

Community Prosperity in the Salmon & Challis National Forests

Social Assessment in the Forest Plan Revision

~ **DRAFT** ~ (*not for citation*)
January, 2019



University
of Idaho

It is U of I policy to prohibit and eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, age, disability, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran. This policy applies to all programs, services, and facilities, and includes, but is not limited to, applications, admissions, access to programs and services, and employment.



Community Prosperity in the Salmon & Challis National Forests

Background

In 2017, the US Forest Service (USFS) initiated a Forest Plan Revision (FPR) process for the Salmon & Challis National Forests (SCNF, see map as Appendix A). The current plans in place have not been updated since 1987 (Challis) and 1988 (Salmon). As a component of the FPR, the USFS established an agreement with the University of Idaho (UI) to provide needed expertise in sociological aspects pertinent to the planning process and community engagement. In 2019, the University agreement served as the basis for organizing a social assessment component focusing on community prosperity issues. The assessment included two phases: 1) stakeholder interviews and 2) community workshops. This report describes outcomes for the assessment and provides feedback directly to the USFS about community perspectives on local and regional prosperity, especially in the context of the FPR. In turn, the report also documents agency perspectives about the community perspectives.

Community Prosperity

Rural communities in America persist despite the long-term trends of out-migration, challenges of access to and control of services, and decreasing political representation. While rural communities do persist across the U.S., many are experiencing uncertainty about future livelihood options, maintaining infrastructure, and retaining means to quality of life factors that motivate people to live and stay in rural places. In fact, many rural communities are searching for answers to support long-term prosperity.

In 2017, President Trump formed an Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity led by US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Perdue. The Task Force findings focused on five key areas to outline the current needs of rural prosperity across the United States:

- 1) achieving e-connectivity;
- 2) improving quality of life;
- 3) supporting the workforce;
- 4) harnessing technological innovation; and
- 5) developing the rural economy.¹

¹ Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. 2017. Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. Available online: <https://www.usda.gov/topics/rural/rural-prosperity>

More generally, no single definition exists of what constitutes community prosperity, but the Task Force report outlines critical areas identified as current barriers to many rural community futures. Rural prosperity, albeit hard to define in simple dimensions, often contains elements of economics, culture, infrastructure & services, as well as dimensions of community satisfaction, attachment, and cohesion in everyday descriptions or characterizations. For the sake of this social assessment, we approach prosperity as an open concept valuable for exploring the needs between environment and community in order to attend to the well-being of both.²

USFS and Communities

The USFS – an agency within USDA – has a mission that focuses on “sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests” as is embodied in the motto “*Caring for the Land and Serving People*”.³ Within that mission and motto, the USFS also specifies that it “balances the short- and long-term needs of people and nature by –

- Working in collaboration with communities and our partners;
- Providing access to resources and experiences that promote economic, ecological, and social vitality; and
- Connecting people to the land and one another....”⁴ (*emphases added*)

Thus, while the emphasis of the USFS is overall forest health and management, the agency specifies that community well-being, and community relationships to surrounding forests, also matter and need attention within planning and action. So, the importance of this mission is that the USFS does not have a direct charge of responsibility for all things we might consider community prosperity, yet as a manager of a key resource for many rural communities and related livelihoods, its decisions have direct impacts on local economies and populations. Regionally, the broad trends away from traditional timber sales and harvest levels from USFS lands in recent decades have contributed to economic instability in the prosperity equations for many forest-related communities (Weber and Chen, 2012).⁵ As such, community-level concerns often arise with USFS FPR processes because of the long-term consequences of federal decision-making.

In this context, the Forest Supervisor’s Office of the SCNF sought external support to incorporate social dimensions of community engagement into forest planning. Traditionally, the agency does not have hired personnel on staff with background training in facilitating social assessment processes, especially at more local-level offices. The objective of this social assessment provides direct community-based input to the ongoing FPR process for the SCNF.

² Smith, L.M., J.L. Case, H.M. Smith, L.C. Harwell, and J.K. Summers. 2013. Relating ecosystem services to domains of human well-being: Foundation for a U.S. index. *Ecological Indicators*. 28(1):79-90. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2012.02.032>

³ US Forest Service. 2019. About the Agency. Available online: <https://www.fs.fed.us/about-agency>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Weber, B. and Y. Chen. 2012. Federal Forest Policy and Community Prosperity in the Pacific Northwest. *Choices* 27(1): 1st quarter. Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/choices.27.1.09>

Methodology

This section describes the methods used to collect and analyze data compiled for the report. The data collection included two complementary approaches – *interviews with stakeholders* and *community prosperity workshops* – both described in more detail below.

Stakeholder interviews

Three phases of stakeholder interviews occurred for the assessment: (I) – November – December 2017; (II) – July – August 2019; and (III) – November – December 2019. The stakeholder interviews for this project met two related objectives: 1) to build a qualitative database of community-based perspectives about community prosperity needs and FPR for the S&CNF; and 2) to provide a basis for structuring community-based workshops about prosperity needs in the region.

A team of two researchers from the University of Idaho, Dr. J.D. Wulforth and Dr. Victoria DePalma, conducted a total of 33 semi-structured interviews to date over the course of the three phases. Semi-structured interviews allow for coverage of a standard set of questions / topics, but in a format that enables the respondent to direct importance and sequence of the session.⁶ Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours, and averaged approximately one hour. The geography of the interviews ranged across Lemhi, Custer, and Butte Counties within the towns of Salmon, Challis, Mackay, as well as outlying areas. Appendix B (p. 23) contains the questions included in our interview protocol. Interviews were transcribed using transcription services at Rev.com. Researchers coded the interviews for dominant as well as unique themes that emerged across the respondents.

Community prosperity workshops

The researchers also designed and implemented two similar workshops to elicit group interaction about the topics embedded in the concept of prosperity and engage input related to the FPR process directly. Workshops occurred on August 28th, 2019 (Salmon; 78 community participants) and August 29th, 2019 (Challis; 25 community participants) in an attempt to make the events accessible to the greatest number of participants.

