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Organization: Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists

Title: President

Comments: [External Email]Lolo Forest Plan revision comments

[attachment text pasted in]

To: Lolo Forest Planners

Regarding: Lolo Forest Plan Revision

The Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists (BBC) mission is to promote, preserve, and enhance mountain biking opportunities in the Bitterroot Valley. Given the proximity of the Lolo National Forest to the Bitterroot Valley, the management of the Lolo National Forest with regards to mountain biking is of significant interest to BBC. Therefore, we submit the following comments for the Lolo forest plan revision.

* In the past the Stateline trail going south from Hoodoo Pass, combined with trails around Peart Lake and Heart Lake (traits 175 and 171), was a spectacular ride for those mountain bikers who seek a remote, challenging, and rugged riding experience. There are limited opportunities for this type of high-alpine backcountry riding in the northern rockies region. Therefore, we strongly oppose the proposed action that designates the trails around Heart Lake be included in Recommended Wilderness. We request that a non-motorized travel corridor be established on the trails surrounding Heart Lake. The recently released draft plan from the Nez Perce-Clearwater NF recommends the Stateline Trail be managed to allow summer bike travel. A segment of the Stateline Trail is included in the route around Heart Lake making it compelling for the Lolo NF to allow bikes on the Heart Lake trail network.

* In the Rock Creek Geographic Area, we support the designation of the Stony Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area as a Backcountry Management Area. The Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists have been working in partnership with the Bitterroot National Forest to maintain the Bitterroot/Rock Creek Divide trail (trait 313), which borders the Lolo National Forest portion of the Stony Mountain IRA. This trail offers excellent scenic and rugged backcountry riding. For adventurous cyclists, the trails descending into the Stony Mountain IRA from the 313 trail (Big Spring Creek (tr. 1269), Wyman Gutch (tr.226), and Stony Creek (Beaverhead Deerlodge NF tr. 2) provide great backcountry Loops together with the 313 trail. Therefore, we strongly request that the Stony Mountain IRA be managed to allow mechanized travel.

* The proposed desired ROS for most of the Stony Mountain IRA is indicated to be Primitive. In the description of Desired Conditions for Primitive ROS Setting, paragraph 3 on page 60, we request that it be clarified that mechanized travel may be present (similar to summer semiprimitive nonmotorized setting).

* The Carlton Ridge/Mill Creek trail in the Lolo Creek Geographic Area is of special interest for mountain bikers. The ride to Carlton Ridge and descending Mill Creek trail 1310 is popular with mountain bikers from both the Missoula area and the Bitterroot Valley. We support the proposed designation of this area as Backcountry Management Area, keeping these trails open for mechanized travel.

* The map for Desired Recreation Opportunity for Lolo Creek Geographic Area shows a proposed ROS of Semi-Primitive Motorized for the corridor of the Mill Creek trail (trait 1310). In the Bitterroot National Forest we have seen severe deterioration of trails due to unsustainable motorcycle use. Trails that were once highly favored by mountain bikers have become highly eroded and loose, such that they are no longer enjoyable as a mountain bike ride. We are concerned that, considering the relatively steep grade of the Mill Creek trail, this is likely to become the situation there as well. The Carlton Ridge/Mill Creek ride is a prized treasure for many mountain bikers in Missoula and the Bitterroot Valley. Therefore, we request that the Desired ROS for this trail corridor be changed to Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.

* The specific trails addressed in our comments above, especially in the Heart Lake area and Stony Mountain IRA, are rugged backcountry trails that attract a relatively small subset of mountain bikers relative to the low elevation developed trails close to town. Riding these trails requires a high level of physical fitness and riding skills. The mountain bikers who are attracted to these trails are seeking a primitive experience with opportunities for self-reliance, and which provide the joys and challenges of exploration; cyclists on these trails are as likely to be pushing their bike as riding. We urge that the forest plan recognize the value of managing the aforementioned trails to allow this type of backcountry mountain biking experience.

Thanks for considering our concerns.