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Comments:

Dear Forest Plan Revision Team:

I have reviewed the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests (Nez-Clear) Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Forest Plan and I would like to provide comment. For background, I am a resident of Missoula, MT and an active mountain biker, backcountry skier, hiker, and snowmobile rider. With that said, I will readily admit that mountain biking is my main passion and exploration of the vast backcountry in Montana and Idaho is one of my favorite activities. During the warmer months, I explore the backcountry terrain of Montana and Idaho by mountain bike about once per month. These are usually long arduous day trips (or weekend campout with a base) with much exploration and adventure involved.

Due to my proximity and personal experience, most of my comments are related specifically to the Hoodoo Roadless Area, the Great Burn area, and the larger and landscape scale recreation opportunities immediately surrounding these areas in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. When it was allowed by Nez-Clear policy, I rode the Heart Lake loop on a regular basis. In total, I've ridden the Heart Lake loop about 10 or 12 times starting in 2009. The Heart Lake loop starts in Montana at the Heart Lake trailhead, rides up Trout Creek Rd to Hoodoo Pass, then along Stateline Trail 738 in the Nez-Clear) to Pearl Lake Trail 175, down Trail 175, and back to the Heart Lake trailhead on Trail 171. By bike, this is a 4 to 6-hour journey that takes you through amazing wild and alpine landscapes that is rarely equaled anywhere.

Although the entirety of Trail 738 is important to mountain bikers due to the connectivity it provides within the larger trail landscape, miles 20 - 27 near Hoodoo Pass are of particular interest because they represent the rare "trifecta opportunity" for bikes in that they are: 1) highly scenic alpine riding, 2) provide looped route opportunities, and 3) (most importantly) encompass trail surface/terrain that is actually rideable by mountain bike (unlike many other remote alpine trails). BUT, those premium miles on Trail 738 would be nearly worthless to mountain bikers if they led nowhere. Mountain bikers highly prefer singletrack loop rides, therefore the opportunity for connectivity to other singletrack trails is extremely important on both the Idaho and Montana sides of Trail 738. For example, on the Montana side, Trails 103 and 101 provide excellent loop opportunities with Trail 738. On the Idaho side, Trail 490, 428, 410, and 567 provide great loop opportunities using County Rd 250 as a connection.

It should also be recognized that the Idaho Centennial Trail (ICT) runs right through the Hoodoo Pass and the Great Burn area and uses many of the same trails I list above, including Stateline Trail 738. The ICT was envisioned by its founders to be a multiple-use trail (Ref #1) with specifically designated alternative routes to those that pass through Wilderness (Ref #2). The portion of the ICT in the Hoodoo area should be maintained as a multi-use non-motorized trail that can be accessed by bikers, hikers, and equestrians as envisioned by the ICT founders.

The Hoodoo and Great Burn area, and in particular the Heart Lake loop described above, represent extremely rare opportunity for mountain bikers. Although claims are often made that mountain bikers have thousands of other miles to ride in our National Forest, in reality there are incredibly few real opportunities that encompass the trifecta of opportunity for mountain biking I describe above. In fact, within the entire states of Idaho and Montana, those trifecta opportunities for mountain bikes can easily be counted on two hands. Furthermore, these special trifecta opportunities have been drastically reduced in the past decade due to the relatively new Region 1 USFS policy that excludes mountain bikes from recommended wilderness areas and wilderness study areas. National Forests throughout Montana (Bitterroot NF, Custer Gallatin NF, & Beaverhead-Deer Lodge NF) have

recently chosen to exclude mountain bikes from RWA's and WSA's during their travel plan revisions which has reduced mountain biking opportunities by nearly 1,000 miles of singletrack trail, many of which were unique trifecta opportunities.

I am happy to see that there are a number of management options being considered in the DEIS that would allow mountain bike access to the Stateline Trail 738, or at least portions thereof. I don't support any single particular alternative presented in the DEIS. Rather, I encourage the Forest Service to consider additional boundary adjustments, cherry stems, and/or companion management designations (i.e. national recreation area, national conservation area, or national scenic area) that would allow mountain bike access to the full Stateline Trail 738 (not just portions), as well as provide desired connectivity and loop opportunity using Trails 490, 428, 410, and 567. Small management adjustments for these trails could be crafted so that they still allow the majority (+95%) of the surrounding Great Burn area to be placed into designated Wilderness for higher protection. The impact of low mountain bike volumes (anticipated due to the remoteness of the area and lack of metropolitan centers) on these trails would be extremely minimal and would not detract from the wilderness character of the greater landscape. Studies have proven that the impacts to wildlife and trail conditions are actually very similar to hiking and equestrian use.

Attached are several photos I took during a mountain bike group ride on Trail 738 in summer 2010. We did the Heart Lake loop and it was a beautiful day.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the DEIS and look forward to further participation in the process. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Idaho Centennial Trail References

- 1.<https://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/centennialtrail/Centennial%20guide%20pdf.pdf>
- 2.<https://idaho.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=05f25d258b8b4645958c0c453d4f0211>
- 3.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idaho_Centennial_Trail