Workshop formats included facilitated solicitation of ideas and issues that matter to community prosperity with a question and answer dialogue about the topics generated in the session.

- *Salmon, ID workshop.* Using the backside of a map of the regional forests, participants listed up to seven critical components they each wanted to see submitted for the process. Participants then formed groups of 6-8 persons to discuss common themes and / or diverging perspectives. Participants ranked up to three of their individual topics in priority order, then groups also ranked up to seven of their aggregated topics in priority order. Researchers prompted participants to also delineate, via the map

⁶ Given, L.M. (ed.). 2008. Semi-Structured Interview. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Available online: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4134/9781412963909.n420>

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

handout, rural prosperity as it may manifest in the landscape. Due to time constraints, most maps did not get submitted with analyzable results.

- *Challis, ID workshop.* Researchers distributed the same map handout at the Challis workshop as noted above. Participants in Challis opted for an alternative format of more open discussion about what constituted community prosperity. In lieu of the individual and group ranking of topics noted above in the Salmon workshop, Challis participants provided verbal input as an aggregated group.

Researchers recorded all primary and secondary suggestions about community prosperity made during both workshops on flip charts and posted them for visibility within the workshop. At the Salmon workshop, participants also used 3x3" post-it notes to orchestrate a prioritization of the various prosperity topics and needs by placing post-it notes on the flip chart topics. In Challis, participants used a dialogue format to discuss topics with researchers facilitating to record key themes and points made during the session. Following the workshops, researchers coded themes generated in the workshops to assimilate and condense common concepts for reporting which are included in the tables within the assessment description below. Appendices C & D include the full suite of responses for both Salmon and Challis workshops.

USFS input on community priorities

As an extension to the community prosperity workshops, during follow-up interactions within the communities, some stakeholders expressed interest to "hear from the USFS" about how they interpret and describe the community priorities about forest planning. The research team solicited feedback from agency representatives directly involved with FPR and leadership functions, posing three open-ended questions for agency response, as follows:

1. How would you describe Forest Planning priorities within the local communities?
2. What are the primary community concerns related to Forest Revision Planning?
3. What would engage the community to trust Forest Revision Planning processes?

A total of 11 USFS employees (9 Forest Plan Revision team members, and 2 agency leadership representatives) participated and contributed to the feedback on community priorities. Results of the agency response are included below within the **Core Themes** and **Discussion** sections and provide an interesting perspective about navigating community priorities within the FPR.

Core Themes from Interviews and Workshops

This section reports a summary of the critical themes and ideas derived from the stakeholder interviews and community workshops. The most common and dominant themes receive the most attention in the body of the report, *however comprehensive documentation of all input from the workshops, recorded from individual & group maps, flip-charts, and post-it votes on the flip charts, occurs within the Appendices (C & D, pp. 24-30).*

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

We summarize the most dominant and recurring themes about community prosperity for the Salmon and Challis National Forest communities as:

- Jobs / employment opportunity
- Public access to public lands
- Healthy ecosystem / fire management / biomass removal
- Medical services / public health
- Education

The results section is organized around these five primary themes for community prosperity, including direct and indirect relationships to USFS planning on the SCNF.

In addition to these most dominant themes, Table 1 summarizes the overall breadth and diversity of ideas derived from the workshop input based on individuals' designation of important aspects to promote community prosperity. For example, other key themes community members also raised for discussion included: communications, infrastructure, economic diversity, transportation, and preparation for climate change. Tables 2-4 list the full summary of individuals' highest ranked aspects of prosperity from the workshops.

Table 1. *Summary of individually ranked important aspects towards promoting community prosperity*

Out of 50 responses	Designation of important aspects towards promoting prosperity		
32	Jobs	10	Sustainable management/use of resources
30	Public access to public lands	9	Transportation (connections to other cities)
29	Healthy ecosystem/fire management	8	Local influence (within government)
21	Medical/public health	7	Prepare for climate change
19	Education	6	Tax base
17	Biomass removal	6	Recreational opportunities
14	Affordable housing	5	Promote small business and Salmon
12	Economic diversity	4	Clean water/air
11	Communication (ie: internet)	2	Emergency services
11	Infrastructure	2	Protect natural resources
11	Rural sustainability		

Table 2. Individual ranking of #1 most important aspect to promote community prosperity

Out of 35 responses	Listed aspects to promote prosperity		
7	Public access	1	Affordable housing
7	Job opportunities	1	infrastructure
7	Healthy forest/ecosystem, including fire resistant	1	Wilderness protection and natural resource management
2	Biomass removal	1	Economic diversity
2	Prepare for climate change	1	Broadband
2	Stay rural	1	More local representation in USDA processes
1	Market Salmon to businesses	1	Responsibly develop natural resources

Table 3. Individual ranking of #2 most important aspect to promote community prosperity

Out of 35 responses	Listed aspects to promote prosperity		
8	Public access	1	Affordable housing
6	Biomass removal	1	Clean water/air
6	Jobs	1	Prepare for climate change
5	Education	1	Rural sustainability
3	Medical	1	Use natural resources
2	Infrastructure		

Table 4. Individual ranking of #3 most important aspect to promote community prosperity

Out of 35 responses	Listed aspects to promote prosperity		
6	Healthy ecosystems (including local influence)	3	Public access
6	Education	2	Tax base
5	Medical	1	Tourism, recreation
3	Job opportunities/small businesses	1	Biomass removal
3	Utilize natural resources	1	Public health, clean water
3	Rural sustainability	1	Prepare for climate change

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

Table 5. Group ranking of most important aspects to promote community prosperity (Salmon workshop only)

Out of 13 responses	Aggregation of group listed aspects to promote prosperity (groups could list up to seven aspects)		
9	Jobs	4	Economic diversity
8	Access to public lands	4	Infrastructure
7	Education	4	Civic engagement
6	Use resources (either sustainably or not)	3	Affordable housing
6	Healthy ecosystems	2	Local input
6	Better healthcare	1	Recreational opportunities
4	Improved internet/communications	1	Promote Salmon area
4	Fire management	1	Customer based regulatory environment-getting to yes instead of no
4	Rural sustainability	1	Payment in lieu of tax issues-federal public land relationship to tax base

Jobs & employment

In many ways, SCNF communities continue to face challenges with diverse and continuous employment opportunities that stabilize livelihoods, family settlement, and community cohesion. Table 6 indicates the differences between national, state, and county annual median household income levels for 2018 that illustrate overall more limited livelihood opportunities in the SCNF region relative to the state and other parts of the country. The poverty rate ranges from 14.7 – 15.1% across the region and is higher than state and national averages.

