5 PUBLIC INVOLVMENT: ASSESSMENT AND EXPECTATIONS

Public involvement was a topic of frequent comment by discussants who participated in this update. In other sections of this report portions of these comments have been presented. In this section we briefly summarize some of the highlights and major points that emerged in other discussions. These comments address assessments of current public involvement issues and desires regarding public involvement regarding management of the Kootenai National Forest. The specific topics developed in this section are:

- The opportunities for public involvement.
- An assessment of the forums for public involvement.
- Issues and desires that apply to improving public involvement.

The substance and details regarding each of these major themes in discussions about public comment is summarized in the three sub-sections that follow.

5.1 The Opportunity for Public Involvement

Participants in this update expressed three strong themes about the opportunity for public involvement:

- There are ample opportunities for area residents to provide public comment about forest management issues.
- Some segments of the population choose not to participate because they are not interested, they perceive barriers to participation, or they have some despair about the viability of the public involvement process.
- Public involvement is assessed as dominated by "the left" or "environmentalists" who know how to use the process; and, this places others in the community at a disadvantage.

5.1.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT EXIST

In general, the participants for this update describe an awareness of the opportunities that exist for public involvement, including writing letters, attending public meetings, participating in open houses and field trips, and personal contact with District Rangers and other KNF leadership. Some of the comments suggest that if there is any discontent about the opportunity to participate, it is not because of a lack of opportunity:

> They are doing everything they can do to engage the public—I don't know how you can make the public feel heard when the opportunity is there.

Similarly, other participants suggested that being involved takes a personal commitment that individuals must be willing to make as part of being "active" in community affairs. For example:

> If you take the time to be active, then you can be heard. You can have your say, maybe not have your way, but you can have your say. People who are unwilling to take the time and make the effort just loose their say while those of us who take the time at least have the satisfaction of knowing we tried.

Others suggested there is sufficient opportunity to provide comment regarding management issues. Additionally, discussants also evaluated KNF communication about the opportunities to participate as sufficient. In general, residents positively evaluate the efforts of the KNF to provide opportunities to participate in public involvement. However, as will be developed below, there were other opinions about the desires for communication about specific management actions that might affect publics, especially road closures

5.1.2 SOME PEOPLE CHOOSE NOT TO PARTICIPATE

A second theme that emerged from the discussions with participants in this update is the assessment that fellow citizens are choosing not to participate in public involvement. Several different reasons were noted for their observations, including the following:

- **Life is too busy**. Other life demands were cited as a reason others do not attend meetings or participating in public involvement efforts. One discussant made the following comment about a neighbor he asked to attend a meeting with him about KNF management issues:

  > I knew it was important to attend the plan revision meeting because it is the only way we are going to get heard. I went down the street to talk to (my friend) about going with me. He just said he was too busy with trying to make enough money to pay his bills and feed his kids. When he had any free time he said he would rather spend it with his family than go to a meeting. I don't disagree with him. I understand his point of view. He is just up against the wall and going to a meeting seems like a luxury to him. To me it is a necessity and so I just make time and go.

The difficulties of life for many people appear to result in choices not to participate because they evaluate other demands as having a higher priority. Observers suggest that these are often the individuals who should be participating because they are among those most affected by management decisions. A related theme is that individuals who are active in their community often attend a variety of meetings and they have too little time to spend with their families. For example, one discussant who is involved with service clubs, high school sports, and the Healthy Communities initiative in Libby observed:

> Three nights a week I am at meetings and I often just don't have time to go to another meeting.

For those who are very active and those who are consumed with life's other demands, public involvement in KNF management issues is a lower priority.

- **It does not affect me**. A similar thread in these discussions is a more general assessment that it is only worth attending meetings that appear that directly affect individual interests and concerns. For example:

> It is real hard to get people to these meetings, unless there is some issue they are specifically concerned about. It is just hard. We have the same problem with lots of government meetings so it is not just them (KNF) it is really a community-wide issue of people just coming out when their ox is being gored.

This is not apathy. But, it is selective participation that may be based on limited information and a limited view of the interactions among management issues. This may also represent some of the most common motivations for involvement or not in public comment.

