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Comments: Lolo National Forest Plan Revision

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Lolo National Forest Supervisor's Office

Attn: Amanda Milburn - Lolo Plan Revision

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Missoula, MT 59804

SM.FS.LFNRevision@usda.gov

Dear Ms. Milburn;

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft WSR and Wilderness inventories for the Lolo National Forest Plan.

I am a Montana native and have lived in our great State of Montana for all my 67 years. I enjoy hunting, fishing, hiking and sightseeing in our national forests as well as our designated wilderness. We have wonderful opportunities to experience all this right out our back door. I am a very good steward of our public land and am a very conscientious user of what is available to us, always being sensitive to the environment and not causing harm in any way while enjoying our forests or wilderness.

I also enjoy over the snow recreation typically in challenging backcountry. This tests my riding ability, but more so allows me to experience backcountry for it's natural beauty and wonder. I, like other public land users enjoy the serenity and solitude. These are areas that I wouldn't normally see due to distance and difficulty of terrain.

I stand firmly against any more wilderness added to the Lolo National Forest. I understand Lolo National Forest managers are bound by the Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70 Section 71.2, and must inventory potential wilderness area to consider. That being said, we have enough wilderness in the Lolo National Forest and in the United States. Current wilderness is used by a very small percentage of the population of the United States. Evaluating 85 areas with 1,528,904 acres to be included in the Wilderness Inventory is unrealistic. The U.S. Forest Service must achieve a mandate of managing national forests for the greatest benefit for the greatest number of users. There is already substantial wilderness in this forest, and allowing for roads, recreation access, timber harvest and others uses is crucial to landscape health and to maximize public benefit. Within the Lolo NF there is already 4 designated wilderness areas and recommended wilderness areas (RWA's). What is now being considered includes expanding the current wilderness and RWA's such as the Great Burn RWA which would close off access for snowmobiling from Lolo Pass. This proposal would expand the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness area, Sliderock Wilderness and the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Creating more wilderness restricts all forms of use. Wilderness is used to eliminate all roads and access to entire areas of land unless by foot travel. More and more of our country will be off-limits to many American's through these designations.

**WE DON'T NEED MORE WILDERNESS.**

A historic riding area for other snowmobilers and myself is the Great Burn which was recommended as wilderness and a travel management plan that forest officials implemented in 2012 closed the area to winter motorized use, putting an end to legal use of motorized over-snow travel. Since 2012 myself and many other motorized over-snow recreationalists have been denied this wonderful winter Great Burn experience and that is wrong, especially since the area is not even designated as wilderness. Why then, do we need more wilderness

that limits use by the over the snow recreation user group? More wilderness will greatly reduce backcountry riding opportunities which I am not in favor of. There is bountiful wilderness area available to those who want to enjoy wilderness within the current wilderness system.

There are those who believe more wilderness is needed to protect wildlife and the environment.

Fact: Over the snow recreation does not disturb wildlife. There is no wildlife in the backcountry that is used by over the snow recreation. During the winter months wildlife is at lower elevations where sustenance is more available. In 40 plus years of riding in terrain at 6,000 to 8,500 elevation it is rare to see any wildlife other than a raven, a snowshoe hare or squirrel. It is even rarer to cut a track of any big game. I have seen wolf tracks on occasion. Over the snow recreation does not disturb wildlife and alter their quality of life. Wildlife will ignore vehicles and people in all seasons in Yellowstone Park or Glacier Park. Wildlife will rarely lift their head from grazing while vehicles travel just a few feet away. I know of no scientific studies offered as proof that over the snow recreation interferes with wildlife.

Fact: Over the snow recreation does not damage the environment. Any evidence of motorized vehicles over the snow disappears when the snow melts. On a grander scale, The United States and Montana are but a spot on the map in comparison to the scale of the earth. The proposed wilderness acres within or joining the Lolo National Forest are very insignificant on an earthly scale as well. Creating more wilderness and eliminating motorized use is not going to help the environment or slow down climate change. Wilderness advocates that want to help the environment or slow down climate change need to start with the countries that have no regard for the environment and pollute waterways, oceans, eliminate rain forests and carelessly mine precious metals. The environment focus needs to be at a much higher level, not on the local level where creating more wilderness and eliminating over the snow recreation will do nothing to help the global environment. I know of no scientific studies offered as proof that over the snow recreation interferes with our environment.

I know there is a contingent that believes that more wilderness is needed for connectivity for wildlife diversity.

Fact: Grizzly bears and wolves are migrating and expanding their territory without more wilderness for connectivity. Grizzly bears have moved out of their normal home range and have been found as far east as the Snowy Mountains near Lewistown, MT in the last couple of years. Federally protected bald eagles, golden eagles and trumpeter swans do not need more wilderness for connectivity. On March 5, 2022 a wolverine was captured on video by a tourist in Yellowstone National Park. Since wolverines are only found in snow fields at high altitude in Canada and Glacier Park, how did the wolverine and other wolverines in Yellowstone Park that have been counted in studies locate themselves in Yellowstone Park without connectivity?

I know there is a contingent that believes that over the snow recreation conflicts with other users.

Fact: In the deep backcountry that I ride in as well as my fellow recreationalists there are not other users. In forty years of riding I have not seen one cross country skier or snowshoer off the groomed trail or immediate vicinity of a groomed trail. (Trails groomed by snowmobilers by the way) The winter conditions are too extreme and challenging for any other use but over the snow vehicles.

Finally, I ask that if nothing else, the Great Burn be re-opened to snowmobiling in this Forest Plan.

My input comes from years of experience of over the snow recreation and is based on eyewitness and facts. My counterparts, and how motorized over the snow recreation is damaging to wildlife, the environment and other users is based on perception.