



Montana Chapter

Adventure Begins Where the
Roads End

1295 Lena Lane
Missoula, MT 59804

October 1, 2013

Kootenai National Forest
31374 US Highway 2
Libby, MT 59923-3022

Objection to draft Forest Management Plan

From: Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers would like to thank the Kootenai National Forest for its effort to plan the future of this remarkable national forest. The plan, overall, provides a largely appropriate balance between conservation of habitat and development of natural resources.

Our objection is related to management direction on a specific drainage: the Silver Butte-Fisher River.

Forest Plan Link: Page 81 Table 17 Listing 5b motorized year- for 21.4% of the area.

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The Silver Butte- Fisher River has been the focus of conservation efforts for decades, perhaps most importantly the successful land swap between the Kootenai National Forest and the Plum Creek Timber Co. to consolidate the checkerboard land ownership pattern across the drainage. This land swap was completed because land managers recognized what was so special about the Silver Butte-Fisher River. It is the only largely

undeveloped drainage in the east side of the Cabinet Mountain Range. It includes relatively large expanses of unbroken forest from the timberline of the Cabinet Range to the shores of the Fisher River. These include the roadless areas around Allen Peak, Barren Peak, Iron Meadows and Silver Butte.

Where other drainages in the Fisher Geographic Area are extensively logged and roaded, the Silver Butte-Fisher River escaped that fate. This holds many benefits for a variety of big game species, including elk, mule deer, moose, black bear, mountain lion, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, as well as benefits for fisheries and streams feeding into the Fisher River. Silver Butte-Fisher River is important habitat for grizzly bears and bull trout, both threatened species.

If the Montanore Mine is built, as proposed, further north in the Cabinets, it only makes the habitat of the Silver Butte-Fisher River Drainage more important.

Our membership seeks out this habitat every year in our hunting and fishing pursuits and note that the area is well utilized by other backcountry hunters and anglers, including those who come from outside the area and hire the local guides and outfitters to hunt here. These backcountry areas are also popular with hikers and horseback riders.

Therefore, it is entirely appropriate for the drainage to be managed as "backcountry" under the Forest Plan. However, the Draft Forest Plan lists it as "5b" or "motorized, year-round". This violates both the traditional management of this land and the suitability of this land. We specifically request that all of the 5b allocation be redesignated as 5a, non-motorized backcountry.

The Silver Butte-Fisher River has view relatively few roads but has a network of trails up every major drainage. These are, without exception, designated as foot and stock trails only. Although it's not unheard of to see dirt bike or ATV tracks on these trails, it is thankfully a rare occurrence and one that is technically illegal. Motorized trail traffic degrades the excellent habitat security offered by this land and will greatly increase the spread of weeds, which is already a growing concern in the lower regions of the drainage.

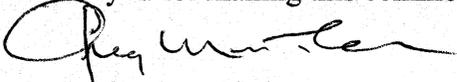
We note that there is no non-motorized backcountry designated in any of the Fisher Geographic Area. This is an oversight that needs to be corrected. In the Draft, a scant 10 percent of the Forest is managed to provide a non-motorized backcountry opportunity.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers has supported Kootenai National Forest "active management" of the drainage, including logging from existing roads, using sprays to control weeds, using helicopters to set prescribed fires, and using chainsaws and helicopters to support trail crews. We are not asking this area be declared wilderness.

We understand the Forest Plan is strategic in nature and does not, by itself, "open up" these trails to motorized use. Still, it makes no sense to us to have a Forest plan that points toward a future of motorized backcountry, while on-the-ground management emphasizes the non-motorized aspects of the land.

Relief: We ask that the roadless areas of the Silver Butte-Fisher River be designated as non-motorized backcountry, or 5a, in the Forest Plan. This suits the past management direction of the Forest Service and best suits the land itself. It seems the only designation that makes sense for this important piece of ground.

Thank you for making this commonsense revision for the Final Forest Plan.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Greg Munther".

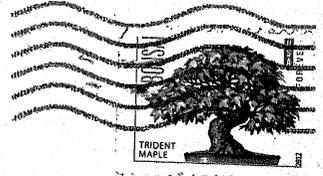
Greg Munther, Chairman

Montana Chapter Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

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