

Nez Perce–Lochsa–Lolo Recovery Area and Wildlife Corridor Proposal

Big Wild Initiative II – Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity

May 2026

Leadership

Nez Perce Tribe, Friends of the Clearwater (FOC)

Executive Summary

This proposal advances the creation of a nationally significant wildlife corridor in the Nez Perce–Lochsa–Lolo region. The initiative aims to conserve and reconnect one of the largest intact ecosystems in North America, supporting imperiled species, restoring ecological function, and honoring Indigenous and historical use of the landscape.

Background: The Big Wild

The area known as the Big Wild is actually two adjacent wild regions. Clearwater Country is a land of moist cedar-fir forests and lower elevation mountains. This is where Friends of the Clearwater has focused its efforts. Salmon River Country is a higher, drier region of ponderosa break lands and glacier-carved peaks. They are joined by the Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness. Our core region, Wild Clearwater Country, contains 3 million acres of wilderness and roadless forest. Altogether, the entire region covers more than 10 million contiguous acres of wild, undeveloped country, making it larger than Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks combined. This unique and irreplaceable region, jointly owned by all of us, is rich in biodiversity. Friends of the Clearwater will secure the largest intact wildland preserve in the contiguous United States for biodiversity and climate health with 3 Initiatives: I. Wild Salmon Sanctuary, II. **Carnivore Corridors**, III. Forest and Climate.

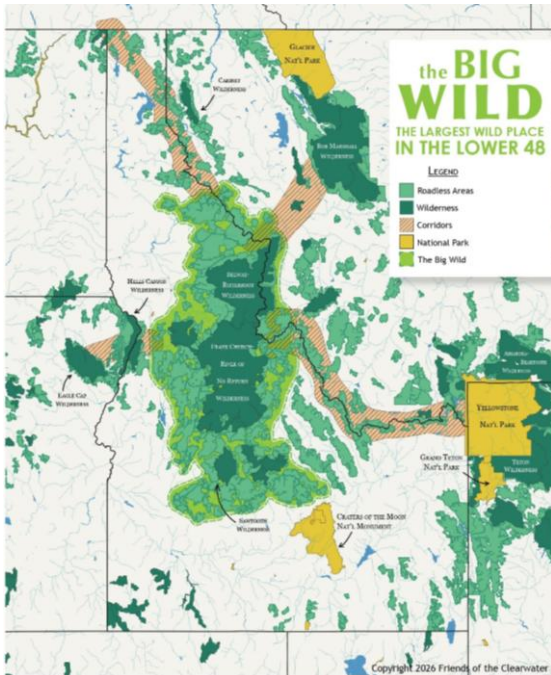
The Big Wild has been central to Friends of the Clearwater’s mission since 1987, and a core focus of the proposed legislation, Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA).

<https://allianceforthewildrockies.org/nrepa/>

The Big Wild connects to major wildland complexes, including:

- Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (east)
- Glacier Park and Bob Marshall ecosystems (northeast)
- Hells Canyon and Wallowa Mountains (west)

- Selkirk, Cabinet-Yaak, (north)



These connections make the area essential for wide-ranging wildlife species and long-term biodiversity resilience.

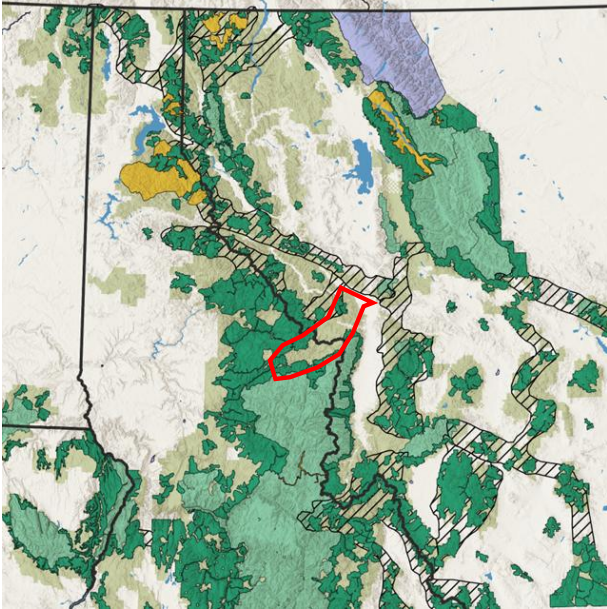
The Big Wild Initiative II - Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity

We will secure the largest, most intact, most abundant and most diverse carnivore preserve in the nation, thereby ensuring the greatest possible diversity of other species as well.

