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Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan Revision. We appreciate the time and effort the US Forest Service has put into the revision and hope our comment will provide critical information to help develop a more comprehensive and effective plan moving forward.

Of the species of concern named in the current draft, we believe it falls short of consideration for all species impacted known to occur in the plan area based on best available scientific data. Attached you will find a report produced by Mike Bader, an independent consultant with Ecological Research Services in Missoula, Montana, for Footloose Montana, titled, "Wildlife, Recreation and Trapping in Missoula County, Montana: Conflicts and Recommendations" that provides more comprehensive report on the species in the Lolo National Forest. The research provided in our report shows that there are more species than those currently listed who may not be able to persist over the long term in the Lolo National Forest and it is our recommendation that after reading the research in our report, that they will be included as species of concern in the Land Management Plan Revision and that the US Forest Service will include banning trapping in the Lolo National Forest to ensure persistence of vulnerable species and maintain safe recreational lands for all. The plan should identify steps to mitigate the known risks to all species impacted by human caused mortality, specifically trapping, to ensure the persistence of all species vulnerable to trapping in the area.

Based on the attached research, it is our strong recommendation that the US Forest Service add the following as species of concern and adopt the following recommendations into the Lolo Forest Land Management Plan Revision:

#### Grizzly Bear, *Ursus arctos*

Though the Grizzly Bear is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, their status as an endangered species should be stated in the plan because of the passage of Senate Bill 295 which allows ranchers to kill grizzly bears they fear and/or they think pose a threat to their livestock, allowing ranchers to kill Grizzly Bears at will due to its lack of definition. This becomes more important due to the fact the Lolo National Forest is one of the few areas in Montana outside the NCDE to have suitable habitat for Grizzly Bears and is a major area of connectivity for them. Grizzly bears are also susceptible to being maimed or killed due to bycatch or the catching of non-targeted species which is common and mostly unreported due to little to no oversight or regulation in the state of Montana. Montana Fish, Wildlife does not require checking traps, so traplines are only checked when the trapper wants often leaving animals to suffer, to suffer for many days before they incur serious injuries or die. The use of bait has increased the incidence of Grizzly Bears caught in traps often leaving them with serious injuries and sometimes leading to their death. The Montana Fish, Wildlife does not require checking traps, so traplines are only checked when the trapper wants, often leaving animals to suffer for many days before they die.

#### Canada Lynx, *Lynx canadensis*

Though the Canada Lynx is also listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, their status as an endangered species should be stated in the plan because the Lolo National Forest is one of the few areas in Montana outside the NCDE to have suitable habitat for Lynx, also. Though there is no season for Lynx due to their protected status under the ESA, they are highly susceptible to being killed due to bycatch or the catching of non-targeted species like Grizzly Bears.

#### Gray Wolf - *Canis lupus*

Based on research not included in the current draft plan, we respectfully disagree with the current language regarding the Gray Wolf. The Montana Wolf Management Plan was recently updated, but because the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission chose to remove it from the Administrative Rules of the State of Montana, it

opens the door to management, or the lack thereof, of Gray Wolves outside of the Administrative Rules and also limits the public's ability to hold the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Division accountable regarding their management of the Gray Wolf. We also respectfully disagree that the population of the Gray Wolf in Montana is only declining slightly after the initiation of hunting and trapping in 2011 and the claim their population has stabilized. New research conducted by Bob Crabtree, founder and chief scientist of the Yellowstone Ecological Research Center, in 2023 found that the iPOM cannot account for the movement of wolves and overestimates their territory. The iPOM also relies on hunter-collected data making the data the iPOM anecdotal, not scientific. Without accurate data the iPOM does not accurately determine the number of wolves or the number of breeding pairs, nor does it factor human causes of mortality and climate-based causes of mortality of wolves making it arbitrary and not based on best available science. We also respectfully disagree that the Gray Wolf faces no unique threats in the area. The current Governor of Montana, his administration, the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and Division have taken a draconian approach to wolf management that allows year-round trapping, trapping on private lands, spotlight hunting at night, the use of bait, snares, and removing setbacks in two counties. Until current wolf management policies implemented by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission are revoked and the use of the iPOM is replaced with a method based on best available scientific information, the Gray Wolf must be included as a species of concern. The decline of the Gray Wolf population in Montana due to the current state policy is supported by declining reported wolf kill counts collected by the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Division which does not include all wolves killed in Montana due to failure to report them and the lack of oversight and enforcement from the division.

