



ISSUED QUARTERLY
FALL 2020, NO. 2

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Friends of the Clearwater Board of Directors decided to hold this year's Annual Meeting as an online party, via Zoom, Friday November 6, 2020, at 7 PM. For login information, please RSVP the FOC office by **November 5**:
gary@friendsoftheclearwater.org or 208-882-9755. We will send you the login information.

As part of the event, we will be showing photos submitted by FOC members of places in the wild Clearwater or surrounding public lands and national forests. Please submit jpegs to:
gary@friendsoftheclearwater.org by **October 28** if you want a photo included in the show.

Board Elections will be handled via mail this year and ballots will be sent out soon. More information can be found on page 3.

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Friends of the Clearwater
Keeping Idaho's Clearwater Basin Wild

THE CLEARWATER DEFENDER

IS A PUBLICATION OF:

Friends of the Clearwater
 P.O. Box 9241, Moscow, Idaho 83843
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foc@friendsoftheclearwater.org
friendsoftheclearwater.org

Friends of the Clearwater, a recognized non-profit organization since 1987, defends the Clearwater Bioregion's wildlands and biodiversity through a Forest Watch program, litigation, grassroots public involvement, and education. The Wild Clearwater Country, the northern half of central Idaho's "Big Wild," contains many unprotected roadless areas and wild rivers and provides crucial habitat for countless rare plant and animal species. Friends of the Clearwater strives to protect these areas, restore degraded habitats, preserve viable populations of native species, recognize national and international wildlife corridors, and bring an end to industrialization on public lands.

The *Clearwater Defender* welcomes artwork and articles pertaining to the protection of the "Big Wild." Articles and viewpoints in the Defender do not necessarily reflect the views of Friends of the Clearwater.

Friends of the Clearwater is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions to Friends of the Clearwater are tax-deductible.

Annual Meeting Photos!

- **Reminder:** As part of the annual meeting, we will be showing photos submitted by FOC members of someplace in the wild Clearwater or surrounding public lands and national forests. Please submit jpegs to gary@friendsoftheclearwater.org by **October 28** if you want a photo included in the show.



Brett Haverstick Photo

**EXPLORE
 CLEARWATER COUNTRY
 THROUGH OUR WEBSITE**
friendsoftheclearwater.org

Printed on 100% post-consumer,
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 Montana Policy Director: Jeff Juel
 Staff Attorney: Katie Bilodeau

Publication

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 Editors: Katie Bilodeau, Jeff Juel, and Gary Macfarlane
 Copy Editor: Sioux Westervelt

2020 Annual Membership Meeting and Remembering 2019 by Steve Paulson

This year's annual Membership Meeting will be November 6th at 7 pm (four days after the election). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions for health and safety, this year's annual meeting will be our first annual meeting conducted virtually. We are hoping to provide as high quality experience as possible. Please RSVP by contacting the office via phone (208-882-9755) or email, gary@friendsoftheclearwater.org. Sign-in instructions will be sent to you.

The 2019 meeting saw Harry Jageman and Al Espinosa re-elected as board members. Tanya Gale was elected to her first term on the board and has been serving in the office of Secretary.

Retiring board members include Lucy Simpson, Chris Norden, Rene Holt, Jeremiah Busch, and Elliot Moffett. Speaking for the present Board, and I'm sure the entire membership, thank you all for your service and sacrifices in attending these quarterly meetings and contributing to a thoughtful decision-making process. As a matter of note, Chris served on the Board for a remarkable 20 years and served in every office on the board. I will especially miss his editing advice on my written work.

This year, Julian Matthews and myself are seeking re-election and new candidates hope to be elected. Ballots will be sent out soon. The terms are two years. This will make a total of five board members. The By-law allows for a maximum of eleven board members. If you would like to join the Board, please contact any of the existing board members. We are especially looking for women, minorities, and younger people, and a good sense of humor, to boost the board-meeting dynamics. An added plus is we have a potluck at each meeting.

In 2019 awards were given to the following:
Volunteers of the year- Allie Gamble and Paul Busch. These volunteers wrote and submitted comments for land manage-

ment decisions, contributed photos, helped at community events and participated in field work.

Activist of the year- Paul Sieracki. Paul has been a long-term forest watchdog on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests and contributes GIS work to local conservation groups.

Macfarlane Plank Award- Kristin Ruether. Kristin was FOC's first paid staff in 1999. After this, she obtained a law degree and subsequently litigated for several northwestern environmental groups, including Oregon Natural Desert Association, Advocates for the West, and Western Watersheds Project.

