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Comments on the 2021 Environmental Assessment

The planning for this work dates back to 2015. While the document is difficult to understand, it is time to finish the job. I participated in the 3 November 2021 virtual meeting concerning the Wind River District.

In general, I support Alternative 4 as presented in the October 2021 update. I am particularly concerned with the Warm Springs Mountain region since I live in Stoney Point within a mile of NFSR 529. Until about 2018, access to 529 was not a problem even though it was not listed on the 2015 or later Shoshone NFS ORV maps. Starting in 2018, access was curtailed by homeowners on Uphill Road and in the Porcupine area. The new owner of 199 Uphill Road has recently installed a buck and rail fence that eliminates any access except for their commercial guests. They are renting ATVs to use in what is now their private back yard, ie. NFSR 529,

I particularly support WR-07 and the section of WR-13 that replaces the short stretch of 529 that was just north of the NFS boundary. My neighbor, Alan Maier tried to ask at the 3 November meeting if 529 is to be re-designated as an NFS trail. It is very unclear from the documents on the web as to which NFS Roads are to be reclassified as trails. In the addendum to Appendix B, 529 is listed as open all year as a NFSR open to all wheeled vehicles for public use. In contrast WR-07 and WR-13 are clearly designated as NFST open to <64" wide wheeled vehicles, also open all year. Will 529 be re-designated a Trail and restricted to <64" wide wheeled vehicles? If so, that would be great. Otherwise, public use will be limited by the access via WR-07 while the residents of Porcupine and 199 Uphill Road will be able to use "any wheeled vehicle".

As for the proposed stretch of WR-13 south of Warm Springs Creek, would it be possible to restrict it to clockwise only traffic, ie. going up only, closed to downhill traffic?

From page 62 of the 2021 report with respect to changes in closure dates, it appears that substantial changes were made to the Washakie District with little changes made to closure dates in the Wind River District.

This Alternative proposes additional seasonal restrictions, with the largest increase occurring in the Washakie Ranger District. (Table 30) These seasonal restrictions were proposed to address issues associated with protecting road surfaces and Forest resources during the wet spring months. These closures would minimize activities that degrade roadbed protection during these months, thereby decreasing annual maintenance costs. The closures would also decrease the risk to the public of traveling on these routes when they are potentially unsafe.

I would very much favor a winter/Spring closure of 529 and WR-07 and WR-13. As I am sure many others will discuss denning and calving during the Winter and Spring. In May of this year, ~150 elk migrated through the Stoney Point subdivision en route to where NFSR 529 is located and on into the high country. In addition, during April of this year the roads in our neighborhood were virtually impassable due to mud. There was very little snow on the ground for much of last winter, rarely deeper than 12 inches in the NSFR 529 area so not conducive to safe snow machine operation (I was hiking).

While others would like to have Warm Springs Creek designated a Wild and Scenic River, I very much doubt most Wild and Scenic Rivers have hundreds of cattle standing in them with cowboys trying to get them out of the scenic stream. Also since I spent three weeks on standby alert for the Lava Mountain Fire, I very much want a system of NFS trails and roads such that firefighters can easily access any lightning strike or evidence of smoldering material I also support a network of logging roads so that the beetle kill pines can be harvested and the overabundance of flammable material reduced.

Other comments:

One of the questioners from the Wind River District meeting on the 3rd of November wondered why there had to be a 1500 acre carve out for OSV operations in the Deception x-country ski area and the Pinnacles area. She asked why there could not be joint use. To the best of my knowledge, no skier has ever caused a snow machine operator to die but almost all snow machine operations in a x-country ski area cause a great deal of distress for skiers. In fact, when I brought this up with some friends, one said she had gotten far off the trail because she wound up mistaking a trespassing snow mobile track for the groomed trail. X-country skiers cannot coexist with OSV which nearly always destroy any "groomed" x-country ski trail.

This brings up the general problem of enforcement. It only takes a few violators to destroy most anything. With only two enforcement people for the whole Shoshone NF or I hope it was for the Wind River district, there is no way they can have much impact on any of the many problems, be it OSV in x-country ski regions or cutting unauthorized ATV trails through protected areas. The whole Travel Management Plan for the Shoshone National Forest is rooted in 20th century technology. I hope there is a committee or group of people that are trying to grapple with 21st century problems and possible solutions.

For instance, in the 529 region along Warm Springs Creek, it would be interesting to institute a test program where all users, be they hikers, horse riders, ATV or UTV operators would have to have a transponder type device that would allow entry into the region. If conditions are not suitable for minimal impact, then the "gate" would not open. If one did not have a transponder, they gate would not open at all. That way if the roads or trails were considered impassable or if the Elk were migrating through the area people would be kept out. 'Gates' could be de-activated by someone at a computer in Dubois based on multiple parameters. If WR-13 on the south side of Warm Springs Creek is designated one-way up hill, then there could be a one-way gate at the junction with 528-2D. Obviously if one was already in the area when it is closed down then there would be a way to exit but not enter.

With the advent of Google Earth, GPS, Mini-Garmins and other 21st Century devices, people can "see" old roads and trails. There will always be people trying to add new trails to take advantage of the old ones they know about and can see on Google Earth. Consequently, if the Shoshone National Forest does not build WR-07/WR-13 to regain public access to 529 and build the other proposed new Trails, people will continue to destroy the environment building their own. The idea that the Union Pass area is at capacity and no new trails should be build is to force all the "new" people into over-crowding elsewhere, ie. Not in my backyard. In all my years recreating here, I have not yet experienced a "crowded situation" except when I go to Yellowstone or the Tetons. As much as we would like to keep everything as it was at the end of last Century, it won't work. If you don't change with the times, you will wind up roadkill.

Yours truly,

Lawrence A. Lawver

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