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Comments: [External Email]Travel Management Plan comments

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I live in Sunlight Basin year-round and hike the area extensively. Therefore, these comments apply to the North Zone which I am very familiar with. I would also note that in the links on your website, I have not been able to find closure/opening dates for roads EXCEPT for alt. 4. So my first comments below do not reference any alternative because I am unclear which alternative matches. In general, I prefer Alternative 3, but I feel VERY STRONGLY about Sunlight Road Bear Gate and Camp Creek proposed closures in Alt. 4.

1. I am strongly opposed to changing the opening and closure dates of the Bear Gate on Sunlight Rd. With less snow (we haven't had any snow this year), that just means more and more ATV traffic on Sunlight Road. I have lived here since 2006 and ATV traffic, dust, and noise on Sunlight Road has increased 100 fold once the Bear Gate opens July 16. With an extended proposed closure of November 30 instead of Sept 30, road noise will continue. This will mean hunters will have ATV access as wildlife are descending from summer range; disturbance to grizzly bears in hyperphagia. Bears are prolific in that area beyond the bear gate in fall. ATV traffic is well-known as a major disturbance and displacement and this is an area in the PCA. With the recent three years of road work on Sunlight road and stream work by G&A&F, the effect on wildlife was very noticeable. Trail cameras I maintain revealed a steep drop in wildlife from the traffic and noise. With longer vehicle access time to upper Sunlight, this will surely be the effect. I would like the opening and closure dates for the Bear Gate on Sunlight to REMAIN AS IS.

2. The other red flag for me is Camp Creek. It appears SNF is decommissioning some of the roads that were used for logging decades ago. Those are offshoots higher up and that is good. But it seems SNF is opening the main Camp Creek dirt road for 10 months, closing only for April and May. I snowshoe this road in winter and spring when it is closed. In the spring, grizzlies are feeding and elk are calving up there. It's not unusual to run into elk with young calves in June. WGF uses that area, because it's closed, for grizzly collaring up through early July. Opening that road will disturb early grizzly bear use. Every year I see sow with cub tracks throughout the area. Camp Creek, since it was an old logged and burned area, is highly desired by bears. During winter, the snow is deep and access would be only by snowmobiles. A big disturbance to any wildlife. I've documented snowshoe hares on the Camp Creek road and on the plateaus. This means it is potential lynx habitat as well. I encourage the Shoshone National Forest to keep the closure dates AS IS.

3. I completely agree with closing Beem Gulch due to road damage. Closure either at the Forest Boundary or at Sunlight Road is appropriate. I also am pleased that SNF is closing off access to the basin above Sulphur Creek. There has been a lot of resource ORV damage in that beautiful area. Now it will be foot traffic only.

4. Disagree: Fantan Lake. There is a road there now but the proposal calls for "Construct new road to access camping site (0.09 miles), with feasibility considered in the context of appropriate mitigation measures." I suggest SNF keep the rutted road there. The beach is small and this would only bring too much use as

beartooths have gotten increased visitors over these last few years. The beartooths are getting more grizzlies, probably because they still have fairly intact White Bark Pine. I have seen grizzlies in this area and the White Bark Pines are still producing and intact. These are some of the last areas for grizzlies to use pine nuts in the ecosystem. I would not encourage more use and I've found lots of trash at the Fantan beach.

5. Winter OSV Use Season should end April 30 (NOT June 15!) to protect wildlife and sensitive vegetation, and to reduce growing use conflict in popular spring/summer recreation areas such the Beartooth Plateau.

6. I am confused why the Forest is proposing more ATV roads when my observation is that the existing roads are not maintained nor is there adequate enforcement. For instance, East Painter road in Sunlight basin has been washed out for over three or four years. When I brought that to the attention of Sue Stressor, she told me SNF has to hire outside contractors to fix these kinds of problems and there just wasn't enough money or help to do that. Consequently, ATVer's will find a way to get through which means resource damage. That is exactly what has occurred. Where ATVer's used to drive their trailer or truck farther up Sunlight Road, then unload their ATV, now they park at Sunlight and Chief Joseph, destroying the roadside area there. Because of the damage, the highway dept. put large boulders to keep the damage to a minimum. Now its an unofficial parking area. I see sign everywhere around Crandall/Sunlight of illegal off-road ORV travel. Unless there is additional enforcement and maintenance, why create more roads that might only degrade, causing more resource damage?

I have to say that for the public this process lacked inadequate information. I attended the North Zone zoom meeting, but there was no comparison between the other alternatives, and not enough information in the online maps to distinguish differences. The online maps were vast and confusing and as a public person I found it just confusing with not enough time allotted for NGO's to help sort things out for me.

Thanks for allowing me to comment,

Leslie Patten

[PII]