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Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (DN/FONSI)

Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction

**Sawtooth National Recreation Area, Sawtooth National Forest
Custer County, Idaho**

T9N, R13E, Sections 2,3,4 and T10N, R13E, Sections 33,34,35

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**DECISION NOTICE (DN)
And
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
For
Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction**

Sawtooth National Forest
Sawtooth National Recreation Area
Custer County, Idaho

The Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction project are presented here. The Decision Notice documents my decision and rationale. The FONSI presents the reasons why I find this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The Environmental Assessment (EA) completed for the project is incorporated by reference in this Decision Notice/FONSI. The EA documents the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the proposed action.

This document is organized as follows:

- Background information regarding my decision;
- My decision to select Alternative 2;
- The rationale for my decision;
- A finding of no significant impact;
- Findings required by other laws and regulations;
- The rights to appeal and administrative review;
- Implementation date;
- Contact information; and
- My signature and date, as the responsible official.

Background

The Redfish Lake Recreation Complex is the most heavily used and highly developed recreation complex on the Sawtooth National Forest. It includes many roads, trails, and facilities. The Redfish Lake Road (#214) serves as the primary access into the complex and branches to include the Redfish Point Campground Road (#213). Pedestrians and bicycles share the road with vehicles of all kinds.

There are two bridges crossing Redfish Lake Creek on Redfish Lake Road. The bridges were built in 1956 (Bridge #2) and 1957 (Bridge #1). Both bridges are over 50 years old and are visibly showing signs of deterioration, including settled abutments, rotted timber railings, and subsurface failure underneath the bridge approaches. The physical condition of the bridges has required that they be posted with restricted load ratings. Inspections have also demonstrated that both would need to be replaced in the near future if vehicle use was to continue.

Between the first and second bridge, near the Visitor Center, there is a sharp curve in the Redfish Lake Road #214. This curve has been the site of several vehicle accidents caused by excessive speed. This situation is also complicated by the existing circulation pattern that results in all traffic accessing the North Shore area, Glacier View campground, and the developed sites on the eastside of Redfish Lake using this segment of roadway.

THE DECISION AND RATIONALE

Based upon my review of the Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction Environmental Assessment, the project record, and comments received from the public, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 as described in Chapter Two of the EA. Implementing Alternative 2 will result in the following:

- Construction of a new bridge across Redfish Lake Creek, realignment of Road #214 to access this new bridge site, and removal of Bridge #1.
- Construction of a new road and overlook on the east side of Redfish Lake Creek to bypass Bridge #2.
- Removal and rehabilitation of the portion of Road #214 no longer needed to access Bridge #1.
- Realignment of the sharp curve portion of Road #214 near the Visitor Center.
- Relocation of the Visitor Center parking lot.
- Relocation of the North Shore Day Use parking lot.
- Construction of a new pedestrian/bicycle trail from Bridge #2 to near the Visitor Center, and reconfiguration of Bridge #2 as a pedestrian/bicycle bridge.
- Removal and rehabilitation of abandoned roadways in the North Shore area.
- Construction of a new service area along the new road, and rehabilitation of the existing service area.
- Improved signage throughout the complex.

In addition to Alternative 2, I considered the “no action” alternative (no changes to current bridges and roads) and an alternative that replaces the bridges in place (Alternative 3). A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA.

Rationale for Decision

The need to replace two bridges on Road #214 presented me with opportunities for improvements throughout the Redfish Lake Complex. I considered these opportunities in light of the overall balance and utility of the transportation system, construction impacts, environmental impacts, impacts to special use permit operators, costs, and long-term impacts to the overall recreation complex operation. Replacing the bridges is an action that will be in place for up to 50 years or more, so I carefully considered the action together with the long term vision for the transportation system in the complex.

