

Jeff Halligan

Ranger Erin Phelps
New Meadows Ranger District
Payette National Forest

RE: Upper Rapid River Trails

Dear Ranger Phelps,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Upper Rapid River Trails proposal to open trails in the headwaters of the critical Rapid River Drainage to motorcycles. I do have some experience in this area as I was the trail program coordinator for the "East Zone" of the Payette which encompassed the New Meadows and McCall Ranger districts, and Rapid River was under my jurisdiction.

Rapid River is unique in so many ways, it is one of the last remaining places where a family can go for a weekend hike or backpacking without motorized or mechanized interference close to town or a highway in the Payette National Forest. There are not many if any real opportunities to go someplace wild like this anymore where motorized activities haven't degraded the experience for those who choose quiet, human powered recreation. The hiker is being squeezed out of all corners of the Payette and Rapid River is one place that needs to be preserved for the quality of the wildlife, fish, hiking, horseback and backpacking opportunities.

When this "Emergency Closure" was put in place it had determined that the Payette and Nez Perce NFs, were violating the Wild and Scenic River act and that needed to be rectified. The closure should have been made permanent through the Travel management process at this time and this should still be the option.

When I was the trails program director one of the most frustrating management issues was the information signage in the Rapid river drainage and trying to maintain the trails to standard in the area. The Frypan Trail # 279 allowed motorized use to the W&S boundary where we would place signs twice a year informing people of the trail use designation change, those signs would be gone in no time. We had many people ride on past and down the trail to the 177 trail and back upriver to trail 183. I only caught one person illegally on this trail and it was an IDPR trail ranger. His rationale for being on a closed trail was that all trails needed to be open to motorcycles to avoid confusion. The current proposal to reopen these trails to motorized use does not address the impacts to the fish and wildlife of the area, this is strictly a "we can't go there on our motorcycles and we don't want to walk" proposal. The signage and turnarounds on the dead-end trails have never been successful, there is really no way to build a turnaround at the Frypan trail 278, plus it just entices illegal uses. Same with the other trails 183 and 184, where the trails are very steep, loose, and eroded with no areas to build turnarounds at the W&S boundary. Lake fork trail 188 was proposed to be closed in the early 90s due to resource damage and dangerous structures built to address boggy areas. This trail should be closed to all uses. Trail 229

from Lick Creek lookout to Bear Saddle had been getting illegal ATV use and causing a lot of erosion and resource damage, same issue with the signing, disappears in a day or so and it invites trespass.

To complete this upper Rapid River drainage ecosystem I feel the best thing to do for the resources of fish, wildlife and recreation is to keep the trails open to foot and hoof traffic only for any trail that goes into the Rapid River watershed, trails 187, 328, 517, 228, 229, 178, 184, 183, 129 should all remain closed to motorized and mechanized uses. Trail 188 should be closed to all uses and trail 181, cow camp should remain closed to motorized uses also, as this dead ends in the Rapid River Drainage. This will help alleviate the confusion of what is open and what is not and continue to allow a quality non-motorized experience for those who seek it.

Most other similar opportunities outside of designated Wilderness are being lost to mechanized and motorized uses. There is Wilderness, but the intent of Wilderness I believe, is not to be the dumping grounds for everyone who seeks a wild and quiet experience, most Wilderness is harder to get to and takes way more time to plan and implement an extended or day trip. Places like Rapid River provide the opportunity to seek solitude, quiet and a place that is still wild. Allowing motorized activities will degrade the last of these opportunities.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on this issue,

||S|| Jeff Halligan

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