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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Rattlesnake National Recreation Area (RNRA):

I have been recreating in the RNRA since 1988. It has always been my favorite place in Missoula to hike, bike, ski, camp, and fish. It gets much more use now, and I try to avoid it on summer weekends, but it still offers a quiet, peaceful, natural setting for recreating during the week or the non-summer months. It is unique in Missoula since it is adjacent to a wilderness area and the front country is managed for a primitive recreation experience. The RNRA should be managed as it has been for the past 44 years. The Lolo NF should establish a separate MA for the RNRA that maintains the standards of the 1986 Plan to protect the recreation resource and its national significance. The MA should emphasize a light-handed management approach; limiting timber harvest, emphasizing prescribed fire, maintaining existing roads and trails as primitive, and maintain high visual quality. This type of management puts a valuable front country boundary around the wilderness area.

MA5 (Concentrated Use Area) is not suitable for areas adjacent to a wilderness area. High density recreation will increase human wildlife conflicts. It will also degrade the current primitive recreation experience by allowing road improvements, new roads, campground improvements, and larger group sizes.

MA4 (General Forest) allows all activities listed in Table A2.3 (Appendix 2: Suitability Summary), which is much different than the light-handed approach in the current management plan. Specifically, MA4 allows motorized access up the main corridor. This should be reserved for administrative use only. There is already too much traffic congestion in the main corridor, especially the first three miles, and all the way to Franklin Bridge on busy summer days. Mountain Bike and horse conflicts are already an issue. Adding faster bikes to the equation is not something we need in the Rattlesnake. Under human power, most bikes turn around at Franklin Bridge, leaving the upper 8 miles less traveled. Ebikes will allow people to reach the end of the corridor easily and quickly; effectively decreasing the size of the RNRA and putting more pressure on the trailheads near the wilderness boundary. Motorized access, outside of administrative use, will change the overall experience.

MA3 (Backcountry) allows commercial use, mineral extraction, grazing, and new facilities. These activities should not be allowed in the southeast portion of the RNRA. Again, the Lolo NF should emphasize a management strategy for the entire RNRA that maintains the standards of the 1986 Plan.

Lolo Peak:

I've enjoyed hiking, backpacking, and skiing in the Lolo Peak area since 1988. Lolo Peak is one of the premier day-hikes in the Missoula area. The short drive to the trailhead and the relatively short hike to Carlton Lake and on up to the peak make it a popular destination. The views from the top are unparalleled, from the Missoula Valley to the spine of the Bitterroots. I've backpacked into Carlton Lake in the summer to climb the peak and in the spring to ski the peak; some of my favorite backpack trips. The Lolo Peak - Carlton Lake basin is worthy of eventual inclusion in designated wilderness.

I support the expansion of the Carlton Ridge RNA and keeping the recommended wilderness for the South Fork Lolo Creek drainage. However, the Carlton Lake basin should be added to the recommended wilderness which would connect the South Fork Lolo Creek Recommended Wilderness to the west and the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness to the south. The management of the Carlton Lake basin would then match management of the adjacent lands.

I also recommend continuing to manage the Lolo Peak-Carlton Lake Basin as non-motorized. Motorized travel would damage the fragile ecosystem of the Carlton Lake Basin; especially since motorized users often travel off designated trails. It's best to manage this area in a compatible way with the adjacent lands; recommended wilderness, Carlton Ridge RNA, and proposed addition to Carlton Ridge RNA. Motorized use is also incompatible with hiking and horseback riding in the basin and on up to the peak.

Great Burn:

I've been recreating in the Great Burn since 1988. Hoodoo Pass has always been a popular and easily accessible area for backcountry skiing. The state line trail is one of my favorite hikes, starting at Hoodoo Pass and heading south.

As climate change continues to shorten our winters and deliver hotter, drier summers, high elevation areas with more precipitation and cooler temperatures, such as the Great Burn, will serve as vital refuges for species such as wolverines and mountain goats. The Hoodoo Roadless Area provides important habitat for many sensitive species. With rapidly increasing population growth in Montana and Idaho, this wild habitat is critical for species requiring large, remote areas.

The Great Burn has been a treasured roadless area and managed as wilderness for all the years I've lived in Missoula. I've supported the Great Burn Study Group (now Great Burn Conservation Alliance) for many years. In 2006, I participated in a GBSG wilderness monitoring trip to check out a backcountry hunting camp near the French Lake area. We accessed our camp and French Lake from Clearwater Crossing. During this outing, we enjoyed hiking through pristine forests, tall forb fields / avalanche chutes, and swimming in a high subalpine lake. This area has all the beauty and grandeur of Glacier National Park without the crowds and reservation systems. I support retaining the recommended wilderness boundaries of the Hoodoo Roadless Area that have been in place for nearly 40 years.

Lolo Pass/Lee Creek Area:

I've enjoyed XC skiing and ski touring in the Lolo Pass and Lee Creek area since 1988. Lee Creek has always been a favorite destination, especially as Lolo Pass has become more crowded with skiers and especially snowmobilers. Lee Creek offers a great non-motorized experience with access to Wagon Mountain and on to Lolo Pass if one chooses. It also offers a great one-way ski from Lolo Pass to the Lee Creek campground. I believe the Desired Winter Recreation Opportunity for the Lee Creek area is Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized. I recommend/support this type of winter recreation for Lee Creek, from the parking area along highway 12 to the border of the Nez Perce Clearwater NF (NPCNF). I recommend the Lolo NF continue to manage it this way and keep it well marked as a blue diamond XC ski trail with clear signs on either end for no snowmobiles/snowbikes, especially on the Idaho side and boundary with the NPCNF. I've seen snowmobile tracks in the past and more recently snowbike tracks going into the Wagon Mountain area on the Lolo NF from the Packer Meadow Road on the NPCNF. I also recommend this be managed as a trap-free zone since so many people ski with their dogs along the Lee Creek Road, from the campground to the top (the first 4 miles).

I recommend the Lolo NF plow the Lee Creek parking lot or establish an agreement with Montana DOT to plow the parking lot. It has been plowed for all the years I've lived here except the last two or three. This has been a loss to the XC skiing community since many people use this trail head instead of going up to Lolo Pass.

Traditionally, the campground is the terminus for a popular ski from Lolo Pass to the Lee Creek Campground. People also stop here to use the restroom in the winter. When the lot is not plowed, but not completely blocked by snow, people drive in and occasionally get stuck in the snow.

I support the Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized designation for other areas around Lolo Pass. Crystal Amphitheater is one area I've used often in the past and recommend that it still be managed for non-motorized recreation in the winter. I oppose FS 16675 as a Semi-Primitive Motorized designation to prevent snowmobile conflict and trespass into this ski area. This is a popular backcountry ski area which provides great access for day trips. There is a very small number of good backcountry ski areas for human-powered winter recreation while snowmobilers have many miles of roads and easy access into more remote areas for a day trip. The prime ski areas close to highway 12 deserve to be managed as non-motorized winter recreation.