- **The process of public involvement is not meaningful**. Discussants also observed that some of their fellow citizens have lost faith in the value of the public input process. The reasons they have lost faith vary, but two themes emerged from examination of the data. One theme is that in the past individuals have provided input, but there is no action based on the input. Consequently, they evaluate the process as not meeting their expectations for action resulting from their input. While this may be an incorrect evaluation of the purpose of the public input process, it is cited as an example of one reason individuals choose not to continue with their past participation. For example,

> You can't just listen to us and walk away. People don't think their voices are heard. We are loosing our culture, our economy, our history, and our way of life. There is concern about closing gates … but people are not heard when they speak out.

The second theme is that the process has become so filled with conflict that they choose not to attend public meetings. For example:

> There are lots of people who are still burnt from the old Save the Yaak days where there were accusations about burning people out and various things. People who lived here in that era tend not to be involved in anything that might be politically… well, they don't get involved because they are burned out over the paving of that road.

A similar sentiment is expressed in the following comment:

> There are a lot of people who don't even vote, who don't want to get involved for whatever reasons. There is also a fair amount who also stay away because the meetings are just so hateful and they don't want to be a part of that hatefulness.

There are other reasons cited for non-participation such as meetings being held at inconvenient times or at inconvenient locations. However, more often the choice not to participate was evaluated in terms of one of the three points noted above. In general, there is the assessment that, "There are a lot of people who don't speak up and have their say when they should."

5.2 Perceived Differences in Public involvement

Another noteworthy assessment of the public involvement process is the evaluation that the process has been captured by a particular group of stakeholders and constituents. This evaluation contributes to some mistrust of the process and its outcomes. At the same time, this assessment also suggests to those who evaluate their position as disadvantaged that they should become more aware of and involved in the process.

The assessment of being at a "disadvantage" in the process is expressed in statements such as the following:

> People here do not understand the public comment process well. The left understands it very well and they use it to their advantage. The rest of us are left out because we are not as aware of the process. It is kind of hard to win a race when they (the environmentalists) are riding a thoroughbred and we are riding a donkey.
>
> People will talk to you, but they won't write a letter. The environmentalists normally have the time, money, and effort. Their networking is far superior to everyone else to get their word out. There was this public comment period about a lake nearby, making it a no wake lake, and 1,236 comments came back and 13 were from Montana and the rest were from out of state. One person who was an environmentalist got onto the internet and got a thousand people to send in a comment. Now it is a no-wake lake. That is what is wrong with public comment: people who don't know anything about a local issue and live outside the area can write a letter and it has as much say as the person who lives here and knows things on the ground.

While this last comment also incorporates another notion about the weighting of public comment and the value of local knowledge, (topics developed in a separate discussion below), there is also the evaluation of "the environmentalists" as being more organized and aware of the public comment process than others. There is often a further evaluation of the "left" and "environmentalists" as having the funds to pay staff or "hired professionals" to attend meetings. For example:

> It is very difficult to get to meetings for a variety of reasons. If they want input they should send out letters or questionnaires so they can find out what we think. What you (the interviewer) are doing is what they should be doing on a regular basis. Right now the green groups pay people to attend meetings and write letters. So why should we go when they are stacking the meetings?

This assessment of disadvantage has resulted in some groups and individuals emphasizing the need to be more involved in the Forest Plan revision process. For example:

> I am making sure I get everyone I can to go to those meetings. And I am reading and getting informed about the NEPA process and things like that. You have to do that if you want a seat at the table. We have not had a seat because somebody took our chair. Well, that is not going to happen for these plan revision meetings. We are going to be all over plan revision and

> turn out as many people as we can and get them to write letters and do all those things the environmentalists do. We are learning the process.

This sentiment articulated by some new groups and existing groups, expresses a need to become more aware of the process for organizing public comment to present a particular point of view. Whether or not the assessment is correct about "one side of the argument" capturing the public involvement process, the net result is new impetus for increased public involvement by some community groups and individuals.

5.3 Forums for Public Involvement

Discussions with update participants elicited comments and evaluations about various forums for public involvement: public meetings, open houses, field trips, letter writing, and personal contact with District Rangers and other leadership team members. We summarize the content of these comments and evaluations in separate sections that follow.

