

March 29, 2024

To: Lolo National Forest Supervisor's Office
From: Grizzly Orienteering Club Board of Directors
Regarding: Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan Revision

The Lolo National Forest Plan Revision Team:

The Grizzly Orienteering Club appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan Revision. The primary objective of this comment is to emphasize the importance of including Orienteering as a Featured Activity in the Lolo Forest Recreation Management Areas. For example, our organization requests that Orienteering be included in Table 72 in Section 4.5 MA 5 on page 160, which lists concentrated recreation areas and Featured Activities. The Proposed Action Plan includes activities such as frisbee golf, hiking, mountain biking, water-based recreation, camping, Nordic skiing, and alpine skiing, but Orienteering has not been included with these activities. Our organization requests that Orienteering be recognized as a Featured Activity in the revised Land Management Area Proposed Action Plan that includes the status and benefits provided for other listed recreational activities.

Orienteering is a sport that involves map and compass navigation with various forms of human transportation such as running, walking, biking, and cross-country skiing to find checkpoints called controls. Orienteering is a competitive sport originating in Sweden to help children and adults alike better connect with the natural world through map reading and physical exercise.

Grizzly Orienteering is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit club located in Missoula, Montana. We host approximately 15 events per year in and around the greater Missoula area at venues such as Lubrecht Experimental Forest, Soft Rock Recreation Area, Larry Creek, Silver Park, Seeley Lake Nordic Trails, and the University of Montana campus and would like to be able to get permits at Pattee Canyon and Blue Mountain Recreation Area according to USFS regulations.

Most of the events hosted by Grizzly Orienteering are attended by 20-75 participants. Most of these attendants are from the Missoula area, but it is not uncommon for people to come from Bozeman, Helena or as far as Spokane. Orienteering benefits our community by encouraging recreation and exercise. It can be a multiple-generational activity for families and is suitable for a variety of ages and fitness levels.

Additionally, Grizzly Orienteering organizes numerous youth clinics and educational events for the Missoula community, including partnering with Missoula Parks & Recreation, the YMCA, Go Run Missoula, Camp Mak-A-Dream, and other community organizations. We teach people of all ages the basics of map and compass navigation, and help them feel comfortable finding their way in nature without relying on GPS-based technology. We also run free after-school programs for Missoula youth, introducing them to the sport of orienteering and helping them feel comfortable in natural surroundings. Our programming can be tailored to different activities (biking, skiing, running) and different areas. Orienteering, as an activity, values wild lands, diverse outdoor activities, and healthy natural areas.

A key aspect to the sport is navigation through the forest with a compass and a map. This can require the need for off-trail travel. When a participant weighs their options as to the most efficient way to approach a checkpoint they have the option to traverse by trail or cross country. Environmental impacts are often a concern for those unfamiliar with orienteering, but many

studies have been conducted (mainly in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and Australia)¹ showing the relationship between orienteering competitions and environmental damage and regrowth time. These studies show the main impact is from driving to the events and parking. Grizzly Orienteering takes care to mitigate environmental impacts by having multiple courses and no fixed route, so very few repeat impacts occur even on the same course at the same event. Environmentally sensitive zones and bike only trails are marked as off-limits and courses are designed to avoid those areas. We create new courses for each event to provide new challenges for participants and minimize resource damage and environmental impact.

We address landowner concerns by providing copies of our courses to them ahead of time upon request and making changes to address their requests. We create custom high-detail topographic maps for all our events that can be used as a resource for the mapped locale and landowners upon request.

While Grizzly Orienteering would benefit from any development that enhances the trail systems in the Lolo National Forest, It is important that off-trail use is also allowed. No additional development is needed to enable Grizzly Orienteering to conduct events and educational activities. Grizzly Orienteering activities are low-impact and compatible with other uses.

Grizzly Orienteering is excited to see Orienteering recognized by the Lolo National Forest in the Revised Action Plan that acknowledges some off-trail use in a responsible way that preserves the natural landscape which we all value.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Grizzly Orienteering Board of Directors

¹ Orienteering USA has compiled a collection of environmental impact studies focused on orienteering events: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VLVMLCLncmDueGhnZoLXbITR78bECrrl>