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Hello Mark -

We wish to comment on certain aspects of the proposed Shoshone Travel Plan. While we really do appreciate you meeting with us on the ground on June 8th, we are dismayed and disappointed to see the proposal to extend over-the-snow motorized use on Beartooth Pass to June 15th.

This makes no sense, no matter whether users are sled-assisted skiers or traditional snowmobile users. As I write this, there are several fires on the Beartooth Face - on November 16th. The Robertson Draw fire blew up 25,000 acres in one day in timber on June 15th this year. There was very little snow at the Gardiner Headwall parking over Memorial Day this year. All of these are examples of the extended snow-free season in the Beartooths. It makes no sense to extend snow-dependent motorized activities adjacent to designated fragile ecosystems, such as Line Creek RNA, the High Lakes WSA, and North Absaroka and A-B Wilderness Areas.

As you are well aware, the annual Beartooth Highway opening has become an event, with a circus like atmosphere, and exponential increase in recreational activities from skiing, snowmachining, kite-skiing, etc, with people coming from all over Montana (and beyond?). It was so disheartening this year to see cars parked on and snowmachines driving over fragile tundra. People were belligerent at just the sight of a camera and I saw no sign of Forest Service law enforcement or education personnel. There were safety issues as well, with snowmachines launching over the highway, where there were in fact snow berms on one side of the road. I believe you have copies of drone footage of the insane action that occurred up there this year. This hardly seems appropriate for an ecosystem that will take generations to recover.

Recreational use has become the latest "extractive" use of public lands, and needs to be managed - not just for current users, but to sustain the health of the land and the natural resources dependent on this unique ecosystem. There is ever increasing pressure for intentionally destructive use like this, for example from Instagram users like David Lesh featured in a New Yorker article in January 2021 called Trolling The Great Outdoors. Even without the malignant intentions, just the sheer numbers of people headed to public lands now in the winter is enough to compromise a functioning ecosystem.

The cumulative impacts of more people, a longer over snow motorized use season, expanded permit operations at Top of the World, and decreased Forest Service presence, coupled with less snow, makes it inevitable there will be long term damage to this landscape. Why?

One group perhaps you haven't heard from is the long running historic Red Lodge backcountry skier community,

who has sought out these unique headwalls and an experience not found elsewhere in Wilderness. The proposal you've put forward creates further user conflict. I realize you expect backcountry skiers to use Wilderness, but this was an existing use previously established here for a reason. Your proposal seems backwards. You are asking skiers to use human power to go hunting for high quality skiing, but snowmachiners are enabled to just unload in what was previously a premium ski area, and run rampant, for an even longer period. Even if you expect backcountry skiers to push further and further into Wilderness looking for skiing challenges, what is the net effect of that use to wildlife?

Speaking of Wilderness, I observed snowmachine incursions into the North Absaroka Wilderness from Cooke City this year of up to 3 miles. There are still no signs marking the Wilderness Boundary at the State line on Hayden Creek.

Rather than being deferential to motorized over snow users, the Forest Service's primary responsibility should be to provide for enjoyment of public lands for the long term, which requires a certain amount of protection and active management. The Forest Service has options to manage for something other than the extremes - either full-blown motorized or Wilderness. I think you have a lot of people here wanting something in-between.

As you bring this 7 year process to a close, I thank you for all your work to date. Travel planning and managing human expectations is one of the hardest things the Forest Service does. I do, however, believe you have a little more work to do. Thank you for sincerely considering these comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Traute Parrie

Don Carroll