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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Lolo Planning Team,

First, I want to thank you for your effort in creating this Lolo Forest Plan Proposed Action. I hope that my insights as a long-time user of the Lolo Forest can help with revisions that will strengthen the plan going forward. I write as a non-motorized user of the forest areas - as someone who runs trails in the Lolo National Forest multiple times per week, who paddles and teaches whitewater paddling on rivers in the Forest, who hikes and backpacks to remote streams, lakes, and peaks, and who backcountry skis multiple ranges in the Forest. The non-motorized users of the Forest are a strong, and, importantly, growing part of the user base, deriving vast utility from recreating in the Forest. The economic benefits that these recreators bring to communities surrounding the Forest is also great.

I live in Missoula primarily because of the non-motorized recreational activities that the Lolo National Forest offers. I live for the quiet sound of my skis swishing between trees coming down off Morrell Mountain or in Crystal Basin. For swimming in Fish Creek on a hot day or paddling it during spring runoff. For taking the children in my life to the friendly whitewater of the Thompson River to help them learn to love our natural places. For arriving at a natural alpine lake - or an area where an artificial impoundment has been removed - after a long hike, and jumping in with my dog.

I am writing to encourage you to manage the Forest for non-motorized use as much as possible, preserve clean rivers and lakes by designating them Wild and Scenic, and restoring rivers and alpine lakes that have been artificially dammed. Specifically, I am asking the following:

Please protect the following rivers as Wild and Scenic eligible, for they have unique and exemplary features found nowhere else.

*Thompson River - whitewater boating in a region with little other options, suitable for all levels of paddler, and especially good for beginners, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in the West Fork Thompson River

*Fish Creek - whitewater boating, again, good for beginners to experience a smaller river that is accessible to them, for smaller rivers give unique paddling experiences, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters within the Great Burn

*South Fork Fish Creek - exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in Cache Creek

*St. Regis River - exemplary angling, critical spawning grounds, and cold water climate refuge habitat

I also support protecting the following 21 rivers and streams as Wild and Scenic eligible. These streams have outstanding recreation, fish, and wildlife values and include:

*Rattlesnake Creek

*Rock Creek

*Lolo Creek, South Fork Lolo Creek

*Clark Fork River (St. Regis to Quinns)

*Blackfoot River, North Fork Blackfoot River

*Clearwater River, Colt Creek

*Morrell Creek

*Monture Creek, Middle Fork Monture Creek

*Lodgepole Creek

*North Fork Fish Creek, West Fork Fish Creek, Straight Creek, Cache Creek

*Deer Creek, Cromie Creek, Up Up Creek

*West Fork Thompson River

The Forest Service also needs to better operationalize climate refuge within its Conservation Watershed Network by protecting riverside shade cover, cold water seeps and springs, areas of persistent snowpack, microclimates, genetically pure fish populations, and riverine connectivity. This also means protecting rivers in other ways, because species might be able to survive climate stress if not facing other stresses, like increased sediment runoff from additional motorized use or degraded watersheds.

Please increase your goal for the number of restoration projects; in the past five years, the Clark Fork Coalition has partnered with the Forest Service to remove 46 fish passage barriers and upgrade 7 fish passage barrier culverts in the Upper Lolo Watershed. The current goal of 20 is less than half of that and should be tripled, at minimum; climate change is only going to make this restoration more important to struggling species.

I ask that the Forest Service eliminate the proposed expansion of motorized recreation in the Rattlesnake, LaValle, and Butler Creek watersheds. The Rattlesnake is home to stable populations of bull trout, while LaValle and Butler Creek have genetically pure cutthroat trout. Existing roads already deliver sediment to these streams, but allowing much higher-impact motorized recreation would drastically worsen water quality and degrade these native fish strongholds.

Similarly, I hope that you will reduce the excessive motorized buffer size along Morrell Mountain Lookout Road (FR 4365), as this is unnecessary for motorized enjoyment of the area, and because this area has one of the few backcountry yurts in this range, where I have stayed and enjoyed the ability to ski, not snowmobile.

Crystal Amphitheater on Lolo Pass is one of the best backcountry ski and snowboard destinations that the surrounding communities have, and probably the most travelled by winter nonmotorized users. This space should be prioritized for its highest winter utility, and motorized use should be prohibited there. I oppose FS 16675 as a Semi-Primitive Motorized setting. Please consider it as a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting to prevent snowmobile conflict and trespass into this beloved ski area.

For the same reasons, please restrict motorized access into Saint Regis Basin. I oppose FS 18591 as a Semi-Primitive Motorized setting. Please consider it as a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting to lessen snowmobile conflict.

I support the designation of a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting for our favorite local spots at Lolo Pass, Hoodoo Pass, Saint Regis Basin, Wishard Ridge, Marshall Mountain, and Morrell Mountain. These popular areas provide opportunities for accessible human-powered backcountry skiing/riding day trips on public lands.

Finally, I hope that you remove human-created impoundments/dammed reservoirs in the Lolo National Forest. While they might provide some additional water later in the summer, these reservoirs kill a natural water system and strenuously degrade the recreational value of these places. I actively avoid travel to Forest locations with artificial impoundments.

Thank you,
Chelsea Liddell