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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service officials,

I write to offer my hope that your ongoing development of the Flathead Comprehensive River Management Plan (#56536) will accommodate private citizens and not favor outfitters. Further, as a rafter, kayaker, and packrafter, I hope you will make clear delineations in potential impacts. For example, a few responsible packrafters doing a self-support trip will likely have less impact on the river corridors than a guided raft trip and all the attendant equipment. Such differences matter, and so I hope the Plan clearly articulates how different various types of trips can be in terms of potential impacts. Please don't just "lump" all users together for the sake of simplicity.

I strongly support the free, mandatory float permits to improve visitor use data without restricting access. As I mentioned above, I value responsible river running behaviours, including the packing out of human waste and mandatory firepan requirements. At the same time, I support a nuanced approach that acknowledges that self-support kayakers and packrafters should be able to carry waste containment and firepan equipment that makes sense for the kinds of craft people are piloting.

I also support river rangers increasing their presence as a means of helping educate river users about the environmental and recreational rules and guidelines. As river use increases, in other words, so should patrols.

My concerns about transparency have been heightened as a result of the Trump administration's approach to governing. Please do not give in to the temptation to cut out the public from decision making. Share how user input was considered in the decision-making processes and you will have better-informed and likely happier river users. Finally, it would be great if the transparency could extend to explanations about how your agency intends or will manage the different types and kinds of boaters. Again, outfitters and their guides and clients should not "rule the day," nor should private, self-support boaters be unaccountable to the Plan. If you can be clear about the what and the how of the Plan, all will be better off. Thank you for considering my comments.

John Eliason, former river guide and avid river runner