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Organization:

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Comments: Dear Supervisor Botello and team,

As you work toward the final CRMP, please consider these comments about the Middle Fork of the Flathead's management units.

Thank you for managing the Middle Fork Wild section for solitude and consistency with a primitive ROS, a Wild River classification, Wilderness management direction from the Forest Plan, and applicable wilderness management plans.

I applaud the proposed action of specifying Staircase Rapid and Splitrock as river landmarks, indicating the beginning and end of the no-stop zone to protect goats from human disturbance. Those are excellent natural markers, and the action offers thoughtful protection to wildlife. I look forward to a robust educational campaign and signage at Bear Creek to notify the visiting and local public of this provision. I applaud the proposed action to prohibit dogs from Bear Creek to Essex.

I applaud the proposed action to prohibit motor vehicle camping or parking on gravel bars on all segments with river access adjacent to roads.

I appreciate the characterization of Bear Creek to Cascadilla (proposed MU1) as a semi-primitive ROS framework. Please consider splitting MU2 into two units, Bear Creek to Essex and Essex to Cascadilla, which would address the unique protection needs of specific ORVs within this dynamic 22-mile stretch. Managing Bear Creek to Essex as its own, unique management unit will allow wildlife biologists to study and protect goats near the Walton Goat Lick while zeroing in on capacity numbers that I envision being overly challenging to gauge in the greater proposed MU1. Currently, and thankfully, no camping is allowed from Bear Creek to Essex, and no stopping is permitted through much of the section, which has guided the culture of the rafting/fishing community to recognize this stretch as having unique management requirements that already set it aside as its own unit. I think this should be solidified separately from the greater proposed MU1. From a capacity standpoint, this is especially important as private and commercial rafting and fishing parties exiting the Middle Fork Wild section often take out at Essex rather than Bear Creek and should not be included in capacity numbers suggested through Cascadilla. Managing Essex to Cascadilla as its own unit under the listed actions proposed for MU1, including carrying capacity, should be considered because it has three public river access sites with dynamic opportunities for multi-day and one-day floats, as well as easy river use by non-floaters who have walked in from Highway 2 or along the South Boundary Trail.

I suggest setting watercraft limits in conjunction with the 50-person group limit for all recreational segments to prevent 50 single-person watercraft from launching as a party. These limits already exist for commercial users.

I applaud the proposed action of requiring metal fire pans or fire blankets for campfires in all segments.

I recommend amending the proposed action to authorize 50 user days under a temporary education and outfitting and guide permit annually for each recreational and scenic segment and the wild segment of the Middle Fork to require any additional permit holder, albeit temporary, the same safety, training, guiding, and outfitting requirements as currently required of existing commercial operators, or require that these trips be run through existing commercial operators. Underserved groups certainly need access to the corridor. And their safety and experience should not be compromised. That's why their trips should be run through permitted outfitters who are existing partners with managing agencies, have approved operating plans, licensed and trained guides, and a clear record of safety, ethics, etiquette, and stewardship.

Thank you for your dedication to this important plan.