I believe Alternative 2 best meets the purpose and need for action, adequately addresses the key issues, and is responsive to public comment.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to address the safety and load capacity of the two bridges on Forest Road #214 leading into the Redfish Lake Complex, along with improving the safety of Forest Road #214 at the sharp curve near the Visitor Center. Alternative 2 goes beyond the purpose and need of improving the bridges by reconfiguring the roadways so that only one bridge is required. The new bridge crossing is in a better location, and this decision will defer and ultimately reduce the size and cost of replacing Bridge #2 by converting it to a bicycle/pedestrian bridge. In terms of the sharp curve, Alternative 2 adequately realigns this portion of road to improve safety. In addition, Alternative 2 redirects traffic to the east side of Redfish Lake and will result in less motor vehicle traffic congestion in the North Shore area.

Key Issues

Through review of the internal and external feedback received regarding the Purpose and Need and original proposal, the interdisciplinary team identified four key issues.

Issue 1 - Wetland, Fish and Aquatic Habitat: Relocating the road and/or replacing the bridges may have short term impacts and/or long term benefits on wetlands, streamside, and instream habitat, including that of ESA ‘endangered’ sockeye salmon, and ‘threatened’ Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout, as well as cutthroat trout, a Forest Service sensitive species.

The indicator for this issue was acres of roadway in wetland, streamside, or instream habitats. In reviewing the EA, I find that Alternative 2 results in the fewest acres of travel ways within Riparian Conservation Areas. Relocating Redfish Lake Road to the east side of the creek and removing old roadways along the north shore of the lake will result in less roads in these sensitive habitats and the greatest long term riparian benefits. Alternative 2 also does the best job of meeting objectives stated in Executive Order 11990 (minimizing destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands). Alternative 2 has a slightly higher probability for improved shoreline conditions at the north shore of the lake resulting from less traffic in this area.

When I compared the amount of activity near the creek to remove one bridge and install one bridge (Alternative 2) as opposed to installing two temporary bridges, replacing two bridges, and removing two temporary bridges (Alternative 3), it was clear that Alternative 2 results in less risk of temporary sediment loads in the creek and substantially less risk to fish.

Issue 2 - Wildlife: Relocating the road may result in additional disturbance to wildlife habitats (e.g., ESA-listed and sensitive species, management indicator species, and migratory birds).

The indicator for this issue was habitat condition from road and bridge construction and other improvements, road and bridge restoration, and pit expansion. The wildlife section of the EA describes the changes in wildlife habitat as a result of the alternatives. While alternative 2 increases the miles of roads somewhat, of all alternatives it results in the greatest improvement to permanent wetland habitats.

Issue 3 - Traffic Flow within the Area: Relocating the road, adding a new road, and converting Bridge #2 to non-motorized use may result in increased travel time and distance between locations within the Redfish Lake Complex for both motorized and non-motorized users.

The indicator for this issue was distance and travel times between locations for both motorized and non-motorized users. Alternative 2 increases the distance and travel times for motorized users between the east side of the Lake (where many campgrounds and the boat launch are located), and the north and west side facilities (such as the Visitor Center, Redfish Lake Lodge, and horse corrals). I believe, however, the increase in time and distance is relatively small (a few minutes, at most) and the benefit of more evenly distributed traffic will improve circulation and, if needed, emergency access and evacuation. Alternative 2 also results in a higher probability of visitors moving around the recreation complex on foot or bicycle due to improved pedestrian and bicycle pathways.

Issue 4 - Economics: Adding a new road may impact local businesses such as the Redfish Lake Lodge and horseback ride provider that rely, to some extent, on the visibility their business receives from travelers to and from the Redfish Lake Resort area. Additionally, the configuration of the intersection that leads traffic to the Resort Area or the campgrounds/boat launch may affect the amount of traffic that drives past these local businesses.

The indicators for this issue were estimates of visitors (vehicles) passing by the Lodge and horseback ride facility and number of turns required to access these facilities. The EA describes the possible changes in visitation to the lodge and corrals in the short and long terms. Alternative 2 has a clear advantage in the short term because the existing road will continue to be used during the construction of the new road and bridge, thereby minimizing delays during construction. In the long term, the differences between alternatives are less clear. Based on traffic counts, about one-third of the vehicles currently drive to the east side of the lake. How the new road will affect visitor use of the lodge and corral facility is uncertain, but I believe the improved signing and the addition of non-motorized pathways will minimize the effects to local businesses. Under Alternative 2, the main route from State Highway 75 will continue to lead directly to the facilities on the west and north sides of the lake.

