

Facing the New Forest Plan

The draft forest plans for both the Idaho Panhandle and Kootenai National Forests were released in May. Here is a very brief review of how these draft plans impact the Scotchman Peaks area.

The Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF) has strengthened their wilderness recommendations for the Scotchman Peaks area. Specifically the IPNF has re-drawn boundaries for the recommended wilderness which make better geographic sense, and in so doing have added some acreage to the total amount they are recommending for wilderness for the Scotchman Peaks area. Additionally, they have proposed restricting snowmobiling from recommended wilderness. Snowmobiling is an activity suitable to non-wilderness areas.

The Kootenai National Forest has removed the category of recommended wilderness from the entire forest, including areas in the Scotchmans that had been managed since the 1970s as recommended wilderness. They have replaced it with a newly created “wildlands” category. The wildlands category does not contain a recommendation for wilderness from the forest service. By withdrawing their recommendation for wilderness, the Kootenai hinders the process of securing congressional designation of wilderness. This decision contradicts existing forest planning regulations as well as the forest service’s own directives. As residents and users of the Scotchman Peaks area we stand to lose our wilderness unless we take action. The Kootenai Forest has the opportunity to correct this egregious error when they write the final plan. In order for this to happen they need to understand we are not satisfied.

Make yourself heard and help make recommended wilderness a strong component of both forest plans. A strong community voice, with many people joining the chorus, can create this change. Comments on these draft plans will be accepted by the forest service until August 10th. Please send copies of your comments to both:

Kootenai National Forest
KIPZ Revision Team
1101 Hwy 2 W
Libby, MT 59923

Idaho Panhandle National Forest
KIPZ Revision Team
3815 Schreiber Way
Coeur d’Alene, ID 83815

We need to let both forest supervisors know that:

- We fully support the Idaho Panhandle National Forest’s wilderness recommendation for the Scotchmans and thank them for setting aside this area to be free from snowmobiles.
- We do not believe that the Kootenai National Forest represented the best interest or desires of ourselves, or our communities, by removing recommended wilderness. ***We want Recommended Wilderness back in the plan for the Scotchman Peaks!***
- We want the Recommended Wilderness boundaries to include all areas identified in the 1987 plan as recommended wilderness as well as all areas identified in the “starting option” as recommended wilderness.
- We are particularly concerned that the “5C” area east of Savage peak (which was recommended wilderness until the draft plan map came out) was carved out of an area with high wilderness values and containing critical habitat for many species. This action slices into the biological heart of the Scotchmans and undermines the wilderness integrity and solitude of the surrounding area. This area needs to be returned to recommended wilderness for the Scotchmans.
- We expect both forests to recognize and, through recommended wilderness, to protect all critical habitat in the Scotchmans for threatened, endangered and sensitive species including the Grizzly Bear, Bull Trout, Canada Lynx, Wolverine and Mountain Goat.
- We believe that opportunities for solitude, scenery, biological integrity, quiet recreation, quality hunting and fishing should be the primary concerns in determining boundaries and recommending wilderness for the Scotchman Peaks area.