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Organization:

Title:

Comments: [External Email]Public Comment Not Submitted for LNF Revision

To Whom it May Concern,

I tried to submit my comment via the CARA portal but got a message saying the comment period had closed, even though the website says it will close at midnight MST on April 1, 2024. I have included my comment below.

My Comment:

Dear Lolo Planning Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Lolo Forest Plan Proposed Action.

I grew up in Missoula recreating on the rivers, trails, and snow of the Lolo National Forest. Having outstanding nearby access to quality ecosystems for human powered recreation, coexisting with wildlife, a little bit of solitude, and the healing quality of the outdoors, has done more for enriching my life in this place than anything the cities or towns have to offer. I know that many in this community feel the same way about the national forest, whether they are hunting, bird watching, or snowmobiling. The ways I have come to know and love this forest is through whitewater kayaking, backcountry and cross country skiing, hiking, backpacking, mountain biking and a little bit of hunting and fishing. These sports have brought vibrant communities of people into my life, and these people all want to be stewards of the land and for the ecosystem's integrity to be valued.

The Forest Service has already done a lot to work towards these values that are held by the community. First, there is the management of whitewater and fishing streams. I appreciate that the good work that has been done to protect the following streams, which have outstanding recreation, fish, and wildlife values:

- [bull] Rattlesnake Creek
- [bull] Rock Creek
- [bull] Lolo Creek, South Fork Lolo Creek
- [bull] Clark Fork River (St. Regis to Quinns)
- [bull] Blackfoot River, North Fork Blackfoot River
- [bull] Clearwater River, Colt Creek
- [bull] Morrell Creek
- [bull] Monture Creek, Middle Fork Monture Creek
- [bull] Lodgepole Creek
- [bull] North Fork Fish Creek, West Fork Fish Creek, Straight Creek, Cache Creek
- [bull] Deer Creek, Cromie Creek, Up Up Creek
- [bull] West Fork Thompson River

In addition to the 21 rivers and streams listed above, Wild and Scenic eligible protections are also warranted for the Thompson River, Fish Creek, South Fork Fish Creek, and the St. Regis River. The Forest Service dismisses these streams as neither unique nor important within western Montana. I disagree. These rivers possess outstandingly remarkable values that are unique within the region of comparison and include:

- [bull] Thompson River [ndash] whitewater boating, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in the West Fork Thompson River
- [bull] Fish Creek - whitewater boating, exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork River and cold water climate refuge headwaters within the Great Burn
- [bull] South Fork Fish Creek - exemplary angling, and important habitat connectivity between the Clark Fork

River and cold water climate refuge headwaters in Cache Creek

[bull] St. Regis River [ndash] exemplary angling, critical spawning grounds, and cold water climate refuge habitat

Westslope cutthroat trout should be added to the Species of Conservation Concern list due to lack of distribution of high genetic integrity and the potential for increased distribution resulting from restoration. Finally, the Forest Service 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.

I also want to recognize the good work done by the Forest Service so far in managing several spots with great backcountry skiing opportunities such as Lolo Pass. However, I have some suggestions to revise the forest plan to better protect this and similar locations. Given the importance of these areas for the non-motorized winter recreation community, I believe the areas bulleted below should be classified as Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized or Primitive in winter:

- Lolo Creek: Lolo Pass
- Saint Regis: Saint Regis Basin
- Clearwater Upper Blackfoot: Morrell Mountain
- Middle Clark Fork: Hoodoo Pass
- Greater Missoula: Marshall Mountain and Wisherd Ridge [ndash] specifically in the case of the Morrell Mountain Lookout Road (FR 4365), we feel it[rsquo]s appropriate also to include a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting, narrowly buffering the road.

I also love recreating on trails and in primitive areas in the Lolo National Forest. I thus have the following suggestions to protect this kind of access:

- The Cube Iron Roadless Complex: In the northwest corner of the Lolo National Forest, the Cube Iron area encompasses three inventoried roadless areas: Cataract, Cube Iron-Silcox, and Sundance Ridge. This area serves as a vital wildlife corridor connecting the Cabinet, Bitterroot, and Mission Mountains. The proposed action has continued to propose managing these roadless areas as nonmotorized backcountry. I encourage the Forest Service to recommend this area for Wilderness, thereby protecting its incredible wild character and wildlife connectivity.

- The Great Burn: The Great Burn and String of Pearls is a chain of wild roadless areas that stretch nearly 100 miles along the Idaho-Montana border. The center of the Great Burn is the 275,000-acre Hoodoo Roadless Area, which is split between the two states. The Idaho side is managed by the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest and the Montana side by the Lolo National Forest.

This Hoodoo Roadless Area should be protected in its entirety across both Forests so that it can continue to serve as a rich, intact habitat for mountain goats, wolverines, and other wildlife at risk from motorized use.

The Lolo proposed action is initially proposing to retain the recommended Wilderness boundaries that have been in place for nearly 40 years. I strongly support this part of the plan and call on the Forest Service to continue protecting the entirety of this important recommended Wilderness area.

Just north of the Hoodoo, there are two smaller roadless areas known as Ward Eagle and Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork, which are part of the [ldquo]String of Pearls.[rdquo] These have previously been managed as nonmotorized backcountry areas and are great candidates for recommended Wilderness due to their wild and remote nature.

- Landscapes addressed in the Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Act: I ask that the Forest Service to mirror all

of the pieces of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act in the Lolo Forest Plan's designations and recreation suitability components, including recommending Wilderness for the Westfork Clearwater.

- Lolo Peak: I was pleased to see that the proposed action retained the recommended Wilderness area and expanded the research natural area, which is something a group of local citizens has been requesting over the last several years.

- Rock Creek: While I'm pleased the Forest Service has retained recommended Wilderness designation for the main Quigg Roadless Area, it missed an opportunity to recommend Wilderness for the Stony Mountain Roadless Area to the west. It is vital that all the pieces of the Rock Creek watershed area are protected so the creek can remain the blue-ribbon stream it is and the area can keep serving as a vital corridor for elk, mule deer, and other wildlife.

Please consider these improvements within the Proposed Action to better protect western Montana rivers.