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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To the Lolo Forest Planning Team:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Forest Plan Revision process. We appreciate the challenges the Forest Service faces in planning for varied interests and uses over time, and recognize the complexity and difficulty these tasks present.

As long-time residents of western Montana and Sanders County, and active outdoor recreationists who enjoy both motorized and non-motorized use areas, we have personal experience with almost all of the places included in the current planning process.

We are frequent users of the Cube Iron-Silcox, Cataract, and Sundance Ridge areas, and support permanent protection for this wild area. Its lakes, peaks, and trails are highly valued by non-motorized recreationists and trailheads are accessed relatively easily from the small communities in Sanders County. The area is also important wildlife habitat and a valuable connector between the Cabinet Mountains and the Bitterroot and Mission Mountains.

The Cube Iron area already benefits from a mostly non-motorized backcountry designation, which draws enthusiasts seeking an experience not available in the many National Forest areas designated for motorized use. Backcountry hikers, hunters, horsemen, fishermen, and campers appreciate the experience that has long been available in this favorite local wild area.

We support durable continued protection for this valuable area with a designation as recommended wilderness. Its wild character and merit as habitat seem obvious, and we would like to see those values maintained for future generations.

While we are among those who enjoy National Forest lands with mechanized and motorized access (ATV, ebike, and off-road vehicle), we feel there are significant existing opportunities for mechanized and motorized use (ATV's, motorcycles, ebikes, snow machines, mountain bikes, etc.), on our public lands. There are comparatively fewer local, easily accessible areas available to users seeking a wild experience that does not include motorized/mechanized use. We would also note the agency's lack of capacity to address issues of unauthorized motorized/mechanized use and potential user conflicts. Unfortunately, even a few bad actors can cause harm to wildlife and consequential conflicts with other users, and these are problems the agency is already unable to address effectively. The durable protection offered by the recommended wilderness designation will help reduce instances of unlawful use and conflict and maintain the current wild experience valued by many Montana residents.

We do not support any additional road closures in the Cube Iron area, and expressly support efforts to maintain the Graves Creek Road as open to motorized vehicles year-round. We likewise do not support a loss of acres suitable for timber management. Timber was previously harvested in the area; however, our understanding is that opportunities for additional commercial harvest in the area are limited due to topography, fires, etc., and there appears to be no reason to open currently closed areas to support this use.

We would also like to express our support for the following area designations:

The Great Burn and Hoodoo Recreation Area: We support retaining the 1986 recommended wilderness designation and boundaries for the Hoodoo Recreation Area, as shown in the proposed action. This area has

significant value across the Lolo and Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests and to users and wildlife in multiple states, and should be protected in its entirety. There are significant areas open to motorized/mechanized use on these forest lands. The Great Burn/Hoodoo areas have considerable value for wildlife and users seeking a non-motorized/mechanized experience-values that see have seen diminishing protections over time.

We support recommended wilderness status for the Ward Eagle and Meadow Creek areas.

Lolo Peak: We support retaining the South Fork Lolo Creek area as recommended wilderness and expanding the Carlton Ridge research natural area, as shown in the proposed action.

Quigg/Rock Creek: We support the proposed action for Quigg/Slide Rock and Stony Mountain.

Blackfoot: We support retaining recommended wilderness areas along the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness, as identified in the proposed action. We support recommendations of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act agreement, which included input from ranchers, timber workers, outfitters, snowmobilers, business owners and conservationists.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We respect the planning effort taking place and look forward to the agency's continuing outreach and engagement.

Sincerely,

Scott Tuxbury  
Renee Hofeldt