We will present these awards again this year.

Last year's silent-auction generated \$2845, from generous donors and buyers, a major contribution to FOC's annual budget. Due to the pandemic's impact on local businesses, this year we are asking members to pledge donations to FOC in lieu of a silent auction.

Special thanks to Tom Peterson, who in 2019 entertained the group with wonderful live music, his vocals backed by guitar.

There will be staff presentations about the grandeur of the Clearwater Country, the many threats to our wild heritage, and FOC's efforts in 2020 to reduce these threats.

We will show pre-recorded footage of Carole King advocating for the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, a bill to protect our remaining wild lands. NREPA represents a comprehensive plan to save all remaining wild lands within the northern continental divide ecosystem, for perpetuity. It will be reintroduced into Congress again in 2021. Our best hopes ride on this legislation.

Virtual may be the modern norm, but I must say at this point, that for me, the biggest loss in FOC going virtual is the Potluck dinners at the annual membership meetings. It will be impossible to have virtual Potluck. The FOC Potlucks are the epitome of the genre, unparalleled. The food people

brought to tables over-flowing with locally produced bounty was prepared lovingly. The private conversations during the meal, among this intelligent and thoughtful tribe, were delightful. I grieve, and look forward to their return.

Mark your calendars, save this date, and please plan to attend.



Luci Simpson speaking at Moscow City Hall
Thanks for your service to FOC! FOC file photo



Kristin Ruether receiving the Plank Award and Blanket
from Steve Paulson. FOC file photo

Defaming Old Growth: Disparaging the Idea, Destroying the Habitat

by Jeff Juel

Since the late 1980s, the U.S. Forest Service has managed our Clearwater National Forest and Nez Perce National Forest under direction of forest plans which recognize the importance of old growth. The Clearwater plan says old growth “is vital to the perpetuation of old-growth dependent species of wildlife.” Similarly, the Nez Perce plan includes a mandate to “manage for old-growth habitat for dependent species.” These species, including the pileated woodpecker, fisher, pine marten, northern goshawk, Canada lynx and many others, have a strong preference and even dependency on old-growth habitat conditions for their persistence.

Old-growth forests encompass later stages of stand development and are distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes. Along with large, old trees these attributes include multiple canopy layers, large snags, and large down logs. Old growth also differs from earlier stages by species composition and ecosystem function. Floral species richness is high, particularly for arboreal lichens, saprophytes, and various forms of fungus and rots. Old-growth stands are genetic reservoirs for some of these species, the value of which has probably yet to be determined.

Both current forest plans include a requirement for maintaining at least 10% of the forest as old-growth habitat, with explicit or implicit language to the effect that it remains essentially unmanaged. That is, the forest plans see no need to alter old-growth habitat to meet the needs of associated species. However, ten percent is far below the historic norm, due to wide-scale clearcutting over the past century. And since the Forest Service has not monitored population trends of these wildlife species as the forest plans require, the agency has little idea how wildlife have fared under its management regime. Now, with both Forest Plans scheduled to be replaced as soon as next year, the Forest Service is radically targeting most remaining old growth for logging under its proposed

revised Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Forest Plan.

The history of the relationship between the Forest Service and old-growth forests has been contentious. The agency’s management paradigm views trees as primarily a source of timber and--because of its tree farm mentality--seeks to exploit, manipulate and control nature to maximize production of wood volume, with harvest at “rotations” ranging from a few to several decades. Yet old growth--being an ecological condition after often a few centuries of natural processes acting to shape the forest--is the very antithesis of control. Traditional forest management and old growth are mutually exclusive.

Robert G. Lee, a retired professor of sociology of natural resources at the University of Washington, examined these disparate worldviews in the 2009 book “Old Growth in a New World” edited by Thomas Spies and Sally Duncan. Lee writes, “Foresters trained in the twentieth century ... were committed to bringing order to the forest and replacing the messiness of ‘decadent’ older forests with manageable, fast-growing

plantations of uniform trees.” Then, controversy reached a head in the late 1980s, with the battle over the spotted owl and its old-growth home in the Pacific Northwest. Not only did the issue rally environmentalists armed with the science of owl habitat needs, it also captured the deeper relationship between humans and the natural world: “The birth of ‘old growth’ as the iconic forest can be encapsulated in a few words describing social meanings, time and space: re-enchantment trumped rationality; the eternal



Ashley Martens and Dawna Jones in Old Growth Cedar
Larry McLaud FOC file photo

present absorbed the chronology of forest growth; mystical places colonized the choreography of sustained yield operations,” Lee wrote.

