Lolo National Forest Supervisor’s Office
Attn: Amanda Milburn, Plan Revision Team Leader
24 fort Missoula Road
Missoula MT 599804

Ms. Milburn and Team Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Lolo National Forest Plan currently under development. I appreciate the dedication that you bring to this difficult task and the complexity of balancing myriad competing public interests. I wish you well in this endeavor.

I have spent my working and retirement years doing field work and recreating in the Northern Rockies, predominantly within the boundaries of the Lolo National Forest. During those 56 years, I have hiked, backpacked, hunted, fished, and canoed within every designated and recommended wilderness area of the forest as well as other lands within the Lolo N.F. My experiences in the Lolo have been enriched and informed by my training in Biology and my work as a population ecologist with research experience in game management and minimum viable population size, especially with respect to grizzly bears. I know the country and its wild inhabitants well.

My comments emphasize a few general considerations that I hope you will carry forward in all your deliberations. If your actions represent fair considerations of my requests, I will be grateful and satisfied.

PROTECT THE UNIQUE FAUNA OF THE NORTHERN ROCKIES AND MANAGE FOR ITS WILDLANDS REEQUIREMENTS.

Alone within the lower 48 states, the uniquely intact fauna of the Northern Rockies represents the greatest wildlife legacy that we can give to future generations. Creating a landscape where all these species can flourish must be the highest priority of our management agencies. According to the best available science, that landscape must include large areas that support viable subpopulations of lynx, grizzlies, wolves, wolverines, fishers, bull trout and other sensitive species as well as corridors sufficiently large and secure to allow genetic exchange between subpopulations.

Creation and maintenance of an appropriate landscape is a primary responsibility of the Lolo N.F. which contains portions of essential large habitat blocks [NCDE, Selway-Bitterroot,...] and numerous areas required for effective connections between those blocks. In order to meet these responsibilities, please give full consideration to:
- All recommendations of the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, the only broad-scale management plan sufficiently comprehensive to give these species a chance of long-term survival.
- Maintaining and expanding areas managed as Recommended Wilderness at every opportunity. These areas must certainly include Ward Eagle, Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork, and Cube Iron-Silcox roadless areas and the Lolo Creek and Quigg/Slide Rock areas.
- Consider the need to create secure wildlife corridors that connect with secure habitat within other National Forests as well as within the Lolo N.F.

MAXIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NON-MECHANIZED, LOW-IMPACT EXPERIENCES AND MINIMIZE HUMAN INFLUENCE.

The wildlife and the wildlands of the Lolo National Forest have given my life spiritual meaning, inspired the best of what I have done and provided solace in difficult times. Large landscapes far from heavy human influence have been essential components of those gifts. Please help my grandchildren keep those opportunities for inspiration and comfort. Wherever possible, expand Recommended Wilderness and roadless designations and exclude mechanized intrusions.

SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS THAT MODEL GOOD MANAGEMENT.

In this politically-polarized time, our public agencies need to support and participate in collaborative efforts that bring competing interests together. Outstanding examples within the Lolo N.F. include the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act and the Montana Beaver Project led by the National Wildlife Federation Regional Office in Missoula. Please consider formalizing relationships with these programs in the Forest Plan.

EXTEND ACTIVE MANAGEMENT TO THE BELOW-GROUND BIOME.

Recent research has revealed previously unknown and underappreciated relationships between the root systems of trees and below-ground fungal networks. Optimizing forest health demands consideration of the complex interactions that exchange information and nutrients among these organisms.

With thanks for your consideration,

Lee H. Metzgar