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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Amanda Milburn,

Thank you so much for taking the time to read comments such as this from the public concerning the land management plan for Lolo National Forest. Thank you for all you do to protect and preserve this incredible Forest! I really appreciate being able to add my two cents.

Lolo National Forest has become a very special place to me and my partner. We have created so many amazing memories exploring in these mountains and are keen to contribute to this new land management plan.

Foraging for mushrooms in Lolo National Forest has changed our lives. We have discovered a whole new unexplored world full of wonder and mystery which began a quest to learn as much as possible about mycology.

It began on a camping trip in June when a forest service personnel told us where to look for some burn morels and I took a picture of the spot on his map. We hiked 5 miles and just like he said, what looked like pinecones at first became morels with a squint. They were tucked under downed logs and hiding in beargrass in the blackened terrain. Soon we were covered in ash and overwhelmed with dopamine. Gleefully we returned to camp and cooked them with white wine and butter on cast iron over the campfire. It was our first forage. We found food in the forest and ate it! This was radical self reliance and food sovereignty!

It changed our lives. Suddenly, we had so many questions. We purchased our first field guide and joined the Western Montana Mycological society.

It happened again when we attended our first festival in the woods in Montana- Forest Creatures 2019, a magical musical experience with like minded eclectics. After setting up our camp we went for a walk and discovered Chanterelle mushrooms growing all around! We harvested some and donated them to the communal kitchen. Again, the joy of discovering, correctly identifying, and then sharing these ephemeral creatures with our friends was insurmountable.

Did y'all know that there are extremely rare and valuable mushrooms out there? And some that can be sold for ridiculous amounts of money?

Not just morels, I'm talking about Matsutake and Porcini and the most beautiful blue/black "Chanterelle" called *Polyozellus altrolaluzinus*. This one is being studied for use in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease!

And so many yet to be identified species! We need a fungal survey to know what is even growing in our backyard. Perhaps the tremendous value of fungi should be considered first when thinking about how we "manage" land. There are keystone species whose existence depends upon them.

We've returned to a special area in Lolo National Forest that has a wild variety of mushrooms. Purple ones with velvety caps, red ones with viscid caps, ones that ooze white milky latex that tastes like Red Hots! Spicy! And yes, you can taste any mushroom and as long as you don't swallow this can be a very useful tool in identifying the mushroom. There are shelf mushrooms here big enough to sit on, puffball mushrooms that eject billions of spores with just one poke of a stick, mushrooms that smell like watermelon, almonds, and anise. There are far more edible ones than poisonous ones, but our culture is mycophobic and we have much to learn. Will you help us learn more about this kingdom?

I'm afraid if mushrooms aren't even mentioned in the new plan, they won't be considered in the overall health of the forest. What we know now is that they are the reason the forest exists in the first place. Without the

mycorrhizal relationships in place between fungi and trees and plants we'd have no forest at all! Without fungi to decompose organic material we'd be drowning in downed trees that would never rot! Imagine!

Brown cuboidinal rot holds 5x its weight in water, holding onto that precious resource during drought. As we face a changing climate, partnering with fungi seems imperative.

We must beg you, on behalf of this forest, which has given us so very much, to consider fungi, and consider it first, when considering how to protect and preserve this cherished land. They are not just "other Forest product".

Sincerely,

Aly Barrett and Nathan McDaniel