices for water quality protection and trail maintenance.

These best management practices and others can be used or adapted to specific circumstances found along the road and trail corridor. Over the long term, implementing and maintaining best management practices along the road and trail and corridor will be essential for trail sustainability.

For future site-specific projects, soil erosion control practices and best management practices will help to protect water quality, maintain recreational trails and roads in the trail corridor, and reduce the costs of maintenance. Through the use of best management practices, adverse effects to the trail and surrounding areas would be mitigated and the trail maintained. The purpose of trail best management practices is to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to soil, water quality, and instream riparian resources that may result from road management activities.

Socioeconomics

The Nez Perce National Historic Trail provides recreational opportunities, economic benefits, historic, cultural and quality of life attributes, and other amenities to both visitors and residents of the region. The social and economic conditions of the trail are characterized by its demographic composition, structure, and size of the economies of the communities intersected by the trail. These conditions are outlined in the socioeconomic evaluation of the current condition of the trail (located in the revised comprehensive plan project file). There it is also describes recreation opportunities, quality of life amenities, and attributes of the region specific to the Nez Perce National Historic Trail corridor. Also included is a discussion of the importance of recreation and park and forest visitation to the region, the potential contribution of visitor spending to the local economy (in terms of jobs and income), as well as other potential social and economic benefits accruing to people as a result of the trail system.

Most existing land and resource management plans along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail do not specify goals, objectives, or management direction specific to social and economic outcomes. However, plans often recognize the role of the public lands in contributing to local economic activity and nearby community well-being. Additionally, management direction for other resources often overlap desired social and economic outcomes by including goals such as providing for a broad range of year-round, high-quality recreation opportunities and visually appealing scenery and preserving cultural resources.

Public beliefs or perceptions play into their behavior and well-being. For example, perceptions of visitor crowding, quality of experience, beliefs of the potential impacts of visitor use on historic resources, all ultimately may impact well-being. If managers, or visitors, perceive crowded conditions along trails, data produced by monitoring can provide actual use data for planning or management action purposes.

Measuring the human relationship with the ecological environment requires two types of indicators: those that help to understand social and economic conditions in communities near the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and those that measure human uses of forest lands and resources. In addition, an analysis of public values, beliefs, and attitudes related to the trail and its use can help us understand behaviors and the relationship between the public and trail management.

There does not exist enough information specific to trail use to do an economic impact analysis. Such analysis would combine baseline economic data with resource use data—in this case recreation visitors—to estimate employment and labor income associated with trail resources and uses. In addition, the proposed action does not result in any measurable changes in recreation visitor use which would be needed to estimate changes in economic contributions related to trail recreation visitors. The socioeconomic evaluation of the current condition of the trail (located in the comprehensive plan project file) reports average national forest visitor expenditure data to help illustrate the potential economic contribution of visitors to the trail, and illustrate how these communities might benefit if trail use increases, and conversely the opportunity cost if trail use is limited or if potential users choose alternative sites due to real or anticipated trail congestion.

Communities

The trail passes numerous small and large communities as it travels through Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. Smaller gateway communities along or near the trail provide supplies and amenities for trail users (for example, Grangeville, Idaho and Hamilton, Montana). Larger communities farther from the trail corridor provide transport hubs, specialized amenities and public services (for example, Lewiston, Idaho and Missoula, Montana). The trail and associated sites serve as a destination attraction (for example, National Park Service's Nez Perce National Historic Park Visitor's Center), day use recreation areas for the nearby communities (for example, Tolo Lake), for visitors passing through or visiting the region, or as side trips as part of other site visits and trips. Users can also experience solitude or a deep connection to history along the trail in many sections, for example the Musselshell Trail (No. 40) or walking the White Bird battlefield.

Tourism contributes to economic activity in communities near outdoor recreation sites. In rural areas with relatively few economic opportunities, recreation visitor spending can be a particularly meaningful economic driver. Overall, the data suggest many communities located near the trail corridor experience higher rates of economic insecurity than the States' overall. New sources of economic activity can improve economic well-being. This indicates tourism spending associated with the trail has the potential to contribute to economic sustainability in gateway communities.

The Nez Perce National Historic Trail presents opportunity for the communities surrounding the trail. The trail offers local citizens recreation, cultural and scenic opportunities. This can translate into an improved quality of life in these places which further attracts people to the communities. In addition, increasing the attractions of the trail has the potential to bring additional visitors to the trail and therefore additional spending and economic opportunities to local communities.

In addition to the foot trail, the auto route offers significant opportunities to draw additional users to the trail. Maintaining and improving these interpretive displays, road side kiosks, and day use areas has the potential to continue to increase visitors to local communities, again bringing economic opportunities for local business to provide goods and services to trail visitors, while providing recreation, cultural and scenic opportunities to a variety of user types.

However, as visitor use increases, there would be trade-offs to those who may appreciate a more remote, sparsely populated experience on sections of the trail. Increased visitor use would need to be balanced with preservation of historic features for future visitors and for the cultural and historical importance the solitude of the trail can offer.

Values, Beliefs, and Attitudes

An assessment of values, beliefs, and attitudes provides insight into the relationship between the public and trail management. Controversies and disagreements over land management often are grounded in values (Allen et al 2009). Public comments have been received on the comprehensive management plan revision for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. The majority of the comments were received during public workshops. No public comments have been received on this proposed action; however, the comments on the revised comprehensive plan provide insights into the potential range of values the public holds for the trail.

Values are likely to vary considerably among the public. Some members of the public may believe unhampered access to the trail will improve public use and enjoyment. For example, a commenter requested the trail corridor be accessible to mountain bikes in addition to stock and hiking. Other commenters recognized the role the Nez Perce National Historic Trail may play in the economic

development of communities along the trail corridor. On the other hand, some commenters expressed frustration with large groups, or even other users, on the trail. This group identified historic resource conservation and the preservation of solitude as trail values that increased trail could diminish. These types of comments included a wide array of sentiments regarding the need for protection of the sacred and historic sites which could be adversely impacted by trail use. In the context of trail visitor capacity, these values may be the main source of conflict.

Environmental Justice

An assessment of environmental justice communities is outlined in the socioeconomic evaluation of the current condition of the trail (located in the comprehensive plan project file). This assessment finds there are communities which may merit consideration as potential environmental justice populations based on the presence of low-income and minority populations. The proposed action is an administrative non-ground-disturbing action and therefore will not have any adverse, disproportionate effect on these populations.

Considerations as individual units consider the recommended visitor capacity should include the potential disproportionate impacts to environmental justice populations, including concerns affecting federally recognized, State-recognized, and non-recognized tribes; individual tribal members, including those living off-reservation. The environmental justice analysis may give members of a tribe living outside a reservation or maybe having disagreement or different opinions than the formal tribal government an opportunity to express their issues or concerns (Grinspoon et al 2014). The review of values, beliefs and attitudes may help identify these impacts.