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First name: Mike

Last name: Blessing

Organization: West Mountain Snowmobile Club

Title: President

Comments: West Mountain Snowmobile Club

P.O. Box 959

Cascade, ID 83611

April 15, 2020

Dear Ms. Probert:

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the DEIS for the Nez Perce/Clearwater Forest Plan revision. Two of our more established members, Gary Hodge and Ronn Julian, attended the open house in McCall and reported their findings to our Club. The effort to do a revision of the forest plan is daunting to say the least. The effort has spread over a number of years and is encumbered by a change in personnel and the exhaustive length of the planning documents. We do not envy the task you have before you but agree it is time to conclude the effort.

First, it is fair to say that our Club is not a traditional user of the NPC forest. The logistics of time and distance make it difficult for us to visit. However, over the years we have been educated about one particular area and it fascinates us to think there is consideration being given to make this area accessible by snowmobile. Should that become a reality, it is likely that this location could become a destination for a few select members of our Club to visit. Mr. Hodge and Mr. Julian have been patiently waiting for a number of years to capture this riding adventure.

I'm sure you recognize I am referencing The Great Burn. The history and reputation of this area has the potential to provide an unqualified experience that cannot be duplicated on National Forest System lands in northern Idaho and western Montana. We would encourage the area be managed as multiple use which provides for motorized over-snow vehicles. There is no organized trail grooming program nor should there be one. This will eliminate the overwhelming majority of snowmobile users from considering riding in the Great Burn. Secondly, the terrain in this area is of such difficulty that non-expert riders will avoid it. In essence, the Great Burn will appeal to a small segment of the snowmobiler community. As a result, snowmobile use numbers are likely to be very low. Those who choose to ride the area will have a unique experience and have an opportunity to take-in all of the amazing scenery.

While we generally support a special management area being created for the Great Burn, we must admit that approach makes us a little uncertain as to its workability. As we understand the proposal, the area would be recommended for wilderness with the provision of restoring historic motorized snowmobile use as part of the designation. This approach can be interpreted to mean the USFS has explicit authority to identify non-wilderness compliant activities and has the where-with-all to insure they are included in a Congressional designation. We believe that once Congress entertains a wilderness designation, all bets are off on any preliminary agency promises. It would seem that a non-wilderness recommendation as the management direction in the plan is the least confusing option to use. Identifying the historic use areas could be very problematic. For example: the historic use in The Great Burn at the time it was closed to snowmobiles would not compare to the use patterns of today. The improved technology in snowmobiles in the last couple of decades would result in quite a different used area map. The management direction should apply to the entire management area not just the historic interpretation zones.

Accompanying Wild & Scenic River designation should provide for over-snow use. Winter snowmobile riders take great caution to avoid creeks and rivers since they are dangerous life threatening obstacles. Once snow levels

reach depths to accumulate snow bridges over these water courses, riders are even more certain to check the strength of the snow bridge prior to riding across. Winter snowmobile use and river/stream protection are very compatible.

The DEIS really does little to address the increasing growth and popularity of UTV sport recreation. We see the same thing on the Boise and Payette National Forests. If this use is not planned, then it grows on its own and users will dictate through use which areas become UTV routes. An effort to identify acceptable routes along with any maintenance needs would be time well spent.

The range of alternatives identified in the DEIS appear to be skewed towards increased recommended wilderness designation. Alternative X as described in the DEIS excludes any RWA. Based on this understanding, we would support Alternative X over any of the other alternatives. X provides the greatest assurance that someday we will be able to experience The Great Burn in winter.

Thank You. My contact info is: mblessing.magsmallengine@gmail.com 208-861-5931

Respectfully,

Mike Blessing
President

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P.O. Box 959
Cascade, ID 83611

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