

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/1/2018 7:22:10 AM

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Title: Executive Director

Comments: I am writing to the US Forest Service as the Executive Director of Tailgate Alaska, a 10 day wintersports festival that takes place every spring in Thompson Pass. Over the past 11 years Tailgate Alaska has invited more than 4,000 recreational and professional freeriders to enjoy Alaska's public lands (both state and federal) in a festival environment. I use the blanket term freeriders here on purpose. The participants of Tailgate Alaska represent both non-motorized and motorized users, as well as crossover users. Think of it like Democrats, Republicans, and Independents all coming together for one common purpose - to recreate in the world's best venue, the Chugach mountains. This is why we refer to them as freeriders and not as skiers, snowboarders, skimmers, or slednecks, because of that common purpose, that shared identity. In the end, there will always be more that unites us than divides us, and we will only come to find this out once we all do a better job of understanding the other.

Although Tailgate Alaska represents all types of backcountry winter sports recreational users, for the purpose of this letter, and the new forest management plan, we will be representing the motorized user group. An interest group that is probably the largest recreational constituency of the Chugach national forest, yet still heavily underrepresented in the planning process (to its own fault I must admit).

Given all options Tailgate Alaska stands firmly behind Alternative Plan B and furthermore against anymore closures for motorized access within the forest boundaries. The motorized community in Alaska has the potential to be great stewards of our public lands - more so than they already are. In 2018, we are seeing far more engagement from this user group as it pertains to environmental awareness and the sharing of public lands than ever before. Tailgate Alaska has seen firsthand the economic impacts winter sports recreational tourism has on the Alaskan community both from our locals and from those who come from out of state. Economic impacts of any further closures of public lands must be weighed.

And now, as an individual who grew up in the backcountry of Alaska riding snowmachines, I must say that this little contraption, with a seat, a motor, and a track, is much more to Alaskans than just a machine. It is part of our identity. My family of five had 13 snowmachines growing up. We used them to access our cabin south of Cantwell. There was a machine for every age level, and one for every purpose - utility and fun.. We even owned a snowmachine that had 2 tracks and one ski - we used it to haul timber for the new cabin we built. These machines serve a purpose. They serve a purpose to the Alaskan way of life. This notion must be taken into account when regulating on our Alaskan public lands.

Snowmachines and recreational snowmachine access are a part of the Alaskan identity. Please take all of this into account when you make your new decisions. Thank you for taking the time to read all of our comments on this very important matter.

Dustin H James

Executive Director

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