As Lee saw it, foresters have become “most troubled by what can best be described as the re-enchantment of the natural world.” So fast forward to 2019, when the Forest Service proposes its new draft forest plan (DFP) for our Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. The DFP deems untold thousands of acres of old growth “non-desired” because the agency claims it is “over-represented compared with historic conditions” and, therefore, “should not be specifically protected by forest plan components.” The Forest Service

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proposes the old growth be clearcut if it cannot be “converted to a desired old growth type.” Since this idea of engineering old growth completely lacks scientific basis, one doesn’t have to read far between the lines to see the specter of clearcuts to come.

Even the “desired” old growth is slated for logging under the DFP, as long as “activities . . . increase the resistance and resiliency of the stand to disturbances or stressors” and if the logging is “not likely to immediately modify stand characteristics to the extent that the stand would no longer meet the definition of old growth over the long-term.” In other words, log, manipulate, control, and exploit old growth, leaving a few of the larger trees so that the stands might, at some later time, meet the agency’s stale, technical definition of old growth.

With climate change already drastically affecting forests, especially in terms of fire, the importance of maintaining old growth in an unmanaged state becomes paramount. Scientific researchers have noted that dense, closed canopy forests such as old growth stay a few degrees cooler than surrounding logged forests and, therefore, have a natural resistance to fire. On the other hand, the Franken-forests envisioned by the Forest Service would be “thinned” to an open, drier, and warmer condition. Many of the large snags would be cut down for logger safety, and the damp logs protecting and maintaining the biological diversity and ecological processes of the soil would be piled and burned. Noxious weeds would invade and, as scientists have discovered, wildlife species richness would decline.

Contrast that dystopian image with the words of Robert Lee, who writes, “visiting old growth is not required to appreciate its meaning, because this place is first of all a refuge for the imagination, not a material condition. It is a place of power because natural processes are free to function unimpeded by human demands. As such, it opens a door to different experiences of space and time.”

Do not cede this place of power to the industrial paradigm of Forest Service management. When you have the chance, go--find yourself among the old trees. And just as important, visit the Alert on the Friends of the Clearwater website, where you can easily transmit your experience to the Forest Supervisor. Please urge the Forest Service to protect--not exploit--all of the old growth on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.

Clearwater Country Report

Receive monthly action alerts
and comment on proposals on the
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
friendsoftheclearwater.org/get-e-news



Steelhead fly fishing Snake River - Lower Hells Canyon

Professionally guided
42 years of steelhead guiding
experience
Licensed & Insured

One full day for 2 fly anglers
Boat transportation, Wade fishing
Excellent shore lunch
Flies provided as needed
No expiration date

Retail Value \$550
Fishing licenses not included

Donated to FOC by
Michael J. Mathis
“All About the Grab” Guide Service
Native Fish Society
River Steward
michaelmjmathis@comcast.net

Please contact the FOC Office (208)882-
9755 if you are interested in bidding on
this offer.

(Ed. Note: Just think how great the fishing will be when the lower Snake River dams come out. Michael Mathis has been kind enough to donate this to FOC with no expiration date, recognizing that steelhead runs have been poor for a number of years.)

Update in the Courts by Katie Bilodeau

Lolo Insects and Disease Project lawsuit

Earlier this summer Friends of the Clearwater (FOC) and Alliance for the Wild Rockies (AWR) filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the Lolo Insects and Disease Project. Like other Orwellian-titled projects, this one authorized approximately 3,387 acres of logging on the Lochsa Ranger District (including the Lolo Creek watershed) of the Clearwater National Forest. The Lolo Insects and Disease Project has exactly the same project boundary that the Lochsa Thin Project, which authorized approximately 2,800 acres of logging in 2011. Other logging legacies in the Lolo watershed include the White-White Timber Sale and the Yakus Creek Timber Sale from the 2000s.

FOC and AWR provided detailed comments on our concerns about the Lolo project, but the Forest Service signed the final decision in 2019. FOC and AWR sent the Forest Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service a notice-of-intent-to-sue letter on Endangered Species Act violations this past spring, and followed with the current lawsuit in late June for violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA).

