



BlueRibbon Coalition / Sharetrails

P.O. Box 5449

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Ben Burr, Executive Director

BlueRibbon Coalition

P.O. Box 5449

Pocatello, ID 83202

February 2, 2022

Cathy Tighe

3031 Tongass Avenue

Ketchikan, AK 99901

Dear Ms. Tighe,

BlueRibbon Coalition/ShareTrails (BRC) is writing to provide feedback for the Ward Lake Recreation Area Improvements. BRC is a national non-profit organization that champions responsible recreation and encourages a strong conservation ethic and individual stewardship. We champion responsible use of public lands and waters for the benefit of all recreationists by educating and empowering our members to secure, protect, and expand shared outdoor recreation access and use by working collaboratively with natural resource managers and other recreationists. Our members use motorized and non-motorized means of recreation, including OHVs, boats, horses, mountain bikes, and hiking to enjoy federally managed lands and waters throughout the United States, including those of the Ward Lake area. Many of our members and supporters live in Alaska or travel across the country to visit Alaska and recreate on USFS managed lands throughout Alaska. BRC members visit the Ward Lake area for recreation, sightseeing, bouldering, photography, rockhounding, fishing, wildlife and nature study, camping, observing cultural resources, and other similar pursuits. We would like to add our support to any comment submitted by any individuals or organizations that advocate for continued use. BRC members and supporters have concrete, definite, and immediate plans to continue such activities in the future. We support any comments made by our members.

Sharetrails.org – it's what we do!

Plan Specific Feedback

BRC supports the overall objectives of the proposed project. We commend the USFS in it's desire to increase opportunities for recreation and public use on public land.

We support allowing dispersed camping and believe it provides a valuable user experience that the Forest Service should be protecting. Only allowing designated campsites is detrimental to many users, and dispersed camping areas can provide overflow camping opportunities if the designated sites fill up. While some may prefer a designated campsite, many prefer to find their own secluded area of nature to enjoy. Analyzing the dispersed camping opportunities for this area or recognizing dispersed camping opportunities in nearby areas should be part of this process to create a diverse range of recreation experiences. Research shows that having an experience in nature where no one else has been has many mental and physical health benefits. Restricting dispersed camping will hinder these benefits. Outdoor recreation has grown incredibly the last few years because the public is starting to recognize the value that enjoying nature brings to your life. In fact, NASA claims that human exploration is innate and what leads to discovery.¹

Many of our members hold organized events in this areas like this. A significant portion of the education mission of organizations like ours and the fundraising that supports organizations like ours comes from these organized events, and we see the continuation of these events as an integral expression of protected First Amendment Rights including freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

BRC supports the FS should analyze increasing the number of visitors allowed on trails. There has been expressed interest in not only increasing the maximum number of visitors for certain trails but also increasing the group size allowed. There is a need for increased group size for local businesses and groups.

In 2019 the Bureau of Economic Analysis showed outdoor recreation contributed \$459.8 billion. The desire and need for outdoor recreation and meaningful experiences with nature has only increased since then and will continue to increase. Local economies should be able to benefit from this trend as long as the USFS uses proper management techniques. Local businesses have already identified a need for more guided tours and an increased number of users.

¹ <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/the-human-desire-for-exploration-leads-to-discovery>

Conclusion

We would like to close by saying we support “shared use”. As long as overall visitation numbers are appropriate for the affected resources, users can be compatible with one another so long as individual users understand designations and plan their activities accordingly. Indeed, recreation use often overlaps with activities such as hiking, camping, equestrian use, etc. We also hold that responsible recreational use of public lands can exist in harmony with ecosystem needs.

BRC would like to be considered an interested public for this project. Information can be sent to the following address and email address:

Ben Burr
BlueRibbon Coalition
P.O. Box 5449
Pocatello, ID 83202
brmedia@sharetrails.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized initials 'BB' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ben Burr
Executive Director
BlueRibbon Coalition

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simone Griffin' in a cursive script.

Simone Griffin
Policy Director
BlueRibbon Coalition