

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 7/9/2023 2:40:50 AM

First name: Kristi

Last name: DuBois

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Designate peatlands (including fens) as a unique and rare habitat.

Wetlands in general are a rare habitat in western Montana relative to other types of habitats, and peatlands are a rare type of wetland. The Lolo National Forest has quite a few peatlands, which is unusual for most national forests. However, peatlands still occupy a small proportion of the Lolo National Forest.

Justification for designating peatlands as a special unique and rare habitat include:

- 1.Their rarity on the landscape, both regionally and locally on the Lolo NF.
- 2.Peatlands support many rare and unique plant species, including many designated Species of Concern. Many of these species were evaluated for inclusion as SCC species. As of 2003, nine percent of Montana's rare flora were associated with peatlands (Jones 2003).
- 3.Peatlands support some rare animals, such as the Northern Bog Lemming. They provide important habitat for a variety of other animal species, such as wallows for elk and bears. Some provide breeding sites for amphibians.
- 4.Peatlands contribute significantly to local and regional biodiversity.
- 5.Peatlands have considerable scientific value as repositories for pollen and ash deposits that can be cored for research.
- 6.Peatlands act as carbon sinks.
- 7.Peatlands are often in headwater areas where they help maintain downstream water flows.

Peatlands should be carefully managed to protect this ecosystem and the rare plants and animals found there.

Management should include the following:

- 1.Exclude snowmobile use as it causes snow compaction that can negatively impact subnivian species such as northern bog lemmings. One example is Shoofly Meadows which is used by snowmobiles, even though it is a Research Natural Area and a northern bog lemming site. If that use is illegal, more signage and enforcement is needed. (see photo)
- 2.Exclude off-road vehicle use, including legal and illegal use.
- 3.Use wide buffers around peatlands and disturbances, including timber harvest, roads, trails, and campsites.
- 4.No livestock grazing, including stock used for backcountry access.
- 5.See Jones 2003 and Chadde et al. 1998 for additional information and management recommendations.

Chadde, Steve W., J.S Shelly, R.J. Bursik, R.K. Moseley, A.G. Evenden, M. Mantas, F. Rabe, and B. Heidel. 1998. Peatlands on National Forests of the Northern Rocky Mountains: ecology and conservation. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS-GTR-11. Ogden, UT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. 75 p. https://www.fs.usda.gov/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr011.pdf

Jones, W. M. 2003. Kootenai National Forest peatlands: description and effects of forest management. Report to the Kootenai National Forest, Montana. Montana Natural Heritage Program, Helena. 14 pp. + appendices. <https://archive.org/details/1FAE4B9F-E3BA-4595-90B7-B4009CEFE75C>