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Comments: I have concerns regarding the Lolo National Forest Plan Revision 2023 - specifically as it relates to Lower Rock Creek, and its associated waterways.

Most are of a general nature and weigh towards State's rights, private landowner rights, and public access to public lands. Also, consideration of the freedom of the local residents in their way of life, and their recreation and enjoyment in the Lower Rock Creek area - while still giving the necessary weight to the fact that it is the health of Rock Creek and the area itself that allows for their very way of life and enjoyment here to exist.

I will start with my observation that there has been a nationwide push in the last 20 or 30 years in particular, at the federal level, to increase restrictions and regulatory burdens on public lands - especially in the western United States. From the mid-1990's with the Clinton Administration's "Roadless Rule", continuing along with ever expanding "Wilderness" designations, ever more land is being placed under ever more strict federal controls. While this is done in the name of "Protecting it FOR the Public and Future Generations", in reality it frequently ends up protecting it FROM the public. Regulations that effectively deny or sharply restrict access or truly reasonable uses of the land do "save it for our children" - so they can't use it either. Yes, I do believe in CONSERVATION - defined as "wise USE". Frequently though (especially in the last decade or so), federal conservation actions seem to have made a hard turn heavily into the PRESERVATION end of things. Preservation defined as being highly restricted, to allow almost no real USE at all. I agree there are areas that warrant preservation, and areas that are sensitive and should not have roads built into them, but "preservation" seems to have somewhat replaced the "conservation" definition at times.

Also, I have seen the results of studies that have been done demonstrating the NEGATIVE ECONOMIC EFFECTS that Wilderness designation in particular can have on local communities. Frequently these communities are small, with small voices. There are excellent, if few, businesses on the lower creek. While I don't claim to have a full understanding of all the ramifications whether good or bad, that the designations would bring, I certainly would not welcome ANY economic harm done to these businesses. Two of the most well established and longest running businesses on the lower creek have to struggle with thin margins as it is. I'm sure the other businesses are in a similar situation.

I was concerned that the designation, if adopted, would create added restrictions, costs, and regulations (beyond the present covenants and restrictions) - to the future development (one small house and garage/shop) of my <5 acre property which is presently undeveloped but I plan to build on in just a few years. Having looked into the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in some detail, my concerns about this are largely allayed. Still, I feel a bit on guard to the possibility of unintended consequences of designation down the road.

I am concerned about keeping and maintaining continued and unrestricted on-foot and wading style fishing access to the creek(s) - continuing to exist as it is now. I know the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act DOES allow this to be changed. I am concerned about how this might negatively affect the way I have enjoyed angling for trout in Rock Creek for the last 30 years. I am also concerned about how possible access restrictions might negatively affect the businesses on the Creek.

I am concerned that appropriate (as it's PRESENTLY understood) personal firewood permitting and harvesting in the Rock Creek drainage area still be allowed - in the same way and in the same areas as it is now. I know the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act DOES allow this to be affected. There are many residents on Rock Creek that cannot afford the cost of propane and electricity alone to heat their homes during the cold months - and I will be counted among them someday. Wood heating is vital, and restrictions on firewood gathering would be more than a trifling

inconvenience.

