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First name: Matt

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello Forest Plan Revision Team,

I live in Missoula, MT and over the course of the New Perce-Clearwater Forest planning process, I have attended several meetings and submitted comments on the desired conditions for the forest plan. I was in attendance at the Forest Plan Revision Workshop you all held at the University Center at UM in Missoula and at the open house meeting held at the Smokejumper Center in Missoula that presented the components of the plan you are considering. I'd like to thank you all again for taking your time to reach out to those of us in Montana who access the part of the forest you manage and again, I want to express my gratitude for the efforts you made to consider ideas presented to your office from the mountain biking community. It is encouraging to feel heard in this process. Thank you. I'd like to submit this letter as a my formal comments regarding the forest plan revision. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions or require clarification of any of my comments.

First, I consider myself a conservationist and a lover of recreational access available in Montana and Idaho to explore on a mountain bike. While I wholeheartedly support 95% of the recommended Wilderness in your identified alternatives, my primary concern regarding the forest planning process is the loss of mountain bike access to historically ridden trails. I would like to advocate for no net loss of bike access in the forest plan revision and I support protections that are friendly to mountain bike use. With this in mind, I'd like to see the boundary of the Great Burn RWA adjusted to allow for existing and historical mountain bike access on existing single track routes like the Stateline Trail (Tr 738). Please restore mountain bike access to miles 20-27 of the Stateline trail which will allow for connectivity to bikepack a premier long distance, remote, wild, challenging backcountry mountain biking route through the Great Burn. Where boundary adjustments are not feasible, I would like to see the forest make use of corridors through, and cherry stems into potential future Wilderness for continued access to trails currently and historically accessible by mountain bike. Until formal designation by congress, the Great Burn (and all RWA's) should continue to allow bicycle access because bicycles do not degrade wilderness character nor does it prevent Wilderness designation as evidenced by the Boulder White-Cloud Wilderness designation in Idaho, where bicycling was allowed for generations up to the day former president Obama signed the Wilderness bill into law. Latitude and the discretion to maintain existing uses in Recommended Wilderness is outlined in the 2012 planning rule Chapter 70, section 74.1(2) which states you may "Continue existing uses, only if such uses do not prevent the protection and maintenance of the social and ecological characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness designation."

As a back country mountain biker, my goal with riding into areas like the Great Burn is to slow down the pace of life and connect to wild areas. I ride in the back country in a slow, deliberate, and intentional manner - many of the rides I have done in the back country average in speed 3 to 5 mph. This style of riding is not the adrenaline and RedBull fueled antics that those who oppose bikes in the back country would have you believe; back country rides are deeply immersive experiences. These trails are rugged, they are remote, and they are quite difficult to ride. They require solid navigation skills, self sufficiency, and they often require sections of walking or carrying your bike. When myself and other mountain bikers ride back country areas like the Great Burn, we are seeking challenge, connection to place, opportunities for self sufficiency, solitude, and an undeveloped wild experience - essentially we seek a wilderness experience on our bikes. This is something that other front country and roaded areas cannot provide. The Great Burn area is one of the last remaining areas in the US that provides this type of experience for mountain bikers. Loss of access for mountain biking here is irreplaceable.

Finally, I would like to request that you evaluate, review, and discuss mountain biking separately from motorized and mechanized uses. In your document outlining alternatives, mountain biking is categorized as "mechanized" as well as "non-motorized." I encourage you to conduct a google image search of the term "mechanized." You will see images of tanks, tracked vehicles, armored carriers, soldiers, etc. This is a far cry from the experience of

mountain biking quietly on backcountry single track. Please consider changing how you present and discuss mountain biking in your public documents. Mountain biking is a quiet, human powered form of travel and there is a body of research that indicates mountain bike impact on soil, water, flora, and fauna is no greater than the impact of hiking; and considerably less of an impact than horses/stock and motorized conveyances. Mountain bikes deserve to be looked at and evaluated as a unique use in an area, and managed accordingly.

Thanks again for taking the time to gather information and for considering my comments in the forest planning process.