Public Comment

The Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction project has been continually listed in the quarterly Sawtooth Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions since July 2008. Public involvement for the Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction project was initiated with a letter sent to agencies, organizations, and interested individuals on November 16, 2009. This was followed on July 8, 2010 by a 30-day “Notice of Proposed Action” comment period that began with the publication of a legal ad briefly explaining the Proposed Action and specifying a contact for further information. The legal ad was published in the paper of record, the Challis Messenger, on July 8, 2010. Many comments were received from the scoping efforts. These comments resulted in the key issues identified above, as well as identification of other concerns that were addressed in the analysis.

The input from individuals and organization was valuable in helping shape the proposal and has informed my decision-making. Comments included concerns about recreation, trails, scenery, impacts to special use operators, signing, safety, traffic flow, fisheries, construction costs and construction impacts. Although I've addressed many of these concerns in the Key Issues section above, there were additional recreation concerns and construction impacts to be considered. I believe Alternative 2 best supports a quality national forest recreation experience as it more separates motorized and non-motorized traffic, more evenly distributes motor vehicle traffic between east and west developments, creates a higher probability of people choosing to move around the complex on foot or bicycle rather than motor vehicles, and provides improved safety and visitor experience along roads and trails. This alternative also results in less direct interaction of construction equipment and personnel with the public. An unexpected advantage of Alternative 2 was the opportunity to build an overlook along the new road with a broad view of the Sawtooth Range.

Alternative 2 results in the highest cost, but will require less maintenance in the long term. Replacing and upgrading utilities now will reduce impacts in future. For the community, there is a greater positive short term construction impact to the seven-county social economic impact area. Roughly 37 total jobs and \$1.5 million in labor income spread over the three year construction phase (compared to roughly 28 total jobs and 1.2 million in labor income for Alternative 3).

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and I have determined this decision is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This determination is based on the completed environmental analysis and assessment for this project and was made considering the following factors of context and intensity:

A. Context. The effects of the proposed project are localized with implications for only the immediate area. Cumulative effects of past management, combined with the current proposal, ongoing activities and reasonably foreseeable actions are displayed and discussed in Chapter Three of the 2011 *Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction Environmental Assessment* and in the project file. These effects were considered in my determination.

B. Intensity. The following were considered in evaluating intensity:

- 1. Environmental Effects.** I considered beneficial and adverse impacts associated with the alternatives as presented in Chapter Three of the EA and in the project file. These impacts are within the range of effects identified in the Forest Plan. The overall impact of the selected alternative (Alternative 2) will be beneficial, with no significant adverse impacts. Impacts from the selected alternative are not unique to this project. Previous projects involving similar activities have had non-significant effects. On this basis, I conclude that the specific and cumulative adverse effects of the selected alternative are not significant.
- 2. Public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety

beyond the project area. Within the project area, public health and safety will be improved by an improved road system built to current standards which includes the new bridge. This project does not involve national defense or security.

3. **Unique characteristics of the area.** Based on field reviews, literature research, the Forest Plan, and information in the EA and the project file, I find there are no significant effects on unique characteristics such as historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers. The proposed activities are in conformance with the Wild & Scenic River Act and will not impact the eligibility of Redfish Lake Creek for Wild & Scenic status.
4. **Controversy.** I find the effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain, are very unlikely to involve unique or unknown risks, and are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no known scientific controversy on the impacts of the project. There are opposing opinions regarding the proposed action and alternative; however, there is no substantiated controversy over the effects themselves. The EA documents and discusses the effects in Chapter Three and there is additional documentation on effects in the Project Record. Public comments and opinions are contained in the Project Record and summarized in the EA, Chapter One.
5. **Uncertainty.** I find the effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risk (EA - Chapter Three). The selected alternative is well defined and located over a limited area. We have considerable experience with the type of activity to be implemented.
6. **Precedent.** The selected alternative is similar to other projects on the Sawtooth National Forest and on the National Forest System and does not set a precedent. Any future decisions will need to consider all relevant scientific and site-specific information available at that time. All proposed actions are allowed under the Forest Plan. This decision does not preclude the consideration and advancement of other proposals in the area.
7. **Cumulative Impact.** The selected alternative was evaluated in the context of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. When considering other activities within the area affected, the cumulative effects of implementing the selected alternative are anticipated to be minor. The action does not result in cumulatively significant effects.
8. **National Register of Historic Places; Significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.** The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The action will have no adverse effect on any districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The action will also not cause any loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with these findings.

