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First name: Ryan

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Greetings,

I write to you as a frequent recreational user of National Forests in the Northwest. I live in Olympia but I travel nearly every weekend to hike, camp, backpack, kayak or mountain bike in Washington's amazing forests. I have visited Colville Forest three times. The first was when I hiked the Pacific Crest Trail from Canada to Mexico in 2005. The second and third I rode mountain bike in the Kettle Crest Area. On my third visit I rode my mountain bike and camped for two days, a combination of activities known as bikepacking. Bikepacking is an increasingly popular sport that I have fallen in love with. It involves strapping your camping gear, supplies and food to your bike and taking off into the freedom on the mountains and forests. Since you have to carry everything on a bike, bikepacking is a pretty low-impact activity. You can find out more about bikepacking at websites such as www.bikepacking.com/.

The Kettle Crest area offers a wonderful resource to bikepackers like myself: miles and miles of interconnected backcountry trails that allow bicycles. Because bikepacking allows you to travel larger distances than on foot, it is crucial to have trail systems in large areas that allow bikes.

If I understand the Draft Plan correctly, it would designate a Recreation Special Interest Area in the Kettle Crest Area. From the sound of it, the SIA is a tool that has a lot of potential benefits for bikepackers. It allows the Forest Service to preserve the backcountry character of an area while still allowing for human-powered activities such as biking. I think the establishment of the Kettle Crest SIA is a great idea.

I would ask you to consider a plan that would include the Snow Peak/White Mountain area in the proposed SIA instead of designating it as wilderness. This would allow bikepackers to continue riding the entire Kettle Crest all the way to White Mountain. It would also allow us to continue to be able to ride from Sherman Pass to the Thirteenmile trailhead on Highway 21. That is an amazing opportunity for bikepackers. I rode portions of those trails during my last visit and I would love to be able to connect them all together.

So in short, I support Alternative P as long as it is amended to keep the Snow Peak/White Mountain area open to bicycle travel. I do not have any problem with wilderness designation in general - I have loved my hundreds of days spent backpacking in federally-designated wilderness areas. I would fully support an amended plan that designated wilderness in another area of the forest that does not contain so many great trails for bikepacking.

I ask you to consider the interests of the bikepacking community, which is rapidly gaining devotees as more people try it, by preserving access to the Snow Peak/White Mountain.

Thank you,

Ryan McCord