We believe this project violates the ESA. The ESA prohibits federal agencies from acting in a way that will harm endangered species. To ascertain a project won't harm an endangered species, the agency proposing the project must consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (for terrestrial species and aquatic species that don't migrate to the ocean) or the National Marine Fisheries Service (for species that spend time in the ocean, like steelhead). The agencies must always use the best information available when evaluating

impacts and must reconsult with each other when activities within the project change or new information comes to light. Neither was done here.

When the agencies assessed the logging project's impact to steelhead, they didn't consider the best information available. The Forest Service relied on a 2016 steelhead report that was based on 2015 steelhead numbers. In 2014-2015, NMFS estimated that 45,789 Snake River Basin steelhead returned to their natal waters. But, in 2018-2019, NMFS estimated that 8,182 Snake River Basin steelhead returned to their natal waters, the lowest number of steelhead returning

since the 1990s. The USFS and NMFS relied upon the higher 2015 numbers, ignoring the 2018-2019 data for incredibly low steelhead returns in recent years. Additionally, the biological opinion considered only two culvert replacements proposed in occupied steelhead habitat. But, after NMFS approved the biological opinion for two culvert replacements in steelhead habitat, the USFS authorized three more culvert placements in steelhead critical habitat without re-consulting with NMFS. These are the lawsuit's ESA issues.

FOC and AWR also believe that the federal government violated the National Environmental Policy Act because it failed to properly consider the logging proposal's impacts to steelhead in Eldorado Creek. Cobble embeddedness is a term that refers to how many rocks in a stream are covered, sunken, or buried by dirt or mud on the streambed. Steelhead need low cobble embeddedness because they lay their eggs in the spaces between the rocks where those eggs incubate, and steelhead fry

seek these spaces as shelter from predators before growing big enough to migrate to the ocean. The Forest Service measured cobble embeddedness at a part of Eldorado Creek with a steeper incline and faster moving water. This is problematic because a steeper, faster segment of stream is less sensitive to water resource changes and is not where steelhead linger. Both steelhead and sedimentation occur in the meandering, slower parts of the stream, which the Forest Service failed to examine. If the Forest Service did not sample where cobble

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**Clearwater Pine Marten,
by Katie Bilodeau, FOC file photo**

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embeddedness would occur, it cannot properly evaluate the current conditions or the proposed project's impact on steelhead habitat. Without properly evaluating current conditions, the Forest Service also cannot adequately evaluate whether sediment will increase as a result of this project, which the Clearwater Forest Plan prohibits in this area because of all the sedimentation from previous logging projects.

Finally, FOC and AWR believe that the Forest Service has violated the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) because the logging project will exceed soil quality standards. NFMA requires the Forest Service to maintain soil quality, and in this region that means not exceeding 15 percent detrimental soil disturbance. Detrimental soil disturbance includes compacting and displacing soils in addition to rutting and surface erosion, mostly caused by logging equipment rolling around on forest soil. Detrimental soil impacts are likely to reduce vegetative regrowth in stressful climatic conditions. In the Lolo Insects and Disease Project, the environmental impact statement noted that sixteen logging units will surpass the 15 percent limit on detrimental soil disturbance, amounting to 831 acres.

This litigation has just begun, so we have yet to present our arguments to the judge. The firm Bricklin & Newman, LLP, is representing FOC and AWR. We will keep you updated.

Wolverine lawsuit settlement

On March 18, 2020, FOC joined allies and filed suit to compel the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to decide on whether to list the wolverine under the Endangered Species Act. This was the latest lawsuit in a string of legal efforts to protect the struggling wolverine from going extinct. The wolverine population in the contiguous United States is estimated at 300 or fewer. In 2013, the USFWS published a proposed rule to list the wolverine in the Lower 48, but withdrew that rule in 2014. FOC and a host of conservation organizations sued the USFWS and a Montana federal district court held that the agency acted unlawfully, ordering the USFWS to consider listing the wolverine. After three years of agency inaction, this past spring FOC joined Center for Biological Diversity, Conservation Northwest, Defenders of Wildlife, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Idaho Conservation League, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, and Rocky Mountain Wild and sued the USFWS again for its delay and to compel a decision. The USFWS entered into a settlement with us this past July, agreeing to decide whether to list the wolverine by August 31, 2020. We've just received news that the USFWS has declined to extend ESA protections to the wolverine. As of press time, FOC and our partners are preparing to send the USFWS notice of our intent to sue on this decision because without the protection of the ESA, the wolverine's future is grim.

