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Timothy Coleman, Kettle Range Conservation Group

509-775-2667 | tcoleman@kettlerange.org

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Lawsuit Filed to Protect Ancient Forest & Wildlife *Sanpoil Timber Sale Challenged*

Spokane, WA. The Kettle Range Conservation Group filed a complaint yesterday in federal district court challenging the Sanpoil timber project in the Kettle River Range, located in the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington. The U.S. Forest Service predicts the timber sale will produce 50-60 million board feet of timber, enough to fill an estimated 10-12,000 logging trucks.

The Project threatens to cut down ancient forests, destroy wildlife habitat, and ruin pristine wilderness areas. The complaint contends the decision approving the Sanpoil Project was arbitrary and capricious, and that the Forest Service failed to evaluate the Project's effects on the upper Sanpoil River watershed.

"This project is going to change the forest landscape for decades to come," said Timothy Coleman, executive director of the Kettle Range Conservation Group. "The project provides for the logging more than 10,000 acres, much of which will be clearcut, or have just a couple of trees left standing per acre."

The Forest Service recently completed two other projects adjacent to the Sanpoil area of the Kettle River Range, and has two more projects already in the planning phase. Conservationists allege the Forest Service failed to consider the cumulative effects of these projects on Colville's recreation, wildlife, ancient forests and pristine wilderness areas.

"Unlogged wild forests are our primary source of clean water, and contribute significantly to the health of fish and wildlife," Coleman said. "They also support main street businesses, a high quality of life, and solitude and beauty valued by both residents and visitors. The visual impacts from the Sanpoil, Sherman Pass, and other projects presently in the works are going to change the Kettle Crest forest landscape for decades to come."

The Forest Service also failed to assess the Project's impact on vital habitat for sensitive, threatened, and endangered species, including lynx, grizzly bear, gray wolf, and wolverine. The conservation group is sending a 60-day warning letter to the Forest Service indicating its intent to file a lawsuit under the Endangered Species Act for its failure to properly assess the Project's impact on lynx, a federally threatened species and state endangered species.

The Forest Service indicates the project is needed to decrease wildfire risk. However, research shows that any given acre of forest has about a 1 percent chance of burning each year, and wild forests are less likely to burn at high severity than managed forests.

“Forest health problems that exist today were created by Forest Service logging and fire-exclusion management,” Coleman said. “We, haven’t litigated a timber sale in 20 years because the agency listened to our concerns. Unfortunately, all that seems to have changed. With the Sanpoil Project, the agency is applying the same old heavy-handed timber plantation strategy—clearcutting ancient forests and bulldozing wilderness, and claiming that this is now the path to restoring forest health. ”

“Time and again the public has told the Forest Service it does not want public lands managed like corporate tree farms,” Coleman said. “We forget this history at our peril.”

The law firm Animal & Earth Advocates is representing the Kettle Range Conservation Group in its suit.

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