

THE SUN TIMES

Groups push Forest Service to update planning effort

01 September 2021

From the air, no clear boundary delineates the Lolo and Bitterroot national forests.

On paper and in the public sphere, however, the two federal public landscapes soon may become very distinct. If Scott Laird and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership have their wish, "soon" will become "now."

"There's momentum here," Laird said after an aerial tour of the two national forests with EcoFlight pilot Bruce Gordon on Tuesday.

"We hope to elevate this issue and put pressure on the D.C. office to get this going," he added. "The forests want to feel they're prepared, with staffing, support and good relations in the community. We want to show they've got constituents in three counties who say we'd like you to move forward."

Forest plans contain a multitude of current condition inventories of tree stands and campground facilities, user groups and future demands. They also form the rule book for decision-making as new issues come up.

Last March, TRCP joined 10 other conservation groups and the commissioners of Missoula, Mineral and Sanders counties in encouraging the two national forests to accelerate their planning efforts. The whole U.S. Forest Service has been undergoing a planning revision since 2012.

From the air, a constellation of future concerns comes into view.

Old and current logging sales bump against roadless forests in the Ninemile Valley, where several conservation groups are [suing the Lolo](#) National Forest over proposed new road-building and timber management plans. Burn scars around Lolo Peak and a nearby failed ski resort show two different kinds of rehabilitation work that could be considered in the Bitterroot National Forest. Across the Bitterroot River, housing developments creep toward the edge of the Sapphire Mountains and their isolated elk winter and summer ranges, nestled below the [new Mount Dean Stone trail](#) network on the edge of Missoula.

The Forest Service has divided its national forests into three: the Mountain, Pacific and Eastern [planning service groups](#). All the Montana national forests are in the Mountain group. Of them, only the Kootenai and Flathead national forests have completed new plans as of June. The Helena/Lewis and Clark and Custer/Gallatin national forests are close to completing their plans. That leaves the Lolo and Bitterroot with three-decade-old plans and Beaverhead/Deerlodge with a 12-year-old plan in need of revision. The Lolo plan is 35 years old; the Bitterroot a year younger.

Source: https://www.fairfieldsuntimes.com/news/state/groups-push-forest-service-to-update-planning-effort/article_db8851cc-6ca7-53fd-92b4-369cdec35dcd.html