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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Who it May Concern:

My name is Chantae Kochuten, I am a lifelong Alaskan and I strongly oppose the changes proposed in the Chugach Forest Plan Revision regarding snowmachine terrain on the Kenai Peninsula area. I am a snowmachine rider myself. I've ridden in Eureka, Petersville, Cantwell, Summit, and Hatcher's Pass. I am a beginner rider and I try to ride these and other new areas as much as I can. With winters in Alaska becoming warmer and snow conditions being inconsistent, I have been able to go out riding from 6 - 8 times per year. I am learning more and more each year to be a responsible and safe rider and am working my way towards being able to ride in more technical terrain. These more technical areas include riding areas in Turnagain Pass and Lost Lake near Seward which are both affected by the proposed revision plan.

Personally, I partake in snowmachine riding because it promotes both my physical and mental health. Typically, the cooler temperatures in the winter months keep people indoors. Snowmachining gets me outdoors and into the fresh air and provides me with a physical workout that keeps me active and engaged. It is widely known that regularly partaking in exercise contributes positively to both physical and mental health. Being outdoors has a positive effect on my mental health as I am exposed to fresh air and sunshine (Vitamin D) while out riding. Also, any time I am out riding I am out with family and friends. Snowmobile riding as a shared activity promotes strong personal connections which benefit my overall wellbeing. I am against the recommendations in this revision plan for recreational, economic, and safety reasons.

Recreational

-With winters in Alaska becoming warmer the conditions for safely riding have not been available until later into the winter season (adequate amounts of snow). Riders are already experiencing limitations on the amount of time during the year that they get to ride in open areas. The proposed designation of additional acreage as "wilderness" further limits the access riders currently get to enjoy.

-Inconsistency in snow accumulation in areas also limits the access to areas, which varies year to year. For example, if there is low snow accumulation in a popular riding area, riders will resort to areas with more snow. Having a variety of areas where people can ride allows them to choose to ride in areas with adequate snow accumulation that makes conditions safe for riding.

Economic Benefits

-Open access brings riders into parts of the state that are otherwise less busy in the winter months. When visiting to these areas to partake in motorized recreational activities riders typically must buy gas and food to make most of these trips. This means that riders are spending money in these areas where there are businesses that typically have lower traffic in the winter. Winter activity from riders in these areas can provide intermittent economic boosts to these small businesses.

-During the summer months I also frequent the Kenai Peninsula area to hike, bike, and participate in subsistence harvesting of wild berries. I access much of these areas with a motorized vehicle. I do not want access to these areas where I partake in recreational activities further restricted.

Safety

-Currently, the trails that are utilized by riders provide emergency access routes for first responders to both motorized and non-motorized accidents. Further restricting access will make rescue efforts more challenging without access trails available to these remote areas.

-Closing off current riding areas could force riders away from familiar riding terrain. Riders will begin to consolidate their riding activities to a few select areas that they could not be familiar with which can lead to a brief increase in accidents. Accessible terrain could also be affected by overriding.

-We want to have access to riding terrain that is safe to ride in. The further restriction on access to riding areas limits the options for safe riding terrain.

-These proposed areas are also locations that are used to host avalanche safety trainings. These trainings promote best practices for riding and the hands-on learning experience provides riders with safety education in

regard to avalanches and the use of mountain areas. The hosting of these trainings also economically benefits the Alaska Avalanche School and the financial benefit allows the organization to continue to provide avalanche safety education to all users of recreational mountain areas.

Access to riding areas is already restricted both by low snow accumulation in recent years and the areas that already have "wilderness" designation. The snow machine riding community has been respectful of the current designated areas and we would like to continue to participate in outdoor, winter motorized activities into the future. Any further designations of land as "wilderness" limit winter recreational activities that bring economic benefits to winter areas and small businesses. The safety of recreational users to this area is also a strong argument to not restrict access as trails provide emergency access to both motorized and non-motorized incidents and the trainings hosted in these areas provide valuable safety education to recreational users. I strongly believe that it is inappropriate to recommend the designation of additional acreage to limit motorized access. It is important to me to preserve motorized access to these areas so that we and future generations may continue to enjoy outdoor winter recreational activities.