- 9. Endangered Species.** The action conforms to all requirements for endangered or threatened species and/or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Forest Service prepared Biological Assessments for all threatened and endangered species potentially occurring in the project area. Consultation occurred with both National Marine Fisheries Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and their concurrence with the determinations was received. (August 30, 2011 and July 19, 2011, respectively)
- 10. Federal, State, or local laws.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the Forest Plan.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

2003 Sawtooth Land & Resource Management Plan

This decision is consistent with the 2003 Sawtooth National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The project was designed in conformance with the Forest Plan, and to implement plan objectives. The resource specialist reports in the project record contain references to specific Forest Plan objectives that are relevant to the project.

Public Law 92-400 (Sawtooth National Recreation Area enabling legislation)

It is my determination that this decision, as designed with required mitigation and management requirements, is consistent with Public Law 92-400 and does not cause substantial impairment to the scenic, natural, historic, pastoral, fish and wildlife, and other values, contributing to and available for public recreation and enjoyment.

Clean Water Act and Idaho State Water Quality Standards

The Clean Water Act stipulates that states are to adopt water quality standards. Included in these standards are provisions for identifying beneficial uses, establishing the status of beneficial uses, setting water quality criteria, and establishing Best Management Practices (BMPs) to control non-point sources of pollution. Idaho DEQ has assigned designated beneficial uses for all waters of the state. If a waterbody does not have uses specifically designated, then the general uses apply. All waterbodies within the Redfish drainage are considered *undesignated waters* and are protected for *cold water biota* and *primary or secondary contact recreation*. There are no designated *municipal watersheds* within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Within the project area the State of Idaho completed beneficial use surveys on Fishhook Creek in 2001 and concluded all beneficial were supported. However, the *Salmon River – Redfish Lake Creek to Valley Creek*, was determined to be not supporting the beneficial uses and is included within IDEQ's most recent 2008 Integrated Report of impaired waterbodies (i.e. 303 (d)). The pollutant is identified as *sediment and temperature*. Though negligible effects from sediment are possible from the action within Redfish Lake Creek, in no case would these be expected to carry downstream, through Little Redfish Lake, to the Salmon River.

Endangered Species Act (1973)

This Act requires the Forest Service to protect and conserve threatened and endangered plant and animal species and/or their designated critical habitat. Biological Assessments and Biological Evaluations (BA-BE) were prepared for the decision and are contained within the project record. Consultation occurred with both National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and their concurrence with the determinations was received (August 30, 2011 and July 19, 2011, respectively).

My decision incorporates elements specifically designed by NMFS to protect the fisheries resource:

1. Visually enumerate the number of adult sockeye salmon utilizing Bridge 1 for cover each day prior to deconstruction activities commencing. Visual surveys should be conducted from the location(s) providing the greatest visibility to habitats and should be modified as environmental conditions and lighting dictates.
2. A post-project report, confirming successful implementation of all proposed conservation measures, and the results of monitoring will be submitted within four weeks of project completion.
3. To mitigate the effects of climate change on ESA-listed salmonids, follow recommendations by the ISAB (2007) to plan now for future climate conditions by implementing protective tributary and mainstem habitat measures; as well as protective hydropower mitigation measures. In particular, implement measures to protect or restore riparian buffers, wetlands, and floodplains; remove stream barriers; and to ensure late summer and fall tributary streamflows.
4. Visually or quantitatively monitor instream turbidity and inspect all erosion controls daily to ensure the erosion controls are working adequately. If monitoring or inspection shows that turbidity levels are higher than anticipated or the erosion controls are ineffective, immediately repair, replace, or reinforce controls as necessary.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (W&SR) (Public Law 90-542; 16 U.S.C 1271-1287) was enacted by Congress to address the need for a national system of river protection on October 2, 1968. The W&SR seeks to protect and enhance a river's natural and cultural values and provide for public use consistent with its free flowing character, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values. Redfish Lake Creek has been found to be eligible for further consideration under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. This decision will not affect the potential eligibility, classification, listing, or Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Redfish Lake Creek under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 Regarding Floodplain and Wetland Management

