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Organization:

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Comments: To the Lolo National Forest Planning Team,

I am writing as an ecologist, evolutionary biologist, and conservation scientist with a deep-rooted belief in the importance of preserving our public lands for the diverse ecosystems they support and the recreational opportunities they offer. While my professional and personal life is dedicated to the study and preservation of natural habitats, I am also closely connected to the backcountry skiing community through friends and colleagues who cherish the pristine conditions of our Montana mountains. It is from this dual perspective that I wish to express my strong opposition to aspects of the proposed plan for the Lolo National Forest.

The areas of Lolo Pass, Hoodoo Pass, Saint Regis Basin, Wisherd Ridge, Marshall Mountain, and Morrel Mountain, represent not just a haven for winter sports enthusiasts but also a critical habitat for wildlife. These areas provide unique opportunities for human-powered recreation that is both accessible and sustainable, producing minimal impact on the natural environment. Therefore, I strongly support the designation of these beloved local spots as Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized areas.

I am particularly concerned about the proposed motorized access into the Crystal Amphitheater on Lolo Pass, and into Saint Regis Basin, as well as the proposed large, motorized buffer along Morrell Mountain Lookout Road. Introducing motorized access to these areas threatens not only the safety of backcountry skiing and snowboarding but also the integrity of these ecosystems. The intrusion of motorized vehicles could lead to increased pollution, habitat disruption, and wildlife disturbance, undermining the very essence of what makes these areas special.

I oppose the designation of FS 16675 (Crystal Amphitheater) and FS 18591 (Saint Regis Basin) as Semi-Primitive Motorized settings. Instead, I urge you to consider these as Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized settings to prevent conflicts and preserve the serene and unspoiled nature of these landscapes for both current and future generations.

Additionally, the proposed motorized buffer along Morrell Mountain Lookout Road (FR 4365) is excessively large and would significantly diminish the non-motorized access to terrain near one of the few backcountry yurts in this range. This proposal seems to prioritize motorized access over the conservation of a quiet, beautiful environment that is rare and valuable.

In summary, I strongly advocate for the protection and preservation of the Lolo National Forest by limiting motorized access in sensitive areas. Such actions will not only enhance the recreational experience for human adventurers but also safeguard these habitats for the wildlife that depend on them. It is our responsibility to ensure that these wild, beautiful landscapes remain unspoiled for generations to come.

Thank you for considering my comments on this critical issue.

Kindly,

Cynthia Ulbing, PhD candidate in Ecology and Evolution