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Organization:

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Comments:

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To whom it may concern:

Please take into consideration my thoughts and regards pertaining to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement Forest Plan Revision of 2018 for the CNF. I am wholeheartedly in favor of Option A as it relates to the to the Draft. If change is necessary for reasons beyond my understanding then option B is a compromise I would be willing to support. Further limiting access to specific user groups i.e. options C and D is first, un-alaskan and second, short sighted and not in the best interest of one of the most valued and growing user groups.

About myself: My name is Matt Smelcer, I am a 43 year old lifelong resident of Alaska, hailing from Tazlina, Alaska. I am a proud member of the Ahtna Native Corporation and the Native Village of Tazlina. To this day I share our ancestral lands with the many that come to visit, live, and recreate in the the Ahtna Region. I'm also 23 year resident of Valdez, Alaska where I am currently raising my family between my home in Tazlina and Valdez. I am a 18 year member of the Valdez Snowmachine Club Backcountry Search and Rescue Team and current board member of the Valdez Snowmachine Club. I have served on the Valdez Parks and Recreation Commission for the Valdez City Council for the last 12 years. I am a 12 year member of the Valdez Fire Department (VFD), 10 of those years also serving on the VFD Backcountry Search and Rescue Team. I am an avid outdoorsman and have explored extensively the backcountry of our great state. I am also a Professional snowmobile racer with multiple state and local championships to my credit. I do not list these accomplishments to boast but rather to impress upon you my viewpoint that bridges multiple gaps in cultural, socioeconomic and recreational backgrounds.

As to my thoughts, beliefs, and opinions. I believe that the CNF has the ability to sustain all types of recreational opportunities, primitive, semi primitive, motorized and non-motorized as described in the Proposed EIS. As a child growing up in rural Alaska I embraced all of the above mentioned modes of transportation. I snowshoed our family trapline with my late father in the same tradition his grandfather had showed him. We skied to fishing spots. We spent the summer months motor boating to our hunting and fishing grounds. We also used snowmobiles as a means of gathering the bounty provided to us by our creator. I witnessed first hand the impact or lack thereof that motorized access had on our harvest and to the land we traveled. Motorized access allowed us to reach further into the backcountry when game was more scarce.

I now utilize motorized transportation along with semi primitive means to access areas in and around Prince William Sound. Like many others in this day and age we are using mechanized transport to get us to the areas normally out of reach by primitive means. As I explore the Chugach mountains I find that the greater sum of the areas we are accessing are seldom if ever accessed by primitive means. If I do find someone backcountry skiing in the winter they are usually using the tracks placed there by the snowmobiles that have gone before them. If by seldom chance I do happen upon a primitive access user, we often share stories of the adventures we are both partaking in. My experience has shown me that we happily co-exist in Gods creation.

As a member of the Valdez Backcountry Search and Rescue Team I have found equal opportunity as it relates to victims of accidents while enjoying the backcountry. We have come to the aid of all of the user groups at one time or another. May they be hikers, skiers, snowmobilers, and motorsport users alike; I promise you the hiker or skier we rescue is always more than happy to be rescued by a motorized user.

Responsible use is a burden we all bear. As with any group of human beings there will be a sect that operates beyond the common positive values the vast majority hold dear. My firsthand experience has shown me that the instances where there have been disagreements in user groups the common road block was poor or lack of meaningful communication and a clear understanding of the others intentions.

As a member and past chairman of the Valdez Parks and Recreation Commission I have observed many coexisting relationships in use of the backcountry. In the town of Valdez we enjoy a trail system heavily traveled by snowshoers, skiers, hikers, dog mushers, ATVs, snowmobiles, and even horses. This is an interconnected trail system where segments are designated for one user group or another but all share a common corridor to

access. I live 50 feet from one of those trail systems and I enjoy all of the above activities on this trail system. What I see on a daily basis is all user groups enjoying our gift in harmony with the spirit of adventure and a healthy lifestyle. When disagreements arise it is usually because of a lack of knowledge on the part of the individual as to which areas are designated for which user group. These disagreements are easily remedied when proper education is provided. As commissioners we foster relationships with these users and seek to develop a healthy relationship with each of them. In my mind there is no reason why motorized users and the rest of the recreational users can't co-exist in the CNF the same way we do in Valdez. Limiting access to a single user group hurts everyone.

In the late 1990's and into the early 2000's I spent a great deal of time snowmobiling in the Turnagain Pass and Placer River areas also listed on the plan. The time and memories I have of riding in that area are near and dear to my heart. It was in an era when snowmobiling was becoming a more of a crossover sport. The backcountry skiers and snowboarders were finding adventure and excitement in accessing areas formally not accessible. The sport of backcountry mountain snowmobiling grew exponentially and continues to grow. I have seen next to no negative impacts as this increase has occurred over the last 20 years and I believe that motorized recreation in this area has been nothing but beneficial to the CNF and can continue to be if allowed to continue.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to give you my perspective on the current study and plan options. Please consider my input as I have nothing but love and respect for all of my backcountry family. If you would like to discuss further my thoughts please don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,
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