

Statement from Nez Perce Tribe Executive Committee (NPTEC) on behalf of the Nez Perce Tribe to the Rainbow Family of Living Light regarding Annual Gathering

The Nez Perce Tribe and its members have several concerns regarding the Rainbow Family of Living Light and their Annual Gathering to be held July 2020 or July 2021 on or near our reservation or within our usual and accustomed homeland.

Concerns specifically regarding Covid-19

- There is already a shortage of certain foods, medical supplies, and cleaning supplies here and throughout Idaho due to Covid-19.
- There is no guarantee that people coming in from other States or even from other areas of Idaho are not carriers of Covid-19. Many people carrying this virus are asymptomatic. Therefore, a gathering could become dangerous for the citizens of our reservation with a simple trip to the grocery store by one member of the Rainbow Family gathering.
- The lack of kitchen and medical staff on hand at the gathering and what this might mean for a possible outbreak of Covid-19 at the campsite and potential spread to residents that live on the reservation.
- Overall impact on local community healthcare facilities if there is an outbreak of Covid-19 at the Gathering.

Cultural concerns of a large gathering:

- Packer Meadow is an important cultural place with both historical and present-day relevance to the Nez Perce people. As a long-standing location for gathering camas, it is one of the 'usual and accustomed' places whose use is guaranteed by the provisions of the 1855 treaty.
- There are numerous culturally-significant areas and archaeological sites on or near the Nez-Perce Clearwater National Forests. A large gathering could harm or destroy these sensitive and irreplaceable places and objects.
- There is potential for impacts to soil, water quality, threatened and endangered plants and animals, and other resource impacts caused by large gatherings and/or poor sanitation conditions.
- Packer Meadow is a high elevation meadow with a short growing season. This is but one of the reasons it is particularly sensitive to disturbance.
- Packer Meadow has a unique plant community which has survived to the present day largely because of its comparatively remote location and because of limited disturbance.
- Packer Meadow is under consideration as a 'federally designated Special Botanical Area'.
- Because of the hydrology that creates the meadow, the water table is close to the surface and can be easily contaminated by both surface sources and by the proposed 'latrine' to be built on site. The Lolo Pass Visitor Center contends with crawl-space flooding, septic impacts, and subsidence every year because of the proximity of the water table to the surface.
- A 'latrine' would intercept the water table and will pose a threat to the water quality of Pack Creek, and to ESA listed Steelhead and other aquatic species living there.

- The high value of Pack Creek has made it a focal point for the Nez Perce Tribe's Watershed Restoration program with millions of dollars spent to replace barrier culverts and restore legacy road systems to reduce sediment and protect water quality.
- The meadow has unique soils, which can be easily compacted, particularly this early in the year while they are still wet. Even the limited number of 'user created' trails that are currently present in the meadow pose a threat to the vegetation there.
- Compacted meadow soils will have a profound effect on camas germination and productivity.
- The gathering will bring people from across the country, and potentially from around the world. The possibility of someone introducing invasive species is almost assured, and with such a large number of people using so much of the meadow complex, it would be nearly impossible to locate any new invaders until they were well established.
- Treatment of invasive species will be difficult. The Nez Perce Tribe has worked to control invasive species within the meadow and along the road for nearly fifteen years. We have been able to control most species without the use of herbicides, but establishment of new invaders within the meadow itself would force us to make hard decisions about chemical treatment in an important cultural resource.

**The Rainbow Family of Living Light did not reach out to the Nez Perce Tribe Executive Committee for permission to hold the annual gathering on or near our Tribe's territory.*