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Payette National Forest

US Forest Service
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To Payette National Forest Supervisor,

I am writing in response to the outreach for public comment on the Granite Goose Project. Having spent the last decade recreating here and exploring the public lands encompassed by this project, I would like to express several concerns and thoughts on the future designation of these lands and encourage you to expand non-motorized trail use in the project area.

Specifically, the hiking, trail running, and mountain bike access adjacent to town, including the Bear Basin Trail system, the combined Payette Rim and Lake Trails, and the Bear Basin-Brundage Connector are some of the most valuable and well developed areas of the Payette National Forest. They provide a haven for non-motorized use on an otherwise heavily motorized forest. These trails have become a regional and national draw for trail runners, mountain bike riders, and gravel bike users, attracting riders from across the state and the country. We have incredible access to these systems directly from town, and they are the most public-facing parts of the Payette.

The efforts and funding provided by the local mountain bike association (CIMBA), alongside cooperation from the local agencies, have made these systems possible in their current form. The vision for the Payette Lake Trail and the Brundage Connector Trail was inspired by the hard work of local bike riders, and the execution of this project across a multi-jurisdictional landscape is a stunning achievement - please treat them accordingly.

In order to preserve the unique character and community benefits of these systems we must address some of the user conflicts that have arisen due to their popularity. Certain trails within the system were designed and built with directional use in mind. The Drain, one of the most popular trails in Valley Country and the only bike-specific trail in Bear Basin, should be designated downhill directionally and closed to equestrian use. There is no reason for this very short mountain bike trail to be open to horses, it creates a needlessly hazardous situation for all users, and would remain the only trail specifically for bike users. The entire trail is approximately 1 mile in length, which represents a fraction of a percent of the trails open to equestrian users.

Additionally, the trail system in Bear Basin should be expanded for non-motorized users; more trails should be added to the network to take advantage of the huge amount of terrain available on the lower slopes of Brundage. Ecks Flat is a more suitable location for an expanded motorized trail network, it would mitigate user conflicts and create a clear delineation between the trail systems. We have the opportunity to create a truly world-class trail system on the Payette National Forest that will benefit the

local community in terms of revenue for local businesses, while minimizing the environmental impact of increased tourism.

Mountain Biking and Gravel/All-Terrain Biking have become more popular than ever, with the barriers to entry significantly dropping cost-wise, while the reliability and versatility of these machines has increased exponentially. People across the United States have rediscovered the power of bicycles to transport them across landscapes that were previously inaccessible to them, and brought a new generation of people into the outdoors to explore the National Forest System.

There are thousands of miles of OHV trails on the Payette, along with thousands more miles of Forest Service System Roads available for various types of motorized vehicles. Furthermore, there are millions of acres of Designated Wilderness exclusively open to equestrian users where bikes and motorized vehicles are not allowed. If equestrian users feel excluded by the increased utilization of bicycles they should be encouraged to take advantage of the multitude of opportunities open only to them. Bicycles are a relatively low-cost, low-impact form of transportation and recreation, horses are neither of those things and represent an economic cost that is far out of reach for most of the American public. Catering to this elite class is a detriment to all public land users.

In order to responsibly increase access for pedestrian and bike users, the Agency must recognize and strongly enforce the prohibition of motorized vehicles on non-motorized trails - this includes electric bikes. So called “e-bikes” are unambiguously motorized vehicles; they are powered by an electric motor and drivetrain, and although most models lack a direct throttle input, their power output is only achievable through the use of motor power. The bike industry is pushing these models because of their profitability and appeal to casual users without educating consumers on how to responsibly use them, it is up to the land management agencies to fill this knowledge gap.

Even Class I e-bikes represent a serious problem for non-motorized trails; the increased torque and rear-wheel power of pedal-assist will destroy sensitive trail features and create massive wear on trail systems. E-bike users routinely utilize extra pedal-assist power output when climbing, creating ruts and ditches that will then erode due to water runoff and destroy trails. Continuing to turn a blind eye to this serious issue through de facto non-enforcement of these regulations is unacceptable.

Other Federal Land Management Agencies have tackled this issue head-on; Moab BLM has a clear policy of no e-bikes on their trails, and the Deschutes National Forest has marked all of their trails with obvious “No E-Bike” signage. If the Payette National Forest wishes to reduce user conflicts and preserve the character of our trail systems, there must be a concerted effort to prevent this clear violation of policy within the trail systems through better signage and outreach. Local retailers that continue to facilitate these violations need to understand the undue impact that their actions are having on public lands.

In deciding on a course of action for the Granite Goose Project please take into consideration the changing dynamics and demographics of user groups present on the Payette National Forest; we are being overrun by the impact of motorized vehicles in the community - protect the quiet, tranquil places we have left and make a protected space for human-powered activities.

Sincerely,

Zachary Freundlich