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Comments: Dear Planning Team

Thank you for your time spent reviewing and updating the Lolo National Forest plan. This final letter will attempt to summarize previous sections and submissions and offer geospatially specific suggestions.

NonTimber Forest Products (NTFP) play a vital role in rural economies locally and around the globe, as realized in the literally thousands of mushroom hunting and foraging groups on social media today; in the hundreds of local chapters of the North American Mycological Association (namyco.org); by the United Nations, publisher of NonWood News; and in a growing body of policy such as that wildcrafted by Jon Tester in the Montana Legislature in the early 2000s.

Morel hunting especially has become a favorite recreational activity for the WMMA and our thousands of followers. The nearby Salish Kootenai and Blackfeet tribes have both suspended timber sale activities to allow safe harvesting of these mushrooms, (Seepay, Chippy, Red Eagle fires) but the USFS has no such history yet.

Some areas that are good mushroom habitat, like the Hoodoo, MT/ID state line, and Reservation Ridge, are fir and high elevation spruce habitats that should not be included in the timber base. Maintaining ecosystem integrity in these areas assists in wildlife and watershed goals and helps with vital connectivity for wildlife. Additionally these areas serve as biodiversity reservoirs for regeneration as climate changes.

Riparian areas likewise play a key role in supporting fungi, and we have newly discovered and unique forms of mushrooms that grow in or underwater! The river systems highlighted in the American Rivers comments reflect areas of interest to foragers and mushroom hunters as well. We support the practice of leaving trees to rot whenever possible.

Old growth and mixed age stands are known to produce unique truffle-like fungi. I refer to USDA PNW-GTR-772, April 2009, Diversity, Ecology, and Conservation of Truffle Fungi in Forests of the Pacific Northwest., Trappe et.al. The value of truffles in forests of the LNF should not be ignored. One chap with a dog collected thousands of dollars worth in a few hours.(pers.comm) and I find enough every year to make truffle butter. Many truffle areas are inside the timber base, and shrouded in secrecy for fear of being cut. These same truffles feed flying squirrels and thus the endangered lynx, much as the Oregon white truffle feeds the redback voles that spotted owls feed upon.

Mixed age stands are home to the majority of edible and commercially valuable mushrooms. Often cited studies by Schlosser and Blatner (1991) and University of British Columbia demonstrate the economic viability of managing for NTFP versus timber, examining specific habitat types like matsutake mushroom in hemlock forests, or chanterelles in midage Douglas fir. There is a history of ignoring loss of NTFP habitat due to logging, largely due to a lack of any process to evaluate the relative values of the NTFP versus the timber, and that NTFP have traditionally been a subset of the USFS timber budget.

We support NTFP reserves that are set apart from the timber base, especially in areas where the timber is of limited value or the value of the NTFP exceeds that of a 100 year timber cycle. We support the decommissioning of roads and mitigation of soil compaction to enhance fungal connectivity and tree regrowth, and we support the incorporation and recording of soil temperature metrics before and after any proposed action. We support top-lighting versus bottom-lighting of slash piles, and the incorporation of measures to enhance retention of CWD and sequester more carbon in the soils during treatment processes, and we encourage management practices that conserve and augment the presence of Brown Cuboidal Rot (BCR) in mountain soils.

Thank you for your work on the forest plan. We feel this is an opportunity for our forest to make policy based on up to date scientific understanding of the critical mycorrhizal relationship that trees rely upon.

Sincerely

the Western Montana Mycological Association Board of Directors