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FRIENDS OF THE CLEARWATER

PROTECTING WILD CLEARWATER COUNTRY SINCE 1987

Advancing the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act

BIG WILD INITIATIVE 2 – WILDLIFE CORRIDORS AND CONNECTIVITY

September, 2026

INSERT IMAGE

INSERT NREPA MAP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA) is the most comprehensive science-based land conservation proposal in the United States, encompassing one of the largest intact temperate ecosystems globally. First introduced in 1993, NREPA remains a critical but unrealized opportunity for large-scale biodiversity protection, climate mitigation, and landscape connectivity.

This proposal seeks to launch a coordinated, multi-year campaign to secure federal protection for the Northern Rockies ecosystem.. The project will revitalize NREPA through a strategic combination of public engagement, scientific synthesis, coalition-building, and policy advocacy.

Friends of the Clearwater's Big Wild Initiative provides a strong partner for revitalizing the NREPA campaign. Given the Big Wild's geographic and ecological overlap with NREPA, progress within the Big Wild directly advances broader NREPA objectives.

STATEMENT OF NEED

The Northern Rockies represent the largest remaining network of intact wildlands in the contiguous United States, supporting wide-ranging species such as grizzly bears, wolves, wolverines, and lynx.

Despite its ecological importance, this landscape remains vulnerable to fragmentation, road development, and inconsistent management. Over the past three decades, NREPA has not advanced legislatively, due in part to political barriers and insufficient sustained campaign infrastructure.

At the same time:

- Public support for conservation and public lands remains strong
- Scientific understanding of biodiversity and climate benefits has expanded significantly
- There is an urgent need to protect large, connected landscapes for imperiled wildlife species and for climate resilience

A timely, well-resourced campaign is needed to translate existing support and science into durable federal protection.

PROJECT GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Primary Goal

Secure passage of NREPA.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Protect roadless areas and ecological corridors from degradation
- Increase national and regional support for Northern Rockies conservation
- Expand and diversify the coalition of organizations advocating for NREPA
- Strengthen political support at state and federal levels
- Build durable public engagement exceeding 10,000 supporters

PROJECT STRATEGY

1. Landscape-Based Demonstration (Big Wild Initiative)

The Big Wild can serve as a flagship demonstration of NREPA's vision by advancing protection, restoration, and public engagement across a significant portion of core habitats and corridors. Our Big Wild project includes much of the largest region and at the heart of NREPA—the Greater Salmon-Selway Ecosystem.

2. Science and Communications

The project will synthesize and communicate the latest research on:

- Biodiversity and species recovery
- Forest carbon and climate mitigation
- Ecosystem services and economic benefits

These materials will support policymakers, partners, and the public.

3. Coalition Building

The campaign will expand partnerships with NGOs, regional interests, and national organizations to create a unified advocacy effort.

4. Policy Advocacy

Activities will include:

- Legislative outreach and relationship-building
- Development of policy-ready materials (maps, analyses, draft language)
- Strategic engagement with with legislators and citizens

5. Public Engagement

The project will mobilize public support through:

- Events, workshops, and field tours
- Media and digital campaigns
- Targeted outreach using flagship species as messaging anchors

METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

Key activities for resource development will include:

- Development of campaign materials and digital platforms
- Scientific and economic analyses supporting NREPA
- Public outreach campaigns and media engagement
- Semi-annual workshops and conservation group convenings
- Legislative advocacy and policy engagement
- Field-based conservation and monitoring tied to flagship species

The project will draw on proven strategies from successful conservation campaigns, including the Roadless Rule and other large-scale public lands initiatives.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT POTENTIAL

This project builds on strong indicators of success:

- Sustained, high levels of public support for public lands (>90% support in recent survey)
- Documented support for maintaining Roadless Rule (~ 600,000 comments, 99% support)
 - Potential to bolster Roadless Rule with NREPA as a comprehensive strategy
- Demonstrated effectiveness of grassroots advocacy campaigns
- Favorable public attitudes toward key species and ecosystem protection
- Established organizational expertise and partnerships
- A well-developed legislative and scientific foundation for NREPA

EVALUATION AND METRICS

Progress will be evaluated using measurable indicators, including:

- Number of public supporters engaged with a goal of >10,000
- Growth in coalition partners - >10
- Robust and engaged community and umbrella of partners
- At least semiannual significant events promoting core concepts and partners

Legislator endorsements secured - > 50? Including two in Montana and co-sponsorship by Oregon and Washington

- Media reach and public engagement metrics –
- We and our regional partners will ensure no significant losses to roadless areas or in corridors
- Protection status of priority landscapes and corridors

BUDGET OVERVIEW

Total requested funding: ~\$195,000

Communications & Public Outreach

- Develop campaign materials with Paul and Blake to support regional advocacy and public engagement — \$20,000

- Newspaper advertising campaign to increase public awareness of NREPA — \$5,000
- Social media outreach campaign — \$5,000
- Update AWR website and expand NREPA content on partner websites — \$5,000
- Develop and launch an NREPA petition and public support campaign — \$30,000

Subtotal: ~\$65,000

Research & Conservation Demonstration Projects

- Launch flagship field conservation projects focused on grizzlies, wolves, wolverines, and other focal species; include monitoring, research, and public engagement components — \$50,000
- Develop evidence demonstrating NREPA benefits for climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and regional economies, including contribution toward 30x30 goals — \$15,000
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of NREPA implementation — \$10,000

Subtotal: ~\$75,000

Policy Engagement & Advocacy

- Present NREPA framework to regional political leaders , including outreach related to wildlife corridor initiatives — \$5,000
- Support NREPA workshops and policy discussions through semiannual NREPA workshops — \$5,000
- Participate in regional NREPA events (Sun Valley, Jackson, Whitefish, CDA, Boise, Bozeman Missoula) — \$15,000

Subtotal: ~\$25,000

Community Engagement & Coalition Building

- Increase support among local communities and stakeholders for conservation initiatives — \$10,000
- Quarterly team coordination meetings (Zoom-based) — minimal direct cost

Subtotal: ~\$10,000

Organizational Capacity & Administration

- FOC staff support and campaign coordination (approximately two months dedicated time) — \$50,000
- General travel to support campaign activities and partnership development — \$5,000

Subtotal: ~\$55,000

STRATEGIC / FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- Position interim conservation framework under a Citizens Conservation Biology Initiative
- Explore development of an IUCN Biosphere Reserve proposal building on Yellowstone and Glacier National Park designations
- Evaluate potential development of a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Friends of the Clearwater (FOC) and its partners will bring over 40 years of conservation experience, including leadership in successful campaigns to protect roadless areas and advance ecosystem-scale conservation.

The project team will include established regional and national partners with demonstrated capacity to execute large-scale advocacy campaigns.

CONCLUSION

This proposal represents a rare opportunity to secure permanent protection for one of the most significant ecological landscapes in the United States. With strategic investment, strong partnerships, and growing public support, the campaign is well-positioned to achieve lasting conservation outcomes through NREPA.