

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/13/2024 9:34:51 PM

First name: Caitlin

Last name: Sutton

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Lolo Planning Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Lolo Forest Plan Proposed Action.

I have been exploring the Lolo National Forest for the last 33 years of my life. Some of my fondest memories are camping at Lee Creek Campground, running rampant while letting my imagination run wild among the boulders as a young child. My love for these places only deepened with time as I began paddling the Clark Fork river, camping along the Blackfoot and fishing on Rock Creek. There is no measure of joy that this forest has given me and I thank you for your commitment to protecting these places that are so special for us Montanans. I appreciate your willingness to work with many agencies and hear a variety of voices such as tribal agencies as well as inter-agencies.

I support protecting the following 21 rivers and streams as Wild and Scenic eligible. These streams have outstanding recreation, fish, and wildlife values and include:

- *Rattlesnake Creek
- *Rock Creek
- *Lolo Creek, South Fork Lolo Creek
- *Clark Fork River (St. Regis to Quinns)
- *Blackfoot River, North Fork Blackfoot River
- *Clearwater River, Colt Creek
- *Morrell Creek
- *Monture Creek, Middle Fork Monture Creek
- *Lodgepole Creek
- *North Fork Fish Creek, West Fork Fish Creek, Straight Creek, Cache Creek
- *Deer Creek, Cromie Creek, Up Up Creek
- *West Fork Thompson River

In addition to the 21 rivers and streams listed above, Wild and Scenic eligible protections are also warranted for the Thompson River, Fish Creek, South Fork Fish Creek, and the St. Regis River. The Forest Service dismisses these streams as neither unique nor important within western Montana. I disagree. These rivers possess outstandingly remarkable values that are unique within the region of comparison and include:

- *Thompson River - whitewater boating, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in the West Fork Thompson River
- *Fish Creek - whitewater boating, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters within the Great Burn
- *South Fork Fish Creek - exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in Cache Creek
- *St. Regis River - exemplary angling, critical spawning grounds, and cold water climate refuge habitat

Westslope cutthroat trout should be added to the Species of Conservation Concern list due to lack of distribution of high genetic integrity and the potential for increased distribution resulting from restoration. Finally, the Forest Service needs to better operationalize climate refuge within its Conservation Watershed Network by protecting riverside shade cover, cold water seeps and springs, areas of persistent snowpack, microclimates, genetically pure fish populations, and riverine connectivity.

Please consider these improvements within the Proposed Action to better protect western Montana rivers.