Table 6. National, state, and county (Lemhi, Custer, and Butte) annual median household income, 2018⁷

Geography	2018 Median annual household income
United States	\$60,293
Idaho	\$53,089
Butte County	\$42,250
Custer County	\$39,957
Lemhi County	\$37,921

⁷ US Census Quick Facts. 2019. Available online:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/custercountyidaho,buttecountyidaho,lemhicountyidaho,ID/PST045219>

While the populations remain relatively small, the remote rural locations of Salmon, Challis, Mackay, and other SCNF communities have not always experienced the same level of economic vulnerability that many residents do now. As a region, the SCNF has declined in economic diversity and productivity over the last several decades in three core areas: mining, timber harvest, and livestock grazing. Local residents often lament the loss of these traditional resource-dependent sectors as both the core of their economy as well as local community identities. Prevalent livestock grazing still occurs in the region, but has continued to face vulnerability from loss of permits, net loss of AUMs (animal unit months)⁸, and development pressure for prospective homesites. The mining sector, in addition to its normal boom/bust cycles, has failed to maintain historic production levels despite global market interest and available known minerals, such as cobalt remaining in the region. More direct to the SCNF Plan Revision process, many residents also feel a substantive loss from the erosion of the timber industry infrastructure and economic engine that historically created much of the social and cultural capital of the communities.

As the most frequently cited prosperity issue by individuals in the workshops, the interview data also emphasized needs for jobs. Stakeholders reiterated the impacts related to availability of employment opportunities to incentivize youth to stay in the region and have feasible local livelihoods. In general, interviewees often summarized the prosperity need as:

“A good functioning economy where people want to work, they’ve got the ability to work, and being able to live outside the poverty scale.”

Interviewees did point out that some commercial business aspects of the communities have changed positively over the last decade, noting:

“...about one-third of the buildings were boarded up when we got here, and now there are more businesses than there were 10 years ago – that’s good change!”

However, the communities have also suffered the loss of recent anchor retail stores (chain and locally-owned) such that many in the region experience economic impact of limited commercial options at the local level. This also causes stress and anxiety over additional costs residents may incur to travel to get the same goods and services now only available at the regional scale. During the interviews, stakeholders explained the SCNF communities have become much more “Amazon” – indicating many have moved to online ordering for purchases – because of the loss of local retail options.

⁸ US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2018. Salmon-Challis National Forest Assessment Report. Pgs 63-68. Available online: [https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd587184.pdf_!!JYXizlvb!1xRRhk2Rnre3UHVMasocoFe7aOz_iJ86Eu4bAzdhSaaVIO_TWZO2LgeL_3Te1w\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd587184.pdf_!!JYXizlvb!1xRRhk2Rnre3UHVMasocoFe7aOz_iJ86Eu4bAzdhSaaVIO_TWZO2LgeL_3Te1w$)

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

These changes relate to local economic health in a cyclical pattern because local job opportunities can generate revenue for local investment and purchasing. With the loss of historical industry, effects such as out-migration of youth and ‘becoming more Amazon’ have started to dominate the local economy more and more. This trend challenges the dominant local perspective and values to build and maintain communities that provide lasting opportunities for families:

“How do the youth in this community who want to stay enjoy prosperity? It’s about people living here, feeling they belong here, and wanting to stay here....and, having the option to stay here.”

Others emphasized these sorts of effects in relation to the remote geography that creates both the draw to the region because of its scenic aesthetics, but also hinders the development of economic opportunities: *“Work needs to stay in the community because we are so isolated.”*

Related to jobs and employment opportunities, SCNF residents raised two other community trends affecting local notions of prosperity at the workshops and during interviews. Residents perceive that recreation-based and tourism-related industries have assumed greater proportions of the local economies as timber, ranching, and mining have declined. While many welcome these economic sectors related to the unique and valuable natural resources in the region, many who participated in the assessment wish for a portfolio of jobs related to resource management, not just enjoyment. In this regard, SCNF communities retain identities as “resource stewards” of the vast public lands that fill their counties at extremely high percentages. This perspective also relates to the source of consternation and concern many in the region feel over the possibility of more designated wilderness areas within the SCNF because of the dual-dynamic it could fuel to generate more recreation interest while simultaneously reducing resource management options in the local landscape. In a section below, these points become more critical when linked to ecosystem management and wildfire risk reduction.

Last, the social demographic of the local SCNF communities has continued to change in ways that affect community prosperity opportunity. The average age of residents within the local communities has continued to increase in recent decades (see Table 7) and participants expressed concern about this change as an overall impact to prosperity.

Table 7. Change in total population and percentage of residents 65 yrs and older for Lemhi, Custer, and Butte Counties 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2019 (est.)