5.3.1 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings are perceived as a difficult forum for acquiring meaningful comments from interested publics. The contentious nature of past meetings, observations of public scolding in meetings, and arguments among meeting participants are evaluated as negative elements of this forum for input about management issues. In small communities where residents have multiple types of relationships with each other, there is an incentive to minimize conflict and limit interactions that can complicate their multiple ties. That is, it is difficult to argue with your dentist, accountant, or mechanic in a public forum and then expect to have amicable relationships in the normal course of everyday community life. Consequently, conflict in public meetings appears to inhibit a willingness to participate or at least it inhibits comment from many of those who attend. In fact, some perceive past public meetings as a forum in which those who are especially frustrated or who hold particular positions come to express their frustration or engage in stereotyped conflicts and finger pointing. That is, these meetings become a type of public performance that expresses the differences and conflicts without a mechanism to resolve or meaningfully address those conflicts and differences.

Given the skepticism about past public meetings, there remains some hope that they can be a meaningful forum for individuals to acquire information and provide their input and opinions about management issues. For example, recent meetings about plan revision were generally evaluated in positive terms, although there were some reservations expressed by a range of participants with different viewpoints about management issues. The positive evaluations of these meetings emphasized:

- Holding meetings in local venues that can draw people who might not attend meetings distant from their residence.
- The role of District Rangers in leading meetings since they are familiar with local issues and the local groups and individuals who attend.
- The combination of small group discussions combined with all participants meeting together to review issues and points raised in small groups.
- The availability of the biological and other experts to answer questions about management issues.
- The meetings were well-managed by those in charge.

Comments about the difficulties with these meetings included the following:

- A neutral facilitator should be present to ensure all points of view are heard. Using facilitators from the KNF presents a conflict of interest if the agency opinion is challenged.
- Facilitators are inherently problematic at these meetings in any role because they are biased and tend to limit discussion to only those points of view that are acceptable to the facilitator.
- Local meetings were attended and "stacked" by those from other communities and regions and stifled the expression of opinions by residents of the Districts where the meetings were held.
- The method of recording the views of local residents was inflammatory and did not foster constructively addressing issues. For example, recording comments such as "kill all grizzly bears" was perceived as inflammatory and not constructively addressing the comments offered.
- The manner in which issues were identified and recorded gave the impression of a "vote" on the value of the issue rather than only recording the issue's existence. This resulted in concern about manipulation of the process by those with vested interests on both sides of the argument.

The information collected for this update suggests that, although there is some reservation about public meetings as a viable forum for acquiring public comment, there is also hope they can be useful if conflicts are more effectively managed. The majority opinion also appears to be that "professional facilitators" should be used to ensure that the meetings remain constructive and do not transform into the public performances that limit contributions by the majority of participants. There is also a minority opinion that views any facilitation of such meetings as problematic.

5.3.2 OPEN HOUSES

This forum for acquiring public input received mixed evaluations. Although some discussants perceive the open house as an effective means to interact with KNF staff and to express their views about management issues, the more dominant sentiment expressed by participants is similar to that of a County Commissioner previously quoted who said in response to a question, "If you could tell the people at the KNF any one thing, what is it you would want them to know?" And the response was:

> We **hate**, the public hates, the Open House policy and the way they run meetings. We have been very vocal about it. They are reluctant to change it. I am assuming they don't change it because it is some directive from Washington that it is the way to conduct meetings. But what our constituents feel, and we do as well, is there should be another way.

The reason for this evaluation of open houses is that they do not provide the opportunity for people with different points of view to hear and respond to the opinions of their neighbors. Underlying this concern is what we interpret as some concern that the informal forum in which there is the opportunity for one-to-one discussions without challenge from those with opposing views hides the basis for management decisions. The positive evaluations of open

houses express a theme of a more relaxed setting where the opportunities for conflict are limited; and, the opportunities for extended discussions are possible.

5.3.3 FIELD TRIPS

Field trips were raised as a forum for public involvement by a limited number of the participants in this project. Nonetheless, those who raised the issue suggest this is a powerful means to see and examine specific management issues. These discussants also emphasized that a value of field trips is the opportunity for extended discussions with the professionals who know the issues and make the recommendations for management decisions. As one discussant observed:

> I have gone on a couple of field outings with people from the KNF. I did not expect much, but I was very surprised. The people doing the field trip impressed me with their knowledge and their concern to do the right thing for the resource. I felt that those scientists were trying to do the right thing and it gave me confidence in them. The political process that affects what happens with their recommendations is one thing, but their knowledge and concern for the resource was eye opening.

The comment expresses the sentiments of others who noted that field trips provide the opportunity to become informed about management issues by knowledgeable scientists and management personnel. This forum appears to be one in which there is limited participation among area residents.

