

2013 Kootenai Forest Plan Revision Objection

Objectors Name: Greg Beardslee for the Montana Mountain Bike Alliance (MMBA)

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Name of lead objector (if more than one): Bob Allen

Name of the plan revision being objected to and the responsible official:

Kootenai National Forest Land Management Plan 2013 Revision.

Responsible Official: Faye L. Krueger – Regional Forester, Northern Region.

Statement of issues and/or parts of the plan revision which the objection applies:

I object to the fact that Kootenai National Forest, under direction from Region 1 of the USDA Forest Service, has adopted a policy for the management of Recommended Wilderness management areas that has not been properly assessed through the National Environmental Policy Act.

Statement explaining the objection and how the proposed plan should be altered:

The reasons for this objection are this:

Page 371 of the Appendices for the KNF FEIS, for the Revised Land Management Plan states: **“A white paper provides consistency for management of Recommended Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas across the Region 1”.**

In direct contrast to this, I am in possession of a letter addressed to Citizens for Balanced Use president Kerry White, from Region 1 Regional Forester Abigail Kimbell, dated January 24, 2006, which clarifies points discussed in a previous meeting:

The first point requesting clarification states: “1. Restrictions on motorized and mechanized use in Recommended Wilderness Areas are applied at the discretion of individual Forest Supervisors.”

Mrs Kimbell states: **“This statement is true. We have no Regional policy or direction that requires Forest or Grassland Supervisors to prohibit or allow motorized use in areas they recommend for wilderness designation in Forest Plans. Supervisors may use their discretion when determining the management direction for Recommended Wilderness Areas in their Forest Plans. However, they must weigh these decisions very carefully to protect the values that qualify these areas for wilderness consideration”**

Reason #1: MMBA objects to the changing and implementation of forest management policies based a “white paper” that was never properly evaluated according to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). MMBA believes that the adoption of these management policies without performing a NEPA analysis on the implications of

the new policy and allowing the public to comment on the proposed change in management policy is a clear violation of NEPA.

Reason #2: In addition to not being subject to the required NEPA analysis, the “white paper” referenced above was neither referenced or not supplied in the KNF Draft Land Management Plan, Draft EIS, or Appendices. The fact that the document, which provides the basis for land management policies for certain management areas proposed in the KNF Plan, was neither referenced and supplied in any of the draft documents, is a clear violation of Forest Service policy.

Proposed Solution

Region 1 of the USDA Forest Service needs to suspend the management policies for Recommended Wilderness Management Areas and Wilderness Study Areas, which are based on the management policy recommendations stated in the “white paper” referenced in the response, until such time as the above referenced white paper directive goes through NEPA as a significant action, and the public has had sufficient opportunity to comment on the management policies outlined in the white paper. In addition, a “programmatic impact analysis” should be completed on this white paper before non-motorized designations and actions are done by guidance of this new, non NEPA analyzed, policy.

As part of this objection, I would like to formally request at this time, under the Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the “white paper” which is referenced in the response on page 371 of the FEIS Appendices quoted above.”

Statement demonstrating the link between the objection and prior formal comments: I previously submitted comment for the Montana Mountain Bike Alliance directly and specifically about this issue.

Signature: Greg Beardslee

Send electronic objections to: objections-chief@fs.fed.us

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Statement of issues and/or parts of the plan revision which the objection applies:

We object to the proposal to manage the northern portion of the Whitefish Divide area as MA 1B – Recommended Wilderness.

Statement explaining the objection and how the proposed plan should be altered:

The reasons for this objection are this:

1. The process of evaluating the Thompson-Seton Inventoried Roadless Area was flawed as the portion of this area proposed as Recommended Wilderness does not meet the definition of Wilderness as described in section 2c of the The Wilderness Act of 1964.

This area DOES NOT “generally appear to have been affected primarily be the forces of nature with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable”. The Blue Sky Creek road (USFS road #7020 and spurs #7020C & #7020D), and well as numerous spur roads, (#7045, #7045A & #7045B), which were built, (and still exist), to access timber harvest units, (which also still exist), are present in throughout the very middle of this area. **This area DOES NOT “have outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”.** This area simply does not possess the characteristics to offer the opportunities as defined. (Reference – The Wilderness Act of 1964)

FS Handbook 1909.12 Land Management Handbook Chapter 70.

