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Jeff Taylor

FS Jewkes,

Response to the current Deschutes National Forest Cave Plan/Strategy.

Thank you for working on this. I know how busy the Forest Service personnel can be.

In short, I do feel that an overarching cave plan/strategy can benefit and preserve the natural wonder of our caves and what they have to offer. Combining the current forest orders and cave management plans into a single document and updating it to address current community issues and growing population combined with ease of access to these caves is beneficial.

The current scope of what is generally prohibited is a good start. However, the current cave plan/strategy feels rushed and lacks supporting documentation as well as a bit overreaching as a public management plan. The references cited for this document are over a decade old.

Some areas of concern are:

- * Statements of how wildlife resources will benefit from these regulations and the research that supports this data.
- * How these regulations will be enforced.
- * How the management of these caves will allow recreation and research to flow freely.
- * How the forest service will permit access to sensitive caves in an orderly time frame.
- * How closures of caves benefit for the enjoyment and exploration for all people.

Enforcement

As a caver, I have done my fair share of cleaning up caves and educating people on harmful acts when I see

them. I do not see regular enforcement of the cave or cave areas. I do not see how these regulations will be adequately enforced. Without proper enforcement these regulations are null. We as cavers are a great resource for the Forest Service to help preserve and protect this public resource. A blanket closure of some remote and local caves will have little impact if you don't have either L.E.O's or stewards helping to monitor.

Wildlife

We do know that caves are a sensitive environment for wildlife but we are still learning about the extent of a cave environment on wildlife. Additionally, caves could be a great spot to study the effects or be an indicator of climate change.

Without proper scientific research and exploration, we do not know the extent of how human visitation impacts a cave environment. More research is needed to determine if full closures or partial closures are in the caves'/wildlife's best interest. I would personally be interested to learn the extent of what human visitation does to the wildlife in a cave such as Lava River Cave. Is this a significant cave for bats, perhaps this should be a full closure?

Public Support and Education

As a caver, we use our public access to caves to excite, teach, and inspire new generations. Some of the caves on this list are significant awe-inspiring resources we use to do so. By closing caves it stifles this learning experience and the ability to inspire our next generation that might discover great things. It feels a bit rushed and overreaching by the Forest Service to simply close the caves. Additionally, the process to get written permission hasn't been the quickest. Improvement and attention to ease and time for public access is essential, else people won't use it.

In order to preserve the ability of the Forest Service to learn from the general public about the resources on our land, I suggest a different alternative to simply closing some of these caves. Perhaps the development of a better system to identify sensitive caves for historic or archeologic resources and better scientific data concerning wildlife.

Much of the information the government has about the local caves come from the interested public sharing knowledge and working with the Forest Service. The Forest Service has learned massive amounts of information from local, public sources. Imagine what could be out there that we have yet to discover! The Forest Service and scientists aren't actively engaged with this scope of exploration. Interested parties should be considered in this plan. How the FS will work with them and how both the FS and the public can go forward to advance our knowledge of this land in a way that gets both parties excited.

I hope to see a plan that better assess the current scope of how the caves are used by both people and wildlife. The current plan will be hard to enforce and will likely be disregarded by the general population. It might also have the negative effect of reduced information sharing on our public resources.

Thanks for your work,

Jeff Taylor