In Memoriam: A Tribute to Levi Holt (1948 to 2020) by Gary Macfarlane

I got to know Levi Holt, or Cimuuxcimux Taxcpol (Black Beaver), a renowned conservationist and Nez Perce Tribal member, when he was working for the Wolf Education and Research Center in Winchester, Idaho. He was a stunning person, and looked exactly like what I imagined Chief Joseph looked like.

Levi spent a lot of his childhood in the North Fork of the Clearwater country. No doubt, this contributed to his great and intense love of the natural world. Indeed, one of the great passions of his life was protecting Mother Earth, and he saw it as a sacred duty.

In addition to Friends of the Clearwater, Levi served on the boards of several conservation organizations over many years. He spoke eloquently on behalf of salmon, forests, wolves and bison, be it in front of Congress or at gatherings in Idaho. Among conservationists, he is perhaps best known as a key leader in recovering wolves in Idaho.

He was a leader who served on the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee on two different occasions, having been elected to those tribal positions by members of the Tribe. He was also an accomplished musician and artist. He was truly a well-rounded individual. I will miss his wisdom, kindness, and decency. His compassion made the world a much better place. His kind is too rare in the world today.



Levi Holt

Photo courtesy of the Lewiston Morning Tribune

Adios National Forests: Around the Clearwater by Gary Macfarlane

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a lot of activity on proposals and policies that affect the Wild Clearwater country. On a national level, regulatory changes to the National Environmental Policy Act have been proposed, or implemented, that threaten wildlands and weaken public involvement. The Forest Service has been active in proposing new timber sales in their quest to greatly increase logging on the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests, even though this radical expansion will result in certain damage to wildlife habitat and watersheds. The agency is also promoting ways to greatly expand infrastructure to increase more intensive recreation use without considering whether that increase can be done without harming watersheds, wildlife, or existing recreation uses.

National Policies

The biggest change was the adoption of new regulations under the national Environmental Policy Act, which overturn forty years of policy regarding the evaluation of impacts that harm the environment and citizens. In particular, the new rule greatly weakens the way cumulative impacts are considered, making it almost certain that the health of watersheds and forests is not considered.

As expected, lawsuits have been filed by many organizations. Washington and California are spearheading a lawsuit from 23 states as well. We certainly hope that the new rule, which essentially guts the National Environmental Policy Act, won't survive these legal challenges. The number and quality of the challenges suggests that the new rule might not survive.

The Forest Service has proposed its own dismantling of the National Environmental Policy Act in regulations that are more specific to the kind of decisions and actions approved on national forests. Now that the new NEPA regulations are out, the new Forest Service NEPA regulations could come at any time. Friends of the Clearwater (FOC) submitted detailed comments on both sets of rules.

Watchdogging the Forest Service

Over the past few months, FOC has responded to several proposals from the Forest Service, some of which are discussed below. FOC members, volunteers, interns, and staff have also been out monitoring proposed and past timber sales, seeing whether off-road vehicles have been violating wilderness boundaries and monitoring whether new

trail construction done without any public input along Cayuse Creek was causing damage. Our monitoring also looked at proposed mining operations including suction dredge mining. A big THANK YOU to all who have helped in this endeavor. And, another THANK YOU to Pat Finnegan who has been monitoring suction mining along the South Fork of the Clearwater and the Salmon River over several years and sharing that information with several organizations.

The Forest Service made a few positive changes on the Little Boulder project, near Deary and Helmer, as a result of FOC's formal objections. Like most "projects" this will be one or more separate timber sales. The Forest Service approved this project recently. Our formal objection also caused the Forest Service to withdraw the draft decision on the White Pine timber sale project east of Potlatch. Frankly, it would be better if the agency actually followed the law and did right by the land and people in the first place, but such is the state of national forest management these days.

As of press time, the Forest Service released the second final environmental impact statement for the Hungry Ridge project (timber sales). There is no decision yet, although the Forest Service released a preliminary advertisement for one of the sales from this proposed project. It is in important anadromous fish habitat, and one of the future sales might go into uninventoried roadless land adjacent to the Gospel-Hump Wilderness.

The Dead Laundry proposal would log in the upper North Fork drainage. This sale is in the initial public involvement stages. We expect the Forest Service to release an environmental assessment. Other proposed sales in the initial stages include a project called Limber Elk near Elk City in the South Fork drainage, which would be done with a cursory categorical exclusion. The Forest Service also released a proposal that would log approximately 5,000 acres along 130 miles of roads through the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests with another cursory review, going under the odd name of Aerial Detection Survey Incorporated Roadside Maintenance Update.