2. The process of evaluating and designating the Thompson-Seton area as an “Inventoried Roadless Area” was flawed. When you evaluate historic aerial photographs you can clearly see both roads and past management activities (including numerous timber harvest units) throughout this area. USFS Roads #7020, #7020C, #7020D #7045, #7045A, #7045B are located in the very heart of this area. FSH 1909.12 – 71.1 Inventory Criteria, clearly states: “Areas qualify for placement on the potential wilderness inventory if they meet the statutory definition of wilderness. Include areas that meet either criteria 1 and 3, or criteria 2 and 3 below.” Item #3. as referred to in the above paragraph states: **“Areas do not contain forest roads (36 CFR 212.1) or other permanently authorized roads, except as permitted in areas east of the 100th meridian (sec. 71.12).”** (FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70)

3. The “Area Capability Assessment” performed by the KNF on the Thomson-Seton IRA #483 was incorrect. If you possess a thorough understanding of the on the ground features and characteristics of the area, and objectively evaluate and rate the criteria provided in the Capability Assessment, the following items should be corrected:

- #9 Terrain – should be Med not High.
- #10 Ability/Knowledge/Skill – should be Med not High.
- #11 Non-hunting Outfitting – should be Med not High
- #13 Surrounding Area – should be Med not High
- #14 Location – should be Med not High
- #16 Value Uniqueness – should be LOW not High.**
- #17 Terrain Features – should be Med not High
- #18 Water Features – should be Med not High
- #31 Big Game Populations – should be Low not Med.**
- #36 Area Access – should be Low, not Med.
- #37 Terrain should be Med not Low.
- #38 Use Restrictions should be Med not Low.
- #41 Area Access – should be Low, not Med.
- #43 Natural Process – should be Med not High.

Proof that these evaluating criteria should be altered can be provided with a through examination of the on the ground features and characteristics of the area. Once the Area Capability Assessment for this area is revised, the area would have a LOW capability for Wilderness Recommendation. A correct revision of the Capability Assessment criteria rating, would significantly reduce the capable of this area for Wilderness designation.

4. The Need Rating with resulted from the Area Needs Assessment for KNF Wilderness Evaluations for the Thompson-Seton IRA #483 has incorrect conclusions. The overall need rating was Moderate, despite the fact that the Thompson Seton IRA had 4 Low ratings, 1 Moderate Rating, and 1 High Rating, in the assessment. Part of this rating assessed the population center in which the Whitefish Divide Recommended Wilderness Area is contained as, according to the USFS Northern Region Wilderness Needs Assessment having a LOW NEED for more wildness acres. The Whitefish Divide Recommended Wilderness is within the area which has Kalispell Montana as it’s population center. Within 100 air miles of that population center there are currently 1,704,141 acres of Congressionally designated wilderness (Bob Marshall – 1 million acres, Great Bear – 286,700 acres, Scapegoat – 239,936 acres, Mission Mountains – 73,877, Cabinet Mountains – 94,272 acres). According to the Wilderness Needs Assessment as defined by Region 1 of the Forest Service any population center with 1 million or more acres of Congressionally designated wilderness has a LOW NEED for more wilderness. In addition, the dominant vegetation cover type which is represented in the Whitefish Divide area, is also currently OVER REPRESENTED in Congressionally designated wilderness areas within this population center.

Table 58. Area Needs Assessment for the KNF

Thompson Seton #483	Trout Creek #664	Tuchuck #482	West Fork Elk #692
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**Wilderness
Evaluation –
Need**

1. Areas having the presence of Westslope cutthroat, Yellowstone cutthroat, or bull trout	Low	Mod	Low	Low
2. Presence of sensitive plant species.	Low	Low	Low	Mod / High
3a. Areas adjacent to existing wilderness.	-	-	-	-
3b. IRAs could be combined to form large habitat patches.	High	Low	High	High – East Fork
4. Ecological Sections represented in Wilderness.	Mod	Mod	Mod	Mod
5. Number of wilderness acres within 100 miles of Kalispell.	Low	Low	Low	Low
6. Under-represented plant communities.	Low (riparian)	M (pine, cedar, hemlock, riparian)	Low	H (pine, cedar, hemlock, riparian)
Need Rating	Mod	Mod	Mod	High
# of Highs	1	0	1	2
# of Moderates	1	3	1	2
# of Lows	4	3	4	2

Note: Area Needs Assessment for the Thompson Seton IRA was altered in the FINAL EIS appendices. The alternation in this assessment was that the rating for the Presence of sensitive plant species was changed from Low to High. This rating was changed based on “updated 2012 Natural Heritage Program list of plant species that are rare at the global or state level”.

- A. We would like an explanation of exactly which plant species was found to exist in this area that is on the updated 2012 Natural Heritage Program list?
- B. An explanation of exactly how the identification of a single plant species can change a wilderness Need rating from Low to High.

This appears to be nothing more than the KNF again manipulating the wilderness evaluation process in order to come to a pre-determined conclusion.

