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Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

One of my favorite places to camp in the 1990's was Dalton Lake in the Great Burn Proposed Wilderness Area. One evening on one of my trips, after our party of two had settled into camp, a young man approached us and we fell into friendly conversation. He started by asking if we'd seen any mountain goats up on the ridge that evening. He said he'd seen some in the winter. Then as his story unfolded, my heart sank. He claimed to have ridden along the ridge in his snow mobile, and down over it to some degree, taking risks. He also claimed to have ridden close to the goats in the winter. I asked about the goats' reaction to his presence. He shrugged and said, "They get over it." It turned out he knew full well of the proposed wilderness restrictions and apparently found a way in his own mind to ignore them. He also knew at some level of the potential harm to the goats, but apparently considered himself above the law and common decency. I'd venture to guess he was not alone in riding that ridge and that he had done it more than once was clear. In fact, it was clear that part of the thrill of what he was doing involved avoiding detection. We parted on a friendly note.

I never revealed my thoughts, but came away never having forgotten that encounter and how sick it made me feel. Here was a beautiful, quiet heaven for the creatures who had lived here traditionally and for the people willing to respectfully fit in by keeping a low profile as they moved through it. I have learned recently that the Dalton goats have changed their winter range and I can't help but think the snowmobile activity I heard of first-hand had something to do with it.

Today, I am moved to share this story in the hope that authorities in both Idaho and Montana will take seriously the harm done by snowmobiles to mountain goats and the facts that

- there will always be people who consider themselves above the wilderness prohibitions against snowmobile travel

- there will always be risk takers who thrive on "living on the edge" without regard to the consequences to themselves or wildlife

- the more territory you turn over to the expanding snowmobile industry and their users, the more they will want.

I implore you to maintain and defend the character of every acre of the Great Burn Proposed Wilderness Area as pristine wilderness for our generation and generations to come, for the Dalton Lake Goats and also for the goats at Blacklead/Williams Peak/Goat Lake. Please do not loosen travel restrictions at all in your travel plan.

Sincerely,

Frances Coover

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