



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Missoula Field Office
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Missoula, Montana 59804
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4/01/2024

Carolyn Upton, Forest Supervisor
Lolo National Forest, U.S. Forest Service
24 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula MT 59804
406-329-3750

Dear Carolyn Upton:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments on the U.S. Forest Service Lolo National Forest Plan Revision's Proposed Action (Proposed Action). The Lolo National Forest Plan has many positive implications for our natural resources and our communities. We support the efforts of the Lolo National Forest in updating this National Forest Plan to meet the changes occurring on our shared landscapes.

Western Montana communities are passionate about our public lands. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages approximately 186,484 acres of these public lands playing a small but important role in the region's social, cultural, ecological, and economic well-being. Like the Lolo National Forest, the Missoula BLM has experienced the privilege of acquiring public lands in the Lower Blackfoot area over the past decades. The BLM has acquired approximately 43,370 acres with an anticipated 17,000 acres in the Lower Blackfoot area.

As stewards of these acquired lands, the BLM has a responsibility to ensure that our management is meeting our legal mandates, considers the needs of the local communities, and restores these healing landscapes. We are finalizing an ecosystem watershed assessment to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of these acquired public lands in the Lower Blackfoot River area. Upon completion of the assessment, the Missoula BLM will complete comprehensive travel management and restoration activities in these areas. These lands are adjacent to the Lolo National Forest Greater Missoula and Clearwater Blackfoot Geographic Areas.

Partnerships

Partnerships with the Lolo National Forest, Confederated Tribes of the Salish and Kootenai, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Montana DNRC, Missoula County and many private landowners and non-government organizations, especially the Nature Conservancy, have proved critical to provide efficient resource management of these lands and provide recreation opportunities to the public. Our ongoing partnerships enable us to work across boundaries to achieve benefits at a landscape level for watersheds, wildlife habitats, and other natural resources. Our ongoing partnerships also allow us to consider broader co-stewardship opportunities with Tribes, and enhanced recreation opportunities for the public.

We appreciate how the Proposed Action demonstrates a continued commitment to our partnership, specifically with GM-REC-GO 4 calling "to cooperate and coordinate on cross-boundary land

management planning and restoration efforts, especially for acquired lands in the Gold Creek drainage.” Thank you for highlighting our important partnership, which will also include the Twin Creek and Belmont drainages.

Restoration Efforts on Acquired Lands

Restoration of these acquired lands will require collaboration on forest management activities to achieve landscape scale change. The Proposed Action is aligned with the BLM’s intention to heal our acquired lands. Specifically, the proposed allocations of “Acquired Land Restoration Emphasis” align our shared restoration goals for our adjacent acquired lands. The Greater Missoula Geographic Area and Clearwater Upper Blackfoot Geographic Area emphasis on restoration aligns nicely with our anticipated land acquisitions in the Gold and Twin Creek drainages extending into acquired lands in the Belmont areas.

The BLM would suggest expanding the toolbox for active forest management for lands adjacent to the BLM’s recently acquired lands. The BLM would suggest that the acquired lands within the GMGA adjacent to the BLM be considered “Lands Suitable for Timber Production and Where Harvest Could Occur (Map GM-07)” so the BLM and USFS to partner on adjacent projects and allow opportunities to efficiently harvest if aligned with restoration efforts as appropriate.

Travel and Recreation Opportunities on Acquired Lands

Providing travel and recreation opportunities while balancing restoration and wildlife needs on these acquired lands is also important to the BLM. The public has been recreating on these acquired lands under previous ownerships from the recent Nature Conservancy through the previous Plum Creek, Champion Industrial and Anaconda Mining Company. We want to ensure our shared ability to provide cross-boundary recreation opportunities on these acquired lands, whether one-time special event permitting or establishing cross-boundary trails connecting communities.

Currently, we are going through a public process to assess travel management, which will tie to future recreation management analyses. The public shared through listening sessions how the Gold and Twin Creek areas have been and continue to be popular for back-country skiing and snowmobiling, especially in the Wisherd Ridge, Shoofly Meadows and Mineral Peak areas. We would suggest revisiting the winter recreation allocation in the Greater Missoula Geographic Area for the Proposed Action to ensure opportunities for these types of historic and current winter recreation are possible so the revised Forest Plan positions the USFS and BLM for effective partnership and consideration of cross-boundary recreation opportunities in the Gold Creek, Twin Creek and Belmont acquired lands for special events and trail systems for both winter and non-winter recreation and travel.

T&E Species Habitat Management on Acquired Lands

BLM shares the desire for continued recovery of the grizzly bear, Canada Lynx, wolverine and Whitebark pine and critical habitats. We appreciate the consistency with all agencies adhering to ecosystem direction, conservation strategies, and recovery plans from the USFWS. Moving towards the recovery of these species will require habitat management at the cross-boundary, landscape scale.

Minor data requests

Upon review of the Proposed Action, there were a few minor information requests that would help us ensure alignment on acquired lands. Would you please provide maps for the LAUs and Grizzly Bear

Management Units; a Wild and Scenic River “suitability” determination for Rock Creek eligible segment (if completed); and wildland fire management allocations on adjacent lands in the Gold, Twin and Belmont areas if available.

Closing Comments

Thank you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments on this Proposed Action. We appreciate our partnership with you and look forward to more cross-boundary within the Greater Missoula and Clearwater Blackfoot Management Units to achieve. We are available to connect with your interdisciplinary team to discuss any details in this letter. Thank you for continued dedication managing our public lands.

Sincerely,

Erin Carey
Missoula Field Manager, Montana / Dakotas
Bureau of Land Management

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