Wetlands Executive Order 11990 – This order requires the Forest Service to take action to minimize destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. Aspects of the decision are directly applicable to this executive order. Based on the analysis contained within the project record (and specifically in the BA-BE), this project complies with EO 11998 by maintaining floodplain integrity

Floodplains Executive Order 11988 – This order requires the Forest Service to provide leadership and to take action to (1) minimize adverse impacts associated with occupancy and modification of floodplains and reduce risks of flood loss, (2) minimize impacts of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, and (3) restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values served by flood plains. The objectives for the bridges within the decision would be applicable to this executive order.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and executive order 13186, and the Memorandum of Understanding between the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service and USDA Forest Service provide for the protection of migratory birds. Based on the analysis, this decision should not result in unintentional take of individuals. The project design and timing of habitat removal should reduce the potential for mortality to nesting birds. The decision complies with executive order 13186 because the analysis meets agency obligations as defined under the January 16, 2001 memorandum of understanding between the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service designed to complement executive order 13186, including identifying management practices that impact populations of high priority migratory bird species, including nesting, migration, or over-wintering habitats, on National Forest system lands, and developing management objectives or recommendations that avoid or minimize these impacts (see Wildlife Specialist Report, project record).

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended through 2006, provides for the protection of prehistoric and historic archaeological sites (cultural resources) on Federal lands that are determined to be eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Concurrence from the Idaho SHPO was obtained on September 20, 2010 for the Redfish Lake Complex Road and Bridge Reconstruction project as a "No Effect" activity.

Inventoried Roadless Areas / Idaho Roadless Areas

The Idaho Roadless Rule was promulgated on October 16, 2008 (73 FR 61456) and supersedes the 2001 Roadless Rule for National Forests in Idaho. The 2008 Idaho Roadless Rule establishes management direction for designated roadless areas in the State of Idaho and provides prohibitions with exceptions or conditioned permissions governing road construction, timber cutting and discretionary mineral development. The Redfish Lake Complex is adjacent to the Huckleberry Roadless Area, but no actions are proposed within the Roadless Area. There is no Recommended Wilderness within the project area.

Environmental Justice

This decision will not disproportionately impact any minority or low income population in the immediate area or surrounding counties, nor will implementation negatively impact Americans with disabilities. These effects are expected to be similar for all human populations regardless of nationality, gender, race, or income level. None of the alternatives entails any known inequitable distribution of social or environmental consequences to a particular group or segment of society.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Only individuals or organizations who submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest in the project during the 2010 formal 30-day 'Notice of Proposed Action' comment period may appeal. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of this notice in Challis Messenger newspaper. This date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Timeframe information from other sources should not be relied on.

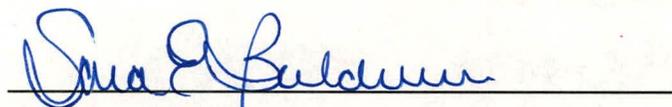
The Appeal Deciding Officer is the Sawtooth Forest Supervisor. Appeals are consolidated through our regional office and must be sent to: Appeal Deciding Officer, Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; or by fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Emailed appeals must be submitted in rich text (rtf), Word (doc) or portable document format (pdf) and must include the project name in the subject line. Appeals may also be hand delivered to the above address, during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Brenda Geesey, at the Sawtooth National Forest. She can be reached by phone at (208) 737-3200 or by mail at: Sawtooth National Forest; 2647 Kimberly Road East; Twin Falls, ID 83301.



SARA E. BALDWIN
Area Ranger

3 October 2011

Date