

Picture this: It's a hot July day and your spouse calls you around noon and suggests floating the river that night. You think yes! That's a great idea and start packing the cooler for a yummy dinner on the river. You get the boat loaded and then meet your spouse at a river access (or take out) and pick him up. Then you drive to the put in and launch your raft around 4pm. This is a regular occurrence for our family. We live on the North Fork Road and are here by choice, because of the river access and the wildness of the area. I would be absolutely devastated if this was not our reality anymore.

As someone who has floated all but the Wild sections of the South Fork (That's 167.7 miles of river!) I have a vested interest in the CRMP currently being drafted by the Forest Service. I went to the meeting at FVCC and am now submitting a comment.

I am constantly in awe of the rivers, their clean clear water, their natural beauty, the way they are always shifting and changing. Over the past 30 years I have watched sandbars shift and rapids change. I have watched as more and more people are taking advantage of this amazing recreational resource. And I have also watched the commercial raft companies explode with business.

One thing that hasn't really changed much are the river access and launch sites along the scenic and recreational portions to accommodate the increased traffic. The North Fork Road (Hwy 486) is still unpaved and kicks up so much dust that I actually find myself complaining about the steady dust cloud that floats above the road and sometimes the river. The Moccasin access parking lot is always full in July and August. One of my favorite floats is from Great Northern Flats to Glacier Rim on the North Fork. The Flats river access actually got worse as far as access goes as there are big rocks that you have to carry your boat beyond. When we were kids we would bring a log and just roll our boat down but now we have to navigate around rocks. I think if you began this CRMP by improving access points, maybe add a launch at the Camas Bridge on the North Fork, increase parking along the recreational section of the Middle Fork, the boats on the river will space out and everyone will still have a quality experience, despite the increased numbers. It would also be nice to get permission from BN to use the "kayak put in" along the middle fork for those who don't have as much time and still want to do the rapids stretch.

I realize that it is a requirement to put together a Comprehensive River Management Plan but I'd also like to add that we need not be hasty with these decisions. The CRMP will have a major impact on the future of river use and access. Page 13: "01 To protect the outstandingly remarkable values, impacts from recreational use should be in the acceptable range per the direction in the Flathead Wild and Scenic River Recreation Management Direction." What is the "acceptable range"? How can you determine an "acceptable range"? These are just a few of my questions as I read through the CRMP.

One comment that I heard at the meeting was to ask people to purchase a yearly permit to float the 3 forks of the river and use that money to fix and maintain the boat launches. A requirement of this permit could be reading through some river rules and guidelines such as being ready when you pull up to launch your boat, no glass on the river, etc. Just giving folks more information so we can continue to keep our rivers pristine.

I would like to stay involved so please add my name to any out going informational emails on this topic.

Thank you for your time,

Michele Colliander

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