To create and maintain carnivore connectivity across The Big Wild, FOC will work to:

- Protect all Identified Roadless Areas;
- Expand and enhance protections and systems to create protected north/south and east/west travel corridors for threatened and endangered carnivores;
- Enhance carnivore survival by increasing coexistence
- Inventory and map threatened and endangered carnivores to help prioritize our efforts;
- Partner with other organizations across both the Clearwater and Salmon Country to advocate for any or all ESA-listed mammals that (will) use these corridors.

We are proposing the first national wildlife corridor- Nez Perce–Lochsa–Lolo Wildlife Corridor.



This proposal connects the upper Lochsa and Lolo pass region with Corridor 2- Glacier National Park/Northern Continental Divide. (Map modified from NREPA proposal)

Commented [ON1]: We need a simple map like this that we can show the loscha land sale/exchange location on top. I stole this from Matt Bishop. This is regarding bear habitat- Unsure of its source

Commented [KK2R1]: Yes, will ask Paul

Commented [ON3R1]: How about this as a concept map?

Nez Perce homeland and stewardship

The Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) and other Tribes had been fishing, gathering, and hunting in the upper Lochsa for centuries before Lewis and Clark came through in the early 1800s. By the end of that century, the Nez Perce Reservation had been greatly diminished and the die was cast for future watershed problems.

The Tribe has built a robust watershed recovery program and done extensive work in the upper watershed, such as road removal/recontouring and culvert replacements in a place they have known for ages.

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Problem Statement

The upper Lochsa and Lolo Pass region faces significant ecological degradation due to:

- Road construction and motorized access
- Intensive logging and habitat fragmentation
- Private “checkerboard” land ownership patterns
- Declining protections, including potential policy rollbacks (Roadless rule, ESA delisting)

- This area is also designated critical habitat for several species yet remains highly compromised.

At-risk species include:

- ESA-listed: grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine, whitebark pine
- Species of concern: fisher
- Threatened fish: salmon, steelhead, bull trout

Opportunity

The Lochsa–Lolo region represents a rare and urgent conservation opportunity:

- Key corridor linking major carnivore populations (including grizzly bear recovery zones)
- Core habitat for wolverine, lynx, and fisher
- Essential watershed for imperiled fish species
- Historically significant Indigenous travel route and National Historic Trail

With private lands currently available for acquisition, immediate action could secure and restore this landscape as both a wildlife corridor and cultural resource.

Proposed Solution

We propose protection of the Lochsa–Lolo area as:

- A **national wildlife corridor**
- A **native fish sanctuary**
- A **secure conservation landscape** in partnership with the Nez Perce Tribe

Key actions include:

- Permanent protection of all roadless areas
- Habitat restoration on degraded lands
- Improved connectivity across north–south and east–west corridors
- Reduction of wildlife conflict through coexistence strategies
- Monitoring and mapping of focal species
- Expansion of the National Historic Trail
- Exploring and implementing ways to facilitate wildlife passage across Highway 12

Theory of Change

- Establishing a bold, large-scale vision builds public support
- Demonstrating success encourages broader adoption
- Collaborative partnerships strengthen outcomes

- Public engagement drives lasting policy change

There is a significant ongoing shift in how we live with wildlife moving from control to coexistence. The public increasingly speaks out to support public lands and wildlife. US polls show that a majority support grizzlies and wolves on the landscape.

The Nez Perce have led fishery and forest restoration in the Lochsa for decades. They have restored hundreds of acres of forest and removed dozens of miles of roads and restored dozens of miles of streams. They have significantly helped to ensure native fish remain viable and prevented extinction of threatened fish.

Commented [KK4]: These numbers are guesses and maybe David knows?

We advocate for continued restoration and new conservation measures for environmental justice for the Nez Perce and to restore and protect this critical area for imperiled fish and wildlife including lynx, wolverine, grizzlies, steelhead, salmon, and bull trout.

