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Comments: I attended both public meetings in August and have read several of the documents available here. I am a native of Columbia Falls and enjoy all three forks of the Flathead River.

As the project moves forward, I can both understand the need for regulation and feel frustration about there being that need at all.

As the project moves forward, I don't know what the right answer is but would urge those who have a strong voice in these matters to consider the following:

Most importantly - There is very little free/low barrier recreation in the Flathead Valley. Floating/playing on the river remains one of the lowest barrier activities. Most people can walk/drive a short distance to access a river site. For families/individuals without much extra income, being able to throw a tube on for the day and float down the river is a great way to spend an afternoon that doesn't cost much. Even free permits could present a barrier if they are only available in just a few locations.

Other things first - I would love to see some real data, from either volunteers or anyone who has the manpower, gathered by sitting at the put-ins/take-outs and asking people where they are from as well as people/boat/car counts. I would happily volunteer to help get it!

Free permitting - I am all for recreation education for the safety and enjoyment of all. Once again, I would just urge that if that is the action, permits be readily available at many different locations (similar to getting a fishing license). This would keep it from being a barrier to people that have very little money to spend getting around to extra places to acquire the necessary permits.

Fee for float - I understand that this isn't what you're necessarily headed to first, but just as others have voiced objection, I would also. As others have also said in their comments, I control my own river experience by choosing what stretch of the river I visit and when. Paid permitting starts to take that out of control when I may have to plan to get a permit for a specific section of river for a specific time.

I can comfortably say that I am not at all familiar with fish populations/water quality for the three forks and can't begin to comment on what the concerns may be there.

Thank you for the continued work on this issue.