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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello, my name is Nicholas Kniveton. I am a backcountry skier, snowshoer, snowmobiler, and backpacker. I currently live in California, however, this proposal concerns me as I am planning to visit Alaska for recreation, specifically in the Chugach Forest area. My family and I are all passionate recreators who access the backcountry with both snowmobiles (or snowmachines as my Alaskan friends say) and non-motorized methods. Specifically, I hope to visit the Chugach area be able to participate in snowmobile accessed backcountry skiing, where one snowmobiles to an area that would otherwise be too far away to walk/hike, and then backcountry skis in that area. Any backcountry closures to snowmobiling would severely impact my ability to participate in snowmobile accessed backcountry skiing.

Furthermore, I am concerned that Alternative A, which is described by many as the "no action" plan, retains the 2002 rules, rather than the current 2007 ones. This results in the closures of some areas that are open to riders currently. My sister and my mom are new to snowmobiling, so when planning a snowmobiling trip with my entire family it is very important to have a beginner area. From speaking to my friends who frequent the Chugach area, one of the best, beginner friendly spots to ride is in the area surrounding Crescent and Crater lakes. From my understanding, this area has been open to riding for many years. However, the "no action" Alternative A appears to close this area. I don't understand all the rules and policies behind how each district is allowed to manage an area, but since this area has been open to riding for many years I believe that that Alternative A should reflect that and leave it open. Closing one of the best beginner riding areas to snowmobilers would severely limit recreators, such as my family, who need a beginner area to snowmobile. Therefore, I hope that the Chugach NF either updates Alternative A to reflect the 2007 management practices, or chooses Alternative B.

Furthermore, as a backpacker and backcountry skier, I understand the desire to experience quietness and desolation. However, 1 million+ acres of primitive/wilderness areas that do not allow snowmobiles already exist for exactly this purpose. Expanding snowmobile closures beyond the current areas is unnecessary, unfair, and in some cases even dangerous. Some of the proposed closures, specifically near the Whittier area, in Alternatives C and D limit snowmobiling to narrow strips. This can increase avalanche risks to not only snowmobilers, but to all users of the forest. In the backcountry all users, regardless of travel method, are forced to constantly evaluate and choose routes that avoid dangerous avalanche conditions. Since snow conditions are in constant flux, the safest path of travel often changes. Forcing snowmobilers to use a smaller, narrow area in the backcountry rather than allowing them to evaluate and choose the safest for the current conditions poses a safety risk to the snowmobilers as well as all the other skiers, hikers, and snowshoers in the surrounding area.

After reading through the proposal and carefully considering how it would impact the activities of wildlife, motorized backcountry users, non-motorized backcountry users, I urge the USFS to either modify Alternative A to reflect the 2007 revisions or choose Alternative B.