Like many landowners/residents of Rock Creek, I come from elsewhere, with plans to live there someday soon. I first visited it in 1993. There most definitely is something rare and very special about the whole place - this is undeniable. Also, the people there are some good people - most I have met there over the years are. Among all the places in the country that have changed so much, Rock Creek has changed the least, and that's a good thing. I'll start by acknowledging that I myself will be a "newer" resident from out-of-state, when I am finally able to move here. When I do move to Rock Creek, I will be coming to Montana to live as Montanans do, NOT to bring where I came from with me (and I certainly don't have the means to try that even if I wanted to). This is not the case for everyone though. I do know that the Rock Creek area most likely has a few people that are non-natives from elsewhere that might perhaps be a bit 'overzealous'. What I mean by this is a problem that has happened in a lot of western and mid-western states in the last few years. People from other states move in or buy property in an area, and once they do, they set about trying to "save" it. They may develop it to their liking, but then look for ways to prevent others from doing the same. Or, they may think they know better than the locals who have lived there, sometimes for generations - how best to be stewards of the land and protect its beauty and/or resources. They may or may not come from "elite" areas of this country or be financially better off than the native locals, and may be bored or feel the need to "make the world a better place" as they see it. I am concerned that there may possibly be efforts among some (newer?) residents in Rock Creek to enlist the USFS, through its "Wild and Scenic Rivers" or "Wilderness" designations along Rock Creek, to effect these "protections". While I won't claim to know for sure that this is happening, I have seen it happen elsewhere and it does fit a pattern. I acknowledge also that people may have good intentions and maybe even sincere motives believing they're doing the "right thing". More often though, human nature being what it is, it is frequently something else. I have personally dealt with people/organizations attempting to enlist government agencies to get things to go their way. I have personally been involved in my home state trying to protect reasonable public access to recreational lands, where anti-access types try to use federal agencies and "reasonable regulation" to restrict or outright lock the public out of. Besides that, I am simply uncomfortable with any individuals or groups leveraging the considerable power of the Federal Government to force their ideas of how things should go, on other people. Please understand, I am not saying that in this instance I think the USFS, or its Lolo National Forest Office has any other intent except fulfilling its role in reviewing this resource for, and possibly including it in its inventory of Wild and Scenic River designated waterways.

I have talked to countless Montanans over the course of three decades - listening intently to what they say to me since I want to make this my home and I need to understand what the expectations will be. I discovered that people here are friendly, but appreciate respect and honesty. I also see that they don't much care to have outsiders come in and tell them how they should live, or worse yet try to force them to adopt whatever thinking and ways come from wherever the outsider or transplant came from. Makes sense. You wouldn't allow a guest in your house to dictate how you do things in your own house.

I believe most residents of the area, if they knew all the details of such designations and especially all the encumbrances that inevitably come with Federal control, would not be in favor of such designations. While I appreciate the idea of added protections for Rock Creek, there are organizations, as well as individuals already that are interested and actively engaged in maintaining the health of Rock Creek and the area around it. Also, I personally believe that more Federal Controls on more of the land in the West is not the best way to "protect" those lands. I think most of the local citizenry are well aware of the value, and beauty of this area. It's why they stay here and cherish it. It's why it's been my dream ever since I first visited 30 years ago. I believe that most actual residents, especially the long-term and native-to-Rock-Creek ones, do not want more development beyond what the parcels that presently exist allow. My property, like many on Rock Creek, has covenants and restrictions/conservation easements on it that I had to agree to when I bought it. On one hand I didn't like the idea of restrictions on MY property. However, I had to consider that it's some of those restrictions that are the reason that lower Rock Creek has retained as much of its character as it has, even 30 years after I first experienced it. I understand that "my" property is just one among many, and owners before me wanted it to retain

the unique character that everyone who visits here enjoys. Yes there's more traffic than there used to be, and the creek is busier - but nowhere near to the level of changes in the same time period as in other places in this country I've been. My point is that the local citizens appear to me to have done a pretty good job of caring for this place, and know and live in a way that works with it. It appears to me that the people here CARE about Rock Creek. I think it's remarkable that Lower Rock Creek is in as good of shape as it is, even after all this time with comparatively few Federal Regulations. Finally, I think the fact that the USFS, as well as some newer residents, think this place is still in good enough shape to be "Protected", tells us a lot about how well the people who live here have been taking care of it.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, pertaining to your eligibility assessment of Lower Rock Creek as a possible Wild and Scenic River, OR Wilderness. As you most likely have gathered by now, due to my rather long-winded comments - I believe Lower Rock Creek should be left as it is, with NO federal designations or regulatory burdens added at this time.