

**MEMORANDUM**

To: The Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee, City of Helena, stakeholders, resources, and media

From: Ecosystem Research Group

Date: January 6, 2016

Re: Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee draft strategy for commenting on the Tenmile South Helena Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee Chairman Joe Cohenour recently had a conversation with the Collaborative's facilitator, Ben Ireby of Ecosystem Research Group (ERG) to discuss opportunities for effective commenting on the Tenmile South Helena Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)<sup>1</sup>. Ben Ireby then had a conversation with Greg Kennett, Principle at ERG, who has a lot of experience coordinating commenting processes for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents such as this DEIS. Chairman Cohenour, Greg Kennett, and Ben Ireby suggest the following strategy for commenting on the DEIS. Please review the draft strategy in preparation for the January 13, 2016 Collaborative meeting, where the Collaborative will amend and vote to finalize a strategy for commenting.

What follows is a simplified version of the draft table of contents for the Tenmile South Helena DEIS, which will be useful for developing a commenting strategy.

- Chapter 1. Purpose and Need for Action
- Chapter 2. Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action
- Chapter 3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences
  - Introduction
  - Resource reports: Inventoried Roadless Areas, Fisheries, Heritage and Cultural Resources, Wildlife, Forested Vegetation, Hydrology, Air Quality, Botany, Transportation, Fire and Fuels, Noxious Weeds, Recreation, Scenery, Soils, and Economics
- Chapter 4 Consultation and Coordination

Upon release of the DEIS, each Committee member should read Chapters 1 and 2, focusing on the purpose and need, the design criteria, the proposed action, and the descriptions of the alternatives. Committee members should be assigned focus areas for reading Chapter 3. Upon release of the DEIS, ERG should ask stakeholders to submit written comments for the Committee to consider while they are reading the DEIS.

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<sup>1</sup> The Forest Service recently estimated that the DEIS will be released in late January, 2016. In ERG's experience it is difficult for agencies to accurately predict the release date for a DEIS due to the inherent challenges of coordinating, assembling, and providing internal review for these complex documents. For planning purposes, ERG recommends estimating a February or March DEIS release date.

At the January 13, 2016 meeting of the Committee, the Committee should discuss and draft assignments of focus areas. Assignments should not restrict Committee members from commenting on other resource areas. The assignment of focus areas should be finalized upon the release of the DEIS by the Executive Committee. The following preliminary assignments of focus areas have been drafted for the purpose of discussion only, at the January 13, 2016 Committee meeting, and are subject to change:

|                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Chairman Joe Cohenour          | Wildlife, IRAs                  |
| Co-vice Chair Mike Bishop      | Forested Vegetation, Soils      |
| Co-vice Chair Jordan Alexander | Fire and Fuels, Air Quality     |
| Commissioner Cory Kirsch       | Economics                       |
| Commissioner Mike Murray       | Heritage and Cultural Resources |
| Ron Alles or Brad Langsather   | Transportation                  |
| Jeff Chaffee                   | Hydrology, Fire and Fuels       |
| Angie Grove                    | Recreation, Scenery             |
| Gary Marks                     | IRAs, Forested Vegetation       |
| Eleanor Morris                 | Botany, Fisheries               |
| Doug Powell                    | Noxious Weeds, Botany, IRAs     |

The Committee members should take either digital or paper notes while reading about their focus areas. Committee members should consider the written stakeholder comments previously submitted and should consider reaching out to stakeholders when drafting comments<sup>2</sup>. Committee members should also reference the Committee's Table of Recommendations to ensure that their comments support the agreed upon goals of the Committee. Committee members should compile their comments into a spreadsheet template that ERG should provide.

Committee members should generate comments in the following format:

- (1) Identify the key issue that the comment is addressing (e.g. elk security, soil compaction).
- (2) Clearly and concisely articulate the problem (e.g. elk security is impacted by treatment, excessive soil compaction will occur).
- (3) Provide a detailed comment on the problem, including page numbers and site specific location information (e.g. Page 111. For Treatment Unit 99, the proposed treatment type will excessively reduce elk security. Too much of the forest floor will become visible from Road 9999 on the other side of the drainage.)
- (4) Propose a solution that supports the purpose and need of the project and the goals of the Collaborative Committee (e.g. Mitigate the effects of Treatment Unit 99 on elk security by tying in terrain features with pockets of denser overstory and understory).

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<sup>2</sup> According to the City of Helena's, "Resolution Establishing the Tenmile/South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee", the Committee is representative of the wider community of stakeholders in the Tenmile South Helena area. Reaching out to the wider community of stakeholders will further enhance the representative nature of this Collaborative Committee.

(5) Provide references to help support the comment (e.g. See Tenmile Collaborative Table of Recommendations goal, "Protect and improve long-term quality of wildlife habitat").

Committee members can then send their comments to Ben Ireby. He will compile all of the Committee's comments, send them to the Executive Committee for review, and then send them to Committee members and to the wider group of stakeholders. Committee members should read the compiled comments thoroughly and note any changes they would like to see made. Stakeholders should be given the opportunity to submit written feedback on the compiled comments for the Committee to review.

The Committee should then meet to test consensus on their comments. ERG should provide two facilitators for this meeting. This meeting will likely take the majority of one business day. When consensus is tested, if the Committee does not gain consensus on a particular comment, those Committee members that did not find the comment acceptable should be asked to make a brief statement describing why it was unacceptable and to propose changes to the comment that would make it acceptable to them. Consensus will then be tested for the revised comment. If, upon the second testing, the comment does not gain consensus, the comment should be tabled. The Committee member that drafted the original comment and those that dissented should be tasked with revising the comment so that it is amenable to their concerns. The redrafted comments should be tested for consensus during a final round of testing. Those comments that still do not have the consensus of the Committee will be recorded and sent to the Forest Service with the level of consensus noted (e.g. consensus minus one - conservation representative). Members of the public that attend this meeting should submit their feedback regarding the meeting in writing. A tentative follow-up meeting should be scheduled in case there are any loose ends.

Ben Ireby should compile the consensus comments and those that did not achieve consensus but that had the level of consensus noted into a draft commenting document. Ben Ireby should compile all stakeholder comments received during the course of the comment period into an addendum. Ben Ireby will then send the draft to the Executive Committee for review. He will incorporate their feedback before sending it once more to Chairman Cohenour for final approval. Chairman Cohenour will then deliver the final comment document to the U.S. Forest Service. The delivery of the final comments to the Forest Service will need to occur within 45 days of the release of the DEIS.