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Comments: I am speaking up for the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Great Bear Wildernesses in Northwestern Montana. The U.S. Forest Service is proposing to renew existing outfitter permits in these three Wildernesses, which collectively comprise the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, without disclosing which permits, their locations, or any associated information, making it impossible to provide meaningful public input. Comments are due February 16.

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex has a long history of outfitting and guiding, and many outfitters there have been great supporters of protecting these Wildernesses. But, outfitting and camps have impacts which are often glossed over or overlooked, including Wilderness trails so heavily used by pack animals that they more resemble roads than foot or horse trails, and outfitter campsites in Wilderness that are allowed to have structures like tent frames, corrals, and hitching posts. All of these outfitter impacts are exacerbated by the extraordinarily large people and pack stock party sizes allowed in the Wildernesses.

Now the Forest Service proposes to renew 62 special use outfitter permits that will be in place for at least a decade, without disclosing the impacts from these commercial operations. The agency's scoping letter lacks important information, such as annual inspections and public complaints, and on top of that, the agency proposes to approve the renewals with a Categorical Exclusion (CE), rather than go through a more rigorous environmental review.

I urge the Forest Service to protect wilderness character in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex as it considers outfitter permits.