5.3.4 LETTER WRITING

Letter writing to gather public input about management issues was evaluated by some as problematic and by others as an efficient and effective method to provide comment about management issues. Those who evaluate it as problematic suggest that letter writing, especially the use of form letters, can result in skewing the information available to decision makers about the breadth and depth of public concern. For example,

> What has happened is that the Forest Service gets a letter from the Save the Butterfly organization and that could be 2 people, but it is usually just a handful of people. They think it is this big organization and represents a lot of people, but it may not. My letter should count as much as the Save the Butterfly group, but I am not sure it does.

The use of form letters is a topic that evoked special concern:

> We are asking people to write letters about Forest Plan revision. We are not asking them to sign some form letter. We are not giving them what to say. We want them to write what they think. There are organizations that just ask people to sign a form letter or send a post card and it isn't really what they may think. They are not taking the time to speak their minds. Should that kind of letter count more than a letter I pen by hand?

Expressed concerns about letter writing are similar to those noted previously in Section 5.2 about how some interest groups and organizations mobilize individuals and other groups to affect a local management issue. That is, there is concern that some interest groups are using letter writing as a means to give extra weight to their opinion by the use of form letters and post cards. These letters and post cards are perceived to be sent by persons who may not be informed about local issues. As one discussant observed,

> There should be no form letters allowed. Only letters from real people in their own hand should count.

However, there was also a strong theme from multiple points of view about resource management that letter writing is an effective means to provide comment. One discussant that represents what might be termed an "industry" point of view made the following comment in response to a question about how individuals can provide public comment about forest management issues:

> Your best bet is to write a letter. Your best chance of getting heard is writing a letter. Everyone can afford a 37 cent stamp and if you can't there are plenty of people who will loan you the money. Every letter from an individual should be as good as a letter from an organization.

This same sentiment was echoed by others who suggested that for those with limited time to attend meetings or other constraints affecting more in-person participation methods, letter writing is an effective means to provide comment about management issues.

5.3.5 ACCESS TO RANGERS AND THE FOREST SUPERVISOR

A strong theme in the discussions for this update is the general accessibility of Rangers and the Forest Supervisor. For example,

> We are very happy with our Rangers up here. I feel like I can walk into their office any time and ask to see them and tell them what is on my mind. It is a way that I can get my say across. Now, they don't agree all the time, but I usually feel like I have the chance to make my point. Not everyone feels like they can come in and talk to the Rangers, but I don't have any problem with it. It is an open door and I take advantage of it.

There was a consistent theme in comments about the accessibility of the Forest Supervisor from diverse perspectives in the two counties. For example,

> When he came in things changed. He is out in the public and he attends community meetings. He is the kind of guy you feel like you can walk up and talk to and he will listen to what you have to say. Now, I don't agree with everything he does. But, I like the fact that I feel that I can go to his office or call him on the phone and get his attention. It is just not that way everywhere and it makes a difference in our relationship with the forest. They listen to you. They may not always hear what you say, if you know what I mean, but they do listen.

Personnel on some Ranger Districts suggest they would like to provide all the access and communication opportunities possible. However, their workload is such that meeting all public demands for communication and access sometimes falls short of their own expectation. For example,

> Sometimes people come in and we try to be as responsive as possible. And we also respond to all the requests for information we can. Sometimes I don't think the public appreciates the workload to respond to appeals, to engage in collaboration, and just the time required to meet our mandates. If we are not as responsive as people would like, it is because the demands on our time don't always allow us to engage the public as much as they needs us to. It is especially the case on a District where there are lawsuits and the amount of time consumed in responding takes away from meeting some of our other demands, including meeting with the public or keeping them updated about everything they would like to know from us.

This sentiment expresses a general concern about responsiveness to public inquiries and communication about management issues. However, discussants generally expressed a positive assessment of access to District Rangers and the Forest Supervisor. This access is viewed as an important means to provide feedback and comment about management issues.

