

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/1/2024 6:44:54 PM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Re: Lolo National Forest Plan Revision Public Comments

April 1, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Lolo National Forest Plan Revision.

I am a third generation Montanan and worked as a Wilderness Ranger in the Mission Mountains Wilderness and Swan Front for 35 years. I will concentrate on the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area, the Great Burn, the Cube Iron Roadless Complex, recommended wilderness additions to the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wildernesses, Lolo Peak, and proposed additions to the Mission Mountains Wilderness, including wilderness recommendations for the Westfork Clearwater, and Rock Creek.

Rattlesnake National Recreation Area

The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area (RNRA) should not allow logging, road-building, or livestock grazing. It is a heavily used recreation area on the north edge of Missoula and has a large constituency of recreationists. It should be managed with a requirement of minimal active management whereby Congress in 1980 required minimal active management, aimed at preserving primitive qualities and non-motorized recreation written into the 1992 RNRA management plan. This plan should remain intact. Because of its popularity, there is a need for a greater Forest Service presence of daily, year-round ranger patrols to provide Leave No Trace (LNT) information/education and also law enforcement authority, if needed. The RNRA provides an essential cushion between the urban layer and the Rattlesnake Wilderness area. The Rattlesnake Wilderness area should be managed according to The Wilderness Act of 1964 (PL 88-577).

The Great Burn on the Lolo National Forest

The Great Burn provides critical linkage for wildlife including grizzly bears, wolverines, and mountain goats. The habitat connectivity is important between the Montana side and the Idaho side of the Great Burn. The entire portion of the Great Burn in Montana should be recommended for Wilderness designation because of the importance of habitat connectivity for wildlife movement and migration. The revised Lolo National Forest Plan should preserve habitat connectivity, critical wildlife habitat, and nonmotorized wildland recreation opportunities for current and future generations.

Cube Iron Roadless Complex

Cataract, Cube Iron-Silcox, and Sundance Ridge, three inventoried roadless areas, should be designated as recommended Wilderness. The values they protect provide essential wildlife corridors and connectivity to the Cabinet, Bitterroot, and Mission Mountains Wildernesses.

Roadless, nonmotorized status is critical to protect these values. The Stony Mountain Roadless Area west of the main Quigg Roadless Area, should also be designated as recommended Wilderness as a critical wildlife corridor and protection of the Rock Creek Watershed.

Lolo Peak

Very few people have spent time in the Carlton Ridge Research Natural Area but I am one of the fortunate individuals who has both studied this high elevation larch forest and recreated in this area. Please retain this recommended Wilderness area and expansion of the research natural area. It is a unique treasure on the Lolo National Forest.

Additions to the Mission Mountains Wilderness

Within the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act 80,000 acres of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, Scapegoat

Wilderness, and Mission Mountains Area should be protected as recommended Wilderness prohibiting motorized use and mountain biking. The Revised Lolo NF Plan should retain the 1986 recommended Wilderness additions to the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness areas and also extend these protections to the West Fork Clearwater area, adjacent to the Mission Mountains Wilderness.

Rock Creek

Please retain recommended Wilderness designation for the main Quigg Roadless area but also include this recommended Wilderness designation for the Stony Mountain Roadless Area. These roadless areas are important to maintain wildlife corridors ensuring connectivity to the Welcome Creek Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Areas on the Bitterroot and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests.

These areas offer a vast array of wilderness values that benefit fish, wildlife, and public landowners now and into the future. They represent a small fraction of the entire Lolo National Forest, yet provide connectivity for imperiled fish and wildlife species that make these roadless areas so important.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kari Gunderson, PhD.

Wildland Recreation Management