With help from Roger Flynn of the Western Mining Action Project, FOC submitted detailed comments and photos regarding a series of mining proposals. These proposals are near or within roadless country contiguous to the Gospel-Hump Wilderness in both the Salmon and Clearwater drainages, near Elk City in the same area as the proposed Limber Elk timber sales, and other locations in the South Fork drainage. These are proposed mining exploration projects, two by a foreign company. The Forest Service has not made any decisions yet. What makes this problematic is the time frame and scale of these proposals would require more than a simple categorical exclusion. The agency admits as much on two of the four proposals, yet proposes cursory analyses. In any case, it is highly unlikely that any of them

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could be done in a year or less, the maximum amount of time mining exploration can take place without being analyzed through an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement.

No, the pandemic has not slowed down proposals from the Forest Service that could harm the national forests. What it has done is cause the agency to neglect its monitoring duties and to properly manage the National Forest System. For example, there have been reports of human waste problems in the backcountry, including in places on the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. There are also documented reports of illegal use of vehicles on hiking and horse trails and inside Wilderness. The question is, will the Forest Service demonstrate to the public it cares for the land and serves the people rather than being beholden to corporate interests?



Great news! We have been chosen to participate in this year's Alternative Giving Market of the Palouse, which is an alternative to buying gifts. Instead, you can give as a gift a donation to an organization, like FOC, and a card will be sent to the recipient of your gift. Due to COVID-19, there will be a drive up market on December 5 at the Latah County Fairgrounds, much like the drive-in of old. The on-line giving portion of the market begins on November 27 and ends December 12, found at www.agmpalouse.org. The mission of the Alternative Giving Market of the Palouse (AGMP) is to "give residents of the Palouse meaningful alternatives to holiday gift giving and an opportunity to support local non-profits." Stay tuned for FOC's holiday cards--all proceeds from our cards go directly back to us. Learn more about the AGMP and other groups that are participating at www.agmpalouse.org.

Member Poetry Submission

GRIDS by Neil P. Cox

EARTH

A platted orb.
Day traders
Create reduction zones.
While tech-savvy plotters
Map every outcropping
and defile.

LAND

Biosphere as commodity.
Wild outliers tamed
By ant-like hordes
With sterling rapiers.
All predicted by Nostradamus.

NATURE

National Parks,
a concept incomplete,
(for only humans park)
blocked by asphalt
and gawkers in SUVs.
They toss sugar wrappers
and Walmart bags
out the windows.

CRITTERS

Nomads,
Seeking their migration routes,
Bump into encased borders.
"Deer Crossings," softly and falsely named,
Are Death zones
Of roaring metal and plastic machines
The last endangered species
Is not human beings.
It is "wild".

(Ed. Note: Neil is an FOC member very concerned with the plastic pollution and litter problem along the Snake River where he lives.)

Wildlife: My View

Sioux Westervelt

Guest Opinion

When Gary asked me to write an article for the fall edition of *Clearwater Defender*, maybe about wildlife, of course I immediately thought about wolves. Their existence in Idaho is a contentious subject, and I find it quite tragic and troubling. I try not to dwell on the fact that had they been allowed to repopulate on their own as they were doing in the 1990's, we probably would not be in the predicament we're in today. And it is a predicament, because when those Canadian wolves were dumped into Idaho's wild backcountry, no one knew how successful they would be. (In spite of the urban legends that abound, they really are just timber wolves like those that were annihilated in the West by the 1930s.) Unlike the wolves that were introduced into Yellowstone National Park where they aren't hunted and harassed, the wolves brought into Idaho have been offered up for the hunt, and handled incessantly by Idaho Fish & Game.

When wolves are allowed to live in peace without continual harassment and disruption, family packs form where alpha members establish a sense of order. There is a hierarchy, and the youth help with the care, feeding, and teaching of pups, and young members are taught to be efficient hunters. When the alpha members of a pack are killed, remaining wolves kill whatever prey is easiest to take down. Often that is livestock pastured in wolf territory. There is ample prey in Yellowstone, and packs have been allowed to create and live within their own territories. They are killed only when they stray outside the boundary of the park. Unfortunately, wolves don't know about park boundaries.

Hunters, and consequently Idaho Fish & Game, are at war with the wolves over who gets to kill the most deer and elk. There were over 500 wolves killed in various ways

in 2019. Wolves are hard to find and kill in the traditional one-on-one, track-them-down-and-kill-them kind of hunting, so they are trapped and snared because they can be tricked by scents and human deviousness.