5.4 Issues and Desires Regarding Public Involvement

Discussions about public involvement also elicited some desires for changes in communication and interaction with the KNF. There were also other issues that our analysis of discussant comments categorized as relevant to public involvement. These comments were organized into the following themes:

- The constituents of the forest desire and have a need for ongoing communication about the activities of the forest and the management decisions that affect resident's use of forest lands.
- The concerns of local constituents about weighting their input, since they perceive they are most affected by management decisions.
- Desires for expanding the leadership role of KNF managers in local efforts to resolve conflicts about natural resource issues.
- The desire to have management decisions "make more sense." A perception exists that management decisions consider facts or result in outcomes that are contrary to common sense.
- The desire to have the best science used in making management decisions and to have that science accessible to the public.

Some of these points are variations of issues discussed previously in this and other chapters. However, to ensure that these desires are explicitly discussed, we briefly develop the substance of each point in the remainder of this chapter.

5.4.1 THE NEED FOR INFORMATION

A theme in comments from discussants is the desire for ongoing communication about management and planning issues. In general, discussants perceive there are limited sources of information for residents. The newspaper and limited choice in radio in some areas are primary sources of information about local issues. However, as one resident noted:

> The local rumor mill here is intense. Rumors about what they (KNF) are doing spread fast and they are usually not true. They need to counteract that with a good flow of information about what is going on down there.

There were suggestions that a weekly newspaper column, a KNF news web page, or some other regular communication about management issues could provide a means for interested persons to keep informed about local issues. A variant of this theme is the notion that the KNF managers, "need to toot their own horn." That is, there is a need for the Forest Service to inform constituents about KNF activities and successes in the regular course of everyday business.

Related to this need for information is a desire for less jargon and more "straight talk" in presenting issues:

> One thing they need to start looking at is they need to look at talking more straight to us rather than getting a four page description of something that take a couple of sentences. They need to tell us what they can and can't do and not hide it in bureaucratize.
>
> They should avoid the use of jargon and talk to people in language they can understand. Don't assume we know the technical details. Just tell us in laymen's terms where possible so that everyone can know what is being said.

These types of desires for more communication and less technical jargon in the communication of management issues were expressed by discussants with diverse points of view.

A second theme about the need for information is a desire for education about natural resource and forest management issues. For example,

> People here really want to know about environmental issues and how things work. They (KNF) have a great resource that I would hope they could share more with the community than they do. I would like to see some educational programs or something like that for people in the community. Now, some of them are not the best communicators, so maybe they could use some kind of liaison to help them out there.

A similar idea is expressed in this statement by a discussant:

> We mostly learn about what they do through the newspaper. It is a great source of information here. You see people lined up down there when it comes out and if it is late then they are knocking on the door to get their

> paper. But, they could use some educational programs that explain how what they do will affect us.

This need for information about management actions is especially acute around road closures, but the general need expressed is that communities desire more information about KNF activities and education programs about environmental processes.

A final theme about the need for information concerns how information and other public meetings are scheduled and organized. For example,

> Most of the time they are pretty good in knowing what is going on and when to schedule meetings. But sometimes they will schedule a meeting at the same time as a local basketball game or some other high school sports event. They should know that people are going to choose to go to the basketball game and not their meeting. They need a little more awareness about when local events happen.

Publics express a need for more information that can be communicated in straightforward language that makes the information accessible to them as well as to those with more technical knowledge. There is also the expressed need to have venues to communicate this information that show awareness of local schedules and other means for acquiring information.

5.4.2 THE VALUE OF LOCAL COMMENTS

There is one dominant theme and another sub-theme in the comments about the value of local input in the public involvement process. The dominant theme is that local concerns about management issues should be weighted. The logic behind this concern is that residents live in and interact with the natural resources of the region and know its capacity and limits; and, residents directly experience the effects on their personal and community lives that result from management actions. A related sentiment is that without weighting local input, then community, lifestyle, and values are at risk:

> I want this to be a community of place for the residents rather than a community of interest for the nation. I would like to have some say in how the land supports this community. I would like people to know that it is not a problem to cut a tree, they do grow back. I just don't want the town to be a colony. Is it fair for our national forests to be a place where you cannot cut a tree? We should be able to use some trees, but there are those who use trees as a means to an end. We just want more opportunities for our daughter so she has the chance to live here and raise a family here if she wants to.

"Outsiders" are perceived to have more input in the process of forest management or at least the input they have is more effective:

> Right now outsiders have more input than we do. They need to figure out a way to let local input have more weight than the person in New York who writes a letter. Their fantasy about our forest has as much say as my

> understanding of the place that I learned from my father who learned from his father. We have an on-the-ground knowledge of the place and it needs to be respected.