	Population totals (% 65 yrs & older, where available)			
	1990	2000	2010	2019 (est.)
Butte County	2,918 (13.2%)	2,891 (14.9%)	2,899 (17.5%)	2,611
Custer County	4,133 (12.3%)	4,342 (14.5%)	4,368 (18.7%)	4,280
Lemhi County	6,899 (17.7%)	7,806 (16.8%)	7,936 (22.2%)	7,961

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

This demographic shift represents not only the primary trend across much of rural America, but in the case of the SCNF communities, also an in-migration of retiree-aged residents seeking quality of life. Indirectly, this trend can have economic effects over time in the form of a greater percentage of a community on a fixed income implicating taxation needs as well as a change in the balance of the labor pool to attract new commercial business. For instance, a commonly perceived effect among interviewees reflects the challenges of funding education for community prosperity:

"...and a lot of people like to retire in this area, so they didn't grow up here and have a harder time wanting to support school levees which are needed."

Public access to public lands

Even though workshop participants cited jobs and employment opportunities with slightly greater frequency as a primary concern, the issue of public access to public lands and the prosperity of SCNF communities received more spirited input than any other topic. In these results, we report this issue in reference to national forest lands for the context of the Forest Plan Revision.

For many local residents, the public access to public lands issue touches many facets of day-to-day life, as well as extends to a broader philosophy about living within such a strong public lands context. In addition, the diversity of sentiments about valuing public lands resources, uses, and access ranges widely from full protection to full use. Three primary sub-themes resonated with workshop participants and interviewees about public access and public lands: economic prosperity and resource access; bureaucratic barriers; and, keeping a working landscape.

Input across those who participated in the assessment emphasized the economic relationships between forest access and economic health of individuals, families, and communities. This takes many different forms such as collection of firewood, hunting wildlife for subsistence, and the interest to harvest greater levels of timber. Local residents recognize the demise of the timber industry, as an industrial base of the region, but they do not have enough information about current global markets and economic feasibility to process current USFS decision-making that constrains timber production potential. This dilemma leaves a gap for community members within the Forest Plan Revision process and exacerbates emotional issues of frustration and trust between agency and community for certain uses, seasons, and practices.

One interviewee explained the dominant perspective among local residents as:

"The main concern of locals is lack of access and when you start talking <access>, and then your revision plan includes wilderness study areas and wild and scenic river study area, that's what gets people upset."

The USFS is mandated to analyze all aspects of forest management in a Forest Plan Revision so as an agency in the process cannot ignore the dimensions that may cause issues for local

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

residents. Another interviewee emphasized: *“prosperity has to come from utilizing the public lands; they are ‘rural America type jobs’.”* During the workshop discussion, participants raised the issue of continuing to work on and within the public lands as a core concern that addresses an integrated experience they seek to maintain as livelihood, identify, and economic prosperity. Thus, these points reinforce the first section above emphasizing jobs and employment opportunities more generally, but in a context of local intent to caretake and use the public lands. Participants often noted:

“Livelihood options that people prefer because people want and have a feeling that they need something from the forest resource.”

Another sub-theme about public access to public lands focused on bureaucratic barriers local residents feel may be in place to restrict their access via policies, or in some cases procedures that act as constraints even when access is granted for activities on the forest. Participants often discussed the first type of concerns in the context of road closures they have experienced by the USFS, citing an increase in closures and without clear or substantiated explanation. As one businessperson explained:

“We do not get an explanation of why they close the roads, and it’s not clear who is managing that or why. We’ve had issues with the County taking responsibility to maintain roads to keep them open but the Forest Service says they can’t do that. That hurts the local community and restricts our access when it doesn’t need to be that way.”

Another individual offered a different angle of the bureaucratic barriers:

“Permitting processes are too lengthy. They are there of course to let you get out there to do some work. But the restrictions are so cumbersome to meet, and so lengthy for things like mining operations, that it just creates such a challenge to people that it doesn’t happen. The jobs don’t come about.”

Residents also feel forest management is hindered in this same domain of bureaucratic barriers due to higher rates of personnel turnover within the USFS. Many residents remember a different era when longevity of positions differed. A local community leader interviewed explained the effect of having work coordinated work with the agency fall by the wayside due to personnel change:

“We had a long-term coordinated plan going for over three years to manage several adjoining areas in the forest, including resources across both public and private lands, and after all that effort, the agency representative got relocated. After waiting for the replacement, now that person has no interest in that project so it all seems a waste and a disincentive to be engaged...and worse, now the forest is suffering because of it.”

Local residents also expressed concern and frustration over perceived disproportionate impacts related to multiple special designations of protected areas (e.g., existing wilderness, potential additional wilderness, an adjacent national recreation area, etc.) that affect the local

communities with costs and benefits. As the USFS followed its mandate to assess wild & scenic river resources within the Forest Plan Revision, this added to the local perspective that the public lands / resources have become increasingly restricted for uses that relate to industrial-type and level livelihood options. While these designations often support select recreation-based activities, a pattern of economic effects has often become a reduction of economic impact for local communities shifting toward a recreation-based uses. To this end, many participants emphasized the needs of public access to public lands with respect to keeping a working landscape intact.

Healthy ecosystems / fire management / biomass removal

During both the workshops and interviews, participants noted substantive concerns about the relationships between community prosperity and a healthy forest system. As a larger construct, those emphasizing this point used different angles to articulate the complexity of the issue, especially as it relates to prosperity. For instance, some discussed that contemporary restrictions on forest management have led to overgrowth, lack of thinning, and poor outcomes related to insect kills of large stands in the forest, all effectively putting the forest health at more risk.

Related, one of the ways forest health is at greater risk comes in the form of wildfires exacerbated by heavy fuel loads that have built up compounded by changes in climatic conditions leading to a pattern of hotter and drier fire seasons. A strong emphasis on wildfire management already exists in the SCNF for resource management and protection, yet many residents worry this risk is unsustainable and will continue to increase more. Participants see prosperity opportunity compromised with the status quo because they believe the knowledge and capacity for healthy forest management exists within the local communities and/or could be renewed if forest management policies allowed. Consequently, local perspectives tend to believe more active management would also curb the increase in wildfire risks. A local rancher from the SCNF added:

“We’re now primed for a huge fire here. The fuel has built up too far and it’s quite dangerous. When local people want to get into the forest to cut firewood or do some logging, it would help this problem, but most can’t navigate through the bureaucracy and give up.”