The attitudes of many people have not changed in generations. There is something about wolves that make people crazy. You either love them or hate them. There doesn't seem to be much in between. I think it's partly because humans have become so accustomed to being at the top of the food chain that it's unnerving to have a predator back in the woods that is as good or better at hunting than a human. Same with grizzly bears.

Grizzlies and wolves are fast and efficient. The fact that there are predators more efficient and stronger than humans is a fearful reality for people who want to go into the woods. There are very few documented attacks on humans by wolves, but a grizzly with cubs can definitely be dangerous and will kill if danger is perceived. There is probably more danger from cougars than from either wolves or grizzlies, but cougars do not seem to have the same fearful reputation.

Idaho Fish and Game has continued to lengthen the killing season on wolves – they can pretty much be shot at any time of year now. Trapping season has been extended to begin in October instead of November, and goes into April. Trapping is an indiscriminate, cruel, and cowardly way of catching and killing wildlife. Animals caught in a leg-hold trap reflexively fight against the inability to get away from the thing that

has them captured and in pain. If you take the paw of your family dog or cat into your hand and don't let it go, they will start to panic and struggle. Do it sometime and you'll get a fraction of an idea of the reaction a wild animal has when caught in a leg-hold trap. No, they do not just lie down and wait for the trapper to come, as some would have us believe.



Gray Wolf

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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And should an out-of-season animal get caught in the leg-hold trap, the trapper is supposed to let it go. A bobcat or lynx? How does that work? Throw your jacket over their head and open the trap to free their foot? I wonder.

Idaho has large tracts of wilderness and back country that is perfect for many wildlife species. It is also one of the least compassionate states in the union when it comes to dealing with wildlife. That is one reason many people move here. We have liberal laws when it comes to hunting and trapping (the “right” to hunt and trap is enshrined in the state’s constitution), licenses are cheap and readily available, and we love our guns. In fact, we love the ability to visibly carry guns anywhere, including into the State Capital when the legislature is in session.

I understand hunting to feed one’s family. My dad was efficient at hunting and fishing. That was a large part of the family’s food supply. He and his hunting partners looked forward each year to getting together for the hunt – going to hunting camp and all that entailed. They didn’t have 4-wheelers, but walked many miles and when an animal was killed in a remote area, they carried it out of the woods on pack boards on their backs. One of my dad’s friends did have an old 1950’s Willy’s jeep that they used to get them as close as possible to where they needed to be, but there was a lot of physical labor involved. And it wasn’t about getting a “trophy” animal, although that caused a great deal of excitement if one of them were to shoot a particularly big bull elk or buck with an impressive set of antlers. That was a bonus to the amount of meat they’d be putting in the freezer.

I’ve tried to come to grips with my distaste for many “modern” hunters and trappers, but it’s not easy. There is a fine line between being anthropomorphic and empathic. I relate too well to the fear and torment of trapped and tortured animals. I understand the reality of it, and a clean kill is one thing, trapping is another. Causing hours and days of torment for an animal is unacceptable to me. It is one of those things that should’ve been ended when we entered the 20th century. Trappers are only required to check their traps every 72 hours (that’s three days) and it prolongs unimaginable pain and fear for the animal. I would say it is torture.

After much time and expense by Idaho Fish and Game capturing wolves and putting collars on them so they could be tracked, and installation and retrieval of many trail cameras recording their presence, the latest count I read recently is about 1,000 wolves live in Idaho. There were 570 wolves killed in the 2019-2020 killing season. There are private funds for helping cover expenses incurred by hunters to encourage the killing of wolves (but none call it a “bounty”), wolf killing tags are cheap and there are many available. There are all kinds of incentives being discussed, including “wolf free zones” - whatever that means. It is basically open season on wolves in Idaho, and I only see it getting worse.

There is a stark difference between the interaction of farmers and ranchers in Minnesota where they have lived with wolves for decades, and those in the western states. People in Minnesota knowingly moved into wolf territory, and they have taken the common sense approach of protecting their livestock

in permanent and practical ways, but ranchers in the west put their animals out onto the range or into the forest to fend for themselves where they blame (and kill) predators for killing calves or sheep. To be fair, there are those ranchers who have been willing to utilize various non-lethal ways to keep wolves away from livestock. Some methods are more successful than others, but there have not been enough serious attempts to thwart the problem beyond killing.

