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**Conservationists Ask Court to Reinstate Protections  
for Grizzly Bears and Bull Trout in Flathead National Forest**

*Complaint Filed in Federal District Court Argues 2018 Forest Plan  
Violates Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act*

Missoula, MT – Two Montana conservation groups filed a complaint in federal district court today challenging the 2018 Forest Plan for the Flathead National Forest. The newly revised management plan violates the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act by abandoning longstanding protections for key grizzly bear and bull trout habitat in the Forest, just as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is talking about removing the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem’s grizzly bears from the endangered species list.

The 2018 Flathead Forest Plan purports to maintain habitat conditions that existed in 2011. However, the plan actually abandons key measures that have protected grizzly bear and bull trout habitat on the Forest for more than two decades, allowing new roadbuilding and wildlife disturbances in formerly secure habitat without meaningful mitigation.

“The Forest Service should be removing old roads in the Flathead, not building new ones that threaten grizzlies,” said **Josh Purtle, an attorney in Earthjustice’s Northern Rockies office**. “It’s surprising that in this day and age a newly minted forest plan would inflict harm on some of the Northern Rockies’ most iconic wildlife. We’re taking the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service to court to help them see the light on this issue.”

The complaint, filed by Earthjustice attorneys on behalf of Swan View Coalition and Friends of the Wild Swan, follows up on a letter the conservation groups submitted in February, notifying the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service that the Forest Plan violates the law. The complaint asks the Court to set aside the unlawful provisions of the 2018 Plan and reinstate former habitat protections.

“This new Forest Plan does away with important protections for bull trout and aquatic ecosystems,” said **Arlene Montgomery of Friends of the Wild Swan**. “By not limiting the number of roads on the Flathead, the Revised Plan puts water quality, bull trout, and native aquatic species at risk from road culverts blowing out and dumping sediment into streams.”

“The Flathead is abandoning road removal, the true habitat restoration it says helps grizzly bears and bull trout populations recover,” said **Swan View Coalition Chair Keith Hammer**. “The Forest Service is replacing that with road building and logging and trying to call it restoration. We don’t buy it and the science doesn’t support it.”

## **NEW ROADBUILDING THREATENS HARM TO GRIZZLY BEARS AND BULL TROUT**

Seminal grizzly bear research in the 1990s demonstrated that the presence of roads in grizzly bear habitat, and the motorized and non-motorized intrusion those roads allow, harm bears’ survival. Researchers found that even roads closed to the public can displace bears from otherwise secure habitat because bears learn to avoid such roads and the roads also facilitate motorized trespass and other human access. Roads also threaten harm to bull trout, because roads and the culverts that come with them can send harmful sediment into the streams where bull trout live.

Recognizing these threats, the Flathead National Forest in 1995 adopted a Forest Plan provision called Amendment 19, which limited the number of roads the Forest Service could maintain in the Flathead. To meet this standard, the Forest Service was required to reclaim old roads to compensate for any new roads it build in grizzly bear habitat. Such reclamation included revegetation, culvert removal, and other measures intended to ensure the roads no longer function as either a road or a trail. The 2018 Forest Plan, however, arbitrarily weakens these key measures.

Under the lax new plan, the Forest Service has already planned extensive new roadbuilding in the Flathead Forest. A new project proposed in the Swan Valley would build 60 miles of new roads without compensating for that new construction by fully reclaiming existing roads elsewhere in the Forest. By contrast, the Forest Service built only 3.2 miles of new roads in grizzly bear habitat over 14 years under the former, stronger plan.

The Flathead National Forest encompasses 2.4 million acres of public land in northwest Montana, including large areas of public land adjacent to Glacier National Park. The Flathead provides key habitat for the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem population of grizzly bears, whose range extends from the Park southward down the spine of the Northern Rockies, as well as a significant stronghold for the region’s threatened bull trout.

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