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Comments: [External Email]lolo forest plan wild and scenic rivers public comment

Dear Lolo Planning Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Lolo Forest Plan Proposed Action. I attempted to submit my comment via the online portal but the website must've had a bug.

As of late, I have been delighted with the Lolo's efforts around my hometown of Missoula. I was fortunate to work on a USFS land survey crew that marked the boundaries for fire and timber harvesting projects in my local area. Seeing the thinned stands around the Pattee Canyon ski trails makes me so pleased. I hope that the Forest Service can continue prescribed burning and thinning all throughout the west, in the interest of wildlife, the timber industry, and recreators.

One thing that I hope the Lolo does is extend river protections to some of our local rivers. I regularly paddle the North Fork of the Blackfoot and think that it is easily as pretty as any river that comes out of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The quality of whitewater also makes it an outstanding paddling destination for not just Missoula paddlers, but also for paddlers across the country.

We have already seen the pandemic-driven growth of river recreation on streams in our national forests. River user groups will likely continue to grow as more people visit and move to Montana for outdoor pursuits. This growth helps out small businesses and the greater economy in Montana, from dining and lodging to supporting local outfitters. As our state's industry transitions more towards tourism as the primary breadwinner, protection of our beautiful areas will be vital for our economy. Furthermore, the protection of our natural places from a conservationist (rather than a preservationist) standpoint will ensure the futures of both the tourism and resource extraction industries. The Wild and Scenic designation allows for this balance to exist, letting timber companies log around river corridors so long as it's done responsibly.

I support protecting the following 21 rivers and streams as Wild and Scenic eligible. These streams have outstanding recreation, fish, and wildlife values and include:

- [bull] Rattlesnake Creek
- [bull] Rock Creek
- [bull] Lolo Creek, South Fork Lolo Creek
- [bull] Clark Fork River (St. Regis to Quinns)
- [bull] Blackfoot River, North Fork Blackfoot River
- [bull] Clearwater River, Colt Creek
- [bull] Morrell Creek
- [bull] Monture Creek, Middle Fork Monture Creek
- [bull] Lodgepole Creek
- [bull] North Fork Fish Creek, West Fork Fish Creek, Straight Creek, Cache Creek
- [bull] Deer Creek, Cromie Creek, Up Up Creek
- [bull] West Fork Thompson River

In addition to the 21 rivers and streams listed above, Wild and Scenic eligible protections are also warranted for the Thompson River, Fish Creek, South Fork Fish Creek, and the St. Regis River. The Forest Service dismisses these streams as neither unique nor important within western Montana. I disagree. These rivers possess outstandingly remarkable values that are unique within the region of comparison and include:

- [bull] Thompson River [ndash] whitewater boating, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity

between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in the West Fork Thompson River

- [bull] Fish Creek - whitewater boating, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters within the Great Burn
- [bull] South Fork Fish Creek - exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in Cache Creek
- [bull] St. Regis River [ndash] exemplary angling, critical spawning grounds, and cold water climate refuge habitat

Westslope cutthroat trout should be added to the Species of Conservation Concern list due to lack of distribution of high genetic integrity and the potential for increased distribution resulting from restoration. Finally, the Forest Service needs to better operationalize climate refuge within its Conservation Watershed Network by protecting riverside shade cover, cold water seeps and springs, areas of persistent snowpack, microclimates, genetically pure fish populations, and riverine connectivity.

Please consider these improvements within the Proposed Action to better protect western Montana rivers. And thank you for taking the time to hear me out. Have a wonderful spring!