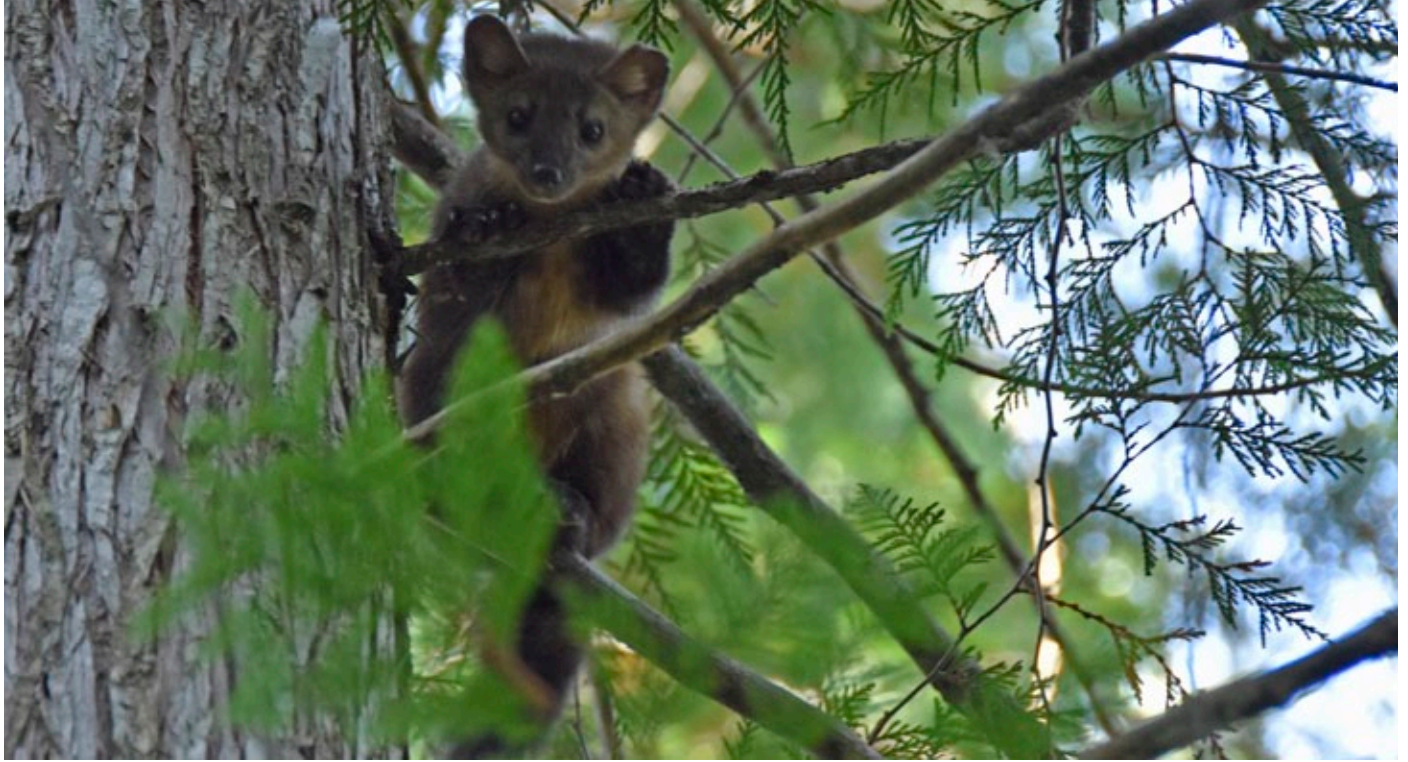
November will roll around soon and it’s hard to not think about trapping season. Animals will be caught in leg-hold traps like they do every winter, only now it will begin in October for wolves. I suppose it’s almost more humane when temperatures drop into the teens and below, because Wolf or Bobcat or Fox or whatever other animal caught in the trap, will die of exposure before the trapper returns to kill it and skin it for the fur that is worth money on the market. I wish humans could survive without causing trauma and torment

to the other creatures we share the earth with.

(Ed Note: Sioux Westervelt is a longtime FOC member and volunteer extraordinaire. She recently retired from the University of Idaho. She puts her degree in communications and creative writing to good use in writing letters to the editor, elected officials, and agencies. She has a particular passion for wildlife, especially canids.)



Clearwater Osprey
Photo courtesy of Roger Inghram



Curious Clearwater Pine Marten

Katie Bilodeau photo

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