

August 21, 2023

Mr. Chad W. Benson  
Kootenai National Forest  
Libby, Montana

RE: Kaniksu Vehicle Travel Plan

Dear Supervisor Benson:

These are comments on winter recreation and travel management planning for the Kootenai National Forest. These comments are submitted on behalf of the Idaho State Snowmobile Association (hereafter referred to as ISSA). ISSA is a statewide organization representing approximately 4,000 people, including forty-one clubs, including the Sandpoint Winter Riders, individuals, and many businesses from throughout Idaho. We are also a member of the Idaho Recreation Council, the American Council of Snowmobile Associations, and the United Snowmobilers Association.

All our members highly value the opportunity to ride snowmobiles on our federal lands and the Cabinet Mountains area is especially important to our members in northern Idaho and visitors from eastern Washington. Snowmobile access is also vital to the winter economy of northern Idaho communities. Hence, we have a strong interest in any action that could impacts this access.

The existing condition for Over-snow Vehicles on the Kootenai National Forest is open unless specifically closed. This should be the starting point for any OSV travel planning and mapping. The existing Scoping Packet and Preliminary Proposed Action Map start from the misplaced statement of opening areas to OSV use. The vast majority of the forest is open to OSV use presently, and the proposed action would actually outright close significant lands to OSV use and would restrict use of the remaining lands. The proposed action appears to be designed to close as many lands to OSV use as possible. This is contrary to multiple-use management and the existing Forest Plan adoption and travel planning rule. The existing proposed action should be scrapped and the process started over. Collaborative groups should be formed and used for gathering correct information.

In addition, area wide closures for grizzly bear management is contrary to minimization, as it is elimination of OSV use. Not all potential bear denning areas should be closed April 1.

There is significant OSV use on the Kootenai National Forest that originates on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. This use needs acknowledged and needs to remain open for OSV routes, trails, and areas.

We intend to participate in the process as it moves forward.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra F. Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and a distinct 'F'.

Sandra Mitchell  
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