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Organization:

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Comments: 5/21/2023

Comment on Lolo National Forest Plan Revision - Designated Wilderness Areas

Lolo National Forest Supervisor's Office

Attn: Amanda Milburn - Lolo Plan Revision

24 Fort Missoula Rd

Missoula, MT 59804

SM.FS.LFNRevision@usda.gov

Dear Ms. Milburn;

My primary interest in making public comment is to preserve as much of the remaining American Wilderness, as possible to fulfill our federal goals of preserving at least 30% of our Wilderness by 2030. It is critical to provide this preservation now before it becomes impossible, as it may be, in the very near future. I think The National Forest Service has the greatest ability to achieve this goal above all other federal agencies combined. It has never been more crucial to our flora, fauna, and all citizens of the United States, than to preserve these forests and the continuity and the connectivity they provide for all. In Montana, Lolo National Forest connects the Bitterroot National Forest in the South, to the Kaniksu and Flathead National forests in the North. For once, the ecosystem must be valued above commercial interests, which always leads to a landscape left in poorer conditions following exploitation. All proposed Wilderness areas should be designated as such by Congress and be expanded to encompass the most acreage possible, for the wellbeing of all concerned.

This Wilderness designation will provide limited access and therefore limited disturbance. It will provide for connectivity of wilderness areas to protect against genetic isolation. They will protect as much species diversity as there is there now, and hopefully into the future. The forests will remain in place and harbor the carbon they contain in their biomass. Finally, they will shield and cool forest understory, preventing such degradation as soil erosion and avalanche risk. They also shade, cleanse, and slow annual precipitation runoff to protect our vital water sources. They do all these things and so much more, too numerable to list here.

As residents of the Ninemile Valley, my family and I, wildlife watch, forage, Horseback ride and hike frequently throughout Lolo National Forest. We occasionally hunt and fish, but mostly just revel in the fact that we are surrounded by this incredible national treasure and the beauty of the forest scenery, flora, and fauna that we see in our daily lives. We share our lives with not only our pets and livestock, but a fantastic array of wildlife. There is not one of my wild neighbors I could bare to see vanish forever off this landscape. Even the wolves, lions and bears are welcome visitors to my land. As keystone species they provide extremely crucial services to our wilderness. This forest and all its components are a national treasure, which needs to be preserved for all future generations to enjoy.

The areas that I believe need to be preserved as soon as possible, are as follows:

Selway Bitterroot Wilderness Area: SB-W-01 the designated 9,831.3 acres and the SB-PW-05 proposed 3,702.5 acres.

Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex: BMWC-W-02 The designated 75,573.6 acres and the additional BMWC-PW-06 proposed 70,994.5 and BMWC-01 Bear Marshall 78,512.5 acres.

Welcome Creek Wilderness: WC-W-03 designated 28,214.2 acres and WC-01(9,788.6), -02(654.2), and 03(49,226.0 acres).

Rattlesnake Wilderness: RS-W-04 designated 34,237.0 acres and RS-03 32,504.3 acres.

Great Burn Wilderness is very crucial for connectivity: GB-PW-08 proposed 90,391.3 acres, as is GB-INT-01 (96.0 acres), GB-01(69.6 acres) and GB-04(11,327.7 acres).
Sliderock Wilderness: SL-PW-01 proposed 58,826.3 acres.

Below are also listed some areas that are only categorized as "Roadless Areas" but should be fully considered for their current use as wildlife corridors. This Five Valleys area has been documented by numerous wildlife biologists as crucial wildlife travel routes. I also feel that wilderness areas should be widely distributed throughout the landscape for maximum functionality and success:

#22 Patricks Knob Cutoff at 23,397 acres.

#23 South Siegal at 16,325 acres.

#24 Reservation Divide/ North Siegal at 46,774.5 acres.

These wilderness areas would best be preserved by limited or no use of mechanize/motorized vehicles to avoid both erosion and noise pollution (this has been a huge concern of ours because the noise from side-by-sides and motorcycles echoes up and down the valley day and night more recently in the past two seasons). Removing all old roads or temporary roads. Then also, by not building any new roads in these areas. Not developing new trails into wildlife/plant/riparian habitat areas. If forest management practices are used for forest ecosystem enhancement, would it be possible to thin out smaller tracts of land to limit disturbance? Prescribed burns would continue to be critical to reduce forest fuels and increase over all habitat for diverse plant and (all, not just game species) animal communities. Thank You, Cassandra