

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/1/2024 3:23:55 AM

First name: Jim and Janet

Last name: Surrena

Organization:

Title:

Comments: These comments are in response to the Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan Proposed Action of January 31, 2024.

These comments relate to the Lolo Peak/Carlton Ridge/Lantern Ridge/South Fork Lolo Creek area of the Lolo Creek Geographical Area.

Submitted by Jim and Janet Surrena on March 31, 2024

We are pleased that the Recommended Wilderness Area SB-PW-05 (from the Wilderness Draft Inventory Map) was carried over from the 1986 Forest Plan. However, our hope was that the larger Recommended Wilderness Area shown in the 2006 Draft Plan, which included SB-PW-05 would be adopted for the current Proposed Plan. That larger area included the upper Mill Creek drainage and extended east to the proposed RNA expansion. This is an area of special scenic value that provides a sense of remoteness and wildness not far from civilization. It is home to rare plants and animals, and along with the South Fork of Lolo Creek corridor, provides a travel path for wildlife connectivity. This area deserves wilderness protection so that future generations can appreciate its unique qualities.

We are in favor of the expansion, to the west, of the Carlton Ridge Research Natural Area. The enlarged area will be a living laboratory for a detailed study of the post-fire ecology of Carlton Ridge. The Whitebark Pines on Carlton Ridge may provide seeds for disease and pest resistant trees.

We also urge that the remainder of the Lolo Creek inventoried roadless area be managed year round as both non-motorized and non-mechanized backcountry. Our reason for urging protection for the lower Mill Creek drainage and lower slopes of Carlton Ridge and Lantern Ridge is based upon our thirty-seven years of year round hiking of this area on foot, snowshoes and / or skis. During our many, many hikes on Lantern and Carlton Ridge over the years, we have seen evidence of an incredible diversity of wildlife inhabiting or passing through this area, including tracks of snowshoe hare, mountain lion, lynx, black bear, wolf, moose and wolverine. The area also provides a unique experience of deep wildness that is accessible year round as a day hike from Mill Creek trailhead (no multi-day backpacking required). To be able to leave Missoula and less than an hour later be heading up Mill Creek onto either Lantern Ridge or Mormon Ridge/Carlton Ridge as a day trip and experience such biological diversity and perceived remoteness is an experience that needs to be preserved for future generations. To that end, the mapping of Mill Creek trail #1310 as summer motorized and the allowance of mechanized travel on the west end of Carlton Ridge trail 1311 and motorized travel on the east end of 1311 are completely antithetical to the needs of the aforementioned wildlife and the serenity of this uniquely year round accessible area. There are plenty of other areas available to motorcycles and mountain bikes, and this area need not be and should not be one of them.