



## *Pend Oreille County*

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#### **Colville National Forest Plan Revision Substantive Comments**

In 1963, the Selkirk School District, which serves the towns of Metaline Falls, Metaline, and Ione, was the closest to the Salmo-Priest Wilderness and had an enrollment of 750. In 1984, the enrollment was 437. Today the enrollment is 230.

Metaline Falls is 5 miles from the current Wilderness area and 2 miles from the Proposed Wilderness Area. In 1967, Metaline Falls had 3 gas stations, 2 grocery stores, a clothing store, a hardware store, a dentist, a hospital with a resident Doctor, an auto parts store, a drug store, a barber shop, 2 taverns, 2 auto repair shops, a movie theater, a café and daily rail service. Today there is 1 grocery store, 1 café, 1 tavern and a seasonal movie theater that survive. Similar statistics are true of Metaline and Ione.

Resource based industries have been the mainstay of northern Pend Oreille County for well over 100 years. They have come and gone for various reasons. Clearly the touted benefits of wilderness and tourism have not replaced the previous economy.

The Pend Oreille County Board of Commissioners has a duty and obligation to the people we serve to protect the local tax base and the value of private property, promote economic stability, advance the customs, culture and heritage of the county, and provide for future generations. Under NEPA law, the Forest Service must consider the objectives of local plans and how they should deal with the general requirements a county has of the surrounding public lands in order to meet the responsibilities counties have for the socioeconomic wellbeing, safety, and culture of its citizens.

***Below are the required changes needed to meet these obligations.***

#### **Wilderness:**

Towns in northern Pend Oreille County are identified as “urban wildland interface communities within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire”. The position that “fire is a tool” puts human life and property at risk. Prevailing winds from the west are a fire hazard to the private property and the power lines in the Abercrombie-Hooknose area. This is very concerning to us and our goal is to reduce this risk to protect our industry, infrastructure, friends, family and neighbors.

The Wilderness areas are a fire hazard because they are not managed and fires are left to burn. According to this plan, wilderness is currently underutilized (less than 1% of visits to the forest are to designated wilderness) and does not meet the criteria of need for more wilderness. There is no crowding in the wilderness that warrants an increase. PWA will encompass the municipal surface water source (North Fork Sullivan Creek) of Metaline Falls and subject that area to less

aggressive wildfire management or preventive vegetative management thus leading to the possible contamination of the town's only water source in the case of a wildfire. There are several areas where PWA will abut private land or a paved, year round county road (Sullivan Lake Rd) in the plan. Current mining claims exist in areas west of Salmo-Priest. There is a proven mineral deposit in this area.

We value tourism, but wilderness has not increased tourism in this county. Most of the additional increase in proposed wilderness is in Pend Oreille County with 74% of total proposed and currently designated out of the whole CNF. This amounts to a 135% increase of proposed wilderness to this county. The Board of County Commissioners' main focus is the health, safety, economic vitality, and jobs for our citizens. There has been very little economic increase to the county with the addition of wilderness. Much of the tourism relates to the Pend Oreille River. Currently, there is no destination lodging relating to forest service tourism and wilderness. PWAs that become wilderness instead of roadless will result in a degradation of existing trails when only hand tools may be used for maintenance and will be an adverse condition for tourism.

*Therefore, we require these changes to meet our obligations:*

- No additional potential wilderness to the west side of the Salmo-Priest wilderness.
- No potential wilderness abutting private property or year round roads.
- There is no acceptable potential wilderness area on the west side of the Pend Oreille River Valley.
- We object to the Forest Service purchasing additional land that removes land from the tax rolls.
- We object to any Wilderness surrounding private land as it makes it landlocked.

#### **Road Density and Access:**

An aging population and ability to access the CNF by motorized means is critical for local tourism. Reduction of road density will cause more problems in the future when responding to management needed to prevent fire or to respond to fire. A road open to a 100,000 pound loaded 70-foot-long truck should be open to a 200-1500 7-10-foot-long ORV/WATV. Some roads are closed for endangered species protection for a specific time period but do not require permanent closure. Traditional uses of our forest roads allow for recreation, forest harvest, mining, grazing, gathering, and fire suppression. All are very important aspects of multiple use. The economically disadvantaged (poverty rate is 18.3% in Pend Oreille county) also need inexpensive recreational opportunities as well as access to resources to gather and sell. We support wise financial use of the People's tax money. Why spend forest dollars to remove a road that was built with forest dollars only to possibly reconstruct the road for a future need with even more forest dollars?

*Therefore, we require these changes to meet our obligations:*

- No net loss of existing roads.
- Mothballing of roads for future use is preferable and more affordable to obliteration.
- Make all roads that are open to highway legal vehicles open to ORV/WATVs.

