

Date submitted (UTC-11): 1/29/2019 5:09:26 PM

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The Salmon Challis National Forest has a unique opportunity to make a decision today to recommend protecting wilderness areas. This may not even be an option to do the next time the forest plan is revised. Now is the time to act.

Idaho is one of the fastest growing states in the country. People are flocking here to access the mountains, rivers and prairies. Now is the time to ensure that these places will exist for future generations of flora, fauna, and people. Below, please find personal stories of why I believe you must decide to protect remaining wilderness areas in Idaho.

I am a year round resident of Ketchum, Idaho and frequent user of the North Slope of the Pioneers in both the winter and the summer. Ive visited this area in the winter and seen rare wildlife such as wolverines and mountain goats. Species that often need vast swaths of undeveloped land to survive. With designated Wilderness areas bordering the Pioneers, there is an opportunity to create an area where species can thrive.

The Pioneer and Lemhi Mountains boast some of the highest peaks in the state of Idaho. They are home to precious alpine environments that are already under threat by climate change. These ranges boast some of the only unprotected highpoints in the west.

Additionally, I have spent multiple summers working and living in Sunbeam, Idaho. After long, gorgeous days floating the Salmon River, I would often adventure to the north and east out Basin Creek and Hardin Creek. I could go for miles without seeing a single person, as the trail dwindled Id get spooked and would turn around. Ive lived in four states in various regions of the country and have traveled extensively and feel that the remote places like areas in the Salmon Challis National Forest are rare.

During the summer of 2018, I went camping in Wild Horse Canyon with a group of local youth. We enjoyed swimming in a swimming hole, camping under the dark skies and most of all searching for bugs in the river. Campers spent hours wading through the river in search of finding a different or a larger bug than in their last sample. Many of the campers never knew that the ecosystem in the stream was so diverse and that so many animals depend on a clean stream. Its experiences like that, in wild places, that help to cultivate the next generation of environmental stewards.

I know that many people feel that we dont need more wilderness, but I feel that we do need more wilderness before its too late. The forest has benefits that people dont always recognize, like generating clean air and water.

I believe its necessary to recommend areas like the north slope of the Pioneers and the Lemhi range as wilderness now, because we may never have the chance to again. Wild land is irreplaceable.