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Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Joe Donahue, I have lived in Alaska for 40 years and have been recreating in the Chugach National Forest my whole life. I grew up hiking and fishing on the Kenai Peninsula as well as riding snowmobiles in the winter to access the wilderness and backcountry ski. Now a father of two, 7 & 8 years old, we spend our time hiking, mountain biking, fishing, skiing and snowmobiling in the Chugach National Forest and Kenai Peninsula.

Over the last 5 years, snowmobile technology has improved and allowed us to push deeper into the forest than ever before. The new machines are quieter and more fuel efficient, which has been a game changer for taking trips exploring zones previously not accessible. Whittier, Placer River, Skookum, Johnson Pass, Groundhog Creek, Carter Lake, Lost Lake, Snow River, Palmer Creek, 20-mile, Trail Lake, Grandview, Grant Lake, are all places my family and I regularly use snowmobiles to recreate. Prior to the closure in 2002, we regularly accessed Center Creek in Johnson Pass. This is an area that I would like to see reopened to motorized use, along with Skookum Drainage after April 1st. The reasoning for Skookum is the snow is typically too soft for both crust skiers and fatbikers to enjoy the area during the afternoons of long spring days.

One thing that the Proposed Alternatives in the EIS do not address are the importance of, use of, and creation of new motorized access corridors such as South Fork of Snow River and 20 mile drainage. This is a modern forest management tool that could be utilized to allow motorized users to access other areas of the forest such as Mills Creek while keeping a "buffer" between other user groups. The EIS does not mention proximity of non-motorized users to the road system. I have never seen a non-motorized user more than 5 miles off of the road system in all my years of recreating in the Chugach National Forest. The exception to this would be heli-skiers, but they are technically utilizing a motorized vehicle for access.

I am strongly opposed to losing any acres of the Chugach National forest to motorized use. Alternatives C and D as detailed in the EIS are not acceptable and at a minimum we should be able to maintain the areas we have today. As such, I am in support of Alternative B. Additionally, I don't feel it is appropriate to recommend any more acreage for Wilderness designation in this forest plan beyond what was recommended in 2002. This has the potential to displace snowmobilers in areas that we have enjoyed recreating in, some of which are extremely difficult to access without a snowmobile, boat, or helicopter. In addition, snowmobiles pose little to no impact on the forest when they operate in areas that have adequate snow cover.

Warmer winters have affected snowpack at lower elevations in the Chugach National Forest. The EIS and proposed plan do not bring solutions forward to address this issue. For example, Lost Lake (via Primrose or Firehouse Trail) is often closed to motorized use when there is adequate snow cover 500' up the trail. Construction of a slightly wider "winter route" trail could solve the issue. At other locations in the forest such as Johnson Pass, motorized use could be restricted to an existing road or trail until a point is reached with adequate snow cover.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and your willingness to maintain dialogue with all different user groups of the forest! I believe that the Chugach National Forest can be adequately managed in a multi-use fashion, keeping opportunities for all user groups to recreate! This part of the process, while time consuming, is extremely valuable. If you have questions or would like elaboration on my concerns, you can reach me at jdonahue907@gmail.com