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Organization:

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Erin Philips, District Ranger

News Meadows Ranger District

P.O. Box J

New Meadows, ID 83654

RE: Rapid River Travel Plan Management Project

Dear Ranger Philips,

Please accept these comments on the Rapid River Travel Plan Management Project. Also please note that I am submitting these comments as an individual stakeholder in the management of Rapid River and not on behalf of an organization.

I do not support the proposal to all motorized/mechanized uses on trails 183, 184, 187 and 188 outside the Rapid River Wild and Scenic River corridor. All of these trails, both inside the Wild and Scenic River corridor and outside the corridor should be managed for non-motorized/non-mechanized recreation.

I believe that the Forest Service should manage the Rapid River drainage for a non-motorized, non-mechanized recreational experience. Managing the Rapid River Wild and Scenic corridor for non-motorized and non-mechanized uses is mandated by CFR regulations. The trails in the Rapid River drainage outside the corridor should be similarly managed to achieve a non-motorized, non-mechanized recreational experience in Rapid River.

The scoping document states that "(m)anagement of other trails in the area is not included under this project, but may be considered in the future as separate projects (pg 4)." I believe this is a mistake. To make an informed decision on this matter the Forest Service should present a larger picture of mechanized/motorized and non-mechanized/non-motorized recreational opportunities available in the larger New Meadows Ranger District area. While I don't have specific trail information, I'd offer that individuals like myself who seek a non-motorized/non-mechanized recreational experience do not have that many options on the New Meadows Ranger District.

Managing the Rapid River drainage for non-motorized/non-mechanized recreation likely provides some much-needed recreational diversity in this area. I suspect motorized/mechanized recreationists have an abundance of opportunities on the New Meadows Ranger District, and the trails under consideration to open to these uses in Rapid River are not needed to provide "more" opportunities for these recreationists.

Allowing motorized recreation in the Rapid River drainage will degrade the recreational experience of others. It is well established that the whining noise of motors carries for miles in these situations. The non-motorized recreation experience expected in the Rapid River Wild and Scenic corridor will be degraded by the whine of motors above the corridor if the proposed action proceeds.

The proposed action refers to "turnaround" construction for motorized/mechanized users where the trails under consideration for these uses end at the Wild and Scenic River corridor. With scarce trail dollars a fact of life, it is disappointing to see this degree of catering to a single constituency. Scarce dollars are better spent on general trail maintenance rather than creating "turnarounds" for a single constituency.

I believe it is naïve to think that motorized/mechanized users will respect the closures of the trails under consideration at the Wild and Scenic corridor if allowed into the Rapid River drainage. Unless the Forest Service completely obliterates the old trails that traversed Rapid River - again, more scarce dollars allocated to mitigate the effects of this proposal - it is guaranteed that a significant portion of the motorized/mechanized recreationists will blast through the trail closures into the Wild and Scenic River corridor. I'm not familiar with any success stories of where these dead-end turnarounds for motorized/mechanized users succeed if a trail, or the trace of a trail, exists beyond the closure. Examples abound on the Idaho side of Hells Canyon, where the Forest Service has tried, and failed, to stop motorized recreationists from driving beyond closures. They simply won't do it if a trail/track exists beyond the closure. It is much more likely that closures will succeed if they occur on the rim of the Rapid River drainage rather than well down into the river canyon, to a dead end, as proposed by this action.

I also believe that conducting an environmental assessment for this project is likely a mistake. The effects of motorized/mechanized recreation on wildlife, soil, other recreationists and other issues should receive a more robust analysis that is usually provided in an environmental assessment.

In summary, I support making permanent the existing closure to motorized/mechanized uses on the trails under consideration in this proposal. The Rapid River drainage, not just the Wild and Scenic corridor, should be managed for non-motorized/non-mechanized recreation.

Please keep me informed of further developments in this matter.

Regards,

Craig Gehrke