Participants also referenced biomass removal within both workshops as a key example of a win-win proposition. Given the loss of timber industry infrastructure across the region, residents noted opportunities to starting with smaller-scale contracts for biomass removal would enable ecological benefits of more active management in critical areas, as well as create local resource and commercial opportunities. In this way, many local perspectives about a healthy forest and community prosperity suggest these themes ‘integrate’ well for the SCNF and provide foundation for longterm prosperity in the communities as part of an economic portfolio.

Medical services / public health

With a well-established medical center in Lemhi County in Steele Memorial Medical Center, the SCNF region has above average medical services for a remote rural area. However, with an aging and increasingly diverse demographic in the population, the SCNF communities have local medical needs (in type and volume) not always fully met. During the workshops, residents focused on community-based issues related to public health that may or may not directly relate to forest management and the Forest Plan Revision process. That residents initiated these topics stems from the notion that community prosperity includes an array of needs similar to the USDA report on rural prosperity referenced above. Local residents appreciate the medical services they do have access to, but worry whether they are sufficient for a changing population which relates to improving quality of life within the prosperity equation.

Education

From the workshop and interviewee input, education remains a strong value in the SCNF communities. Related to the shift in the population demographic, many residents worry about a longterm challenge to maintaining a quality educational system within the SCNF communities. Already remote and relatively small, the school districts and other educational systems do not have large populations to achieve strong economies of scale based on raw numbers of pupils. In addition, a number of local families choose schooling options alternative to the public school districts based on personal or family values. While local community education system parameters do not have apparent direct links to the USFS Forest Plan Revision, for the communities in the SCNF, meaningful linkages occur when we consider the stability and continuity that education as a system provides to the community which has a primary and ongoing relationship to the forests. We may consider a healthy local educational system as a necessary, but insufficient condition for a parallel healthy forest.

USFS perspectives on community priorities

In December, 2019, we solicited direct feedback from US Forest Service representatives about several key dimensions relating to the agency – community relationship, especially in relation to the FPR process. The first question USFS representatives responded to focused on describing forest planning priorities within the local communities of the SCNF. Results to this question are summarized in Table 8 below.

Table 8. *Compilation of USFS input about local community priorities for forest planning*

KEY QUESTION	USFS RESPONSES
<p align="center"><i>HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE FOREST PLANNING PRIORITIES WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES?</i></p>	<p>Local communities would like to see plan direction that...</p>
	<p>Increases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional multiple use opportunities that support the local economy • Access, and lack of restrictions to access • Recreation opportunities among some segments of the community
	<p>Maintains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cultural identity traditional multiple use industries provide • Big game hunting opportunities for local populations
	<p>Improves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest health, primarily through logging and other active management; relates to reduction of wildfire and smoke impacts
	<p>...reduces barriers and restrictions that affect access and multiple uses; communities want more flexibility, adaptive management, and incentives for good stewards.</p>
	<p>...recognizes that traditional industries such as ranching provide open space, limits to subdivision and/or other development, and provides other benefits.</p>

Via these results USFS perspectives about community priorities illustrate awareness of community emphases noted above regarding access, economic relationships to the forest resources, forest health needs, and that many aspects tied to the cultural identity of the region have value with respect to local livelihood options and forest planning. For example, in the Salmon workshop, a particular emphasis that occurred during discussion related to forest health to manage dead or dying timber for harvest potential and long-term reduction of fire risk. The USFS responses recognize the multiple benefits of that management need creating a

key intersection of ongoing collaborative potential to align community priorities and agency actions.

Table 9 provides a summary of USFS responses to the question of how the agency representatives describe the primary concerns of the community about forest planning revision.

Table 9. *Compilation of USFS input on the primary community concerns on forest revision planning*

KEY QUESTION	USFS RESPONSES
WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY COMMUNITY CONCERNS RELATED TO FOREST REVISION PLANNING?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 2012 Planning Rule
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in restrictions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local input should be weighed more heavily
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The existing plans were not implemented in full, specifically objectives related to road building, AUM increase, and timber harvest
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Forest Service already has its mind made up and the new plan will have less multiple use and more wilderness / protected areas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear of the unknown and change
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trustworthiness of USFS employees and concern that NGOs have undue influence over leadership and the FPR team

The range of responses that USFS forest planning team members and leadership representatives recognize as concerns within the communities includes social dimensions such as trust and concerns about change. They also include awareness of some of the bureaucratic aspects to the agency management mandates such as the 2012 Planning Rule and that when change occurs, it can be perceived as ‘added restrictions’.

The third question posed to the USFS employees focused on asking about options to engage the community to trust the Forest Plan Revision process. Table 10 outlines the range of input from USFS SCNF representatives on this question.

Table 10. *Compilation of USFS input on ideas to engage the community to trust Forest Plan Revision processes*

KEY QUESTION	USFS RESPONSES
WHAT WOULD ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY TO TRUST FOREST PLAN REVISION PROCESSES?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Frequent</u> communication
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain speak and having processes easier to understand
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust between community members and stakeholders is lacking
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the community can be wary about the use of contractors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be transparent and open, especially when meeting with groups outside a public meeting setting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take ownership of some negative public perceptions, accepting they are neither 'right' nor 'wrong'
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about what is outside USFS control (e.g., policy, ecology, technology, economic markets, etc) and develop a shared understanding of drivers / stressors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust through on-the-ground projects; demonstrate responsiveness to multiple-use objectives
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish reasonable expectations for how USFS will use public input. Show our work.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not confuse <i>trust</i> with <i>support</i>.

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

In response to the third question, asking what would engage the community to trust the USFS Forest Plan Revision process, agency representatives primarily reflected on social dimensions of perceptions related to communications and providing salient means to engage with the agency's planning effort. Through these data, the USFS representatives understand that challenges exist with social trust in the agency – community relationship.

