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Comments: Forest Supervisor Jewkes,

Regarding the Cave Resource Protection Forest Order[mdash]I am a resident of Bend and a frequent visitor to the Deschutes National Forest and its many caves. I read a list of the positions taken by the Oregon High Desert Grotto on the Forest Order and I wholeheartedly agree with and endorse all of the following:

"200 Foot Buffer Rule - an absolute disaster

One of the portions of the plan which is a grave mistake is the new 200 foot buffer rule on engines, stoves, camping, mountain bikes, and more. This blanket 200 foot buffer will criminalize many officially sanctioned activities and trails. Official roads, parking lots and trails all over the forest are within this buffer zone. Prime examples are Lava River Cave Parking Lot, Boyd Cave Parking Lot, South Ice Cave Parking Lot, China Hat Road, almost every road on Mount Sheridan, many roads on or around Paulina Peak, hundreds of other roads, OHV trails, and mountain bike trails. If this rule goes into effect expect lawsuits from OHV and non-motorized vehicle clubs in protest of the access restrictions, and from conservation groups on the other side saying the US Forest Service is in knowing and deliberate violation of its own rules. It will take years and millions of dollars to fix the thousands of existing violations of this rule. This will become a defacto closure of huge swaths of the forest to recreation, timber sales, and driving on hundreds of roads. In short, it is an impossible idea not supported by science or pragmatism. You need to strike the buffer in entirety and replace it with targeted relocations of roads, trails, and parking areas in specific sensitive spots as funding and time allows.

Wind, Bat, and Skeleton Caves Year Round Closure, Arnold Seasonal

The Forest changed this closure to year round from seasonal 10 years ago to see if the bats from vague old reports would return. The data over the last decade has not supported that summer use is substantial or that maternity use is present. We confirmed that the Forest does not have data to support maintaining these closures through FOIA request 2020-FS-R6-02685-F which revealed no summer counts have been done at any site. This closure is not needed or backed by data. The Skeleton, Bat and Wind Cave Closures have been hugely unpopular with locals, and has driven deep resentment of the USFS. Skeleton, Bat, Arnold and Wind Caves were recreational sites for generations. I have a strong opinion that Skeleton, Bat, Arnold and Wind Caves should be left open during the Summer season for all to enjoy as it was throughout the 90's and most of the 2000's. Take the removable bars to storage in May and put them back on the gate in October as was done from 1990 to about 2009. The Grotto will continue to clean the caves and remove graffiti as needed. If you want Arnold closed seasonally, you should gate the crawl and do the same seasonal gate opening and closing.

Cody Borehole Year Round Closure

Cody Borehole had a few spear points found by Brent McGregor and Neil Marchington. They reported the finding to Penni Borghi and helped her collect the spear points years ago. The cave floors are mostly lava rock, and all the points have been removed. While some charcoal remains in the cave, there is no evidence that significant archaeological artifacts remain, nor are they highly likely to exist in the cave. The 4000 year old points were all located in clear view on the surface of the lava rocks. Cody Borehole is the deepest cave in Oregon, and a significant recreational destination. Hundreds of cavers have visited the cave for decades. I do not believe that this closure is needed or properly supported by the resources still present in the cave.

Edison Ice #1 Seasonal Closure

Edison Ice #1 is NOT a bat hibernation site, and that this cave was added in error. A FOIA request revealed that Edison Ice #1 was not even the cave the Forest was talking about (#2 is what was meant). None of the Edison Ice Caves have any documented hibernation use in grotto records or yours. Mark Perkins 1984 report on "50 bats" was a 2nd hand undated report from a Cleveland High School teacher named Dick Pugh. Perkins said this report needed further study and his degree of confidence was "if this proves to be accurate". Oregon High Desert Grotto has made multiple winter and year round trips to Edison #1 and #3 with no bats seen ever. While I agree that Edison #2 needs further study (since 1984), this study has not happened.

Charcoal #1 and Deg

We know Deg Cave is a hibernation site, and should be closed in the winter. Charcoal #1 and Deg don't have data to support a summer closure for bats. Your current closures are being widely ignored and unenforced as the caves are not gated and well known. Why add another unenforced and poorly supported closure?"