5. Catastrophic wildfires in the Whitefish Divide area would negatively impact municipal water supplies. A local expert (USFS Fire Ecologist Steve Barrett), has stated that the portion of the Whitefish Range contained within the Whitefish Divide area is “overdue for a large scale and high intensity fire event”. Considering that the Whitefish Divide Recommended Wilderness Area is within the town of Eureka Montana’s and Glen Lake Irrigation District’s municipal watershed, management of this watershed with the “let it

burn” fire management policy that is applied to Wilderness Areas is un-acceptable in this watershed which is classified as a B-1 watershed by the State of Montana. Recommended Wilderness management policies for this area would not only decrease the available options to fight wildfire, but also eliminate options to manage vegetation in a way that could mitigate the potential impacts of wildfire on water resources. (Reference – Steve Barrett, USFS Fire Ecologist, Presentation on the Whitefish Range Fire History) (Reference – USDA Forest Service GTR-42-Volume 4, September 2005)

6. Catastrophic wildfires within the Whitefish Divide area would negatively impact Bull Trout, which are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The portion of Grave Creek, which forms the western boundary of the proposed Recommended Wilderness Area, classified as core Bull Trout habitat, and is considered critical spawning habitat for Bull Trout. Runoff of ash, sediment, and other contaminants that would likely occur after a catastrophic fire event in the area has a high potential to have negative impacts on the overall habitat conditions, and spawning habitat success of Bull Trout in Grave Creek, Blue Sky Creek, and Williams Creek. When this fire event occurs, (See Steve Barrett reference), the Kootenai National Forest would be in violation of the Endangered Species Act, as well as numerous policies related to the conservation of threatened and endangered species.

7. Managing the Whitefish Divide area as Recommended Wilderness would restrict motorized and bicycle recreational opportunities within this area resulting in increased motorized and bicycle recreational use within the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area. Considering the close proximity of these two areas, it is not hard to see how restricting motorized and bicycle use in the Whitefish Divide area would essentially displace the vast majority of those user days into the TLWSA. According to the Montana Wilderness Study Act, the Forest Service is obligated to manage their lands in a way that will not encourage increased use within the TLWSA.

8. The Draft Record of Decision for the 2013 Kootenai Forest Plan Revision stated that the one of the main reasons that Roderick Area was being proposed for Recommended Wilderness management was that this management strategy had the support of a local stakeholder group. Similar to Roderick, the Galton Stakeholder Collaborative is a diverse local stakeholder group which has been collaborating on travel management strategies for the Galton Area on the Fortine Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest. The Whitefish Divide Recommended Wilderness is contained within the Galton Area. The Galton Stakeholders Collaborative has 100% consensus on opposition to Recommended Wilderness management for this area, for many of the reasons previously discussed in this objection.

9. Recommended Wilderness management for the Whitefish Divide Area would be detrimental to local economies. The rural economies of this area benefit from the diversity of both summer and winter recreational opportunities currently offered in the Whitefish Divide Area. Managing this area under Recommended Wilderness management policies would significantly decrease the diversity of both summer and

winter recreational opportunities available in this area, thereby negatively impacting local economies.

10. The Area Availability Assessment for the Thompson Seton IRA #483 was inadequate and incorrect. Many of the issues described in other reasons listed in this objection were not adequately considered in this assessment. The inadequacy of this assessment has led to an Availability Assessment rating for this area which does not coincide with the conditions that actually exist on the ground.

Proposed Solution

The plan should be altered to manage the portion of the Whitefish Divide Area currently proposed for Recommended Wilderness, in such a manner that would allow a maximum of both summer and winter recreation opportunities within the area (relieving recreational pressure within the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area), and allow for a wide range of options for both fire suppression, and vegetation management strategies that would prevent and/or mitigate the impacts of wildfire on municipal watersheds, and critical spawning habitat for endangered species.

Statement demonstrating the link between the objection and prior formal comments: Our comments on the Draft Kootenai National Forest Plan specifically addressed the proposed management policy for this area.

Signature: Greg Beardslee

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Statement of issues and/or parts of the plan revision which the objection applies:

I object to the fact that Kootenai National Forest, under direction from Region 1 of the USDA Forest Service, has recommended wilderness in the Galton Area, which does not match the recommendations of the Galton Community Collaborative.

Statement explaining the objection and how the proposed plan should be altered:

The reasons for this objection are this:

On the east side of the Whitefish Range from the Galton area, the Whitefish Range Partnership has worked hard to settle differences and come to agreement on how much of the Whitefish Range can be used, enjoyed, and preserved in the future. Flathead National Forest is beginning the Forest Planning Process. A spokesman for the Forest has stated, “we’re obviously going to give that a lot of consideration when we develop our plan”. On the west side of the Whitefish Range, at the same time, citizens collaborated over issues regarding the Galton Area. The Galton Community Collaborative has developed recommendations for the Kootenai Forest Plan and has also filed objections because of differences between their findings and the Final EIS. Members of the Galton Community Collaborative have an historical and ongoing record of stewardship, all documented, which actually predates the Forest Service itself. They are very qualified to make intelligent recommendations to the Kootenai Forest Plan. The Kootenai National Forest Plan has elements in the Galton Area that do not meet the recommendations of the Collaborative.

Proposed Solution

Regarding the Galton Area, recommendations from the Galton Community Collaborative must be given a lot of consideration; similar to consideration other Collaborative recommendations will be given on the adjacent Flathead National Forest. If any areas of contention lie along the shared boundary of the two Forests, Kootenai officials should encourage the two collaboratives to meet and settle any differences.

Statement demonstrating the link between the objection and prior formal

comments: The Collaborative recommendations from both groups are a new development, so there is no link to any prior comments.

Signature: Greg Beardslee