

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/29/2023 6:00:00 AM

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Comments: Please see the attached text for the comments of the Maryland Ornithological Society regarding scoping for the Winter Travel Plan for Kootenai National Forest. Please enter them into the official record.

Dear Forest Service:

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) appreciates the opportunity to present scoping comments regarding the winter travel plan for Kootenai National Forest. MOS is pleased that the Forest Service plans to not permit snowmobiling in wilderness areas or recommended wilderness areas, as well as nonmotorized backcountry areas. We likewise applaud the closing of denning areas for wolverines and grizzly bears, and where snow depth will not protect whitebark pine seedlings and saplings.

We are concerned, however, that the Forest Service does not adequately account for noise and user conflicts. It is our experience that off-road vehicle use, to include snowmobiles, is incompatible with other forms of outdoor recreation. Noise interferes with the quiet enjoyment of the outdoors, which is desired by birders, wildlife enthusiasts, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, hunters, etc. Such vehicles also spook birds and other wildlife, depriving birders, wildlife enthusiasts, and hunters of opportunities to gain their quarry. This also stresses birds and mammals, which are already challenged by the extreme conditions of winter.

Snowmobiles, and other off-road vehicles are also significant sources of air pollution, well in excess of that produced by modern automobiles.

Over 250 bird species have been recorded in Kootenai National Forest, making it a desirable birding destination. Among the desirable species in KNF are four species of grouse, 10 species of owl, 3 species of hummingbird, 9 species of woodpecker, and many different songbirds.

MOS asks that the Forest Service keep snowmobiles out of recommended wilderness areas as well as non-motorized backcountry areas. We would also ask that they be kept far from wildlife areas, as well as cross-country ski and snowshoeing trails. Care should be taken to avoid snowmobiling in wildlife corridors vital to grizzlies, wolverines, fishers, and lynx. These corridors permit movement between populations, and promote genetic diversity.

MOS has been participating in Forest Service management planning in the western states since 2007. The Maryland Ornithological Society is a statewide nonprofit organization established in 1945 and devoted to the study and conservation of birds. Currently we have 15 chapters and approximately 2,000 members. Some are scientists and naturalists, but our membership includes people of all ages and all walks of life, from physicists to firefighters, legislators to landscapers. Birding is one of the fastest growing types of outdoor recreation.

Kurt R. Schwarz

Conservation Chair Emeritus

Maryland Ornithological Soc

1 US Forest Service, Birds of Kootenai National Forest, August 2006,
https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fswdev3_007425.pdf www.mdbirds.org