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First name: Dale

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: February, 7th, 2025

Anthony Botello, Supervisor Flathead National Forest

650 Wolfpack Way

Kalispell, MT 59901

Dear Supervisor Botello;

These comments focus on the scenic sections of the North Fork. I first floated the North Fork of the Flathead in 1993 from the border to Big Creek. My family and I have continued to float the river, especially between the border and Polebridge several time each year. We have floated it less in the last five or six years because of the increased use of the river. We have noticed more trash, including human excrement, and we see less wildlife on our more recent trips on the river. I understand the Flathead Comprehensive River Management Plan must balance use with impacts to the river and its adjacent ecosystem. It is our strong believe that protecting the habitat of the North Fork must be the management priority.

Proposed User Capacity. The North Fork Scenic Unit (MU1) should be managed for what it is, a remote and less used stretch of river. Parking is limited and should not be increased, at least at the border. The user capacity per day should be no greater than 90 to provide a remote and quality near-wilderness experience. I believe on many days the proposed use of is already be exceeded. The proposed use of 180 per day is too much. The river in this area runs much lower than below Ford and especially below Polebridge. The river flow volume should influence the number of river users. For a few weeks after peak runoff the river can handle more traffic than later in the summer. Above Ford the river tends to have more sweepers and log jams. Increased use in this area will only increase river dangers as more boats will back-up and make maneuvering more difficult.

The proposed user capacity should be no more than half of the proposed 450 for the North Fork Scenic Unit (MU2). My experience is that this section is less used than the Ford to Polebridge stretch of river and its natural attributes will be diminished by allowing such a high usage.

User capacities should not be set at levels where degradation is already in evidence. Degradation of the river corridor should be considered a trigger for management action.

The user capacity should be set below the point of degrading ORVs, especially since most ORVs will not be adequately monitored so triggers will not be recognized.

River Use Data. The proposed plan document states that "The data collected provided actual user estimates from float encounter monitoring and river patrols (2017-2023) and from fixed-point camera data (2017-2022) collected by the University of Montana under an agreement." The data should have been available to the public. Not providing this data to the public is a major negative mark against the USFS. Ongoing expanded monitoring should be required by the CRMP.

Proposed Management Actions. The North Fork MU1 should be included in the initial implementation of a mandatory, unlimited, and free float permit system.

The plan should include designating days that commercial trips are not allowed (locals only days) and/or granting permits for specific time slots as is done on other rivers in the WSR System.

All users of the river should be required to haul out human waste within the WSR corridor as is common throughout the WSR system.

Drones should be prohibited on sections of the WSR corridor. The presence of drones has significantly diminished my North Fork experience.

Noise restrictions should be implemented. Solitude and quiet are to an authentic North Fork River experience.

Bear proof food containers should be required on the North Fork WSR corridor. Although bear interactions have been minimal, with increased use those interactions will increase.

Thank you for considering my comments. This CRMP is critical to protecting the North Fork so that we all can experience of the beauty and natural wonders of the river. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Dale Horton
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