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Comments: The Flathead River and its surrounding wilderness areas, particularly the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, are facing a crisis that demands immediate action. Habitat protection cannot be delayed, and current recreational use is causing significant impacts that threaten the very wilderness these areas are intended to preserve. A critical need exists for more scientific data to inform user capacity numbers, as the Forest Service currently lacks the information necessary to make sound management decisions. Perhaps most pressing is the issue of wildlife displacement, where current recreation levels are forcing animals out of their natural habitats within the Wilderness. This displacement, along with the impacts caused by flights at Schafer airstrip on the Middle Fork of the Flathead, requires immediate intervention.

A fundamental principle of the Wilderness Act is at stake. The vast majority of use on these wild rivers should be allocated to the public, ensuring access for all. Commercial outfitting and guiding, while potentially valuable, must be strictly limited to what is "necessary and proper," as dictated by the Act. This requires a careful assessment of current operations and a commitment to prioritizing the preservation of the wilderness character. Sound decision-making hinges on comprehensive data collection and analysis. This effort must encompass the entirety of the Flathead River corridor, extending one-quarter mile to either side of the river, to provide a complete picture of the impacts at play.

Finally, the South Fork of the Flathead River is experiencing impacts that are demonstrably out of compliance with its established Wilderness Management Plan. This situation requires immediate action to bring the area back into alignment with its designated protections. Delaying these crucial steps will only exacerbate the existing problems and further jeopardize the long-term health and integrity of this invaluable wilderness resource.