

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/30/2024 4:53:59 PM

First name: KynsLee

Last name: Scott

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I would like to first start off by thanking you all for the tremendous amount of thoughtful work you have put into this revision plan. Your dedication to our national forests, public lands, and water resources is greatly appreciated.

I am also pleased with many aspects of the plan, especially in regards to some of our vital tributaries across the Lolo. I'd like to thank you for the comprehensive Wild and Scenic inclusion of Rock Creek, Rattlesnake Creek, and the headwaters of the Clearwater River.

With that said, I still feel there are critical pieces of the Wild and Scenic eligibility missing from the plan. Specifically, for the following bodies of water: St. Regis River, Fish Creek (mainstem), South Fork of Fish Creek, and the Thompson River (lower).

In addition to a greater Wild and Scenic eligibility scope, the inclusion of Westslope cutthroat trout to the Species of Conservation Concern list is a non-negotiable issue in the face of climate change.

As for our rivers, the entirety of the Clark Fork drainage is faced with many challenges, some presenting irreparable and potentially catastrophic consequences. Adding to the adversity, our beloved Clark Fork battles issues posed by Smurfit Stone pollution and invasive species, among many others. By providing more comprehensive and a greater incorporation of some of the most imperative tributaries of the Clark Fork, we can ensure a better and healthier future.

To begin, the St. Regis River is one of the most important, major tributaries of the middle to lower Clark Fork River. The Regis provides unparalleled spawning grounds and ecosystem connectivity for the fragile Westslope cutthroat population of the lower Clark Fork. Along with crucial reproductive habitat for our native fish, the St. Regis River provides a cold water refugia to a severely temperature impacted body of water. Moreover, the St. Regis River is deeply fragmented, adding to the fragility of the river and greater ecosystem. By providing the Regis with Wild and Scenic River eligibility, we have the opportunity to better manage and protect this invaluable resource. The St. Regis is a shining example of how we could improve upon an already impaired ecosystem and work to enhance aspects within our management control.

Additionally, the mainstem of Fish Creek is possibly one of the most prolific and important trout streams in the west. Not only does Fish Creek, irrefutably, house some of the richest spawning gravels in the Clark Fork River drainage, the mainstem provides a vital cold water injection to the Gorge. No other place in western Montana can you find a larger fish size to creek size discrepancy, attesting to the health of the ecosystem. Fish Creek has been through merciless utility over the course of its history of land use and management. That is why this drainage deserves Wild and Scenic eligibility within the Lolo National Forest management plan. I strongly urge you to include the mainstem of Fish Creek into the revision plan to uphold and preserve the incredible ecosystem that Fish Creek is.

Coupled with the mainstem of Fish Creek, the South Fork of Fish Creek is equally deserving of Wild and Scenic consideration. Serving as a key spawning branch of the Fish Creek drainage, the South Fork carries a significant amount of water to the mainstem on behalf of many important, mountain tributaries. The entire Fish Creek drainage is indispensable to western Montana, please reconsider the inclusion of both the mainstem and South Fork of Fish Creek.

Furthermore, the Thompson River is one of the last strongholds of cold water refugia for the lower Clark Fork,

providing essential solace for our native trout during the warmer months. And the Thompson, with access lining most of and either side of the drainage, is faced with a unique set of challenges. Challenges that can be mitigated and lessened with the aid of Wild and Scenic eligibility and subsequently, interim Wild and Scenic management facilitated by the Lolo.

Lastly, the lack of inclusion of Westslope cutthroat to the Species of Conservation Concern list is a gross oversight when considering the rapid impacts of climate change to our native, cold water fisheries.

In conclusion, many of our rivers, tributaries, and fisheries within the Lolo are in need of greater care and management - with Wild and Scenic eligibility lending to just that. It's hard to believe how significantly our water resources have declined over the past fifteen years, especially considering my scope of personal and professional investment in utilizing and enjoying many of these resources has been during the current management timeframe. Now is the moment to enhance our efforts and elevate our commitment to preserving our natural resources through better management and protection.

Given our role as stewards of the land and river enthusiasts, we now possess the capability to forge a more resilient and promising future for the next fifteen years and beyond.