Wolverine - *Gulo gulo*

See above comments regarding the Grizzly Bear and Canada Lynx.

Porcupine - *Erethizon dorsatum*

We respectfully disagree with the current language that does not include the Porcupine as a species of concern. Trapping for non-game wildlife species like the Porcupine does not require a license in Montana and capture of non-game species doesn't have to be reported. According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program porcupine have suffered "catastrophic declines in conifer forests of western Montana." We strongly recommend that the Porcupine be included as a species of concern in the Lolo Forest Land Management Plan Revision.

Marten - *Martes americana*

Previously Petitioned for ESA Listing

Trapping has contributed significantly to the near eradication of the marten in central Montana mountain ranges which lie just east of the Lolo National Forest. Though the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Division has been working to repopulate marten in this area, the efforts have been funded by the Montana Trappers Association, Wildlife Restoration, Furbearers Unlimited, Fur Takers of America, and Safari Club International (SCI) chapters of Great Falls and Southwest making it clear that continued trapping of marten is the motivation. We encourage the US Forest Service to include marten as a species of interest because unlimited recreational trapping of pine martens is permitted on state managed land surrounding the area. We also think it is necessary to include marten as a species of interest because the trapping season for marten extends beyond Grizzly Bear denning season and Grizzly Bears are often caught in traps set for marten, seriously injuring them and sometimes leading to their death.

Black Bear - *Ursus americanus*

In 2021 the Montana Legislature passed House Bill 468 legalizing hound hunting, making Montana one of a dozen states allowing the practice and on February 16th, 2024, The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission extended the hunting season to June 15th, unless 37 percent of the kill is sow bears, which would stop the season on May 31 in Regions 1-4 with no quota - despite evidence indicating an increase in lactating sow and cub mortality. Wildlife with newborns are at risk when hounds tear up the forest from April 15 through June 15, terrorizing and attacking any wild animals they come upon. Spring bear hunts kill an unknown number of cubs. In the spring it is impossible to know from a distance if a bear is a female and has cubs. The eventuality

of a female bear with cubs being killed is high. Because it is illegal to kill bears with cubs, it stands to reason that most hunters do not report cubs. Black bear cubs are dependent on their mothers for at least 1.5 years after birth. If reported, cubs orphaned and left to starve to death, or killed, are not recorded. It's well past time for all wildlife killed in Montana to be recorded. Otherwise, there is no baseline knowledge to inform management, especially needed now with accelerating habitat loss from multiple factors and an overall decline in the populations of many species. The number of bears and cubs killed by poachers is not considered.

#### Beaver - *Castor canadensis*

The beaver population is not 'rebounding'. Development and human encroachment into their habitat has led to over trapping and elimination of beaver and their dams. According to a 2022 study by Scarmado et.al there is widespread decline in North American beaver populations with as much as an estimated 80% to 98% loss of historical populations. There are an estimated 9-12 million beaver today whereas pre-European beaver populations in North America are estimated to have been around 60 to 400 million. The 2023 Montana Field Guide for beaver documents fewer than 10,000 observations statewide. Beaver are a keystone species who modify wetlands by building dams. As a keystone species their work ensures biodiversity and ecological systems. Their status as a species of concern is critical as they could play an outsized role in the development of climate change solutions. They reconnect waterways, improve water quality and quantity, ensure biodiversity and sensitive species conservation, increase fire resiliency and drought resistance, and bolster carbon sequestration. It is our strong recommendation that beaver be listed as a species of concern.

#### Ban Trapping

In addition to including the above as species of interest, we strongly encourage the US Forest Service to ban trapping in the Lolo National Forest, for all of the reasons stated above, but also because of the increased use of the area for recreational purposes. There are numerous campsites and fishing access sites throughout the area and with a growing population with strong interest in outdoor activity and recreation, there is a growing likelihood of an increase in pets getting injured, sometimes killed by traps. With increased use, the likelihood of children getting caught in a trap also increases. Trappers are a very small percentage of Montana's population, but they have been given disproportionate representation and rights when it comes to public land management policy. This is not only unfair to non-consumptive users who compose the majority of public land users, it also jeopardizes vulnerable species, putting ecosystems at risk and further jeopardizing our climate. With the revision we have an opportunity to protect vulnerable species, ecosystems and give proportional consideration to non-consumptive users of public lands. Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.