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March 1, 2023

Curtis Canyon Road and Campground Project
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Jackson Ranger District
P.O. Box 1689
Jackson WY 83001

BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC) is writing to provide scoping feedback for the Curtis Canyon Road and Camping Projects. 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 United States Forest Service. Many of our members and supporters live in Wyoming or travel across the country to visit Wyoming and use motorized vehicles to access USFS managed lands throughout Wyoming. BRC members visit these areas 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

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immediate plans to continue such activities in the future. Overall BRC supports the five proposed projects. The proposed goals to, “(1) address the deteriorated condition of roads and associated safety concerns, (2) increase camping-related infrastructure to better handle camping demand and reduce resource impacts,” will ultimately better serve users and address public safety on the forest.

Dispersed Camping

BRC believes that all users can and should be accommodated by expanding the developed campground as well as providing opportunities for dispersed camping. 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. For this we strongly support the Curtis Canyon campground expansion, new road and loop. BRC supports all recreational activities if done responsibly. We recommend this plan adopts a 100 ft or 300 ft allowance for vehicles off of routes instead of installing rock barriers.

BRC also is concerned with designating campsites. Although some users prefer this form of camping experience, the USFS should also continue to allow a true dispersed camping opportunity. Dispersed camping has also grown in popularity and the USFS should not set itself up for failure by limiting the amount of people who can access these campsites as users continue to grow. According to The Dyr, a camping app, camping has grown immensely since 2019. Public lands are needing more camping facilities than ever before as almost 50% of campers are new campers. The number of people who use public land to camp is only growing every year. The USFS needs to strongly consider providing as many camping areas as possible as to not concentrate use in limited sites. Management strategies should be exhausted before restrictions and closures of areas to any type of recreational use. Better facilities to address waste issues need to be created before any restrictions. BRC supports all recreational activities if done responsibly.

NEPA

The U.S. Forest Service is required to show a broad range of alternatives when undertaking a NEPA process. In order to adequately comply with NEPA the USFS must have alternatives that explore a range of alternatives. USFS often creates a “conservation” alternative, then it is typical to present several other alternatives that include varying levels of closures and restrictions from the baseline. There should be an alternative that protects dispersed camping and analyzes increasing those opportunities. That USFS has conditioned itself to believe that it must never expand or enhance recreation access through the planning processes is an inherent and

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fundamental flaw of this process and a violation of NEPA. This inequitable privilege of one stakeholder's interest over the interests of other stakeholders taints the integrity of the NEPA process. USFS should form a range of alternatives where each of the alternatives accomplishes the goal of the project. The purpose and need of this plan is to create better management strategies, not to simply close and restrict use. Closure is not management. These areas provide a purpose and need for outdoor access that improves physical and mental health for public land users.

Travel Management

We commend the USFS on this project for working to accommodate the increase of use. This land should benefit as many users as possible. All users can be accommodated through proper education or alternative management techniques. Maintenance projects for roads should move forward as soon as possible in order to provide safe access for users. Maintenance on NFS Rd 30445 and Goodwin Lake road #30440. will help the U.S. The Forest Service fulfill its mission. Roads not only provide access to emergency response teams but also allow for continued maintenance access on the forest as well as acts as a natural fire barrier. There is a purpose and need for these roads and all users should be able to responsibly enjoy them. We strongly discourage decommissioning or closing any roads. Road 30440 shouldn't be decommissioned but users can access at their own risk. Maintenance for Spur roads accessing campsites and road #30444 will help prevent unauthorized off-road use.

Economic Benefits

Local communities rely on recreation and dispersed camping for economic opportunities. There has been a surge of use throughout the nation on public lands as well as in these counties. Restricting dispersed camping and recreation access through roads would greatly hinder economic opportunity. Many local organizations and businesses recognize the influx of traffic and believe that any user conflict can be mitigated through better signage, more amenities, and education.

Users with Disabilities

We recommend that the USFS use this planning process to finally begin to reverse its decades-long systematic discrimination against those with mobility impairment-related disabilities. On his first day in office, President Joe Biden issued an "Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government." This executive order established "an ambitious whole-of-government equity agenda" which focuses on addressing "entrenched disparities in our laws and public policies," and mandates a "comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color

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and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”

Under this executive order, “The term ‘equity’ means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as ... persons with disabilities....”

Historically, there has been no group more greatly marginalized and excluded by public land management policies, and motorized travel management policies in particular, than people with disabilities. Outdoor enthusiasts with ambulatory disabilities frequently rely on motorized travel as their sole means to enjoy recreating on public lands. Not everyone has the ability to hike into a remote wilderness area, but many such people are still able to drive Jeeps, side-by-sides, and ATVs, which are restricted to the designated motorized route network.

Management policies focused on “minimizing” the environmental impacts of motorized recreation has resulted in a dramatic decrease in motorized recreation opportunities on public lands over the last 20 years which has disproportionately impacted people with disabilities. Wilderness focused environmental groups with extreme ableist biases have pushed for more and more areas to be closed to motorized recreation and reserved exclusively for hikers, mountain bikers, and other “human powered” and “quiet use” forms of recreation in which many people with disabilities are unable to participate.

Every time motorized routes or areas are closed, people with disabilities that require the use of motorized means to access public lands are barred from those areas forever. There has been little recourse for such people in the past because the Americans With Disabilities Act does not require public land management agencies to consider disproportionate effects on the disabled community, but only requires that they be given access to public lands on equal terms with everyone else. As a result, the USFS has historically failed to give any real consideration to the impacts of motorized route closures on the disabled community when developing travel management plans.

The Biden Administration’s focus on equity, however, changes the equation. While the ADA focuses only on equality of opportunity, equity inherently focuses on equality of outcome. Any policy that is facially neutral but disproportionately harms a disadvantaged or marginalized group is considered inequitable. The USFS is therefore required by this executive order and others mandating that federal agencies consider “environmental justice” in NEPA proceedings to consider whether any route closures in the Curtis Canyon would disproportionately harm disabled users’ ability to access public lands.

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Any approach to travel management that presumes the superiority of non-motorized forms of recreation like hiking over motorized recreation, or that justifies closing motorized access on the basis that people can still hike on those routes, is inherently discriminatory toward people with disabilities. Any large-scale closures of existing routes would unfairly and inequitably deprive people with disabilities of the ability to recreate in the area using the only means available to them. It is imperative that the USFS consider the access needs of disabled users in drafting the alternatives for this travel plan and ensure that people with disabilities who depend on motorized means do not lose access.

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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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B Burr', followed by a long horizontal line.

Ben Burr
Executive Director
BlueRibbon Coalition

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Simone Griffin'.

Simone Griffin
Policy Director
BlueRibbon Coalition