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First name: Mark

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service and Forks of the Flathead Comprehensive River Management Plan affiliates,

My name is Mark Fuller and my comments on the proposed action plan released in January 2025 are as follows

I would like to commend you all on continuing the Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) for the Forks of the Flathead and listening to the noncommercial and commercial users groups while crafting your proposed action plan released in January of 2025.

I would encourage the implementation of a mandatory, but unlimited and free float permit. This has the potential to be a great tool to accrue data on the amount and types of use happening on the waterways. This data will help inform decision makers in the future with more robust user data and potentially give them a better understanding of how these rivers are being used. I would also encourage the consideration of the said permits throughout the entire length of the Wild and Scenic river corridor to ensure user data for all sections.

I applaud your proposal prohibiting vehicle camping along the river banks of the forks of the Flathead. I believe the increase in camping use at Blankenship and other boat ramps in the Wild and Scenic river corridor has negatively impacted close proximity water quality and the riparian zone through off road vehicle use and human waste.

I am in agreement with the proposal to restrict drone use in most segments of the forks of the Flathead River corridor. Drone activity can be a nuisance and degrades the quality of certain user's river experience. There should be room for exceptions. Examples of acceptable drone use in the river corridor would be cases of search and rescue, limited administrative use, and potential scientific applications.

I would also encourage the Forest Service to put in place administrative "guard rails" on the regulatory process of allocating user days from the user pool. User capacities in the proposed action plan would allow for growth in user activity within the forks of the Flathead River corridor. The allocation of user days, as I understand, is ultimately up to the head ranger and their administration at either Hungry Horse Glacier View or Spotted Bear Ranger Stations. Setting guidelines or parameters of acceptable controlled growth would add an extra layer of security to mitigate the chance of overuse through user activity in the Wild and Scenic river corridor.

I encourage the increase in permits for livery service throughout the forks of the Flathead. There is a need for shuttle drivers to help decrease congestion at boat ramp parking lots as well as reduce the amount of traffic along HWY 2 (middle fork) and the "North Fork rd" in high use times of the year.

It is of great importance that there is a comprehensive and robust monitoring plan for the fisheries throughout the forks of the Flathead. In the section titled monitoring, indicators, triggers, and thresholds, table #5 states that all segments of the forks will have the fishery monitored and if a sustained decline over 5 years is observed, there will be action taken. There needs to be scientifically derived, reliable data to determine if there is a decline in any segment of the forks of the Flathead fishery. I would encourage the Forest Service and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MT FWP) to collaborate and come up with a fisheries monitoring plan that is outlined in detail in the following draft of the CRMP.

Potential options to consider when coming up with how to monitor the fisheries on the forks of the Flathead would be to add a questionnaire to the mandatory, but unlimited and free float permit that asks if anglers are fishing, the number of anglers, and what method they are using, etc. This would help give baseline data to non commercial

and commercial angling use on the forks of the Flathead. Also, it would be of great benefit if fishing guides were required or encouraged to log baseline commercial fishery data. This would include but not be limited to logging species, total catch, general size, and apparent hook scarring or malformation. A version of this is used in Alaska for commercial sport fishing guides for reference. I believe this action would not hinder the guide's ability to run a professional and safe trip. This data could prove quite powerful for determining fisheries trends and help inform better decisions by the fisheries staff in the future.

Thanks for your time.