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Comments: I am writing regarding the Flathead Comprehensive River Management Plan (#56536) proposed by the United States Forest Service (USFS).

I would like to start by commending the USFS for taking the opportunity to increase monitoring and propose new regulations on the Flathead River. The 219-mile Flathead Wild and Scenic River System runs through 87 miles of the gorges and valleys of one of the more than 1.5 million-acre Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex in northwest Montana. The complex consists of the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Great Bear Wildernesses. All of its native wildlife, including iconic native species like grizzlies and wolves, still reside there.

On a summer weekend, the Flathead is flooded with anglers and floaters, often accompanied by guides and outfitters, drifting on the water or camping and fishing along the banks. However, the agency's proposed actions in the River Management Plan fall far short of understanding and addressing the impacts to the River and the Wilderness' that it runs through. In specific, the plan fails to acknowledge current recreation impacts or address the significant threats to Wilderness already occurring in one of America's preeminent wild places.

The Flathead Comprehensive River Management Plan starts out by proposing a number of good actions, including prohibiting parking and car camping on gravel bars; requiring containment of human waste within 200 feet of the river's edge; prohibiting drones; requiring a fire pan or blanket for campfires within or above the highwater mark; and noise level and group size limits.

The agency also lists user capacity numbers but provides no information on how or when these numbers were reached or data to show the actual user limit when considering the well-being of fish and wildlife and the experiences of other wilderness visitors. In addition, the Plan also fails to provide information on impacts to Wilderness due to current recreation use, including the displacement of wildlife and waterfowl caused by rampant overuse, such as the endless stream of outfitting and guide services profiting from tours through the river corridor, and low-flying aircraft overhead.

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex stands as one of the flagship Wilderness areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System-the 3% of land in the Lower 48 where native wildlife can still find refuge from the pressures of ever-expanding human civilization. The agency needs to take this opportunity to research the impacts recreation is already having on Wilderness and wildlife, and act quickly to address the problems. Whether it is boats, planes, pack stock, or hikers, excessive recreation use will inevitably harm habitat and displace animals that rely on Wilderness in a world growing increasingly claustrophobic.

For the sake of the Wilderness and its wildlife, I ask that the USFS revisit Flathead Comprehensive River Management Plan and consider greater limitations on current uses, as well as expand the analysis of the impacts beyond the river to include the entire corridor a quarter-mile on both sides of the river.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment on this important topic.