

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/26/2018 5:00:07 AM

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October 25, 2018

Chugach National Forest's Supervisor's Office

Attn: Draft Land Management Plan

161 East 1st Street, Door 8

Anchorage, AK 99501

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of Share the Slate, which is an organization that strives to preserve access to the winter trailheads and drainages for ALL users in the Crested Butte / Gunnison area of Colorado. We believe that through education and awareness that all users can continue to happily coexist on our winter trails without restricting access to specific user groups on our public lands.

Although we don't live in Alaska, many of us have enjoyed the plentiful recreational opportunities available in your state, especially in the Chugach. In fact, my dad took me on my very first backpacking trip in the Chugach National Forest when I was 14 years old. We were rookies from Ohio and neither of us had backpacked before. Yet, my dad persuaded me to march 17 miles through the pouring rain on the Kenai Peninsula, with a horribly-fitting backpack that gave me bruises, stuffed with too much gear, including a box of wine for him to drink. Amazingly, we didn't strangle one another, or get charged by a bear. And, we came out of the experience better people. After that trip in the Chugach, I knew I belonged in the mountains and every decision I have made since then has been centered around a goal of making successful life among the high peaks. I have returned to Alaska numerous times for various backpacking and backcountry skiing vacations.

I am writing this letter because Share the Slate is concerned about the direction that the USFS is taking in the Chugach National Forest. The preferred alternative C does a poor job of honoring previous motorized use, and unfairly target motorized use for sweeping closures. We strongly oppose alternatives C and D. We suggest taking a longer look at current usage and adding wintertime special management in place of Wilderness so that those areas could maintain protections from things like mineral extraction, but allow for include snowmobiling and other OSV use. Snowmobiles don't require roads or trails and have no effect on the permanent landscape unlike summertime motorized vehicles.

Share the Slate mostly consists of hybrid users. In other words, we use snowmobiles to to access lines for backcountry skiing and snowboarding. We enjoy the mix of both human-powered and motorized access. Because of this, we are unique because we understand the viewpoints of motorized and non-motorized users. We believe that through respect, etiquette, and structure, all users can learn to coexist and recreate in the same spaces. After all, it's not about how you recreate, it's that you DO recreate. Which brings me to my next point...

People's connection to the outdoors is vital to the preservation of our public lands. That connection often happens through various forms of recreation. As a child, my connection began with skiing, and was affirmed

during my first backpacking trip in the Chugach National Forest. But, for others, that connection begins when dad loads his son or daughter onto the snowmobile with him, traveling miles and miles through the Alaskan backcountry, allowing that child to see parts of our public lands that extend far from any road. Then, the child is hooked. They too buy a snowmobile and use it as a tool to enjoy every wild experience that Alaska has to offer in the winter, learning proper stewardship of public lands and understanding the need to advocate for their preservation. That concept is then passed onto future generations of that family. Without that connection, the understanding for the need to preserve our public lands is lost. By isolating user groups, we could potentially be paving the way for a disconnect with our public lands, and maybe future generations won't understand the need to preserve them.

Many of us recreate on our public lands for our own health and wellness. For example, I have a friend who experiences severe mental health issues on a regular basis. While medication does help, the true medicine for her is the outdoors. It's no secret that Alaska has the highest suicide rate in the nation. According to alaska.gov, Alaska's rate was 21.8 suicides per 100,000 people in 2007. Restricting access for specific users to our public lands could cause an increase in suicide attempts as our public land access will be more limited and difficult. The "outdoor medicine" will be harder that helps keep so many people balanced, including my friend, will be harder to access.

Closing vast swaths of public lands to one specific user group (over-snow vehicles) has many unintended negative consequences. In addition to the disconnect as described above, motorized users will be packed into dense areas where snowmobiling is allowed. This will create dangerous conditions for collisions between riders. This will also create hardships for other user groups- rather than the occasional motorized user passing by, the few areas open to snowmobiling will be too busy for other groups to enjoy. We suggest a multi-use approach that allows users to spread out and greatly reduces user conflicts.

Motorized corridors can make effective management tools that allow snowmobilers to explore, provide access for hybrid users, and create effective travel routes in case of emergencies should there be an avalanche burial or other SAR need. Snow River, 20 mile, and Mills Creek are examples of areas where such corridors would be effective. In addition, we recommend that the Crescent and Carter Lake areas remain open to OSV use as they make great areas for beginner snowmobiles. Such beginner areas are few and far between and are necessary for the vitality of the snowmobiling industry.

The draft forest plan does not have solutions that address our changing climate, decrease of snow, and safety. For example, in recent years, the snowfall at the Lost Lake access point has been low. This can be remedied by clearing some branches and widening the trail. Widening the trail would also make it safer for all the users on the trail and allow for a more positive multi-use experience. There are plenty of local volunteers and organizations that partner with Chugach National Forest to help maintain areas such as this to create a better winter recreation experience.

Snowmobiles also have a positive impact on local economies and Alaska is not immune. The International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA) reports that snowmobilers as a whole spend over \$28 billion on their sport annually in the United States and Canada. The economic impact of snowmobiling in the Anchorage and Mat-Su Borough was found to be over \$35 million annually, according to snowmobileinfo.org.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to seeing changes to the draft plan which respects all user groups and a multi-use approach to forest management.

Brittany Konsella
President, Share the Slate