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Comments: On behalf of Hellgate Hunters & Anglers (HHA), I write to comment on the draft assessment plan for Lolo National Forest. HHA is an all-volunteer rod and gun club based in Missoula, and we boast over 500 members in western Montana. Our purpose is to protect, enhance and restore wildlife habitat; promote sound, science-based management of all wildlife species and their habitat as well as educate about hunting and fishing and the biological, cultural and spiritual values of hunting and fishing.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on a draft assessment for a plan that will guide the management of Lolo National Forest. As hunters who care about wildlife and habitat, we would like to see habitat connectivity and migration routes stay intact or even be improved. As Montana gains more residents and sees rapid development, it is important to ensure that wildlife still has a place on the landscape and has access to quality habitat.

Roads can have an impact on wildlife but they are also important for access. There is a balance between access and available sanctuaries for wildlife. Certain roads should remain closed in the winter to protect winter ranges for wildlife.

As outdoor recreation in the Lolo National Forest increases, there should be an assessment on the impacts that increased recreation has on wildlife in the area. Too much disturbance can be detrimental to wildlife such as elk and deer as well as other species.

Habitat restoration should be a priority. Biologists with FWP are often mentioning how deer and elk populations are low in some areas of Lolo National Forest in part due to poor habitat. Improvements to habitat would benefit wildlife, hunters and many native plant species.

As anglers, we also have an interest in clean and pristine waters. Mines and other activities that can disturb streams and rivers should be carefully considered. Fish and other species rely on waterways that are free of pollutants.

We agree with the Species of Conservation Concern list. Some bighorn sheep herd numbers have been in decline in the area and we have concerns that their populations will continue to decrease.

We firmly believe e-bikes should remain illegal on roads that are closed to motorized access. E-bikes can cause an increase of disturbance to wildlife.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the plan.