

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/29/2021 5:25:33 PM

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Comments: Please accept these comments on the Rapid River Trail Management Project.

I support selection and implementation of the non-motorized alternative for the Rapid River Travel Management Project. This alternative designates 25.7 miles of trail as open to foot and horse traffic only.

For nearly 45 years I've hiked the trails of Rapid River, the Seven Devils and Hells Canyon. These landscapes provide a much-needed oasis from the sound of motorized recreationists and the damage they cause to the landscape. Rapid River is particularly unique, being accessible virtually year around for hiking. The project document does not provide any need or justification to provide for motorized recreation within the Rapid River drainage. A review of non-motorized/motorized trails in the project and surrounding area at <https://trails.idaho.gov/> shows that the Rapid River drainage is the last significant non-motorized recreation opportunity, outside the Hells Canyon Wilderness, in the surrounding Weiser, Council, New Meadows and McCall Ranger Districts. NO other landscape of the size and diversity of the Rapid River watershed is available for non-motorized recreationists. Motorized recreation trails lace the surrounding landscapes and watersheds. There are no shortages of motorized recreation opportunities in this region. From the standpoint of just offering a meaningful diversity of recreation opportunities in this region, the Rapid River drainage should remain a non-motorized recreation area.

Motorized recreation will compromise the values I seek in hiking Idaho's backcountry. I hike the backcountry to enjoy the sounds of nature and the absence of sounds of motors. The grinding, whining sound of motorcycles carries far in the mountains, negatively affecting the recreational experience of others often miles around.

The Payette Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (July 2003) states that "(n)on-motorized trail opportunities are the recreation emphasis for the Rapid River Watershed (Payette LRMP pg. 111-143)." The LRMP represents a commitment made in good faith between the Forest Service and public regarding management the Payette National Forest. The Payette National Forest needs to honor that commitment made in good faith with the public that non-motorized recreation would be emphasized in the Rapid River drainage.

I have no expectation that the proposed construction of motorized trail turnarounds will achieve the promised results. I am personally familiar with the failure of such "dead end" trail closures on the Idaho side of Hells Canyon. The Forest Service erected barriers and tried to close to motorized recreationists segments of trails at Sawpit Saddle and Low Saddle. The barriers were torn out and ripped aside by motorized recreationists who proceeded to travel the "closed" segments that extended beyond the barriers. The only chance where trail closures to motorized recreationists have any chance of working are if closures occur at trail junctions, where motorized recreationists can proceed, legally, on a trail open to motorized use at the junction with a trail closed to motorized uses. The non-motorized trails in Rapid River must be closed at the top of the drainage where "pass by" motorized use on through-trails is the option.

The proposed construction of the turnarounds themselves will cause problems. Although the project document attempts to minimize the ground disturbance caused by the turnaround construction, nevertheless it is certain that bare ground, constantly churned up by motorcycles, is going to facilitate the establishment and subsequent spread of invasive noxious weeds.

Experience indicates that this area of the Payette National Forest is not often visited by Forest Service staff. If noxious weeds are established at the ground-disturbing turnarounds, it will be some time before the infestations are found and suppression actions taken. Experience has shown that limited staff resources will focus weed efforts on the "front country" as opposed to remote areas like Rapid River.

The Rapid River drainage likely functions as an ecological corridor between the Rocky Mountains and the Wallowa and Blue Mountains. Motorized recreation in the upper sections of Rapid River could compromise the integrity of this corridor and should be a consideration of this analysis. Across the West the protection of large, core areas that encompass high levels of ecological diversity across topographically complex landscapes, while simultaneously improving connectivity between these large core areas, has been broadly characterized as an important consideration in public land management issues.

For more than a decade wildlife in the Rapid River drainage has benefited from the lack of noise, disturbance, and displacement routinely caused by motorized recreation. Allowing motorized recreation back into the Rapid River drainage puts at risk the security values of core wildlife habitat areas and the value of the Rapid River drainage as an ecological corridor. Decades of research have documented the negative effects of motorized vehicles on various wildlife populations throughout the West and conflicts with other users. These impacts are not addressed in the proposal and must be before any actions are taken that diminish the decade-long positive results that have occurred because of the exclusion of motorized recreation.

The proposed action puts at risk the water quality of Rapid River. It is unlikely motorized recreationists will respect and use the proposed turnarounds; it is more likely that motorized recreationists will proceed down the "closed" trails to try to connect and ride the trails on the other side of the river. This action will degrade Rapid River's water quality. I have seen too many rutted, gouged stream crossings by motorcycles to believe such actions can occur without significant water quality impacts.

The Rapid River drainage is the only non-motorized recreation opportunity of its like in the surrounding region. That opportunity should be maintained with the selection and implementation of the non-motorized alternative for this project. Re-opening currently closed trails to motorized recreation will only reignite conflicts between users that have been dormant for more than a decade. As explained above, it's not like motorized recreationists don't have access to hundreds of miles of trails in the region already. Rapid River is currently, and should remain, a destination for those who wish to enjoy the backcountry without the noise, weeds, and trail degradation that accompanies motorized recreation.