These types of sentiments were expressed among many of the longer term residents and among those who advocate for the continued presence of a forest products industry.

The sub-theme expressed by discussants with what is commonly known as an "environmental" point of view also stresses the value of local on the ground knowledge. For example,

> We don't just sit here and write letters and go to meetings. We do those things too, but we are out in the woods, visiting management units and seeing the conditions on the ground. When we offer a point of view about how things should be it is because we have taken the time to go out there and see it for ourselves. We want them (the KNF) to pay attention to that experience and to respect it rather than dismiss it because they are the "professionals" and we are just the folks who live in the hills.

This sentiment expresses a need to acknowledge local knowledge and experience and to consider its value in formulating management plans and actions.

5.4.3 MORE LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Residents who participated in this update commented about generally positive leadership of the KNF management team, but there were also expressed desires for expanding their involvement in community problem solving. For example,

> We see that the Forest Service needs to step up in leadership and assist in ending the conflict here. There is a lack of leadership in that area. They may not know whose role it is. Maybe there is some kind of a disconnect there. They are human beings too and they live here and have us as their neighbors. They have to be involved socially with the people they are having these arguments with. I think it is a federal agencies job to step up in leadership on resolving these issues. I mean they need to know who the stakeholders are and who is invested in the process and who is not. It is their responsibility to make sure all those interests are represented. Now, look at our RAC committee. The Forest Service helped to create the success of that committee. They failed miserably on the Yaak Stewardship project. They need to step up in solving some of the conflicts.

A similar sentiment was expressed by another discussant:

> The process needs to be more transparent in how things work. Not just having the meetings and having the public come in. If they really want this to be a constructive process that is solution driven, they have to make that happen. It is their responsibility to get involved in resolving some of the conflicts that have gone on forever. If they don't do it, then who will?

These sentiments indicate the expectation that KNF managers should have a role in working with groups in conflict to assist in resolving problems related to resource management issues. This may reflect ongoing frustrations with extended conflicts about management issues with little hope of resolution outside the courts. Many residents perceive the courts as part of the current management problem rather than a true source of locally meaningful solutions.

A second theme about leadership concerns the responsibility of the "upper level" managers to ensure their staff implements policy consistently:

> I expect the upper level managers to make sure their employees understand that whatever group comes forward, I expect them to let them know what the tone of the forest is going to be. If the managers set a tone of working collaboratively with the community, then they need to make sure their employees are on board with that. They are not doing the job as well as they could be on getting everyone on board with how they want things to be.

A third theme is the expectation that the KNF should have greater involvement as an agency in community events and processes. For example,

> Don't get me wrong, Forest Service people are among the most involved in community affairs here. That is not what I am saying. As an agency, they need to step up and participate more in the community. Companies like (name) make contributions to the little league and they sponsor things for kids and they do things to help out the community. The Forest Service used to loan equipment out more than they do now. They need to show the flag more as the Forest Service.

A related theme is the desire for greater involvement in community affairs by the KNF leadership team. Discussants suggested that the KNF has a storehouse of leadership talent that can benefit small communities that have limited resources to organize efforts for a variety of purposes. For example,

> We are a small place and everyone who is involved is about as involved as they can be. Sometimes it just takes a spark to help something get done and lots of times people just don't have the resources to generate that spark. I would like to seem them (KNF) get more involved in sparking community efforts and supporting them.

Most of these expectations may be beyond the mission and capacity of the KNF. However, residents express an expectation for more community leadership by the agency. This expectation may need to be addressed by communication about the limits and capabilities of the agency in this arena.

In general, discussants recognize the breadth and depth of leadership skills within the KNF and their desire is to have more sharing of these skills and talent with local communities. These desires need to be placed within the context of current high demands for leadership within both Lincoln and Sanders counties for response to changing economic conditions.

5.4.4 THINGS JUST DON'T MAKE SENSE

Among some segments of both counties there is strong sentiment that some management decisions, "just don't make sense." The desire is for KNF managers to listen to the common sense perspective of people who have grown-up and lived their lives in and around the forest. There is an important social context to these sentiments that is revealed in the details about what does not make sense. What is perceived as nonsense often concerns endangered species issues, management of old growth, and other common issues in the ongoing debate between the two traditional points of view about resource management in the region. For example,

> They will tell you they need to close off that area because grizzly bears don't cross roads and so they are going to obliterate the roads. I don't know when the last time was they were in the woods, but I saw a bear walking down a road just last week. I guess he didn't read the report they wrote. It just seems they lack common sense in what they are doing and it makes me wonder if they care more about bears or people. I would like to see them take people into consideration a lot more in how they manage the forest.