Discussion

Community is a broad concept often used to describe the interactions, cooperative and in conflict alike, of a group of people in a place. Prosperity of a community reflects the overall health and well-being of a community as it strives for quality of life, livelihoods to sustain itself, and positive indicators of how it is doing along its aspirational path. Yet, community and prosperity remain subject to both individual and collective choices as well as organizational forces like policies and regulations that constrain and enable particular community actions.

Coming to terms: the agency's 'community' mission

Within the USFS Forest Plan Revision for the Salmon and Challis National Forests, surrounding communities that have history and future tied to the same forested landscape feel deeply that they ought to be vested in management decisions and outcomes to guide the agency on local implementation. Issues of trust compound whether community members honor the protocols of the agency to engage the communities during the FPR process. From the community perspective, interviewees summarized some of the tangible *and* intangible aspects of what value living and working in the SCNF region has for them as residents:

"Community is still really important. We have a strong interest in our children and grandchildren. Maintaining a school is a high priority. That's where a lot of events take place so it becomes the heart of a community. We're interested in our children coming back, to start businesses and add to the community."

Others described how elements of community and culture tie directly to options of commercial opportunity, history, and a sense of loss the communities have experienced the last few decades:

"Livelihood is connected to culture. For ranching, they are one in the same. Same with other extractive industries like logging or mining. So it seems like a part of your culture has died."

And, many explained how living in the SCNF region ties them to a public landscape and connects to a sense of who they are in a context of community prosperity:

"We have more of a community identity than other places. Being isolated and surrounded by public lands gives everyone a sense of community with a focus....The intimate tie to people's livelihood is significant because the amount of private land parcels is miniscule. Being able to graze on public lands is imperative to make a living as a producer."

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

Another interviewee emphasized the diversity of interests for a small rural community region and challenges for the agency to balance multiple needs:

“There are diverse identities such as active and retired professionals, extractive industries, agriculture, agency people, and others. But there is little interplay and interchange between them. The forest plan – and federal planning processes – tends to break some of that down and create interactions, which is good! That’s when we may have a change, but outside of that, there isn’t much integration between the segments of the community.”

One of the primary highlights yielded by the social assessment documents the need for the agency – community relationship to take better advantage of its points of common ground, such as the joint interest for transparency and community engagement. The USFS needs community engagement to fulfill its mission. The community seeks engagement to have voices in the management plan that will affect their day-to-day lives in different ways compared to public interests who do not live and work in the region, such as recreational visitors in the landscape. In this context, interviewees remarked on their recognition of longterm contributions of the USFS:

“A lot of my family was here before there was a Forest Service. When the Forest Service first came it was basically a great thing to help manage resources and make economic activity better. They were key to being able to run cattle, developing water, and coming up with allotment plans to end cattle & sheep wars. All of that happened because of the Forest Service.”

And, many recognize the different environmental and legal contexts the agency operates in with respect to broad stakeholder constituencies and interests:

“The Forest Service used to be really progressive in the ‘70s, but some people didn’t like what they were doing, so in the ‘80s, they started suing. Pretty soon, you have judges running the forest instead of the professionals. It’s hard to function because of all the red tape.”

Coming to terms: the community’s loss of ‘the good ‘ole days’

The USFS extends across time and space and goes far beyond the SCNF. It cannot please all people for each decision, and while some may disagree with its scope of regulation and management, those realities constitute a status quo. Equally true, even if not for every individual, the communities grieve the loss of their industrial identities and how those have eroded over the past few decades, parallel to the current Forest Plan last developed in the late 1980s. The communities experience dissonance over continuing to see and know the forest resources remain, but appear much more restricted, and therefore become characterized with diminished value and increased risk. On some levels, the communities tie that change to accountability of the agency and the suite of management decisions made by employees vested with the authority to enable or disable activities on the ground.

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

Individuals recognize the loss of timber industry infrastructure and capacity, but also remain motivated to support future opportunities that would rebuild use of forest resources through more active management. In this regard, the SCNF communities could benefit from a focused “task force” type of effort in which the USFS could play a key role within a community-led effort to discuss timber capacity and operational options for new enterprises. One interviewee noted important context about this type of coordination:

“Recreation and tourism are part of the community. Traditional uses are also there too, but they are more accepting of the rec part than vice versa. The community wants the ‘good ‘ole days’ back, but there has been a shift from mining and timber to agriculture and recreation. We can’t control the market for timber or minerals, and even so, there isn’t a mill. The Forest Service can relate to the people in some ways, but not in others – especially on the scale that people want.”

In this context, and recognizing the challenges within, community – agency interactions should increase in order to identify common expectations, establish joint goals, and implement a vision that would further the needs for both. Evidence from the community workshops *and* USFS input on community priorities indicates these points of common interest not only exist, but can outline an effective path to elements of locally determined community prosperity.

Coming to terms: prosperity action and building trust

Some participants outlined prosperity with components often considered the nuts & bolts to achieve it:

“Rural prosperity is the number of jobs and unemployment rate, or the number under-employed. It’s steady population growth. It’s the median age being younger than 65. It’s vibrant schools and a hospital. It’s having a social backbone. It’s like the 3-legged stool: vibrant schools, good healthcare, and adequate jobs to support your population. On all these, the forest could make a big difference for the community.”

In this context, participants also recognized achieving prosperity has elements of accepting an ongoing process, allowing for emergent timelines, and navigating dynamics beyond the control of individuals. When discussing the relationship between prosperity potential and the forest, residents also recognize the key role agency representatives play:

“a big part of rural prosperity is getting the support from the Forest Service and BLM <Bureau of Land Management> through the individuals in those organizations.”

Through this social assessment, and in response to community requests, the USFS representatives have confirmed they understand the need for transparency, trust, and direct relations with SCNF communities. The agency does not have a crystal ball or magic wand to achieve those needs overnight, but integration of the community perspectives into forest

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

planning is possible and lends itself to creativity based on a persistent process of community input.