Friends of the Clearwater has been actively engaged and effective in the Lochsa checkerboard conservation and proposals for exchanges and sales for over a decade. We led a successful campaign to stop a bad land exchange and more. We are excited to lead with Nez Perce on a new way forward.

Implementation Actions and Budget (Estimated)

- Support land acquisition and conservation funding mechanisms
- Protect and monitor roadless areas including over-snow vehicle access (FOC time– 20k)
- Pursue critical habitat designations for key species (FOC time, legal costs – 100k?)
- Restore high priority logged and roaded lands (partners? \$1 million?)
- Establish a “bear-smart” coexistence program along corridor (travel, outreach, supplies-30k – 100k match)
- Monitor focal species (camera traps, genetic sampling, etc.- 30k) We will proactively search for reports of species occurrence and follow up with direct monitoring. We will work with partners doing current monitoring and partners in the field (FCSB, GB). We will develop citizen science.
- Highlight the corridor at Lolo Pass and at centers in Lolo, Kooskia, Missoula, Hamilton, Lewiston, Orofino- with outreach campaign (outreach materials 10k)
- Build partnerships, outreach, and citizen engagement (outreach, travel - 20k)
- Develop partnership framework with the Nez Perce Tribe (Nez Perce time 40k)
- Expanded designations, nominate as UNESCO world heritage site?

Total Budget (Estimated)

- Core project: ~\$250,000
- Additional restoration and endowment funding: ~\$1M+

Expected Outcomes

- Establishment of the first U.S. national wildlife corridor
- Improved connectivity for carnivores and other species
- Stable or increasing populations of wolverine, lynx, fisher, and grizzly bears
- No net habitat loss for native fish species
- Enhanced recognition of the Nez Perce Tribe (Nimiipuu) cultural history and recent extensive ecosystem recovery efforts
- A replicable model for future corridor conservation efforts

Corridor Partnerships

We will work with conservation partners in the corridor including FOB, Salish Kootenai, Swan Coalition,

Call to Action

The Big Wild is a landscape of ecological, cultural, and national significance. Immediate action is needed to secure its future. We invite partners, funders, and the public to join in protecting this vital corridor—ensuring healthy ecosystems, clean water, and thriving wildlife for generations to come.

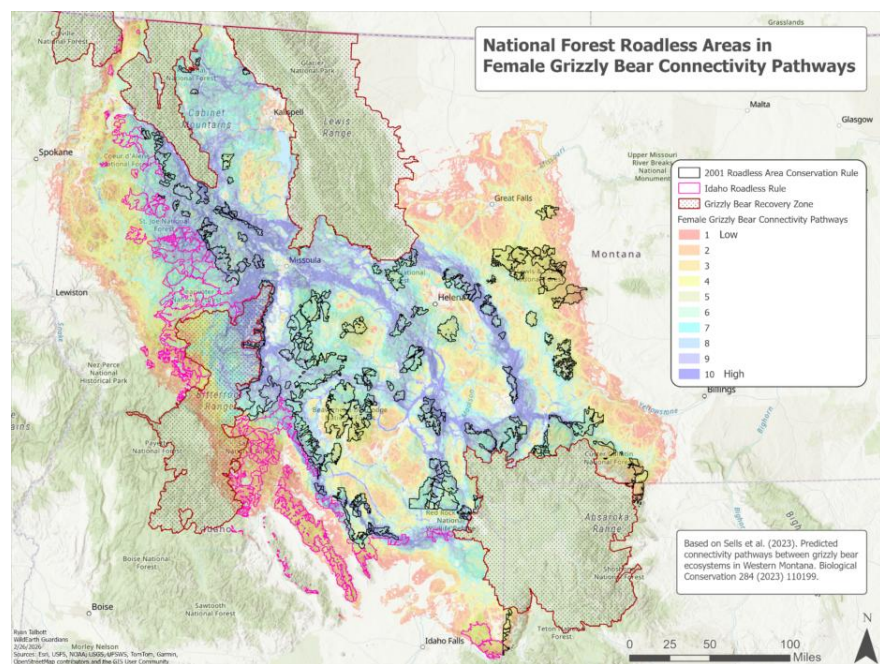
For more information or to get involved, contact:

