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Comments: Hello - My name is J. Porter Hammitt. I came to Missoula and UM in 1992 to pursue an MS degree in Recreation Management. After graduating and working many jobs related to outdoor recreation (including as USFS Backcountry Ranger), I went on to found my own organization that provides outdoor recreation programs in the area - Missoula Outdoor Learning Adventures (MOLA). I just sold the business last year after 23 years. During that time, I was a permitted outfitter on the Lolo National Forest, including the Missoula, Ninemile, Superior, and Seeley Lake Ranger Districts, as well as Bitterroot NF and Flathead NF. In my personal time, I am an avid participant in non-motorized outdoor recreation, including XC skiing, back-country skiing, mountain biking, rock-climbing, backpacking. Much of my time is spend in the Rattlesnake Nat. Rec. Area and Pattee Canyon. I feel that I know the outdoor recreation opportunities in the area as well as anyone, and I love to see people outside being active. I will speak to those concerns, and the opinions are my own.

First off, let me say that I feel Lolo NF has mostly done a good job managing recreation in the area. It's important to most who live here, and it's certainly a diverse constituency. Overlaying those demands with concerns for a growing population, increased urban-wildland interface, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, and Limits of Acceptable Change, it's not an easy task.

With regard to XC Skiing, it's important to note that area opportunities are just about maxed-out. Pattee Canyon needs additional parking. So does the Lolo Pass area (even though not on the Lolo NF). I feel that improving those situations, as well improving and/or increasing opportunities at other locales is called for in the plan. Places such as Deer Creek (near Pattee Canyon), Lee Creek and Granite Pass (near Lolo Pass), and Gold Creek (along the Blackfoot) are all excellent candidates for expanded and improved use. As well, with the ever-growing problem of global warming, we can be sure that access to local areas with reliable snow will be of increasing concern.

With regard to backcountry skiing (and XC skiing), I often find the shared use of higher-elevation access points to be rather frustrating. For example, skiers using Lolo Pass have to contend with snowmobilers. Certainly, everyone is after good snow, so options for road access are limited. But even though skiers take up little space, their use is confined to a relatively short distance from roads and trailheads, and they are essentially silent, they have to contend with the sprawl and noise of snowmobiles for miles around. I'd encourage USFS to look for opportunities to further separate those two uses. For example, maintain a plowed road up to the St. Mary's parking lot for non-motorized use only.

With regard to climbing, the Lolo NF is home to several of the limited number of climbing sites withing a 50 mile radius of Missoula - those being The Heap, Elk Rock, Tor Rock, and Crystal Theatre (all near Lolo Pass). Many programs and groups wish to climb outdoors with people, and typically they involve kids. It's almost impossible to do so, as the Lolo NF only allows group use at The Heap. I believe road access should be improved to the other sites, as road conditions are often horrible, and opportunities should be increased to utilize the areas.

With regard to backpacking, I would argue that increased attention be given to suitable tent-sites at alpine lakes and other high-elevation locales. Backpackers often want to get out for just a night or two, and they typically want to hike up to a beautiful mountain setting, such as a lake, meadow, or a creekside. I know I do. However, in such settings, there is often little room, with tent sites hacked out of the brush, and people causing impacts by camping in spots they shouldn't because their options are compromised.

With regard to mountain biking, I feel that additional opportunities should be pursued in the immediate vicinity around town, where opportunities to partner with city, county, state, private on appropriate lands allow. MTB is

an important activity for many, and the easy access makes our community attractive as a destination for tourism, relocation, and business.

I feel strongly that MTB should NOT be allowed in remote high-mountain backcountry areas. Perhaps the Stateline Trail out along Superior and St. Regis could be allowed, as it's already used for motorized travel, but NOT along the trails to individual mountain lakes, such as Heart Lake, Cliff Lake, etc., or those that follow remote mountain valleys, such as Ward Creek. Even though non-motorized, bikes still move at relatively higher speeds, and they typically result in an alarming encounter for those seeking solitude and a primitive experience at the pace of foot travel or horseback. Even though I love to MTB, I hate seeing them when I'm on foot in remote, pristine, and/or alpine locations. Backcountry trails are also often more susceptible to damage, and the continuous tire ruts of bikes have been shown to lead to increased erosion.

With regard to the Rattlesnake Nat. Rec. Area, I know there has been some concern about the potential for motorized access. This would be in direct contrast to how it's been managed the last few decades. I encourage Lolo NF to maintain the current character and allowable use of the Rattlesnake which does NOT include motorized use, because allowing motorized use, even by just a few, would have a tremendous negative impact of 1000's of others seeking an experience of quiet and solitude.

With regard to Pattee Canyon, I STRONGLY object to the continuation of the allowed use of folging. Folgers create a hugely disproportional impact on the landscape, with a wide primary swath of trampled and denuded ground cover, innumerable secondary trails, and major unsightly damage to the bark of trees from impacts by discs.

Most importantly at Pattee Canyon, there is one of the few remaining "wet meadows" in the areas, which includes a population of Blue Camas flowers, which were a primary food source of indigenous peoples. This area is of tremendous cultural and historical significance, and allowing the fol course to go right through the middle of the flower meadows is an insult to the people who occupied this landscape first.

In a well-mentioned yet questionably effective management action, some of the area of the flowers is fenced off to protect them, but much is not. Even with the fence, folgers routinely climb the fence and trample through the meadow to retrieve their discs. And the rest of us have to contend with the unsightly presence of the fence in an otherwise beautiful meadow, just because folgers can't stay on a trail. The flowers and meadow outside the fenced area continue to be negatively impacted. This really has to stop.

As I understand it, folging was NEVER supposed to be allowed in Pattee under that original Forest Plan from 1986. It simply became established through the renegade actions of folgers. I brought all of this to the attention of Al Hilshey (Rec. Specialist), Andy Kulla (Rec. Manager), and Maggie Pittman (District Ranger) in a meeting in the 2000's, but was disregarded.

And finally, with regard to permitting on the Lolo NF, I know that there are essentially no new permittees being allowed on the Missoula, with severely limited opportunities on the Seeley, Superior, and Ninemile RD's. I continually bumped up against the restrictions of permitting throughout my career. USFS has to realize that there is a growing population, with growing demand for services, and there are continually new ideas emerging about how to get people out recreating on National Forest lands. Certainly there are concerns for overuse, but keeping such a tight restriction on permits, and limiting them to those who have had them for years, only serves as a chokehold on innovation.

This is a long letter. I thank you for taking my comments into consideration.

J. Porter Hammitt, MS

