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Comments: To the Forest Service:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the proposed changes to river management for the Three Forks of the Flathead. These rivers are treasured paddling destinations, and ensuring their long-term sustainability while maintaining reasonable access is a priority for many in the outdoor community.

I support the introduction of a free, mandatory float permit system as a way to collect accurate visitor use data without placing unnecessary restrictions on access. Improved data collection will provide a clearer understanding of river usage and help guide future management decisions.

Additionally, I recognize the importance of protecting water quality and the surrounding environment. Implementing waste packout and firepan requirements is a reasonable step in this direction. However, I encourage flexibility in these regulations to account for the unique needs of packrafters, ensuring that waste containment and firepan options remain practical for those traveling light.

I also believe that ongoing monitoring of visitor experiences and river conditions is essential to assessing potential congestion and environmental impacts. Continued engagement with the paddling community will be crucial in evaluating whether additional management actions are necessary.

Transparency is another key concern. I encourage the Forest Service to clearly outline how user capacities were determined and to ensure that private paddlers have been equitably considered in the decision-making process. Additionally, further clarification is needed regarding how private paddlers are managed differently from commercial outfitters. A clear distinction between these groups will help maintain fair and accessible river use policies.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate the work being done to balance conservation efforts with recreational access, and I look forward to following the progress of this initiative.