

October 30, 2015

Richard Metzger
Shoshone National Forest

[REDACTED]

We live in one of the cabins on East Pinnacle Drive (521) and have three concerns with the proposed motorized trail WR-31:

1. It is an invitation to cut new trails in the vicinity of Brooks Lake Creek and the Pinnacle Heights summer cabins.
2. It will increase the chances for dangerous hunting practices around the cabins.
3. It may disrupt movement of game in the area.

The proposed trail follows an existing cross country ski trail from US 26 to Brooks Lake Road (515). There is probably no detrimental impact of that section. We can see the logic of using land already cleared for power lines when establishing a motorized trail. On the west side of Brooks Lake Creek and east of US 26, the proposed trail intersects existing roads (585 and 521). It is this section of the proposed trail that is of concern to us.

By crossing West Pinnacle Drive (521), the proposed trail brings ATVs close to the summer homes. ATVs could easily follow Pinnacle down to the Brooks Lake Creek (illegally, but traces of the old road that used to go across the creek are still visible) and then up East Pinnacle and finally to Brooks Lake Road. Although this crossing is not part of the proposed trail, previous experience with ATVs in the National Forest certainly suggests this may happen. It will also be easy for ATVs to come up the meadow along Brooks Lake Creek or into the meadow west of the creek that trends northeast from 521 near its intersection with the proposed trail. Such use will seriously damage either meadow, especially in the spring when it is very wet. Policing a "no new trails" rule does not seem to be likely, given that new, unofficial trails are routinely cut and enforcement is difficult.

Our second concern is that the proposed trail could increase hunting from ATVs. During the 2015 season, we daily saw dozens of vehicles, driven by hunters slowly travelling up and down Brooks Lake Road searching for game. At least one hunter fired with a semiautomatic rifle from Brooks Lake Road into the meadow toward our cabin, obviously not seeing the cabins or not caring about any damage he might do. (The rest of the season my wife and I wore orange vests just to hang out our laundry.) Anything that increases the chances for dangerous hunting practices in the area of these cabins is a major concern to us.

Finally, the meadow along Brooks Lake Creek and the meadow on the west side of the creek near the proposed trail are major game areas, large and open with undisturbed grass and willows. We have seen that these serve as habitat for golden eagles and other raptors, moose, elk, and deer. We speculate that they are also a corridor for grizzly bears traveling from Brooks Lake to Deception Creek, bears are seen regularly at Brooks Lake and in the Deception Creek area but prints are generally not seen in the residential areas so they are probably moving through these meadows. Noise of vehicles and hunting in the region will disrupt this movement. Again, enforcement of rules and signage will reduce this damage, but enforcement is always difficult.

We were pleased to see this fall that the roads used in logging operations in the area have now been blocked. Unfortunately, the Forest Service does not have as much control over ATV users, who regularly cut new illegal roads.

We believe that the current unpaved roads between Brooks Lake Creek and SR 287, mainly 521, 585, and 515, provide adequate opportunity for ATV users in this area.

Leslie and Robert Struble

cc. Sarah Walker, WWA