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New Meadows Ranger District
Attn: Railroad Saddle Project
P.O. Box J
New Meadows, ID 83654

BlueRibbon Coalition/ShareTrails (BRC) is writing to provide feedback for the Railroad Saddle Project. 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, horses, mountain bikes, and hiking to enjoy federally managed lands throughout the United States, including those of the Forest Service. Many of our members and supporters live in Idaho or travel across the country to visit Idaho and use motorized vehicles to access Forest Service managed lands throughout Idaho. BRC members visit the Payette National Forest area for motorized recreation, sightseeing, photography, hunting, wildlife and nature study, camping, water sports, and other similar pursuits. We would like to add our support to any comment submitted by any other individuals or organizations that advocate for motorized use and increased recreation access overall. BRC members and supporters have concrete, definite, and immediate plans to continue such activities in the future.

Wildfire

BRC supports the broad project objectives to keep forests healthy and reduce the risk of wildland fires. We recommend using commercial treatment in the maximum amount of land possible. Best available science should be used in making these decisions. Past forest fires that have burned rampant because of the lack of forest projects should be looked at when making decisions. Wildfire is the greatest threat to wildlife and habitat as well as future closures. The Forest Service needs to pursue active management to ensure healthy public lands so the maximum number of people can continue to responsibly enjoy.

If prescribed burns are chosen for an area, and a wildfire arises at any point, that wildfire should be treated as such and the USFS should not allow the wildfire to burn in order to meet prescribed burn objectives. This involves a lot of risks and wildfires should always be treated with as much urgency to suppress the fire as possible.

Roads and Trails

BRC commends the USFS in their efforts to have a sustainable and healthy forest for all to use. Oftentimes we see vegetation projects used as a method to close or decommission roads. Any road proposed to be decommissioned or closed after the completion of the project should be seriously considered for long term use. These roads will offer long term benefits to the forest. There is clearly a purpose and need for these miles of road and the USFS should maintain them and not close them.

BRC does not support the restoration of routes as all routes have been created for a significant reason and serve a purpose and need. If there is a possibility that the route could cause harm to resources the route should be re-routed or USFS should find adequate ways to manage the impact rather than closure. Land agencies are required to manage the land through proactive management and education and not hardwire closure as the correct first response to mitigate impact.

This plan should ultimately identify reasonable standards for allowing dispersed camping as well as added campgrounds. Keeping open roads will allow use for dispersed camping and help mitigate impact as campers won't be concentrated into small areas. Management strategies should be exhausted before restrictions and closures of areas to any type of recreational use. BRC supports all recreational activities if done responsibly.

Economic Benefits

Roads are crucial for various reasons, not only do they act as a natural wildfire barrier to help protect the forests and protect wildlife and habitat but are also needed for fire treatments and emergency response teams. The Bureau of Economic Analysis showed that in 2019 outdoor recreation brought in \$459.8 billion. Outdoor recreation has only grown in popularity since then. BRC is pleased the BLM is not stifling potential economic benefits through road closures.

Not only will the proposed projects benefit the economy by providing a conducive environment for outdoor recreation but will also bring in local revenue through timber sales. BRC supports these efforts and supports any comments made by locals and members who approve these projects for local economic benefit.

Organized Events

Many of our members hold organized events that include organized rides in this area. 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 rights including freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We believe these events are protected by the First Amendment and believe they are crucial to clubs and organizations.

Conclusion

We would like to close by saying we support “shared use”. As long as overall visitation numbers are appropriate for the affected resources, motorized and non-motorized users can be compatible with one another so long as individual users understand designations and plan their activities accordingly. Indeed, motorized and nonmotorized recreation use often overlap as OHV’s often increase accessibility to non-motorized recreational 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:

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brmedia@sharetrails.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'B' and 'B' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Ben Burr
Executive Director
BlueRibbon Coalition

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

Simone Griffin
Policy Director
BlueRibbon Coalition