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First name: Bruce
Last name: Dreher
Organization: GARTRA
Title: Secretary
Comments: Bruce Dreher, GARTRA (Georgia Recreational Trail Riders Association) secretary, member GA DNR RTP Advisory Committee

First, I am very disturbed that GARTRA was not made aware of this project until December, 2019. GARTRA is a volunteer organization working with the USFS since 1992. I would have expected a direct invitation to GARTRA to be a part of this planning process from the beginning.

As a member and officer of GARTRA, and as a motorized trail user, volunteer worker and promoter, I must STRONGLY OBJECT TO THE CLOSURE OF ANY MOTORIZED TRAILS without a plan and commitment for replacement. It has been my experience that the closure of motorized trails means LOST trails, LOST user experience, LOST recreational opportunities, and possible overloading of those trails that remain.

Case in point; The Locust Stake trail system was closed several years ago. The Locust Stake trail system had been funded for years by RTP (Recreational Trails Program) grants which were fully supported by GARTRA volunteers. It is my understanding that, according to the RTP rules, the experience (trail mileage, facilities, etc.) should have been replaced with a similar park, or improvements to other existing parks, to restore the lost trail mileage and user experience. To my knowledge, since Locust Stake was closed, the USFS has made no such plans, and the GA DNR (administrator of the RTP program in Georgia) has made no effort to enforce the RTP rules regarding this.

It is not my intent to merely object to the trail closures and walk away. But more what can I do, what can GARTRA do, to prevent the closure of the motorized trails that we have.

In November, 2019, the USFS requested that GARTRA provide a letter of volunteer support for an upcoming RTP grant proposal in the amount of $583,000. It is our understanding that the plan for that grant is to fund maintenance for motorized trails in general. This sounded like a plan to provide some level of support for those less traveled trails that we are now learning are targeted for closure. GARTRA provided that letter of support in good faith, and will fulfill its obligation.

More . . .

In the Scenery and Recreation Report, there are references to deferred non-routine trail projects and/or deferred maintenance needs that apparently are not receiving any attention (i.e. deferred). What kinds of projects are these? Could some of these be accomplished by volunteer efforts and contributions? For example: picnic table replacement, signage, other light infrastructure.

Regarding the efficient use of limited resources
It seems to me that there is too much emphasis on aesthetics. For example, removal of root wads/slash from 150 feet of viewing points is mentioned frequently. Certainly there should be sufficient clean up from logging and construction projects, storm damage and normal dead-fall where safety plays a part. But I feel like there are thoughts of a manicured forest, at least for the first 150 feet or the need to clear the forest so visitors can see the distant mountain ranges from a viewing point. It seems to me that this might be viewed spending limited resources for the destruction of natural habitat for woodland creatures. Let the forest be the forest.

I've seen the reduction in funding for the USFS over the years. I've seen veteran USFS personnel retire and their

positions never filled. Maybe it's time for users of the forest to begin lobbying there congressmen to increase funding for one of our most precious resources.