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First name: Tobin

Last name: Kelley

Organization:

Title:

Comments: [External Email] Forest Plan Comment

#### Lolo Forest Plan Comment

Regarding the revision of the Lolo Forest Plan I believe we need to add as much wilderness as possible to the forest. One of the tenets of landscape ecology is to find the pattern and processes that exist across a landscape such that these patterns and processes continue to operate. We currently are very interested in pathways of animals and using GPS technology has enabled us to see the pathways that animals are using to disperse across our landscapes both within and outside of the Lolo Forest boundary. We easily see the energy pathways that humans use: roads mainly and also the cities and towns that are embedded in the landscape. Not so easily seen are the pathways that animals use, be they bears, wolves, wolverines or birds (fish have the obvious pathway across the landscape as long as it is passable). The importance of connected landscapes to allow wildlife and ecological processes to operate across landscapes is critical and necessary to allow these species and our species to continue to live and coexist on the Lolo in particular and the greater landscape as a whole.

More specifically, the Cataract, Cube Iron-Silcox, and Sundance Ridge areas are necessary for wilderness protection when you consider the connectivity that would be enhanced to NW Montana, Idaho and Washington where grizzlies and wolves are currently and need a protected pathway to disperse and allow opportunities for survival. These areas also naturally connect to the Ward Eagle and Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork areas that should be considered part of the Great Burn area and are great candidates for wilderness designation. Again, natural connectivity across that portion is an energy pathway for animals that need this type of habitat to aid in dispersion and viability. To the east, the Stony Mountain Roadless Area is a natural to designate as wilderness as it provides a much needed piece in the Sapphire Mountains and across Rock Creek to the Quigg Peak area. These areas provide another pathway for dispersal and habitat for animals to move across the landscape and provide areas that give protected access to crossing valleys that are given over to human needs where roads, subdivisions, towns and cities hinder easy dispersal. We now have the increasing ability to identify and protect these dispersal and habitat pathways that are critical to animals for dispersal and genetic mixing across landscapes. In addition, we can (and have shown) how widely animals will migrate and the issues they face during these migrations crossing highways, fences, developments and forest roads which makes increasing the amount and connectivity of wilderness areas that are free of these issues so important to their survival and genetic robustness.

There is still much we don't know about where and when and how various animals use and disperse across our lands - intense studies in Wyoming regarding wolverine presence on forests and national parks found little to no evidence and then sighting from the general public and evidence showed that individuals were indeed present. This is the other reason for having areas that are protected, we know much, but simply do not really know where and how animals do disperse across landscapes and use them for survival. That is why we need to act for a plan that is only for a short time period to protect what we have now, to give others in 30 years the chance to make decisions when we still have most of the pieces on the landscape that have been here for centuries. Give those that follow us the best we can to increase their decision space.

Regarding my personal experience with these areas, I have had the opportunity to have spent time in nearly all of them over decades in western MT, have hunted, fished, hiked, biked and worked wildfires and done research in parts of these areas. They truly are places that deserve the highest consideration we can give them to allow ecological and human processes to continue to operate for all the species we as the public and the Forest Service as an agency are responsible for managing.