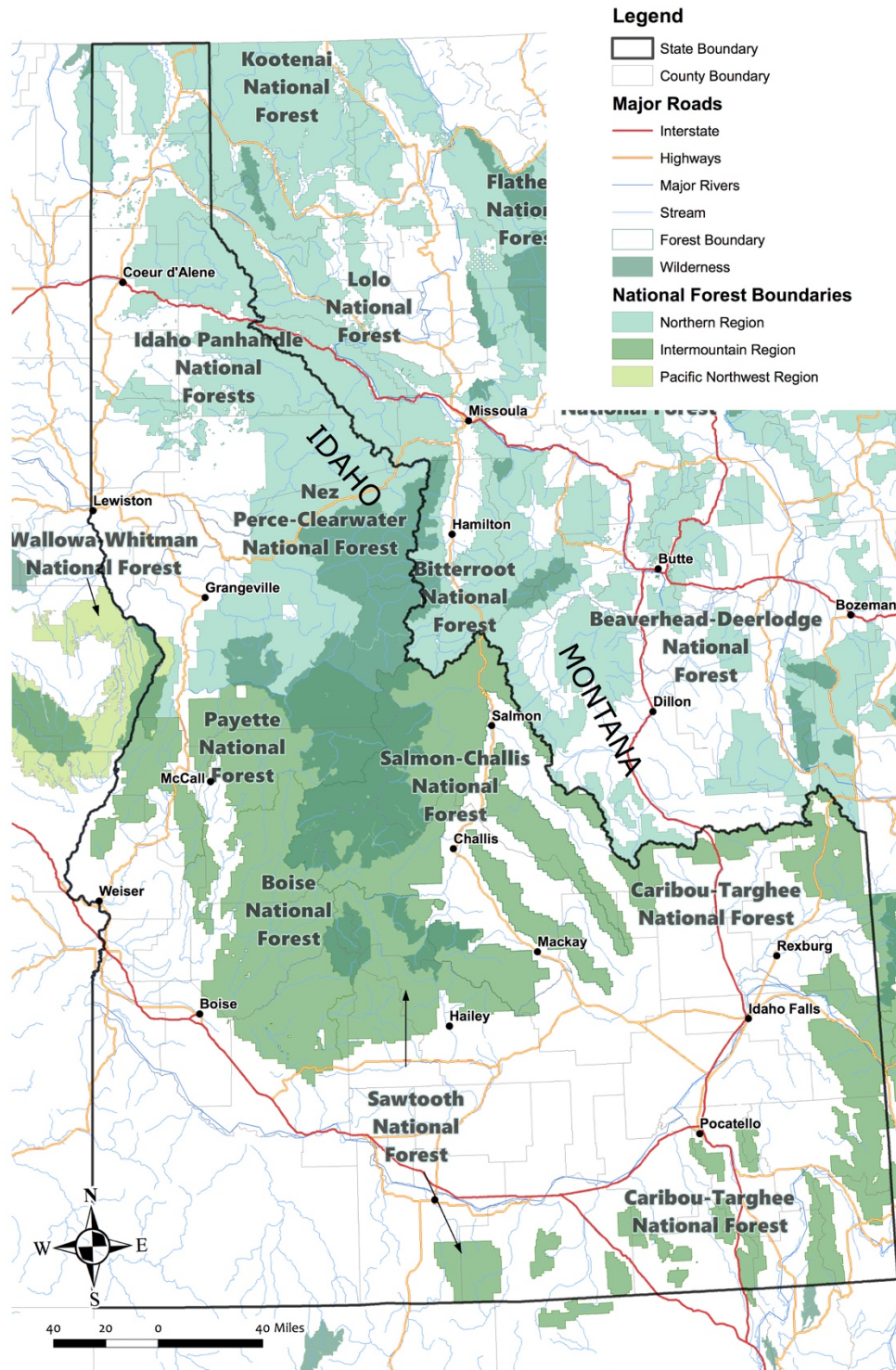
Even with the best individual and collective efforts, community prosperity remains challenging, difficult, and a function of the whole. The local diversity of perspectives includes reason, emotion, and experience – all of which provide value for looking into the unknowns of the future as well as reconciling the past:

“There’s a lot of folks that will simply say the solution to rural prosperity is to mine and timber and we’ll have jobs coming out of our ears. I’m not sure; if we look at the best science, and the best information out there, that we will come to that conclusion. There’s a place for those activities, but will that return us to real rural prosperity?”

The USFS can support its home communities in the SCNF region by engaging residents into active roles, communication, and openness to ideas. Similarly, if the communities embrace the agency as a managing partner, collaborative effort will begin to reap benefits healthy for both the forest ecology and community prosperity.

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

APPENDIX A: CONTEXTUAL MAP OF SALMON AND CHALLIS NATIONAL FORESTS AND SURROUNDING REGION



APPENDIX B

SCNF Forest Plan Revision interview protocol

1. How would you ***describe the community identity*** of this area and ___<town of residence / interview location>___?
 - a. how has it changed over time?
 - b. do you feel like you connect with it nowadays?
2. What are ***the key livelihoods of the region*** that make the community healthy?
 - a. are there livelihood options locals prefer or feel they 'need'?
 - b. how is livelihood connected to culture in this community?
3. What are the ways you would ***measure or think about 'community prosperity'*** for this region?
 - a. what is the role of SCNF in attaining rural prosperity into the future?
 - b. how important is sense of place to community health and rural prosperity here?
4. How would you advise the USFS to balance the dual objective to ***both help community sustainability and manage forest resources to achieve ecological sustainability***?