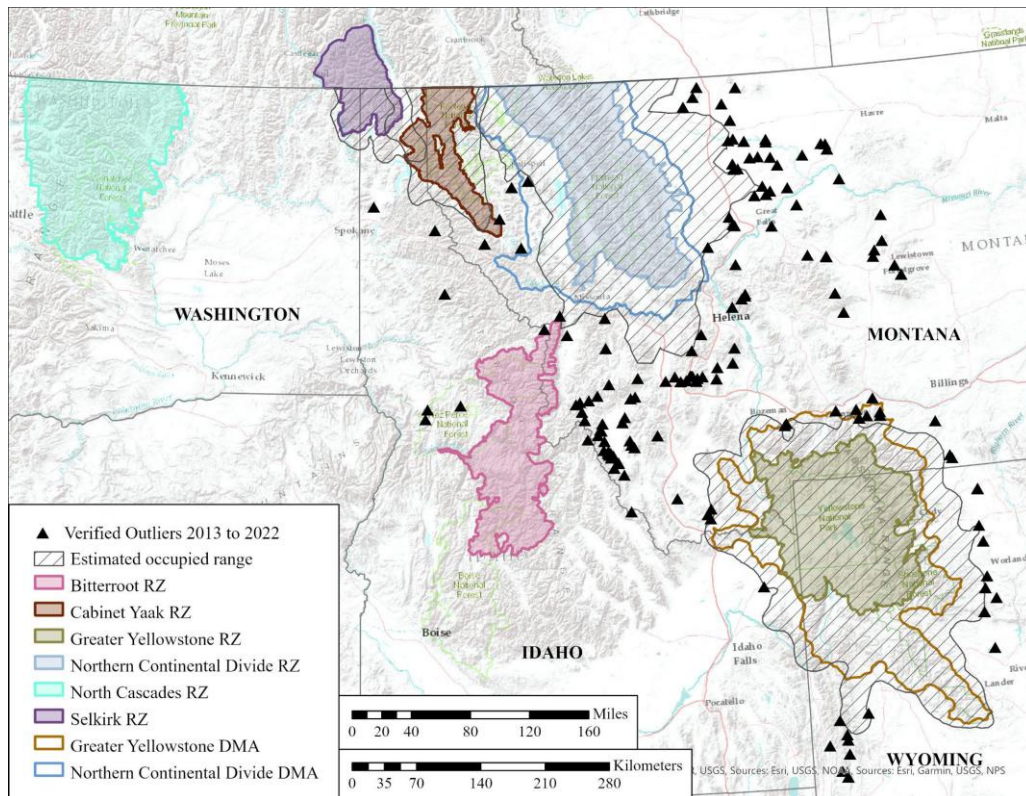
Friends of the Clearwater – foc@friendsoftheclearwater.org

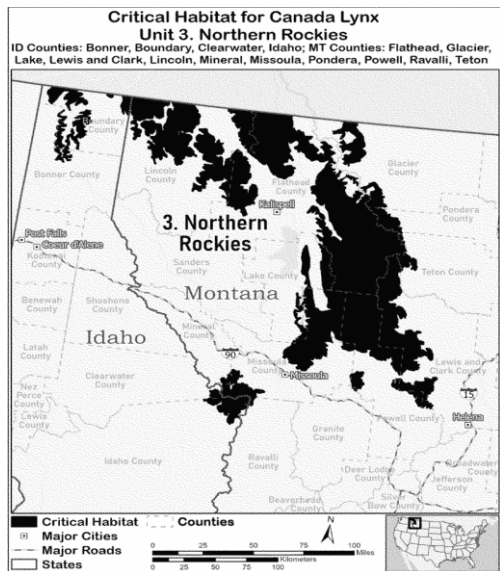
Add bibliography/ references/ other species occupancy/ CH maps...

What refs were you thinking to add?

I hot linked the maps but need the link reference for the wolverine map (at home) – SSA and Inman et al







[Critical Habitat for Canada Lynx- Unit 3 Northern Rockies \(Federal register\)](#)

Current Wolverine Habitat and Connectivity (need hot link)

