September 7, 2019

CRMP Scoping Comments

We are Three Forks of the Flathead River users. Mark was raised recreating on the river, we have raised our family on the river, and now our sons continue the tradition. We have been recreating on the Flathead River for the past 30 years, and have floated the length of all three forks multiple times. We have spent literally hundreds of days enjoying the Wild and Scenic Flathead River, and we hope to continue to do so.

We do NOT want permitting required on the Three Forks of the Flathead River. This is an unnecessary government regulation of a public resource. We would like to see the Forest Service motto “It’s All Yours” in practice. We do not want to see an exclusionary process in use on a river that we call home.

The Wild and Scenic River Act was established to preserve designated areas for recreation and enjoyment of the public. It was NOT established for the benefit of commercial enterprises (outfitter and guide businesses), and it was NOT established to create exclusive areas for neighboring landowners or entities.

The proposed “threshold” on the Upper North Fork of 3 “encounters” per day is unrealistic and unreasonable. Twenty years ago we encountered more than 3 parties per day on the South Fork in the center of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. If a threshold is established, it should be 12 to 15 parties encountered, NOT including those at access points (put-in and take-out). On the busiest summer days it has been our experience that once you are away from the put-in, parties disperse and you are rarely within sight of one another as you float.

Managing the Upper North Fork “as wilderness”, as stated in one article, is inappropriate. This area is NOT wilderness. The road and many homes, on both sides of the river, are visible from the river. Discussion of controlling traffic on the North Fork Road in the River Management plan is also inappropriate. The road is a public roadway, paid for with tax dollars and available to all of us at any time. Nearby landowners cannot expect to control use of it. GNP may control the Inside Road as they see fit, but should not expect to control public land or waterways that are visible from the Park.

If reduction in the use of the Upper North Fork is found necessary, outfitted “for profit” use should be the first eliminated.

If problems in the fishery pressure need to be addressed, FWP should do so with restrictions or regulations limiting fishing. It does not need to be addressed by limiting non-fishing river users.

Water Quality was an element of the proposed plan, and fecal matter testing was one threshold. Everyone using the Upper North Fork knows that toilet facilities should be installed at Coal Creek, and probably at Sondreson. If preserving water quality is indeed a priority, this problem should be solved, not just talked about.

In addition, any discussion of preserving the outstanding values of the River Corridor must include a noxious weeds plan, a problem which grows unchecked each year. If funds spent on the CRMP study had been used to address the access, toilet and weeds issues many of these problems would now be solved.

We attended the public meetings held on this issue. We heard the discussion and read the information and data. We did not hear compelling evidence supporting the need for use restrictions. We know from experience that only a few days each year approach the usage levels established in 1980, and that was supported in the study data.

Please keep this public land resource available to the public. We do NOT want permits to be required on the North, South or Middle Forks of the Flathead River.

Mark and Salena Beckwith

Columbia Falls, MT