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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Ms. Probert,

As an avid back-country snowmobiler I wish to make a comment on the proposed alternative plans for the Forest Plan Revision on the Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest. Even though I am a resident of Valley County, Idaho and have not snowmobiled much in north Idaho or Montana, the area that is being addressed "for snowmobiling" or "no snowmobiling" is of great interest to me.

I have taken the opportunity over the years to either ride my trail motorcycle or walk into many of the areas that I enjoy doing my back-country snowmobiling. I must admit that I have never been able to tell where the snowmobile has left a distinguishable scar or mark. As for conflicts with wildlife, such as the elk, deer, and moose, they have abandoned the area for lower elevations for winter feed. When it comes to mountain goats, I don't believe snowmobiles can conquer the terrain that goats inhabit. On other excursions that don't involve snowmobiling, I have encountered goats on the edge of the Snake River with vehicles driving by and on extremely rocky outcroppings at upper elevations of secluded mountain tops. Granted this leaves a lot of terrain between the two extremes but it is always so steep and rocky that once above any roadbed there is no way for any motorized vehicle to be in the area except for maybe a single track trail. From articles that I've read and comments I've heard it appears that a hunter or mountain bike would create more stress on some wildlife than a motorized vehicle. At least they hear the vehicle and move to their perceived area of safety. In general, I am questioning if there is any area that suffers a detrimental affect from snowmobiles. As for the winter enthusiasts that want to utilize the back country without the sounds of snowmobiles, they want the advantage of the groomed trails but no off-groomed trail riding. Western snowmobiling is primarily boondocking or back-country riding. The groomed trails are utilized only to get to general areas and then off-trail riding is the ultimate goal. Without boondocking capabilities many snowmobilers would not participate in the area and they would dedicate their tag fees to another area. This could mean that grooming programs in those areas would cease to exist. The specific winter enthusiasts that were fore-mentioned would not have their easy access. Hence, just more forest acres that no one would be enjoying. Not to mention the financial impact that snowmobiling has on local economies, of which would be lost.

As for "wilderness areas", I have heard that less than 5% of national forest visitors have ever visited a "wilderness area". I don't feel that the recreational community should lose millions of public domain for less than 5% of the users. The national forest should be open for all users. Non over-snow use of with trail designations, education, and trail etiquette are far better tools than gates. Over-snow use should have little or no restrictions. More and more citizens are heading outdoors to recreate, motorized and non-motorized. There is a greater need for open public lands for all users than there is for wilderness.

As for the proposed alternatives for the Forest Plan Revision, I am in favor of Alternative X.

Alternative Y could be considered if less wilderness was considered, such as not including the area of Surveyor.

I am a current member of the McCall Area Snowmobile Club, Donnelly Snowmobile Club, and the Idaho State Snowmobile Association. I sit on the board of the Valley County Grooming Committee and am the snowmobile representative of the Idaho Rec Council.

I appreciate your time in this matter.

thanks,

Mark Wood

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