These types of sentiments are most often expressed by those who feel their way of life is threatened by management decisions that favor wildlife or outside concerns over local ways of life. They perceive major changes in their schools, their ability to access public lands, and the values about resources that they were taught by their parents and teachers. For example,

> People grew up here knowing the world made sense. People went on tours with the Forest Service in 6th grade and we always thought the forest and the community would always be here. What we believed in does not hold true anymore and it was not our fault. We may not always be here and we did not do anything wrong.

This statement expresses the notion that individual and community ways of life are changing for reasons that do not appear to make sense. Trees appear to be plentiful, there are bears crossing roads in the woods, and there are plenty of bull-trout in the Kootenai River. The apparent contradiction between local experience and management actions that "don't make sense" highlights the need for clarification about the broad context of forest management decisions and planning. The legal and regulatory constraints that affect management decisions may need more explicit discussion when such issues are raised by concerned publics.

5.4.5 LET US KNOW YOU ARE USING THE BEST SCIENCE

A range of residents expressed the desire to know that the Forest Service is using the "best science" in making management decisions. However, there are two variations of this expressed desire. One is the perspective that the KNF is staffed by professionals who know their work and have the responsibility to apply the best science in managing forest resources. This point of view is commonly expressed in sentiments such as the following statement by a Lincoln County logger:

> They (KNF scientists) know how things work. We just need to let them alone and let them use their scientific expertise to make things right. If they are using good science, then even if they do things that go against how I want them to be, I can live with that. If they are doing things because someone in Missoula yells loud and makes a stink, then I have a problem with that. Just let the scientists do what they do.

This perspective places trust in the expertise and professionalism of local managers. At the same time there is the need to know that the management process is driven by science and not "politics." A similar perspective was expressed by a member of a local environmental group:

> We have been on field trips with the biologists and silviculturalists. They impressed me that they know their science and they know what they are doing. The managers need to keep listening to those scientists who know about what they are doing and who care about the forest. It is important for us to know that the process is science driven.

A different idea about science-based management was expressed by another member of an environmental organization in the region:

> I want them to use the best science, but sometimes I hear from scientists not in the Forest Service who have a different assessment of the same situation. Then that makes me wonder if they are using the best science. I think that a layer of peer review should be built into the process when they are doing planning. They should use the best possible science available and I just want to make sure they are doing that. I know they don't like to be challenged, but we need to make sure the science is right.

This perspective also desires to know that the best-science available is the basis for making management decisions. However, the guarantee that the science is credible is based on using peer review and not inherent trust in the expertise of KNF staff. This perspective presents different challenges for response to public concerns about the scientific basis for management decisions.

5.5 Summary of Key Points

There are several consistent themes and issues in the data regarding public involvement and information needs. Participants indicate that ample opportunity exists for participation if residents choose to do so. They also acknowledge that many choose not to participate for one or a combination of the following reasons: their lives are too busy; they believe forest management issues do not affect them; or, they assess the process of public involvement as not meaningful. Some residents also argue that the public comment process has been "captured" by environmental and non-local interests. These residents suggest they are at a disadvantage in relationship to those who know the process and use that knowledge to manipulate it. The methods for public involvement are evaluated differently. Public meetings are often described as "public performances" in which there is limited useful discussion or exchange of ideas about topics of interest to participants. Other methods such as open houses, field trips, and letter writing are each evaluated as having different strengths

and weaknesses. Publics generally believe they have good access to Rangers and the Forest Supervisor; and, these are assessed as meaningful channels for public input. These evaluations suggest the need to use multiple methods to reach diverse constituents.

Residents also expressed desire for other changes in agency interactions with communities and individuals in the two counties. They wish top have more information from the USFS about plans, management decisions, and natural resource issues. They also desire more leadership from the agency to identify and resolve natural resource conflicts as well as more leadership to address community problems and issues. There is also a strong desire for the agency to explain the scientific basis for decision making about forest plans and management decisions. There is also sentiment that local input should have more weight and value because it is based in local knowledge about ecological processes and conditions.