

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/9/2023 7:00:00 AM

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Comments: Bear Basin is located close to McCall and is easily accessible from Highway 55. This ease of accesses and close proximity to a highly-motivated recreation population has caused Bear Basin to be abused by motorized vehicles. Vestiges of old logging roads have enticed users off the designated system roads. There has been so much use many of these roads now appear to be sanctioned forest roads. Putting up a few signs indicating that these heavily-eroded areas are not system roads, is not working. Drastic action is needed to allow Bear Basin to heal after so many years of off-road use, camping and wood cutting that has occurred.

Currently there are two Forest Service roads that connect to the area commonly known as Bear Basin. One road is in the south east corner off of Bear Basin Road (50451) and is 50839. Forest Service Road 80841 splits off from 50839 deep inside Bear Basin, and for the purpose of this letter, think of them as one road. The other comes in on the north side of Bear Basin and soon ends. This road is 50813. Almost all damage can be traced to access from these two roads. These roads must be closed. A permanent closure would be preferred, but gates would work to restrict year-round public motorized use, if the system roads are determined to be crucial to future forest needs.

A gate just off the Bear Basin Road closing 508039 needs additional fencing. The east end of 50839 is flat and makes it easy to drive around a gate. Not far to the north and south there are deep ditches and high cut banks along the west side of the Bear Basin Road. Fencing that extended out from a gate closing 50839 would discourage any casual entry on to the forest land to the west of the Bear Basin Road. About a half mile north of the 50839 road the Forest Service constructed a fence (near junction of 50841 and 50837 to the west of the purposed new parking area), and over the years, a former road that entered Bear Basin has seen almost no incursion into Bear Basin. This is evidence that, with minimal fencing at the east end of 50839, it could be successfully closed to public motorized use.

Forest Road 50813 is proposed to have the eastern most end decommissioned (Map 9 page 41). In Table 7 on page 27, 50813 is called out to have 1.9 miles closed to year-round public motorized use. I am not sure where that would put the closure. The west end of 50813, I believe, comes out of the the lower-elevation parking lot. This is a main snowmobile route in winter. I do not think the Forest Service intends to close the western end of 50813 to public winter motorized use. A closure just east of the creek crossing where the snowmobile route leaves 50813 and move on to 50852 would be a good location. It is densely forested at this point and a gate would be effective.

In the winter, snowmobiles mistakenly follow 50813 road into Bear Basin. This is understandable but once they hit the groomed Nordic trails the riders look for a way out and end up driving all around trying to find the groomed snowmobile route. A well marked gate might help direct snowmobilers back to the correct groomed route for snowmobiles.

I believe that it is crucial to the recovery of vegetation and recreation that non-approved motorize use be eliminated from the Bear Basin area. If these two access points are not definitively closed to public motorized use the outstanding nature of Bear Basin will decline. Biking and hiking in the summer and winter skiing and snow shoeing has made the area renowned thru out the region. It must be one of the most used non-motorized recreation areas in the entire Payette National Forest. I strongly encourage the Payette National Forest to close these roads permanently, or to year-around non-motorized use.

A winter motorized closure is separate from the closure of the system roads in Bear Basin. At this time the local community has supported and respected the establishment of the Nordic trail system. Unfortunately a few users

drive on groomed trails early in the season or encroach with over-snow vehicles in the winter. With the current protections in place for Bear Basin this is allowed. Having strong protection for the Bear Basin Nordic Area would hopefully discourage winter degradation of the groomed trails by motorized users. Trail damage caused by over-snow vehicles is also a safety concern. This closure would begin November 10 and continue until April 15, each year.

The proposed winter closure on Map 16 is a good start. The proposed closure to the east and west of the current Nordic trails would allow for signage away from the established trail system so that a user with a motorized vehicle could be informed before they found themselves on the trails. Additional closure to the north of Polar Express trail (closed section of the 50841 road) and west of Max Loop (just west and north of 50813 road) would need to be added for this same reason. Forest road 500056 is proposed to be decommissioned and this could be a good northern boundary for the winter closure. If the eastern end of 50813 is closed to non-motorize use as is noted in this document, the Nordic area around Max Loop would not have much chance of winter incursions.

The proposed winter closure shown on Map 16, on the east side, goes all the way to the south eastern boundary of the Payette Forest. A motorized route through the closure area is needed to allow home owners and other users to the south and east of the forest boundary access to the snowmobile trails to the north of the proposed winter closure. I do not believe the Forest Service intends to restrict over-snow motorized use through this long-established winter use of the 50451 road. Enforcing users to stay on this motorized route could be a challenge, but it would serve the needs of both motorized and non-motorized users.

See the attached photos which show damage to the ground from motorized use. Included is a rudimentary drawing on Map 16, which shows an addition to the closure area in red and a yellow line through the eastern side of the closure to show a possible route for motorize use. There is a possibility of a motorized route following an old logging road that is east of 50841, creating a greater separation, but I would need to walk the area again to be sure.

ATTACHMENTS

Map - Screenshot 2023-03-09 at 8.10.15 PM.png

Photo - image00007.jpg

Photo - image00009.jpg

Photo - image00011.jpg

Photo - image00015.jpg