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Comments: Chugach National Forest Service Revision Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Chagach National Forest (CNF) Revision process. I am writing to voice my opinions and concerns with the proposed CNF Revision Plans. My primary concern is with motorized access, particularly winter access, and is what the following comments will focus on. My name is Cory Hughes and I am a lifelong Alaskan and routinely use the Chagach Forest year-round as one of my primary recreational areas for myself and my family. I have used the forest, primarily snowmobiling, for more than the 23 years that encompasses the entirety of my adult life. Each year I snowmobile in and around Turnagain, Lost Lake, Summit, Placer Valley, Snow River, Grandview, Whittier, and many others. My primary concern with any forest use revision is further limitations on winter motorized access and the expansion of the recommended acreage within the Wilderness Study Area (WSA). I am vehemently opposed to any additional limits on motorized winter access and the expansion of the recommended acreage of the WSA. For those reasons revision plan options C and D are completely unacceptable.

One of the primary reasons I oppose limiting the available motorized access within the Chagach National Forest relates to the yearly increase in the number of users of the forest. This increase is seen across all forms of recreational use and any further restrictions are only going to lead to more conflict, higher congestion of popular areas, and a less enjoyable experience for all users. In addition to traditional winter motorized users, there has been a large increase in traditionally non-motorized users, skiers, snowboarders, snowshoers, fat bikers, etc., utilizing snowmobiles to access further from the road system and deeper into the forest than ever before. This ability has provided more people with more access and continues to help disperse the increase number of users. With an increased number of people wanting to access deeper into the forest motorized areas should be increased, not decreased, to best facilitate current and future users. Two areas in particular that would benefit from increase access is Center Creek in the Johnson pass area and Mills Creek in the Summit area. Currently Center Creek is essentially only accessible by helicopter as it is beyond what would be considered a reasonable distance to travers in a day on skis, snowshoes, or by foot. Opening this drainage to motorized access would allow both snowmobiles and sled-skiers to easily access a significant amount of terrain that is currently used by only an exceedingly small number of heli-skiers each year. Mills Creek in the Summit area is an ideal location for the implementation of a motorized corridor that would preserve the near highway terrain to human powered activates only, while greatly expanding the accessible areas beyond the highway's front range to both traditional and non-traditional motorized users. A two currently existing motorized corridors that highlight their effectiveness and must be maintain is the 20-Mile corridor and the south fork of Snow River that provides access to the Nellie Jaun area. Without this corridor Nellie Jaun would be inaccessible to everyone, regardless of preferred activity. Along the same lines, access to Blackstone Bay from Whittier also needs to be maintained as this is a traditionally used area, particularly in spring when higher temperatures lower snow depths to inadequate levels in other motorized areas.

Increasing the recommended wilderness acreage within the WSA would be counter intuitive and counter productive when considering the ever-increasing number of users and advancement in technology that will continue to allow more users, more access to the forest. Not only is increasing the size not recommended, the areas included in the increased acreage is some of the easiest to access and most commonly used areas today. Continued limitations on these areas will only lead to further conflicts between users and more stress on the remaining accessible acreage. Again, for these reasons plan revisions C & D are ill-advised and unacceptable.

Today's snowmobiles are quieter and more efficient than ever which leads to greater access and less disruption of other users. This trend is only going to continue as technology continues to improve and emission and noise

regulations increase. This is a good thing for the industry and all users as it reinforces the arguments laid out above to not only maintain but expand motorized areas to allow users to disperse throughout the forest and lower their environmental and personal impact. Continued limitation of usable areas will not only lead to more conflict with an increased number of people in a smaller area but to a higher environmental impact and stress on those smaller areas. Large, well-funded, out of state groups put significant resources into each forest revision to influence the outcome of the planning with the stated goal of the elimination of all motorized use. These groups ask and push for the most restrictive options because they know any restriction is a win for them and they just have to continue to chip away at motorized user's rights over time in order to eventually reach their ultimate goal of an outright ban. Motorized users never ask to restrict or eliminate other users preferred method of recreation and willingly limit their own access to certain areas easily accessible by human powered means for those users to enjoy their recreational opportunities. Motorized users accept and support this compromise because they know this provides the ability everyone to enjoy the forest while avoiding unnecessary disruption and conflict. The motorized community recognizes our national forest are for everyone's use and enjoyment but designated non-motorized areas already exist in all forest plans and additional restrictions are simply unacceptable and will only lead to further conflict and animosity.

I would also like to state the forest service does a good job of implementing the current plan in a way that is beneficial to everyone. The current plan allows for the beneficial implementation for all users and is why it should remain basically unchanged except for a few positive changes allowing additional access listed above. In addition to those access improvements there are a few other aspects the forest service could implement to further enhance every users experience. The trail system into Lost Lake desperately needs to be widened. In recent years less snow accumulation at lower elevations has limited the timeframe in which there is adequate snow coverage to open for motorized use. If the trails were widened and the adjacent trees were trimmed to allow more snow to reach the forest floor at the trail the timeframe of adequate snow coverage could be significantly increased. Not only would wider trails allow for more snow to reach the trails but it would also lessen the impact and effect on the trail itself. This would lower icy conditions on the trails which would increase travel safety. As it stands now, safety can be a concern in specific areas when traversing the trail due to ice conditions limiting breaking ability, especially during two-way traffic situations. Trail widening procedures could be beneficial to multiple areas but the Lost Lake trail should be the first and highest priority. A Good example of this type of trail maintenance can be seen in the Whittier area where a volunteer group of motorized users help clean up and clear local trails. Similar volunteer work has been performed on the motorized side of Turnagain to help police trash and debris once the snow has melted in the spring.

Limiting or expanding motorized access has a broader effect than on just those who choose to recreate in that capacity. The economic impact of motorized users to the communities adjacent to the forest boundaries and those outside the boundaries can be significant. Motorized vehicles, snowmobiles, boats, ATVs, along with all of the accessories, clothing, safety gear, avalanche training, instructional training, food, fuel, lodging, maintenance, etc. are significant investments. Those investments employ and support a substantial number of Alaskan's across multiple industries and businesses. Limiting the ability of specific user groups to enjoy the forest could have economic impacts difficult to fully quantify and is something that should to be thoroughly considered.

In closing I would again like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to comment and provide input on this process. Although I limited my focus on winter motorized access, I would also like to state in general terms, what I am most in support of is providing as much access to every user group that has the privilege of calling Alaska home and fundamentally against any specific groups', local or otherwise, agenda implemented to the detriment of other users. Thank you for your time and efforts.

Cory Hughes