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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Greetings. I have lived in the Missoula area for 45 years, and have hiked in, on, and around the area we think of as Lolo Peak. I was actively involved in the Forest Plan Revision process in 2005-6, and was very pleased with the proposals in that draft for extending wilderness to include a fair amount of territory around Lolo Peak. Also, I live in the upper Rattlesnake in Missoula, and have spent a considerable amount of time in the National Recreation Area and Wilderness there. The 2024 PROPOSED ACTION is a terrific step in the right direction. I have particular comments specific to Lolo Peak, and to the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness.

Lolo Peak:

I am very glad to see an extension of the Carlton Ridge Research Natural Area proposed. This has been proposed since the 2006 draft plan, and is absolutely merited, and (apparently) not contested at this point.

I do see a modest proposal for an addition to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, even though it appears to be identical to that proposed in the 1986 Forest Plan. However, that addition does not coincide with what is intuitively wilderness when one is on the ground up there. I strongly encourage you to make the proposed wilderness addition boundary identical to that in the 2006 draft revision of the Lolo Forest Plan. That draft shows a proposed wilderness addition which looks and feels very much like the immediately adjacent Selway Bitterroot. I am not a scientist; I can't offer scientific data to explain why that seems so true. I can say that from Lolo Peak itself, the landscape has very similar qualities in all directions. Vegetation varies from place to place, as does topography. However, the desirable wilderness characteristics in your PROPOSED ACTION (Appendix 8 Wilderness Evaluation) are indeed well met:

"apparent naturalness" ---yes, this extended area is very "apparently" natural, with essentially no human modification.

"opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation" -- yes, in spades. Areas above roughly 6600' elevation are premium in this regard, as much to the north as to the south with existing wilderness designation.

NOTE: there should be no extension of any roads for any purpose within one mile of this proposed wilderness.

"unique features" -- the viewscape from the Missoula urban area is truly unique, as you indicate in Map LO-06. And Lolo Peak itself is iconic.

"size"---since this proposal is not a "stand alone" wilderness, but is merely an extension of an existing wilderness, the acreage is not especially significant from a management perspective.

"suitability"--these lands are not really suitable for any economic purpose (such as timbering).

Overall, this request to use the 2006 Selway Bitterroot wilderness addition boundaries in the current Forest Plan revision is quite simply this: let's (please) designate these lands as what they actually are: wild.

The Rattlesnake: I am well aware of why the Rattlesnake Recreation Area was created, of the numerous issues in managing that area that have arisen over the past 40+ years, and especially of how important this semi-wild area is to Missoulians. I have read the comments made by Andy Kulla and agree entirely. This area was congressionally designated as a very special place...surrounded by formally designated wilderness. We must continue managing this RNA with at least the same sensitivity as has been done. I think the hand-thinning (etc) process over the past few years has been very successful. This represents the best...and the maximum...management intrusion into these forests. I strongly oppose any proposal for "timber harvesting" and other mechanized management tactics. This RNA is not a commercial resource. It is a public outdoor recreation resource.

Thanks you for considering these remarks. Sincerely, Phil Smith