

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/27/2023 8:00:00 AM

First name: Melissa

Last name: Blunt

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Revision Team,

Am writing to submit my strong objection to removing 32,000 acres of recommended wilderness in the Great Burn/Hoodoo which would open these areas up to snowmobile use. The proposed forest plan will irreparably harm the capacity of this landscape to provide critical wildlife habitat connectivity, especially for sensitive wildlife species like wolverine, mountain goat, and grizzly bears, and will degrade the inherent values of wild lands and wilderness[mdash]including a secure place for species that require "space" away from human activities.

I have backpacked in the Great Burn since 1980 - those earlier decades when large number of goats straddled the cliffs; elk herds filled the valleys, and wolverine dens and tracks were numerous. Last I was there in 2021, we were lucky to see a few goats, but no elk and no sign of wolverine. A recently published scientific study states that the goat population inhabiting the Idaho side of the Hoodoo (Blacklead) has declined from over 100 animals to less than 20, according to Idaho Fish and Game records. Those records indicate unauthorized recreational snowmobile activity near wintering goats as a suspected contributing factor. Importantly, the Lolo National Forest's planning process is treating the mountain goat as a species of special conservation concern. Elements of the Lolo Forest Plan will help safeguard the viability of the species into the future, as I implore you to do as well.

The Great Burn/Hoodoo is a magical place, worth saving for the public-at-large as a wild place, not compromised by a special interest lobby. I have participated in previous forest revision meetings, and am keenly aware of the very vocal and well-funded snowmobile lobby. Please do not cave in to this group whose recreation impact will severely damage habitat and wildlife corridors, that are already under threat by a warming planet.

For 50 years, the Forest Service has managed this magnificent landscape of mountains, meadows, lakes, and streams to preserve its wilderness character. That management has afforded solitude for non-motorized recreational use. Please do not destroy this legacy of protection.

Respectfully,

Melissa Blunt

Missoula, MT