APPENDIX C: Comprehensive lists of ranked aspects to promote community prosperity (workshop, Salmon, ID, August 28, 2019)

Table C-1. *Individuals top-ranked aspect to promote community prosperity*

public access to public lands-per multiple use as congress-trails, roads, ability to move through
middle class job opportunities
marketing of Salmon / Lemhi area to entice business relocation
affordable housing
healthy ecosystems
infrastructure
prepare for climate change
job opportunities
restoration of forest health
healthy forest-fire safe
fire-resistant landscape/WUI
wilderness protection/natural resource protection and management
economic diversity
broadband
lack of representatives of locals in USDA processes
stay rural-increased rural infrastructural houses, transportation
healthy forest
agriculture and cattle. Keep this community rural.
healthy ecosystem
healthy ecosystem
biomass removal (wood logging)
job opportunities
ability to move through forest freely
job opportunities
responsibly develop natural resources
Jobs
public access to public lands
job opportunities
biomass removal
public access to federal land, all uses as per congress
plan for climate change actively
job opportunities
access to public lands
public access to public lands
unrestricted public access to public lands

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

Table C-2. Individuals 2nd-ranked aspect to promote community prosperity

medical care/public health
access to public lands-trails/roads
job opportunities
clean water and air
job opportunities
education opportunities
public access to public land
attractive schools
access improved
medical
educational opportunities
preparing for climate change
education
jobs
public access
public access to public land. All federal
lack of funding for local infrastructure
access for public to fed and state public lands
rural sustainability
job opportunities
health facilities
public land access
public access to public lands
biomass removal
biomass removal
use natural resources
educational opportunities
biomass removal-timber dead or other
affordable housing
promote small business
job opportunities
infrastructure
biomass removal
biomass removal
biomass removal

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

Table C-3. *Individuals 3rd-ranked aspect to promote community prosperity*

healthy forest=healthy communities
healthy forest, healthy communities
educational opportunities
local public input to healthy ecosystem
tax base
medical
public health-clean water
educational system to attract young families
promote small business
biomass
healthy forest
tax base-fed public lands
education
good medical care
rural sustainability
promote small business
job opportunities
open access to natural resources
education
healthy ecosystems
sustainable management of resources
education
health and medical facilities
public access
tourism, recreation
rural sustainability
medical
public access to public lands
open public land to everyone and all uses-roads, firewood, trails, mining, hunting, grazing, biking
healthy ecosystem-local influence
rural sustainability
access to public transportation, good medical facilities
educational opportunities
utilize natural resources
utilize natural resources

APPENDIX D: Comprehensive lists of aspects to promote community prosperity (workshop, Challis, ID, August 29, 2019)

Page 1

- Cattle production industry
- Timber industry
- Jobs with living wage
- Retention of multiple uses across forest and access
- Multiple use purpose
- Downscale bureaucracy
- Access (wood gathering, grazing, logging, recreation) without harassment
- ESA

Page 2

- Healthy resilient forests
 - Public health impacts
- Fuel reduction
- Firewood restrictions lifted
- Prescribed burns/ CAA
- 1964 Wilderness Act
- Good schools
- Good healthcare
- Places to gather
- Well-functioning community

Page 3

- Decentralization of central management
- Follow multiple use
 - MUSYA 1960
- Human prosperity=environmental prosperity
- Agencies imposing regulations on small businesses
- How to adapt economics?
- Wilderness Act regulations too demanding
- External cost to do business on Federal land

Page 4

- Local opportunity to engage and work
- Need political clout
- Opportunities for young people / families
- Agency workers staying
- Timber/mining production
 - Multiple use
 - Fishing, etc
- Lack of cooperation between agencies and county because of environmental side
- What is good for the county?
- What is good for FS?
- Decrease rules/regulation, increase prosperity

Page 5

- Cooperation, how to rebuild?
- USFW regulations
- Modify ESA
- Relationship deteriorated, live in fear of FS officers. Makes people opposed to FS
- Ppl are victimized, too many regulations/fines
- Antagonism, escalating? If people lived here, they would understand better.
- Land exchanges take too long
 - Uniformity in how things are applied
 - Federal processes
- Tie water to natural average for \$1 million?
 - Can't do that with aging population
- Not just market that is stopping mining
- Wilderness proposed in cobalt mine viable area
 - Managers open to saying YES
 - Make it work

Page 6

- BLM hands are tied, they are frustrated too. Can't do their job.
- Decentralize authority needed in order to say YES.
 - Lack of personal decisions
- Building relationships, investing in what you're doing! Can't move away. This is one way to get to YES.
- Personal momentum and continuity
- Lots of factors needed for ie: timber access
- Clean up trash, clean environment
- Simplify bureaucracy
- Economic potential, new growth potential

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

- Recruit the market
- Viable industry
- Economic development, private sector
- Tax base for schools

Page 7

- School base down 50% in the last 20 years
- 97% public lands increasing
 - Do we have a voice?
- High speed internet
- Calls for production in the law, benefits nation and community
- ESA, need to change laws/ regulations
- Multiple use, productivity is good for the environment
- Access to natural resources
 - New businesses of various kinds
 - Get in and fight fire
- One-size-fits-all doesn't work
- Government close to home is a good government
- Idaho creates own roadless rule
- New forest plan will lock it all up
- Plan doesn't account for economic growth of Lemhi/Custer counties

Page 8

- Comes back to Wilderness Act of 1960
 - 44% of public land is wilderness
- If there's no wood sales, mills will come out
- I just want enough wood to build a shed, I don't need several acres. Can't do this anymore.

Closing comments (also page 8)

- Visit with people in town in the know
- Hard copies
- Another meeting to talk about results
- Unbiased results
- Site visits
 - Economics 20 yrs ago vs now
- Common themes between Salmon and Challis
- What regional realities are more powerful?
 - Differences/similarities between Salmon and Challis
- Health of local economies
- Obligation to the United States, WE are important to the forest

~ DRAFT ~ not for citation

- Hands tied, regulations coming down from Washington
 - Needs to listen to communities
 - It is getting better
- Timber/mining can bring in manufacturing
- Long—term commitment needed for big investment to come in
- Long-term sustainability or they won't do business